

This illustrated tale was born out of a common passion for traditional Indian music, with its accompanying attendant rigorous training, patiently undertaken by the authors over the years. In their journey from Calcutta to Bombay, they returned to be with their masters (Pandit Shankar Ghosh, the famous Dagar...), undisputed virtuosi of an ancient art form. A rare opportunity not only to share in the intimacy of private (home) concerts, music lessons, family life and enriching exchanges, but also to discover unique musical instruments, enjoy colours, savours and the sometimes disconcerting magic of India....

This book comes with a CD of original recordings: extracts of concerts and instrumental practice, musical atmospheres caught in the moment...

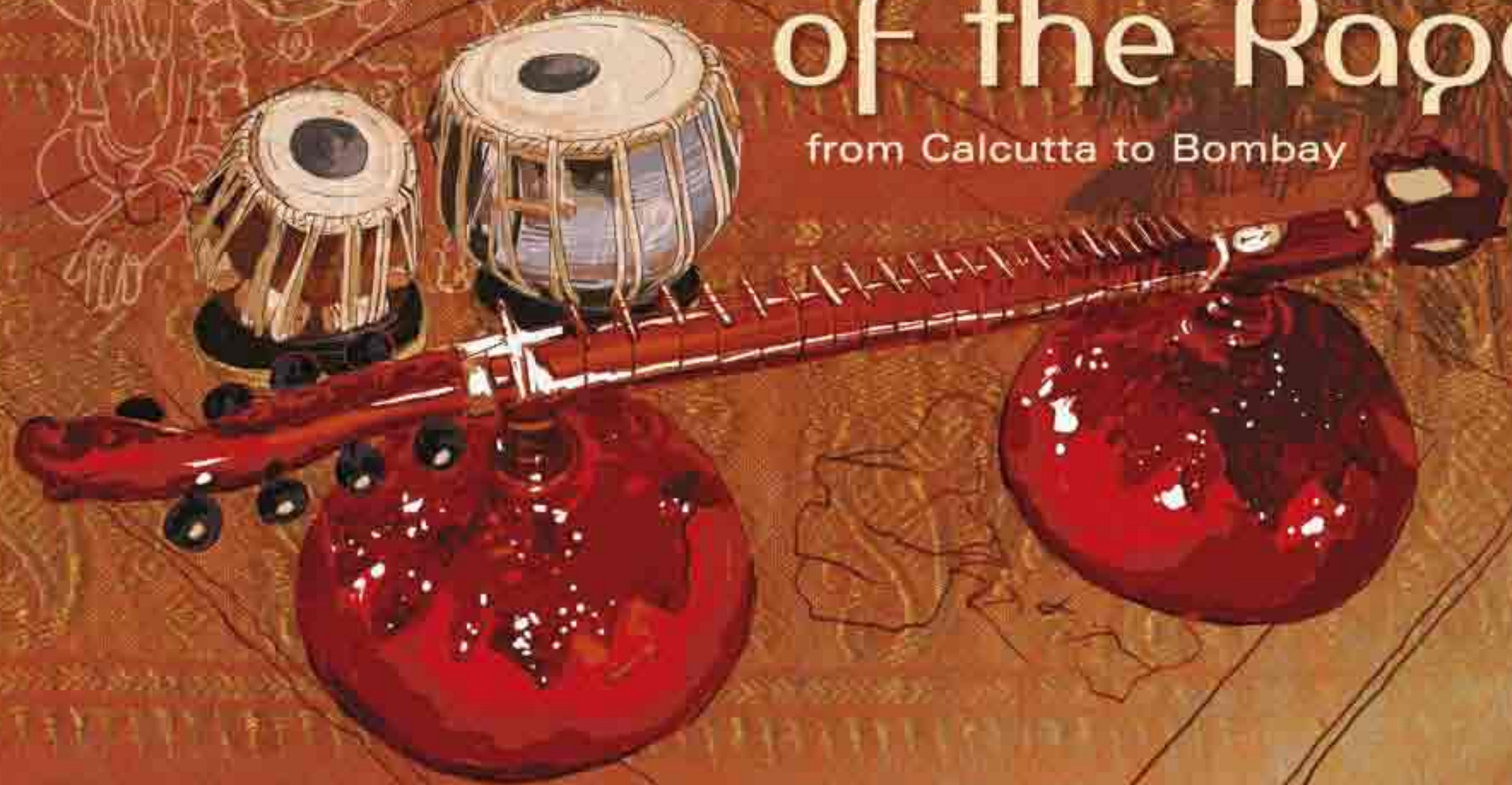
" We are bound for Pune... packed like mules with luggage and instruments. At Howrah Station, Kolkata's railway station, the crowd is in a constant frenzy, as if the world were about to end, with a colorful bang! We manage to find a huge wooden cart, with blue wheels, and conveniently unload our burden. "



Philippe Puget | Marc Ingrand

Rhythms of the Raga

from Calcutta to Bombay



Rhythms of the Raga

from Kolkata to Bombay

Written by Philippe Puget / Illustrated by Marc Ingrand

Translation from French by Christophe Roustan Delatour

What does it matter if we fail to derive the exact meaning of this great harmony?
Is it not like the hand meeting the string and drawing out at once
all its tones at the touch? It is the language of beauty, the caress,
that comes from the heart of the world and straightway reaches our heart.

Rabindranath Tagore

Introduction

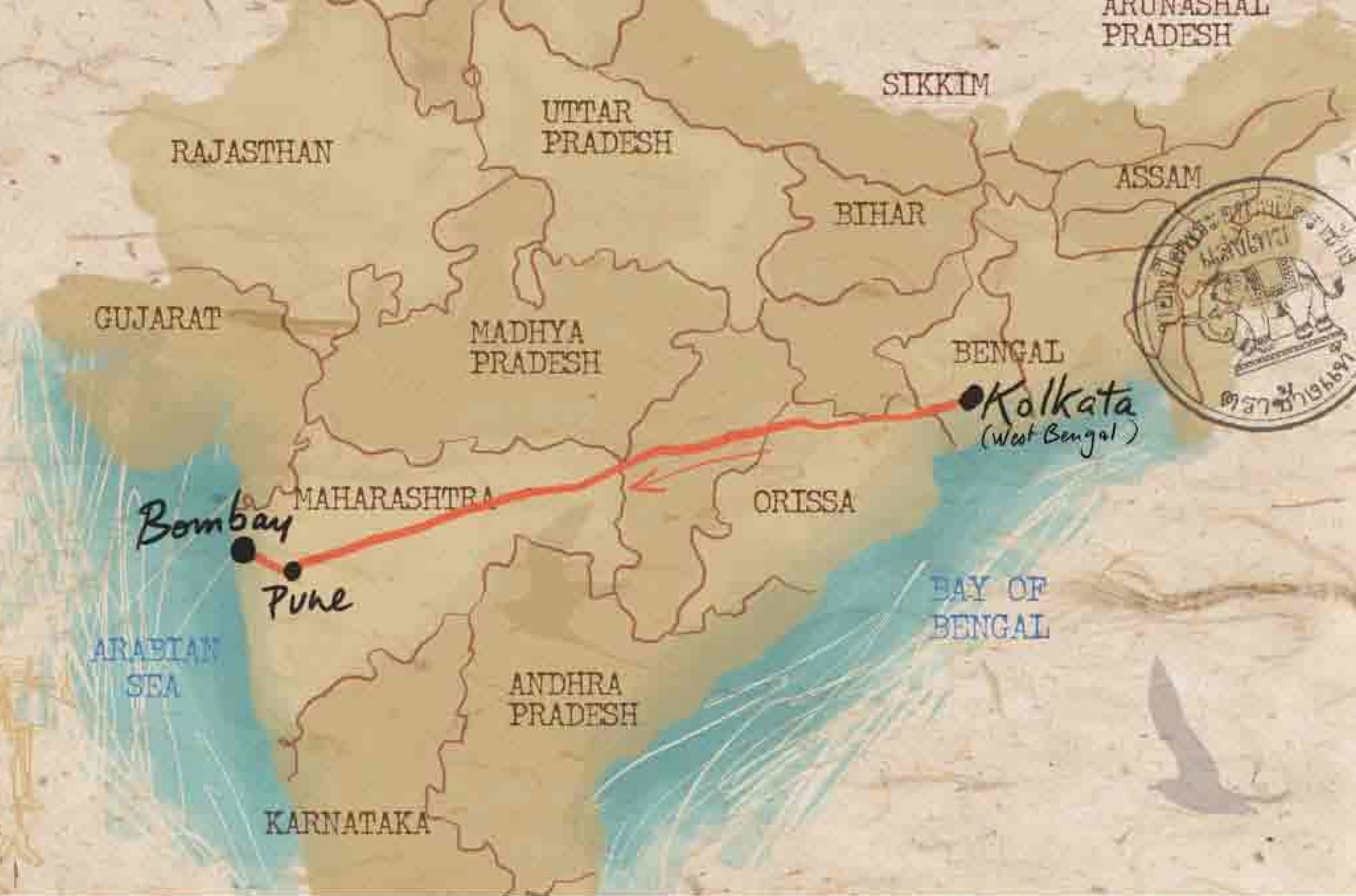
This travel journal was not born of a random encounter. It is the fruit of a solid friendship which began in childhood, some 40 years ago, and has remained untarnished, despite the changing circumstances of our lives.

Marc wasn't more than 10 years old when I first saw him: a spiky haired kid in shorts, swift and agile as a monkey. We lived in Paris, in the 15th arrondissement, near the Square Necker.

The neighborhood was our village and adventure lay at every turn. Decades passed, bringing their share of relationships and family ties, children to raise, careers to handle... We managed to keep in touch throughout the years; although each followed his own path, as one does, with very different experiences along the way.

We lived with our times, and the rock music and jazz-rock of the 70s and 80s were a dominant influence.

We separately became interested in folk and Non-Western music, which led us to seek authentic, personal tuition in northern Indian classical music. This would eventually alter our perception of instrumental practice.



Our travelogue is an evocation of the musical course we've followed thus far. It conveys various impressions and anecdotes, in order to present the "gharanas", or musical lineages, to which we belong. It also seeks to describe, in simple terms, certain teaching methods, while highlighting the relationship between master and disciple. Ultimately, it is a tribute to the teachers who have graciously accepted to guide us.

Collaboration on this journal came naturally, through the joy of combining words and illustrations, imagery and writing. Its framework recalls the development of the "raga", or Indian musical mode: a series of notes corresponding to a particular mood.

Likewise, the concept of "rasa", or "flavor", which underlies all Indian art (music, dance, poetry, sculpture, painting...), can be described as the direct, instinctive perception of a particular state of being. Omnipresent during our journey, this has also been a guideline for the text, illustrations and music.

LAGA: THAT WHICH COLORS THE MIND

"For a raga to truly color the mind of the listener, its effect must be created not only through the notes and the embellishments, but also by the presentation of the specific emotion or mood characteristic of each raga. Thus, through rich melodies in our music, every human emotion, every subtle feeling in man and nature can be musically expressed and experienced."

Ravi Shankar (*My Music, My Life*)





Kolkata, January 2005

Today, a quick jaunt downtown... I'm eager to catch a glimpse of bygone British India; whose Victorian architectural imprint is still very present. Here, delusions of colonial grandeur reached their climax. A reminder is Empress Victoria's memorial:

an oversized, English version of the Taj Mahal.

A yellow "ambassador" (Kolkata's famous taxi) leads us through the banking district, whose most impressive office tower is the TATA building.

That's where Marc and I decide to get off.

From there, we walk toward bustling side streets, as busy as main roads.

We hope to find a quiet place for lunch, and afterwards visit a good bookstore.

Through the sprawling maze of pavement shops (cobblers and shoeshiners for the most part) a multitude of services are offered...

One quick glance is all it takes... from a distance, they immediately spot a business opportunity, or dismiss the passing tourist as a lost cause.

Knowing smiles flash all around me. I fall into step... Indians are generally playful.

I enjoy our break. I order "rice biriani" with a "sweet lassi". Marc only fancies his lassi! His dish is soaking in a ghastly red sauce... it's "chop suei" (a Vietnamese speciality), and judging from the look on his face, it tastes revolting.

Dejected, Marc gives up after two mouthfuls; his culinary hopes dashed.

And all this leading to a fascinating encounter in a specialized bookshop where Tagore, the great Bengali poet philosopher, reigns supreme.

A woman of mesmerizing beauty...
I entered the store feeling that we knew each other, or could have...
I hardly dared to look at her, afraid she would sense my confusion. Mid-forties, delicate features outlined by a sober sari and thick, ashen hair, swaying below her hips as she walked. Now and again, Marc would ask her about painting or some such subject, and I was sure that he too had fallen for her quiet, graceful charm.
I decided to confront her gaze, and after that, the usual, commonplace remarks became delightful!
Her eyes and the sound of her voice became the pivotal notes of a new raga.
A particular mood set in; a fleeting moment of connection.

We each left with one or two selected books tucked under our arms, amazed to have met... a 16th century Hindu princess.
A wonderful touch of grace, in frantic Kolkata.



No. 4108
CASH MEMO Date... 15/11/2011
CLASSIC BOOKS
10 MIDDLETON STREET, KOLKATA-700 071
PHONE : 2229-6551
M/s. _____



Kolkata, the dark city... impressive, inconceivable, unbearable...
For days on end, a low, gray sky, like a leaden shroud spread over decaying houses...
Dampness; sometimes chill.

The air is hardly breathable. I must wear my scarf on rickshaws, buses and taxis...
half-wrapped around my face, like most Indians motorcyclists, to protect myself from
the terrible black exhaust fumes. Day and night, the incessant rattle of enormous,
antiquated buses speeding off in all directions... overcrowded...
thronged with human clusters. A constant state of emergency... almost like wartime.

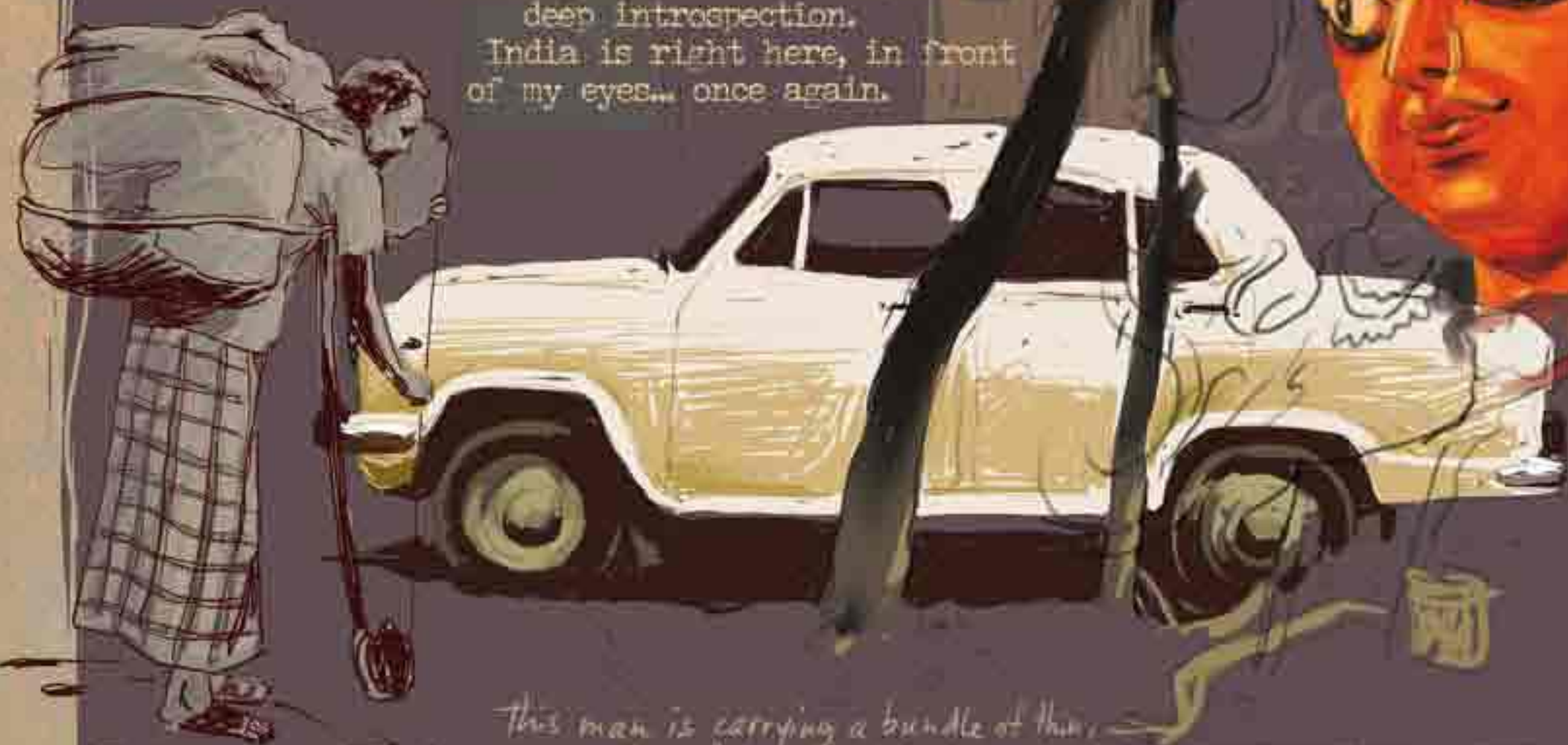
Flocks of black and gray crows watch over everything! They've invaded the terraces,
the low walls, electric wires, posts, bicycles. They fly about with loud shrieks, as if
warning us of something, interpreting a symphony without respite.



Small shopkeepers each have their own sound to distinguish one another,
and these are known to everyone here. One rings a handbell
as he strolls by in tattered "chapals" (flip-flops), his "lungi"
drawn above the knee... Another regularly yells something
to announce his arrival. Suddenly, the muezzin
begins calling the worshippers...

Finding silence here requires
deep introspection.

India is right here, in front
of my eyes... once again.



This man is carrying a bundle of thin,
coarse cotton fabrics. With the tool he's
holding (Dhanuri), he can unravel the cotton on demand.
To get attention, he plucks the metal string...

Chonu, the Samaddar's young servant girl, is a special presence in our lives here in Kolkata. A little flower from Bihar, pink and blue. She left her family, too poor to provide for her needs, and barterers her services to the Samaddars.

Risen early, she helps the cook prepare breakfast for the entire family, as well as for the students and boarding guests, like us. She serves the steaming, fragrant "talis" (round stainless-steel trays): to the father first, then the two sons- Shubashish and Debashish- and lastly to us, in the order of arrival.

We each receive filtered water in a yellow or gray plastic bottle.

Chonu, beaming with a sincere, constant smile, watches us sample fried fish and other Bengali specialities.

She is here, waiting to serve. Each morning, the master of the house shaves at table, a mirror and cup of tea within reach, his brahman's thread across the chest.

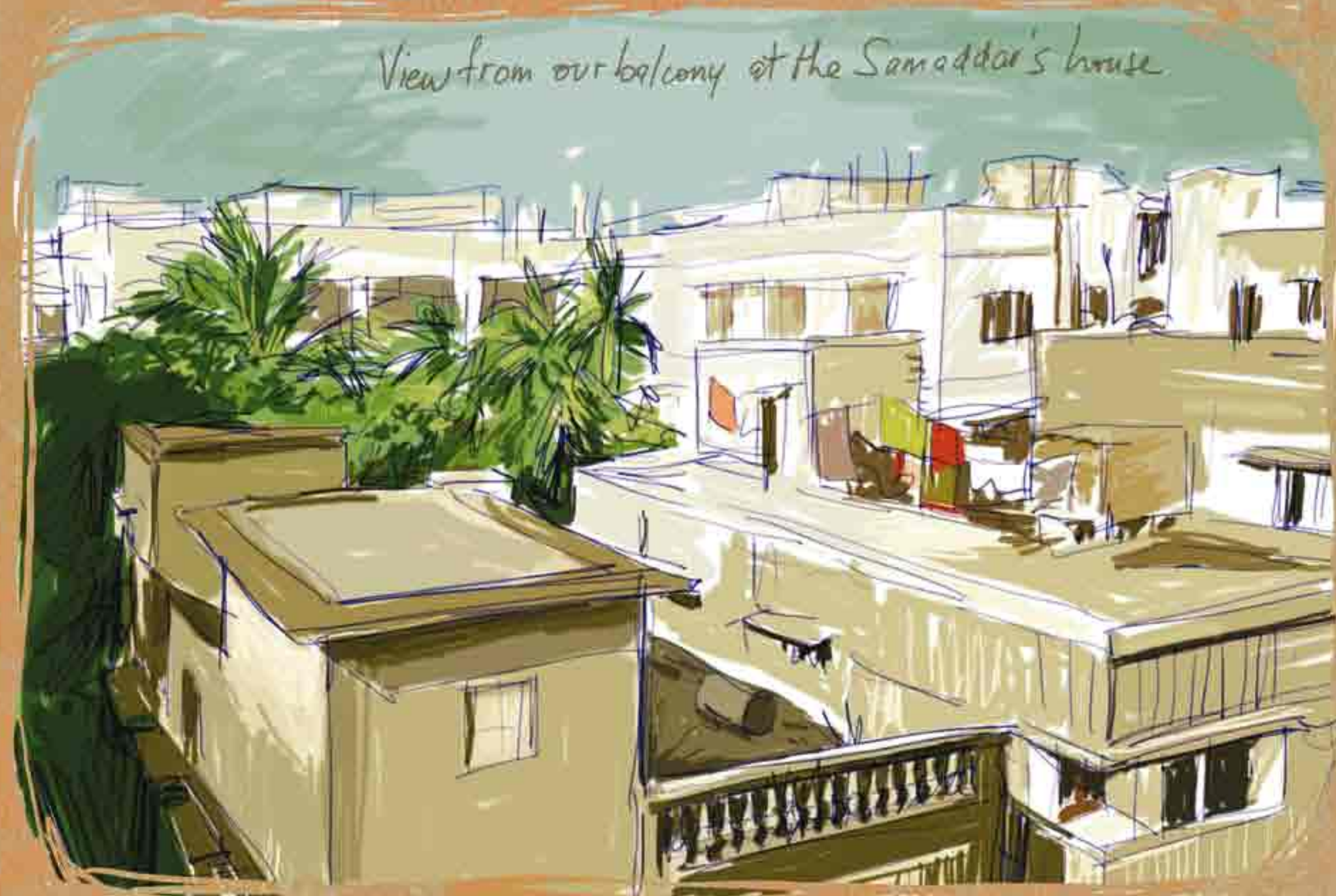


The Chapattis (whole wheat flatbreads) are kept warm





Marc and I can't help laughing as we await the invariable questions which always start off the day: "What is the program today?"... After breakfast, Chonu takes her orders from "Mataji" (the mistress of the house). And for a 10 or 12 years-old girl, she has plenty of chores!

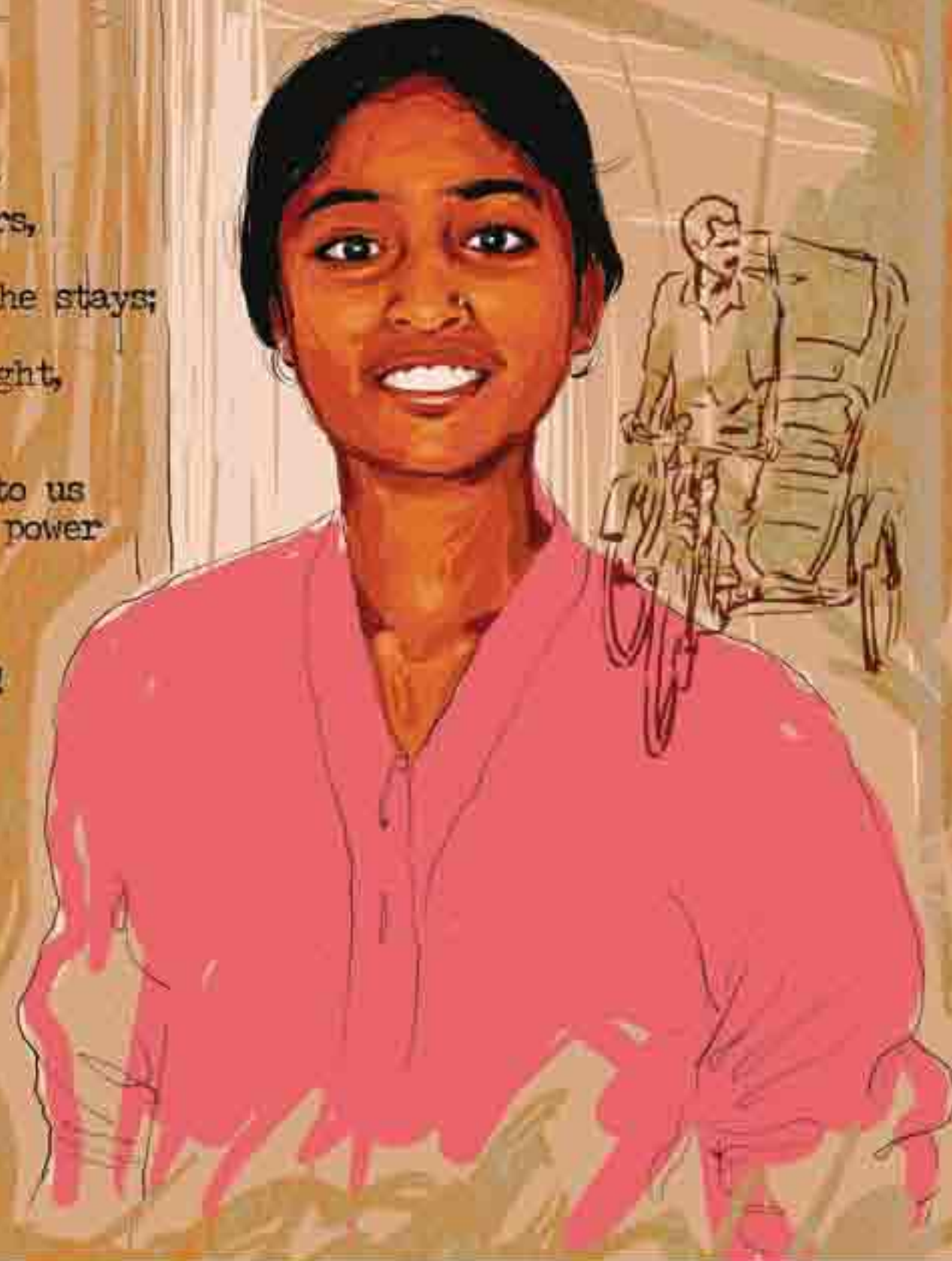


Rarely "inactive", always needed. I've seen her lie down in the afternoon, during the hottest hours, with a mosquito net over her bed, in the middle of the big apartment. That's where she stays; it's her own place. Her work is essential to the comfort of all. In the evening and during the night, she is in charge of the comings and goings within the building...

From the balcony, she lowers the front door key to us on a string... she relishes that moment, the little power she wields as she tugs back the string just when we're about to grab it.

Her smile is enormous, delightful. Her shrewdness in all circumstances surprises me! Almost adult, not quite a child. To everyone, Chonu is like a ray of sunshine, a pearly-white smile set in ebony. She's the household's center of gravity, reassuring and invaluable.

The Samaddars are a good family; Chonu is fortunate... this is India and Kolkata, let's not forget!





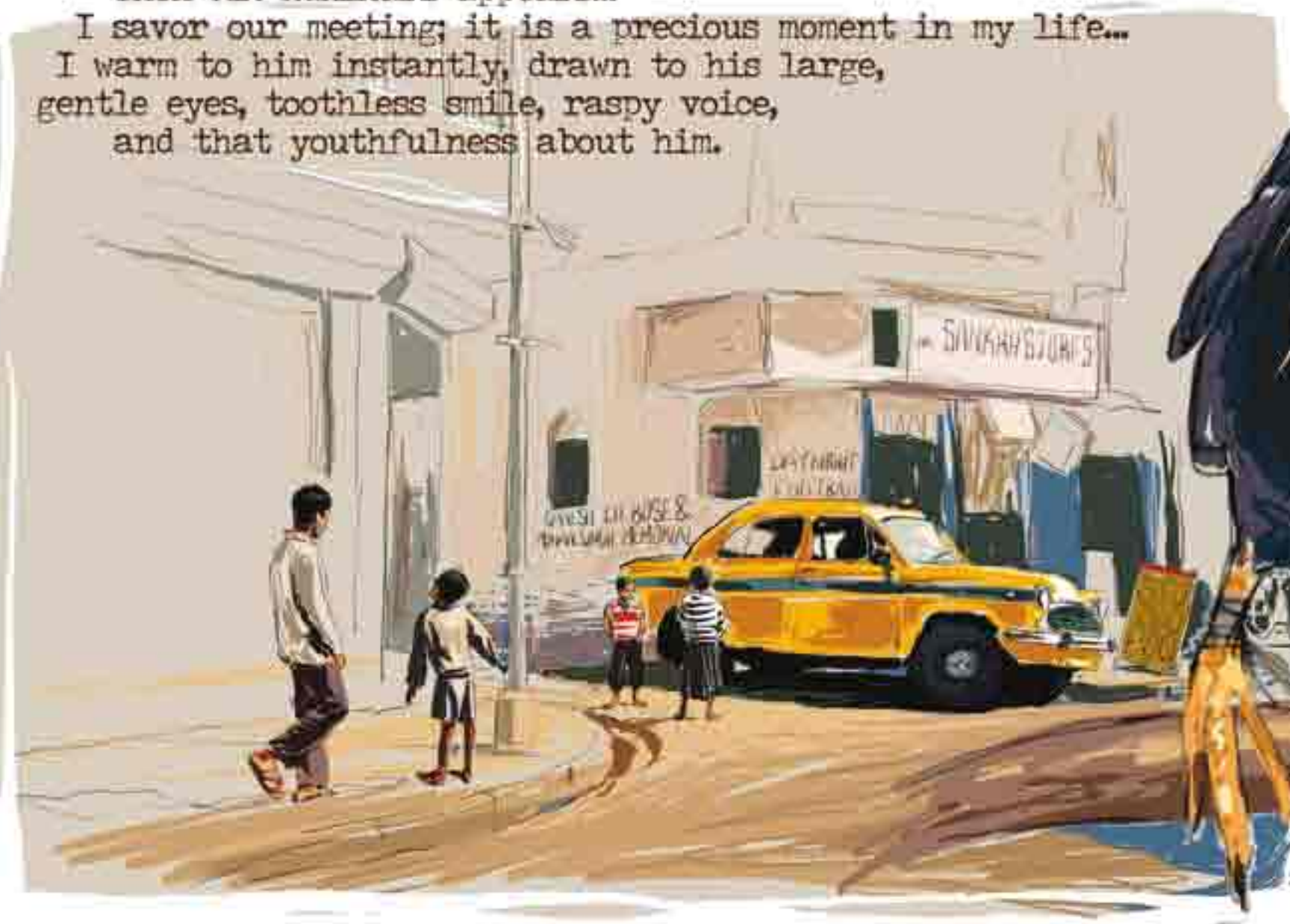
Sidewalks of Kolkata...

A special tribute must be paid to Mr. Murari Mohan Adhikari, the last of a distinguished line of instrument makers: Kanai Lal & Brother; a name synonymous with nearly 120 years of superior workmanship.

I've come to the "Chittimor" district to fetch my instrument: a Rudra veena, or "been", ordered the previous year. Perched in his tree, a mynah studies us while we wait, bare-footed, on the smooth, crimson landing.

Then Mr. Adhikari appears...

I savor our meeting; it is a precious moment in my life... I warm to him instantly, drawn to his large, gentle eyes, toothless smile, raspy voice, and that youthfulness about him.



We sit down on the rug.
The been is here!
Holding it delicately, I start by playing the rhythmic strings ("chikaris"). At once, the sound engulfs me. I'm spellbound...
I feel as if I've crossed into a different realm of sound. My entire musical practice is about to change.
Mr. Adhikari talks of his work, of music...
Now, I explore the various octaves...
He follows me, alert, nodding his head from side to side in appreciation (a common Indian habit).
I can sense his joy.
He is the last craftsman capable of such work. His sons will not keep up the trade.
Thoughtfully, he explains that they did not wish to receive his instruction.
Marc admires two splendid "surbahars" (bass sitars), recently finished.
Soon, it's time to part.





The been is dismantled for transport. In the ambassador, the "tumbas" (the instrument's two resonators) take up the entire trunk; while the "dandi" (the bamboo tube on which rest the strings) straddles the front and back seats.

We sit on either side. It's a real removal job!

Mr. Adhikari doesn't look back for a last farewell. Why should he?

My Western expectations are disappointed... Wrapped in his beige shawl, he slowly returns indoors.

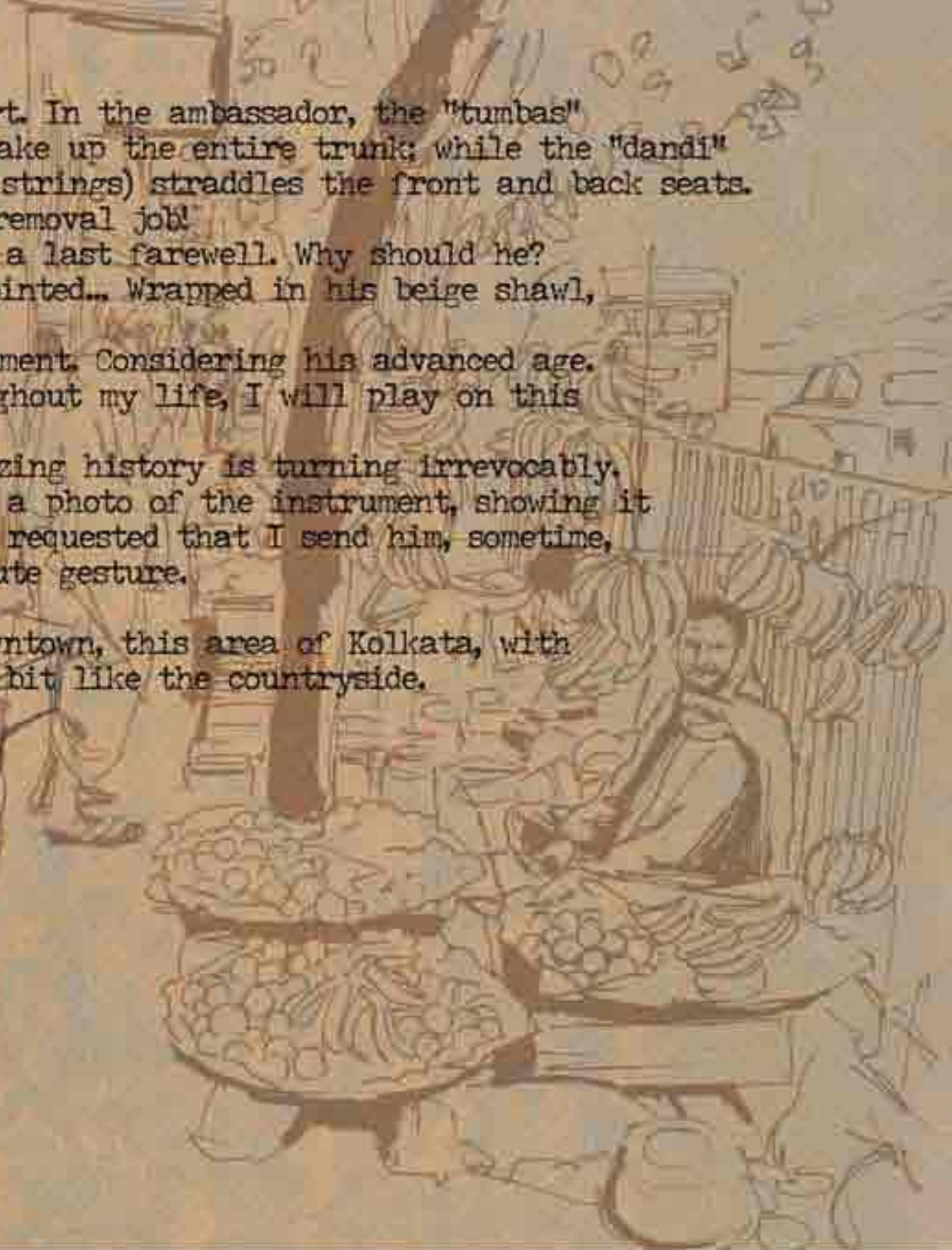
I grasp the significance of the moment. Considering his advanced age, I'll never see him again... Yet, throughout my life, I will play on this outstanding instrument.

With him, a page in the been's amazing history is turning irrevocably.

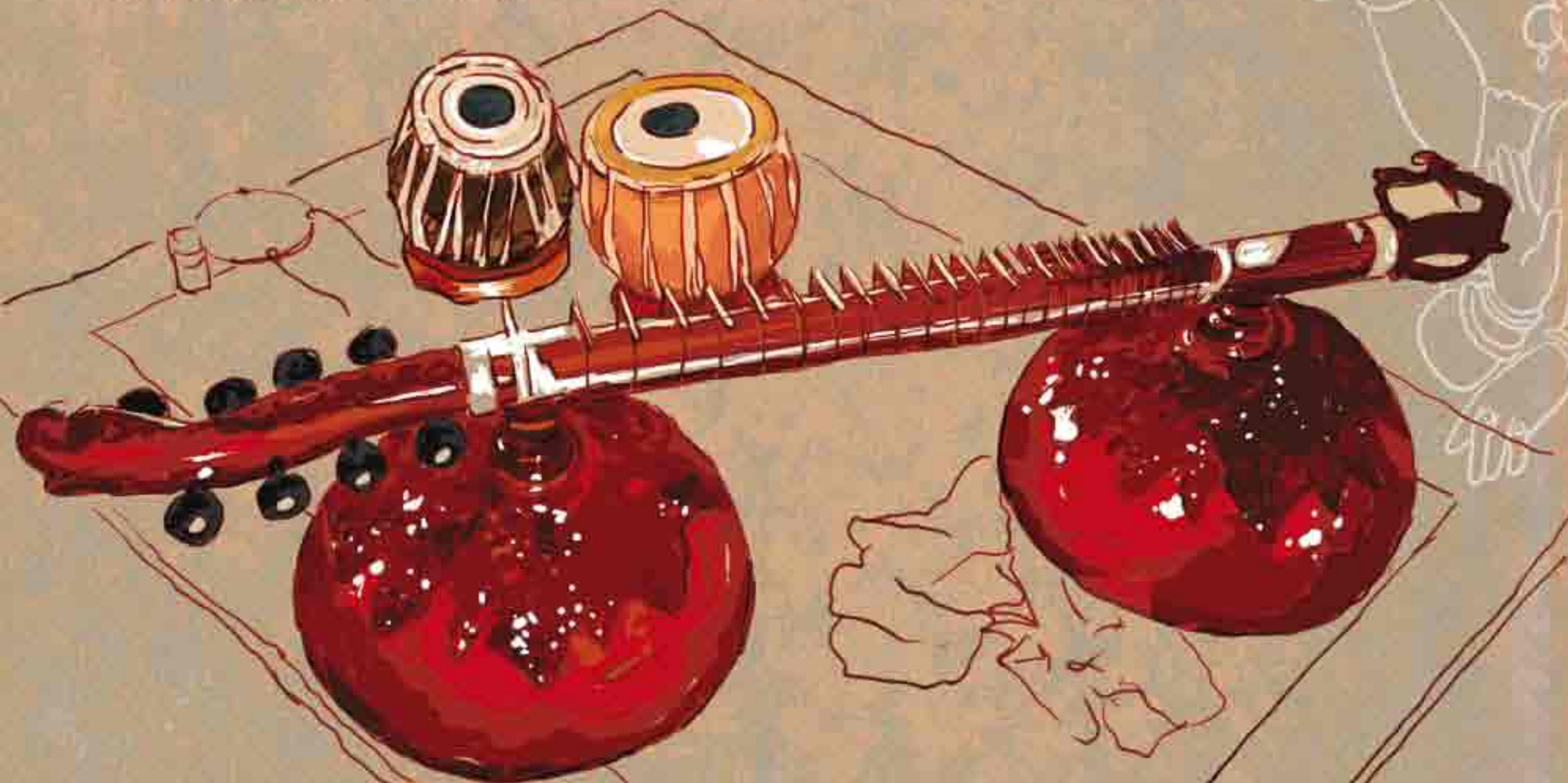
He asked me to send from France a photo of the instrument, showing it arrived in good condition. He also requested that I send him, sometime, a recording... a wonderful, last minute gesture.

After the scrap-iron misery of downtown, this area of Kolkata, with its leafy, winding streets, feels a bit like the countryside.

We head back to Lake Garden.



Side by side, on the beige floor mat: our new instruments.
So much has gone into this...



We are staying in Lake Garden, on the 3rd floor of a newish building owned by the Samaddars, a very hospitable Bengali family. After dark, our practice room serves as a bedroom for two students. Their furnishings are minimal: each has a simple wooden bed with mosquito net, a small table and a chair.

In the daytime, Marc retires there for his personal practice, while I occupy our own bedroom, working on my bed under an opalescent light. We meet again on the floor mat, to work on compositions in a 12 beat rhythmic cycle called "chautal". The veena and tabla both sound good. Notes drift towards the empty walls, some reverberating off the cool floor tiles, others prolonged, suspended... The instruments observe each other, seeking harmony... Slowly, conscientiously, we sculpt the silence. I lack improvisational technique and measure, once again, the road that lies ahead...

I've traveled here to learn new means of expression. Beyond intellectual reasoning, I am convinced that musical language is based on a simple, almost fail-proof system, which allows total freedom to play. We repeat this 12 beat cycle, oblivious to time and space. The sounds mingle with the blueish incense rising from Mrs. Samaddar's altar. Our hearts fill with glee, with the simple pleasure of sharing this moment. The music doesn't disturb Mrs Samaddar's "puja". On the contrary, she says it's good for the soul and makes the gods happy. I fall asleep, tonight, feeling I've accomplished some important part in a crucial undertaking.

At dusk, our street becomes a cricket pitch for the neighborhood children. They wait until "Goldfish" (that's how we've nicknamed our grocer) has closed his iron curtain.

When we arrived in Kolkata, he greeted us in his usual, good-natured way; turning about like a goldfish in his 10X10 ft shop, stocked with just about everything: soap, mineral water, Coca-Cola, chewing-gum, various mouth-freshening blends of herbs and spices (such as Pan Parag) which Indians adore, toothpaste, toilet paper, spicy snacks, sandals...

He broadly waves whenever we pass by, as if it were the first time, always enquiring about our daily schedule.

Like all Indians, "Goldfish" wants to know everything.

I remember him sparking off overwhelming fits of laughter!

What a blessing to have him there.

A local figure, to be sure.

India take to rhetoric

Ignore India at your own peril; Dravid

Where

g to play
d game



...ndulkar can bat at any position: Kapil



When meeting someone in India, the same questions are always asked whatever the background; yet they always maintain a proper, unbreachable distance. In the human hive, Indians behave as if they were alone. They like to preserve themselves. Draped in dignity, they usually concentrate on their own actions, unaware of others, turned towards themselves.

I've witnessed this attitude countless times, in overcrowded rickshaws or trains, as bodies are wedged together in the confined space!



Pandit Shankar Ghosh leans back against the wall, between two large, flat cushions.

he looks me straight in the eyes and after the customary introductions, invites us to attend his class.

I immediately recognize a true teacher.

By the end of the morning, students of all levels will have come and gone, presenting their work to the master.

First, the rhythmic phrases are learned by heart, through flawless repetition of each basic formula.



At this stage, working on diction is crucial. The instrument may only be played once the memorization is achieved. Then the student can leave, he has sufficient work till the next lesson, and another takes his place. Guruji's liveliness is astounding ("guruji" is a title of respect, meaning "master", used by his students and entourage). He interacts with each disciple. At times theatrical, spicing up his musical explanations with anecdotes, he assigns to each, in due course, the exercise on which their progress depends.

Musical training requires a blind faith in the entire teaching process. The responsibility falls upon the master: it is he, and he alone, who "knows".

The reputation of India's great musicians rests, in part, on the accomplishments of their pupils.

Aside from his authority as both musician and teacher, Pandit Shankar Ghosh is a simple man, amiable and generous. I recall spending wonderful moments with him; such as an evening in a select Bengali restaurant, to which his wife, his son and his daughter-in-law has also been invited. After the fine dining and lively conversation, he had us driven to our lodging in Lake Garden. An uncommon touch, in India.



Giving tabla lesson to a 3 year old!

Tabla

The tabla is India's most popular instrument and consists of two upright drums.

The right hand "dayan" drum (also called "tabla"), is carved from a block of dense wood.

Finely tuned to the desired tonic note, it produces bright, treble tones.

The left hand "bayan" drum, larger in diameter, is a nickel or chrome-plated brass kettledrum. It delivers the unmistakable, deep bass tones.

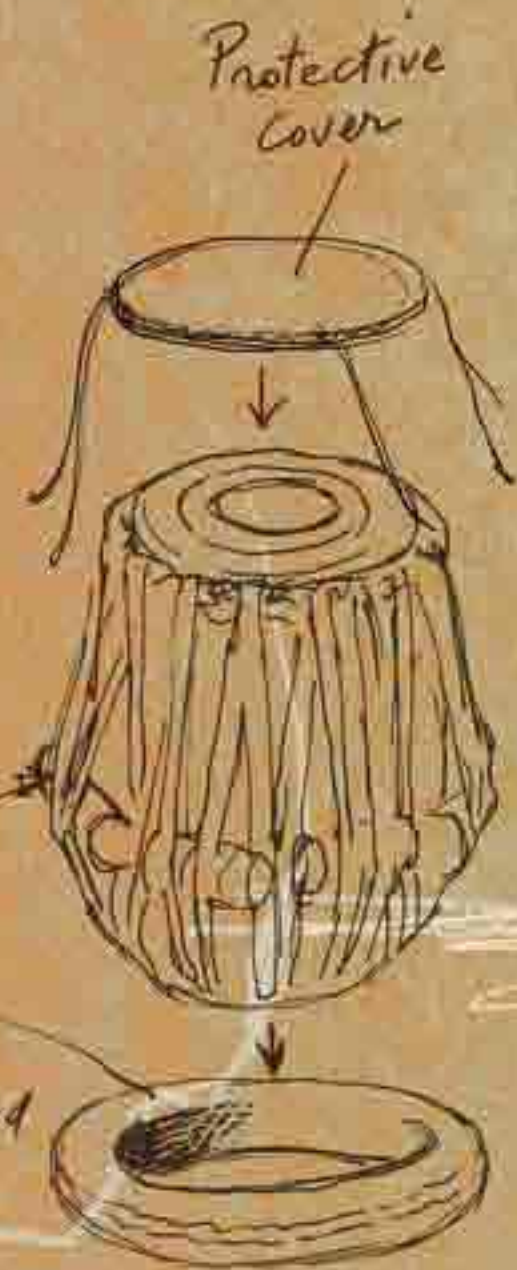
Each drumhead is fashioned from goatskins and overlaid with a central black spot, called "gab", made from a pasty mixture of rice, charcoal and iron filings. The "gab" gives the tabla its full resonance.

Played using the fingers and palms, the tabla is capable of producing an array of over twenty sounds.

It is the most elaborate percussion instrument, allowing unlimited expression.



Hatori
tuning hammer.
used for tapping the
edge of the drumhead
or the wooden pegs.



Ring
used for
positioning and
tilting the
tabla



Although Kolkata is no longer the country's administrative and political center, it remains, nonetheless, a leading cultural city. Among other things, it is the capital of tabla. It numbers more than fifteen thousand tabla players, among whom the highly talented Apurba Mukherjee, a student of Pandit Shankar Ghosh.

Straightforward and kind, he immediately adopts me into his family: father, mother and younger sister, whom Marc had met on a previous trip. On the ground floor of a small building, I am ushered by the mistress of the house through a narrow corridor, leading to three rooms. The goddess Durga occupies the largest room, amid portraits of the family forebears. Summoned by the gods, Durga is an aspect of the mother-goddess, Shakti, also known as Parvati, Shiva's spouse, and Kali. Represented with red eyes, a red tongue and black skin, Kali is the most terrifying deity in the Hindu pantheon.

Kolkata worships her. (Kalikota)
Outside, the feverish celebrations of a sikh festival are under way. Loudspeakers tied to the trees blare out twangy, grating noise; we can no longer hear each other!

Indrani, Apurba's wife, sparkles with the grace of motherhood. Their son, Anjishnu ("sun"), is their pride and joy. She is an accomplished "khayal" singer. On stage and off, they form a cheerful, attentive couple.

We are kidnapped for dinner, in turn, by either of the two families. This time, we are treated to another meal, of homemade Bengali fish and "masalas" (spice mix).

Indrani and Apurba are promising young artists. They are regularly invited to perform at prestigious festivals in Europe, or on famous stages.





Sandip



CASH MEMO No. 18019 © 465 2474

THE MELODY
Home of
"MELODY HARMONIUM"
82A & 86A Rash Behari Avenue, Kolkata - 700 026
Largest retailer of Audio Cassettes and Compact Discs in South Kolkata.

QTY	DESCRIPTION	Rs	₹

Arriving for our evening appointment, Sandip Chatterjee has the look of an Italian operetta tenor! Dark complexion; neatly trimmed mustache; a bright-red hood, typically local, to match his Vespa scooter... we are taken aback by his stylishness.

To escape the heavy traffic, he suggest that we take shelter in a bar on Jawaharlal Nehru Road, near the Victoria Memorial. In the subdued atmosphere, a few regulars are sipping bad whiskey (by no means an Indian specialty) or downing large Fisher beers.

Sandip is a young "santoor" player whom Marc had met at concerts in France, touring with Apurbo. His musical knowledge has already earned him academic recognition, and he is currently a staff musician at All India Radio.

"Music is the shortest path to God", he says, in words which express a heartfelt quest for truth and liberation. He lives his music as a spiritual pursuit. A profound peacefulness radiates from him, like soothing, crystalline light.

The "santoor", introduced from Persia during the 15th century, is a trapezoidal dulcimer. Its hundred-odd strings are struck using thin, curved mallets.

At table, we talk for ages. About "talim" (instruction), tradition, raga... and also about France.

When we finally part, bald lightbulbs, hanging from the storefronts, cast a faint glow through the murky streets.

Santhendralal
WHOLESALE & RETAILERS
100, 101, 102, 103
The Swastika Market, 2, Gumbhat Road,
Kolkata-700 048, Phone: 432 9773



fr
1-30
PUTRU VA
KUNT SHEF
TANICA No. 536
S. B. EDIES LTD
WOLCOTT'S
At Entrance to
L. S. B. B.

GOODS CARRIAGE

N RI 2582



THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION
INSTITUTE OF CULTURE
Gol Park Road, Kolkata - 700 029

The bridge is long. Extending in an endless arc, over houses pelted by countless monsoons. We are walking to the Ramakrishna Mission, one of Kolkata's main venues for Classical Music.

Even from afar, I could sense her immediately... An anguish deeper than usual.

She squats on the sidewalk, in the Indian manner.

Black, black... she's completely black! The remains of tattered garments and skin have formed a cloak of grime and scab... Her hair is a shapeless shell of caked mud...

We no longer exist; nor do the chaos of traffic or the lack of air, so close to the ground... Nothing exists, now. She is disconnected.

Motionless, she empties herself from bellow, slowly flooding this spatch of sidewalk, in the very heart of Kolkata... As we pass, an animal-like groan rises from her body: one last prayer to who knows which god! I look up, calling the sky to witness. This dark mass, next to me, was once a woman. Our eyes never even met. She has gone beyond. Closer to death than to life, perhaps.

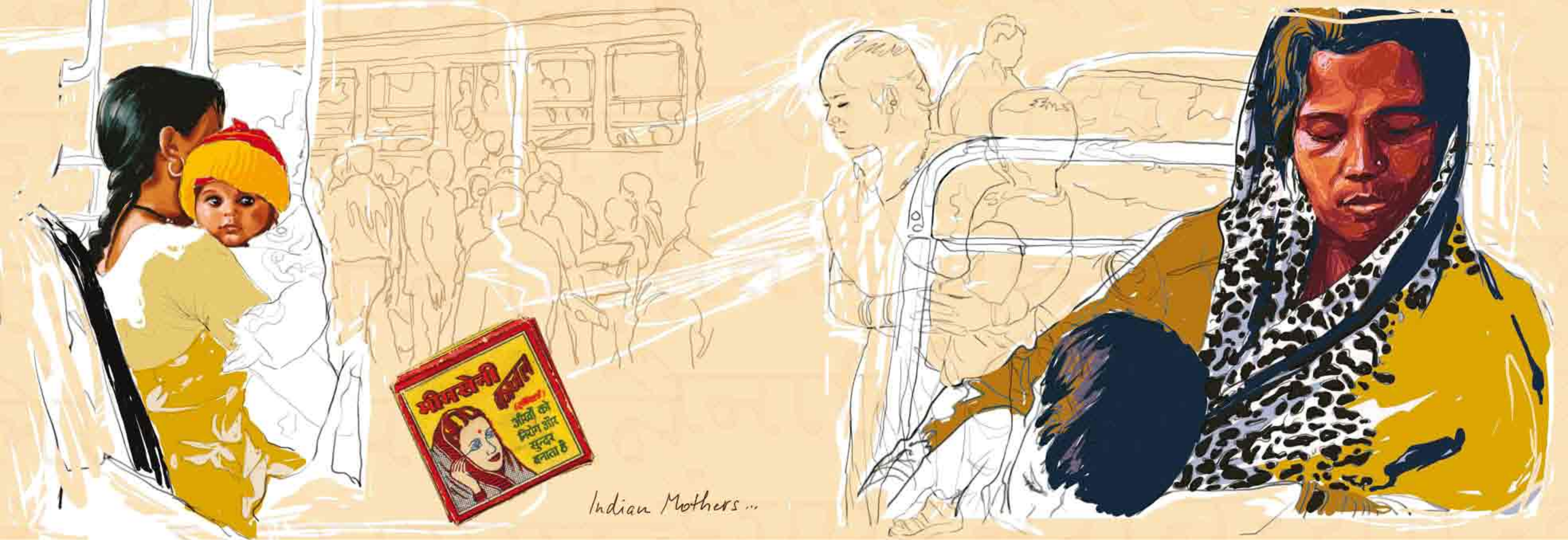
The threshold of the intolerable has been crossed...

We continue walking along the bridge. No words can be spoken, not even a sound...

NOTHING.

She is a sister in misery to that girl I once saw on a railway platform in Bhopal, twelve years ago, and whose despair has never left me.





Indian Mothers ...

Sculptures of Durga and Saraswati
in the craftsmen's quarter.



Today, we catch a taxi a stone's throw away from "our place". We settle in the back; windows open, Kolkata starts rolling by... The car winds its way through constant traffic, like a huge black ant carrying its load. Now, the driver tells us he has an errand to run. We keep on driving, changing neighborhoods. Finally, the car pulls over onto the sidewalk. Our man calmly leaves, asking us to wait. So... we do! He returns with an associate, talking loud and gesticulating, all ablaze. The second man leans an elbow on the car door, gives us the once-over with a wide grin and sits down in the front. We've just caught on: this is the boss. It's obvious from the picture on the license dangling from the roof. In the backseat, we ironize: "Traveling with a buddy is much more fun, right?" So off we go again, expecting further adventures.



We are racing northward.
We've learned from the
Sammadars that the northern
sectors are tough, overpopulated,
located near gigantic
shantytowns...

From the back of the ambassador,
I notice a Hindu shrine stuck
to the dashboard. It's Ganesh,
the plump elephant god,
surrounded by fake candles and
flickering incense sticks.

Indian chic par excellence.
Their conversation is
overwhelming, they're shouting,
not talking, until the ambassador
comes to another stop.

Dismissing his partner, the
taxi boss grabs the wheel.
In between persistent horn hooting,
our second driver warns us that
he too has a stopover to make.

We're being abducted again!

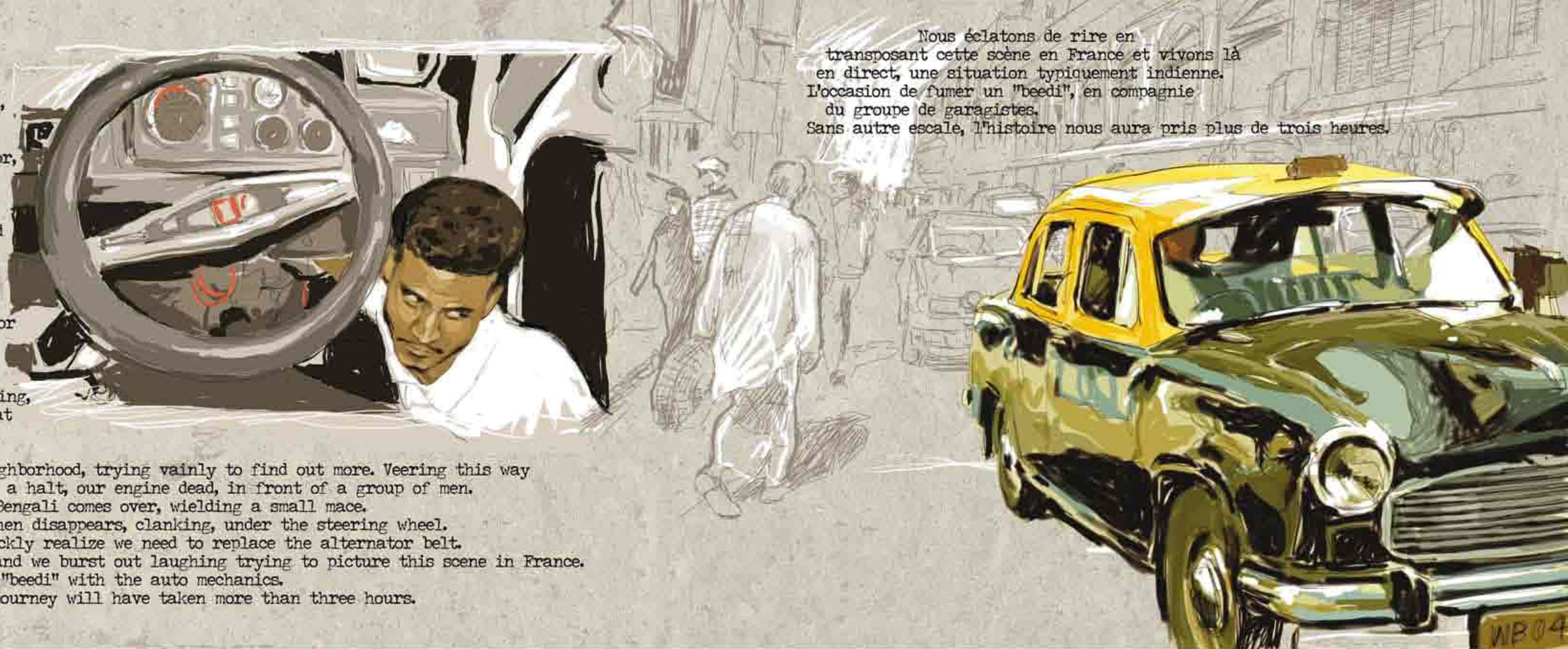
We cross neighborhood after neighborhood, trying vainly to find out more. Veering this way
and that, we finally grind to a halt, our engine dead, in front of a group of men.
The driver steps out. A young Bengali comes over, wielding a small mace.

He opens the front hood, then disappears, clanking, under the steering wheel.
Peering into the engine? I quickly realize we need to replace the alternator belt.

Typical Indian situation... and we burst out laughing trying to picture this scene in France.

Time enough, now, to smoke a "beedi" with the auto mechanics.

Without further incidents, the journey will have taken more than three hours.



Nous éclatons de rire en
transposant cette scène en France et vivons là
en direct, une situation typiquement indienne.
L'occasion de fumer un "beedi", en compagnie
du groupe de garagistes.
Sans autre escale, l'histoire nous aura pris plus de trois heures.

Tuesday, January 25th, 2005

We are leaving Kolkata... after spending two weeks in between Pandit Shankar Ghosh's tabla lessons and Mr. Murari Mohan Adhikari, the craftsman who made my been.

There were also several concert, most of them intense...

Amjad Ali Khan (sarod), Anindo Chatterjee (tabla), Pandit Sasraj (vocal),

Pandit Hari Prasad Chaurasia (flute), Wasifuddin Dagar (vocal) and many others...
I've set foot in the circle of Indian Festivals: Kolkata's "Dover Lane".

535



Sabrang Sangeet Sammelan

Organised by : **SABRANG MUSIC TRUST**

Each evening, we get prepared! Equipped with beedies and a shawl, I'm geared up for the night and the long hours of concert ahead. Our musical diet is selective; there's no use in absorbing everything. Every so often, we warm ourselves over a burning hot "chai" (Indian tea), drinking slowly, exchanging opinions on the musicians. The "chaiwallahs" (tea peddlers) are mobbed by the crowd! More than two thousand people attend each concert, fanned out around the stage, within a red-curtained enclosure. Clearly, the Dover Lane Festival is a sanctum of Indian classical music.



DESH
53rd Session
THE DOVER LANE MUSIC CONFERENCE
 22nd January - 25th January 2005 (Night Long Session) ★ Nazrul Mancha, Rabindra Sarobar

PROGRAMME
INAUGURATION : 22nd January 2005 (10 a.m.) ALL ARE WELCOME
 SANGEET SAMMAN 2005 : Recipient : Shiv Kumar Sharma
 Bhajan Recital by : Jasraj ★ Haimanti Shukla ★ Upendra Bhat ★ Saswati Bagchi

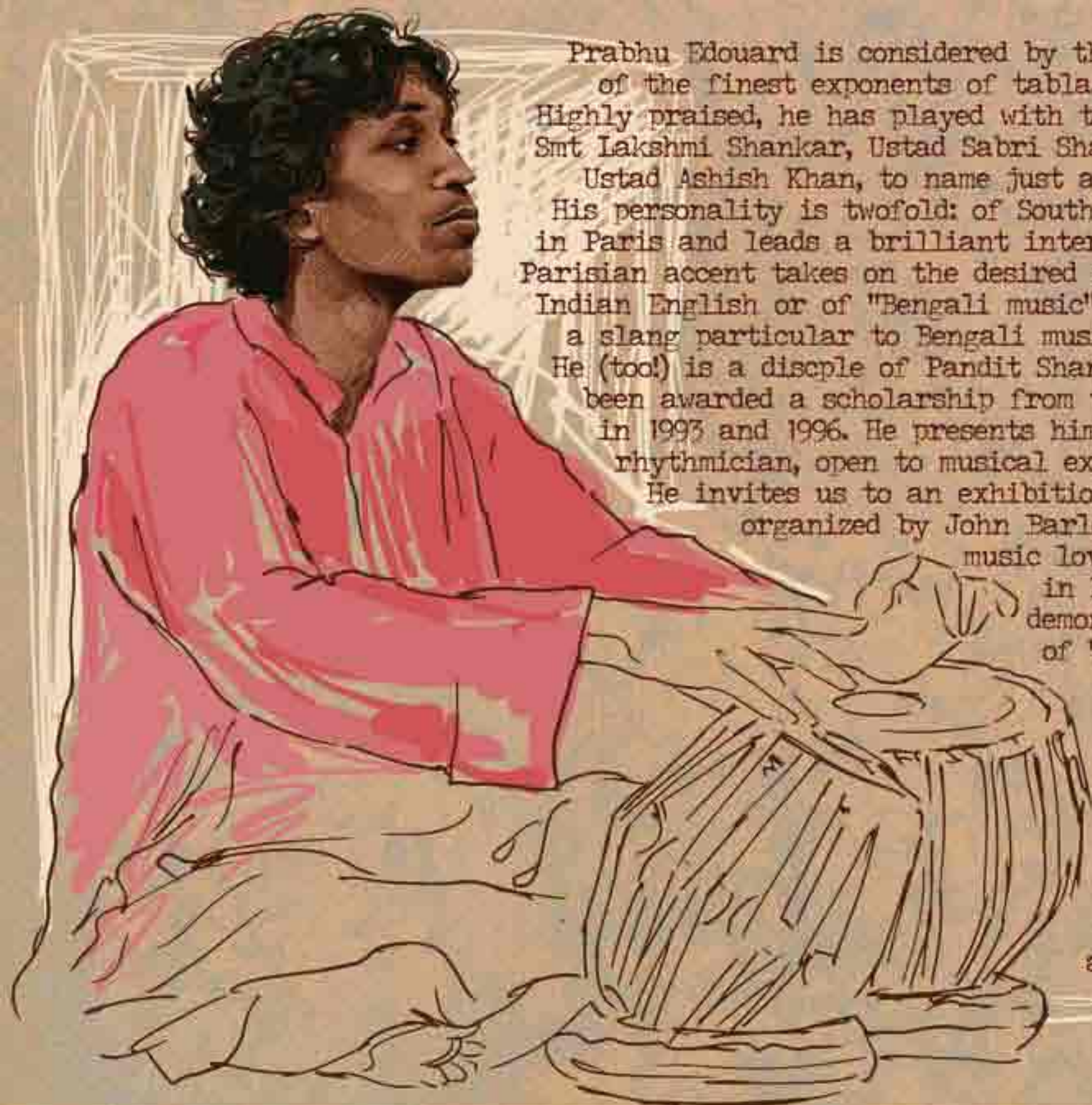
22nd January 2005 (Night Long, from 8.30 p.m.)
 AMJAD ALI KHAN (Sarod)
 JASRAJ (Vocal)
 HARIPRASAD CHAURASIA (Flute)

23rd January 2005 (Night Long, from 8.30 p.m.)
 PADMA TALWALKAR (Vocal)
 AMAAN ALI BANGASH (Sarod)
 RASHID KHAN (Vocal)
 SHAHID PARVEZ (Sitar)

24th January 2005 (Night Long, from 8.30 p.m.)
 KAUSHIKI CHAKRABORTY (Vocal)
 PURBAYAN CHATTERJEE (Sitar)
 SRUTI SADOLIKAR (Vocal)
 M.S. GOPALKRISHNAN (Sitar)

25th January 2005 (Night Long, from 8.30 p.m.)
 TRIPTI MUKHERJEE (Vocal)
 SHAHID PARVEZ (Sitar)

Accompanists - Tabla : Swapan Chandra
Harm : Akram Khan, Abhijit Benerjee, Sandip Das, Debaprasad Dey, Dasgupta, S...



Prabhu Edouard is considered by the young generation as one of the finest exponents of tabla.

Highly praised, he has played with the likes of Smt Lakshmi Shankar, Ustad Sabri Shankar and Ustad Ashish Khan, to name just a few.

His personality is twofold: of South Indian origin, Prabhu lives in Paris and leads a brilliant international career. His natural Parisian accent takes on the desired inflexion, whether of lively Indian English or of "Bengali music",

a slang particular to Bengali musicians.

He (too!) is a disciple of Pandit Shankar Ghosh and has twice been awarded a scholarship from the Government of India, in 1993 and 1996. He presents himself as a versatile rhythmician, open to musical experimentation.

He invites us to an exhibition of musical instruments organized by John Barlow, an Australian collector, music lover and musician who has lived in Kolkata for 30 years. Live demonstrations are staged, mainly of "sarod" and "sursingar", an instrument derived from the Afghan rebab.

Prabhu is definitely an accomplished artist, perfectly at home on stage. Spontaneous and smiling, he plays with conviction, assisting the soloist while staying in touch with audience. His cutting humor reveals a vigorous energy.



" Coffee, coffee, tchai, tchai, ollachips, ollechips, dhalwalla, samosa... coffee, coffee... "

Bajalpur Junction



Pune

We are bound for Pune... packed like mules with luggage and instruments.

At Howrah Station, Kolkata's railway station, the crowd is in a constant frenzy, as if the world were about to end, with a colorful bang! We manage to find a huge wooden cart, with blue wheels, and conveniently unload our burden.

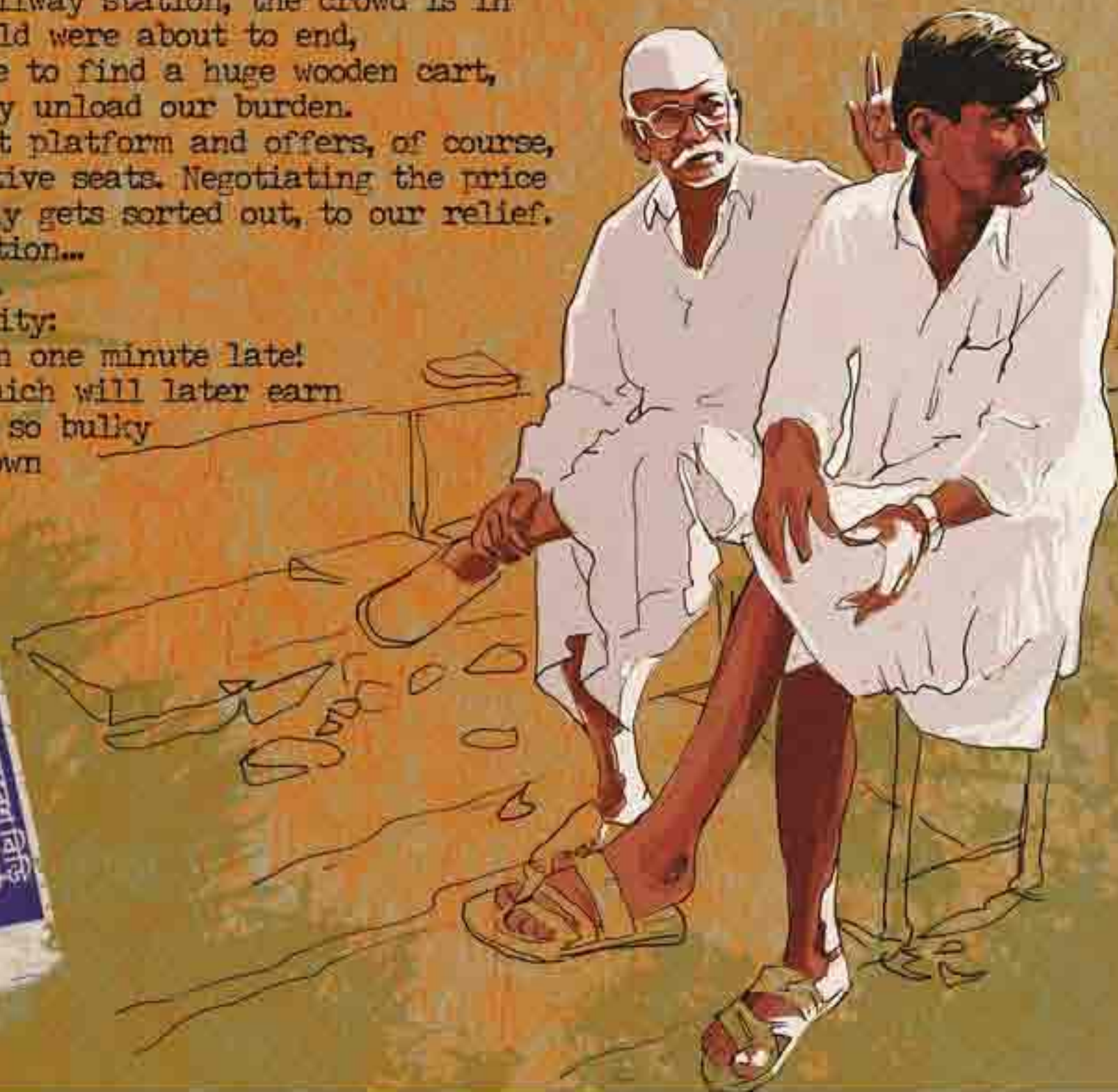
The coolie takes us to the right platform and offers, of course, to carry our bags to our respective seats. Negotiating the price isn't easy, but everything finally gets sorted out, to our relief.

The train pulls into Pune Station...

38 hours after our departure.

We are amazed by the punctuality:

The Azad Hind Express isn't even one minute late! We've traveled in third class (which will later earn us a certain respect). The been, so bulky in its two crates, even had its own sleeping berth. Luxury.



Uday Bhawalkar is waiting on the platform, uncombed and sleepy-eyed.

It's 6 a.m. and the soft, morning glow is enticing.

Pune spreads its fragrance, ready for a tryst.

"Rama Govind" is a truly welcoming house and Jyoti, Uday's wife is its queen.

She greets us with good-natured attention. It is a stirring reunion.

We last saw each other in 1995, during their honeymoon, when

they had stayed with us for a few days on the

French Riviera.

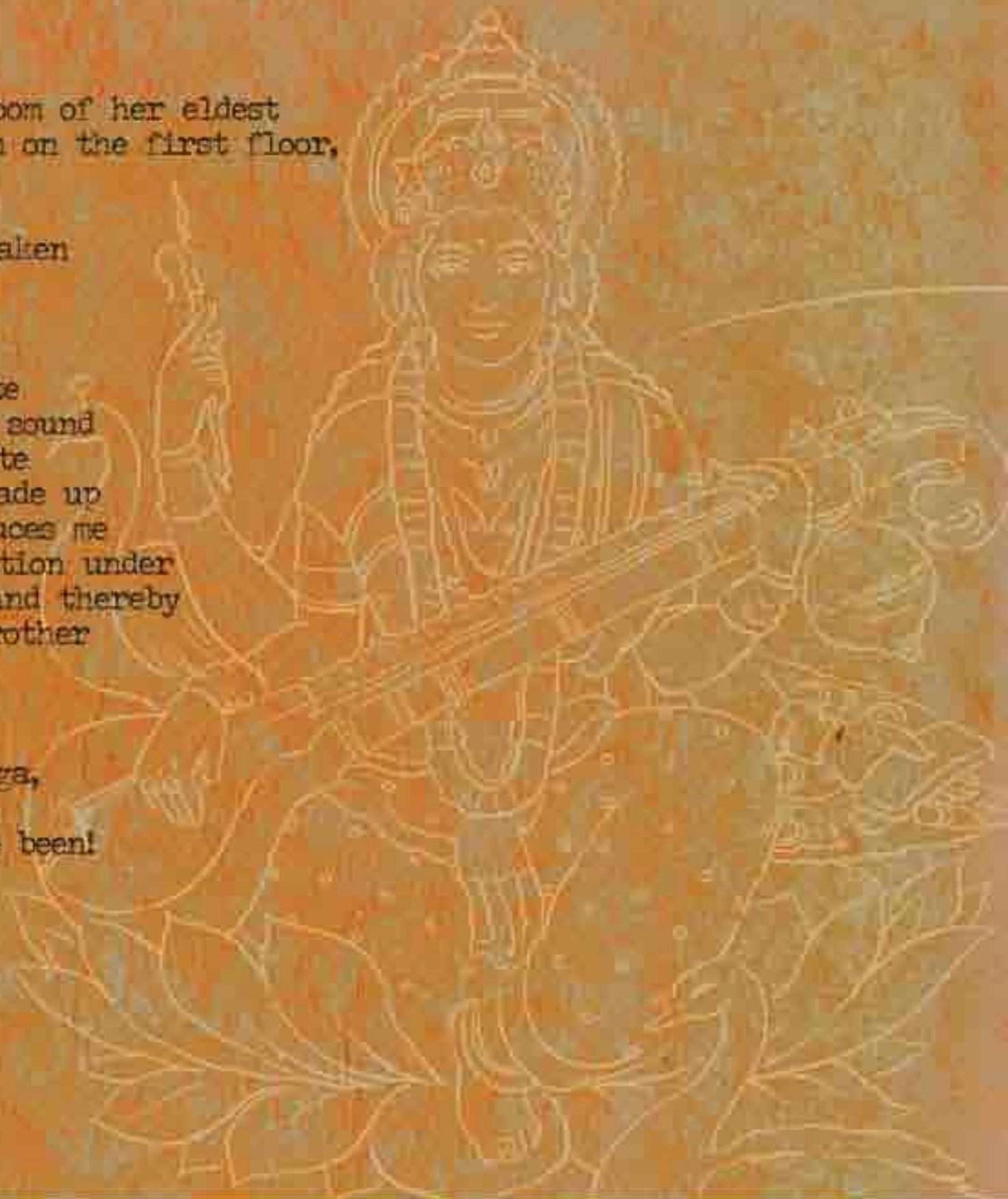


To accommodate us, Jyoti prepares the room of her eldest daughter, Manasi. It faces the music room on the first floor, also used as a practice room for the student's lessons. Without further ado, we settle into their daily lives: meals taken with the children, breakfast shared with the pupils...

The very next day, Uday stages a private concert in the living room, complete with sound and recording system, in order to evaluate my performance skills. The audience is made up of connoisseurs of all ages. Uday introduces me with his usual tact, recalling my instruction under Ustad Zia Mohiuddin Dagar (Bare Ustad) and thereby acknowledging me as his "guru bhai", a brother trained by the same master.

I present Raga Multani, in the three sections: "alap", "jor", "jhala". Uday now offers to interpret another raga, Malkhuns, in duo. I feel perfectly secure, confident. What a gift: the voice and the been!

Everyone is attentive, congratulating and questioning me, encouraging me to pursue my endeavor.



Beautiful portraits of the two masters along with a black and white portrait of the goddess of music, Sarasvati, takes flicker at her feat. Here, in these to me, and teach.

adorn the walls of the music room, of Uday's father, just above of "tanpuras" (drone lutes), a breath... and little oil-lamps surroundings, Uday will listen



It's not yet dawn... In the trees which line the house, birds are fluttering and chirping boisterously, anticipating the salutation to the sun! In the rehearsal room, a "tanpura" is already telling the beads of eternity... I'm lying on my cot, spread over the floor. Instinctively, I get up, wrap myself in my shawl and take my place beside the tanpura, played by Sagar, a young disciple of Uday's. As tradition requires, Sagar will spend five years at his master's side.

I have always followed the practice of "karaj", the first of a singer's daily exercises. Gathered in unison, each voice find the keynote. Yet, regardless of the number of participants, this remains an individual pursuit.

I appreciate this journey within, scaling the steps of ascending and descending notes, while darkness lingers and the body is still numb: "sa, re, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni, sa".

Their vibration, deep inside, is like an introspection. The notes intervals fall precisely into place, laying the necessary markers for the raga to develop.

Power and freedom are joyfully unleashed. Something stirs, striving to live. This exercise aims chiefly at developing the lower tones. By mastering these, the high notes are more easily achieved. Breathing settles into its proper rhythm. I've often experienced an awakening of the body and mind through this morning practice.

For more than an hour, we partake in this daily "sound massage".



Kana
Kana





Manasi
Jyoti and Uday's eldest daughter



Sagar

Mazhana
the youngest
daughter

Later in the morning, I return for my instrumental practice. I have the room to myself, mindful nonetheless of the pervading sense of "tradition".

After a few "murch'hanas" (exercices on a given mode),

I start developing the "jor" section (improvisation of melodic patterns based on a rhythmic pulse).

Discreetly, Sagar has sat in front of me, visibly thrilled. He keeps the beat by tapping his hand against his thigh, smiling and following every note. We drift like this for a while... filled with joy, playfulness, creativity and inspiration.

Sagar is blind. He lost his sight in early childhood.

But although he is a student and full-time boarder at Uday's, he's fully independent. During our stay, we're amazed to see him taking part in the chores, aware of everything.

He and Marc often launch into wild rhythms, using their hands, thighs and anything that produces sound.

This can start any time: on the terrace, coming out of the shower or just before meals. It's a mad contest,

with no holds barred. Sagar is a very good singer and the vocal dhrupad he represents has a bright future.

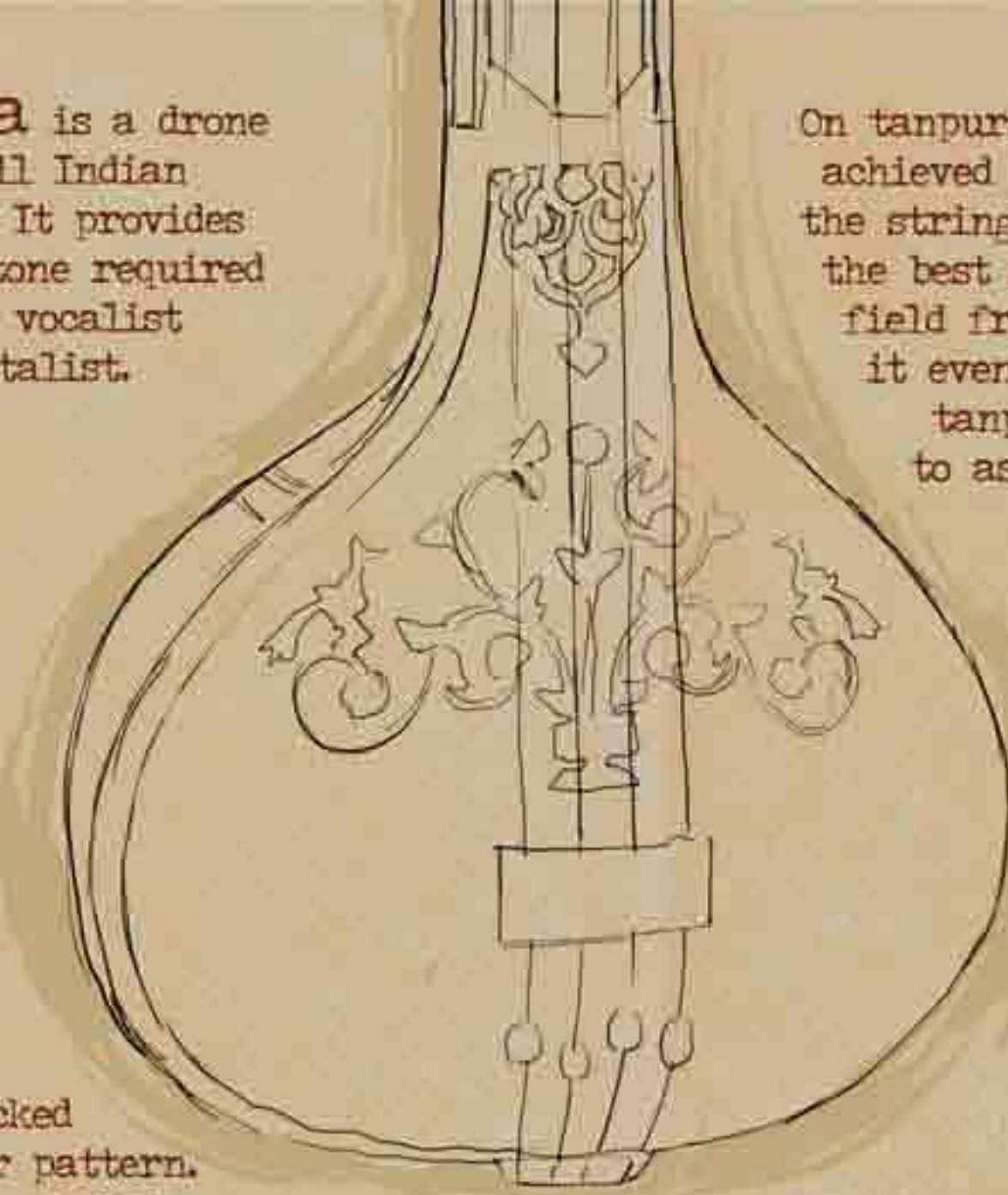
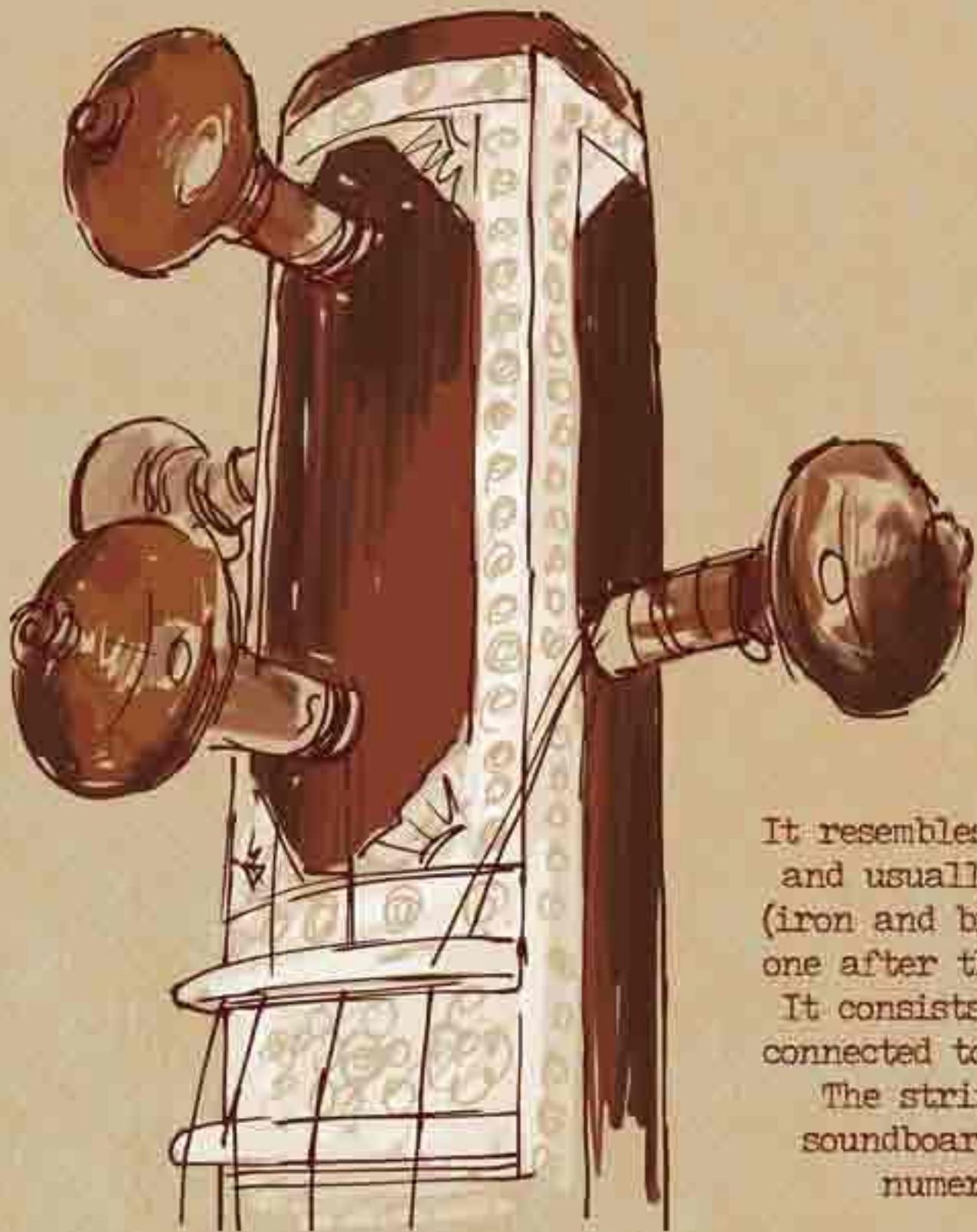
Ensuring the continuity of the transmission is Uday's daily concern, along with pursuing his international artistic career.

Tomorrow, our morning karaaj awaits!

The **tanpura** is a drone lute common to all Indian musical styles. It provides the reference tone required by the vocalist or instrumentalist.

It resembles a fretless sitar and usually has four strings (iron and bronze), which are plucked one after the other in a regular pattern. It consists of a long neck, made of teak, connected to a large gourd, which acts as a resonator. The strings rest on a flat bridge placed across the soundboard, and are taut to produce numerous subtle harmonics.

On tanpuras which accompany dhrupad singing, tuning is achieved by means of a simple cotton thread, placed between the string and the bridge, which can be shifted to provide the best harmonic resonance. The drone creates a reference field from which improvisation can develop, and to which it eventually returns. Whether ornate or simple, the tanpura has a courtly elegance. It is referred to as the "abode of sounds".



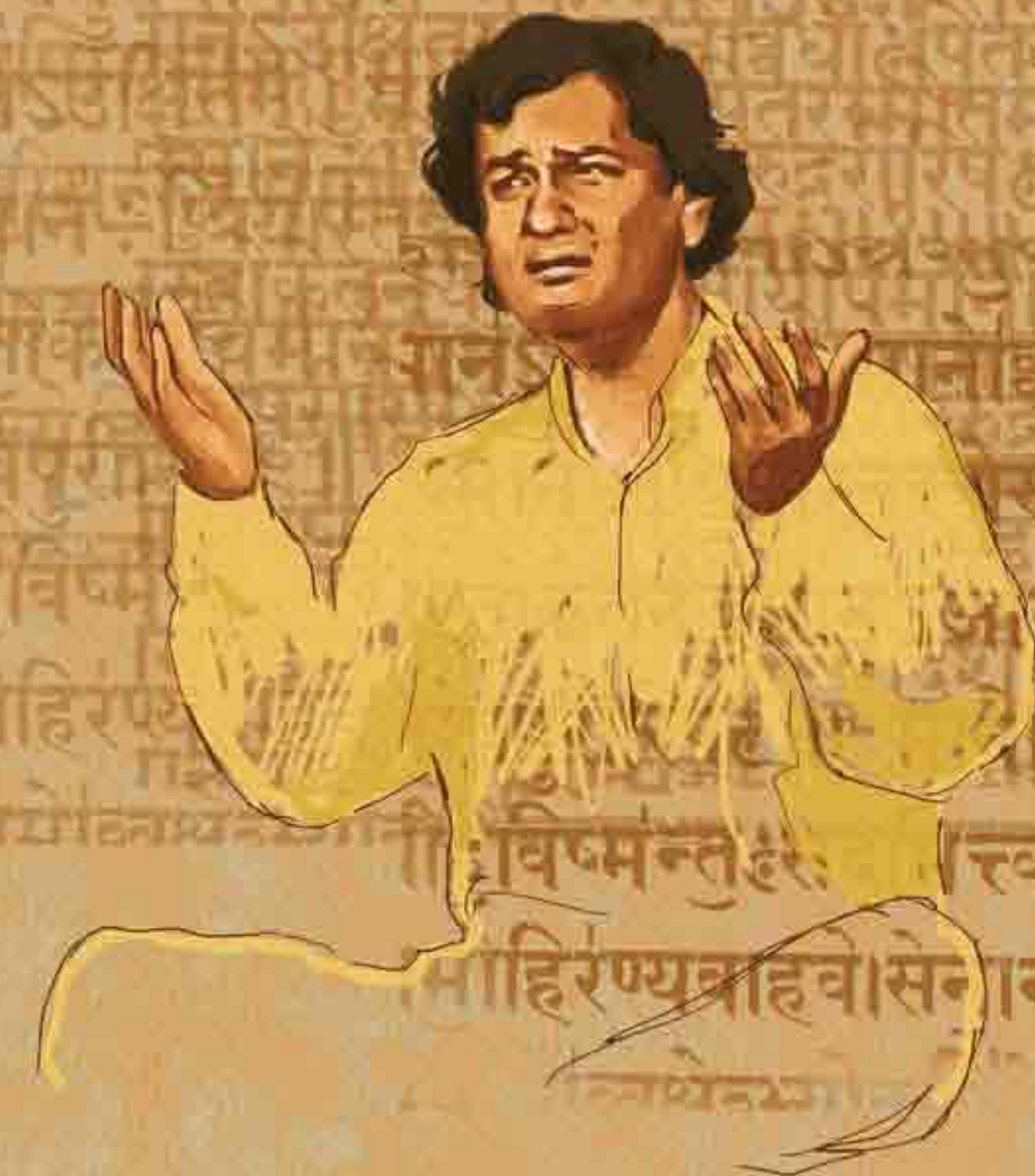
I first met Uday in 1989. He was accompanying Ustad Zia Mohiuddin Dagar (Bare Ustad), a rudra veena player ("beenkar"), who was then teaching at the Rotterdam Academy of Music, and with whom I had started my musical instruction, thrilled to be accepted as a pupil. Uday had undergone five years of rigorous training with Bare Ustad's younger brother, Ustad Zia Fariduddin Dagar (Chote Ustad), a singer in the dhrupad style. He was completing his tuition ("guru shishya parampara", or transmission from master to disciple) under the guidance of Bare Ustad.

Both belong to an illustrious line of dhrupad singers, whose tradition dates back to the Mughal Empire. Their father, Ziauddin Khan, was a brilliant dhrupad singer and beenkar (though he only played in private), who had succeeded his own father as premier court musician to the Maharana of Udaipur.

Accompanied by Chote Ustad, I once visited in Jaipur the house of Behram Khan, son of Baba Gopal Das, the founder of the Dagar family.

Over the past decades, thanks to his meticulous teaching method, Chote Ustad has trained excellent dhrupad singers, thereby insuring the continuity of the style.

Today, he remains an esteemed artist, capable of incredible freedom of expression on stage.





Whether in India or Europe, my relationship with Uday remains strong.

We always recognize one another!

He has long understood what makes me tick. Respectful of my musical pursuit, he takes heed of my ability to assimilate the different aspects of his teaching.

He imparts his knowledge with selfless dedication, extreme patience and constant good humor.

His creativity and composure are a constant source of inspiration.

He's a true prince!

In everyday life, he is considerate, intuitive, easy and discreet, always in command of himself.

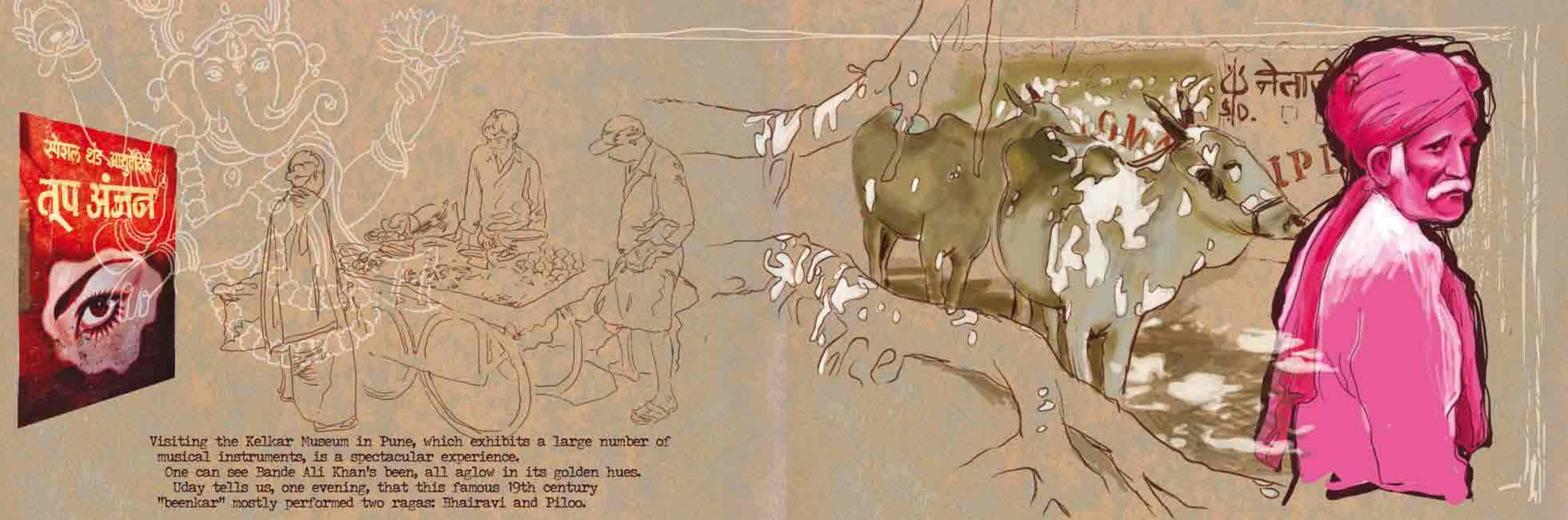
The bond we forged as disciples of Ustad has never dwindled. On the contrary, it has matured, through our master's legacy, into an almost exclusive friendship.

We show our appreciation without restraint, like family.

I've greatly enjoyed each of his stays in our house, and his arrival is always a thrill for us all.

He has become a consummate artist, acknowledged by the "ustads" and "pandits" (Muslim and Hindu masters, respectively) of India's various musical styles.

Invited to the major Indian festivals, he has also earned acclaim amongst a vast, ever-growing audience abroad, by touring regularly throughout Europe and the United-States. He is now one of the foremost ambassadors of dhrupad singing worldwide.



Visiting the Kelkar Museum in Pune, which exhibits a large number of musical instruments, is a spectacular experience.

One can see Bande Ali Khan's been, all aglow in its golden hues.

Uday tells us, one evening, that this famous 19th century "beenkar" mostly performed two ragas: Bhairavi and Piloo.

After following several courtyard alleys, we enter a dark elevator, closed by a heavy, rusty shutter. It takes us to the right level, judging by the name on the door. We remove our shoes and are received into a room covered in green and brown-specked tiles.

A little later, we are greeted by Shri Ramdas Palsule in person: a cordial, soft-featured young man in his thirties.

For a moment, I can't help admiring his sculptural black hair, expertly parted and shining with coconut oil.

We chat for a while, until the tabla maker arrives.

Acquaintances are made and the tabla are placed on a small mat, along with a reinforced carrying case, specially ordered for transport back to France.

Instrument craft in India is outstanding.

There are elaborate techniques for tightening the drumheads, as well as fine tuning possibilities. To be retightened, the tabla must be partially dismantled. This is why the specialist is here, with his three crude tools.

His dexterity is staggering; each gesture faultless. We observe him in silence, astonished by his know-how.



Boite pour
transporter
Tablas



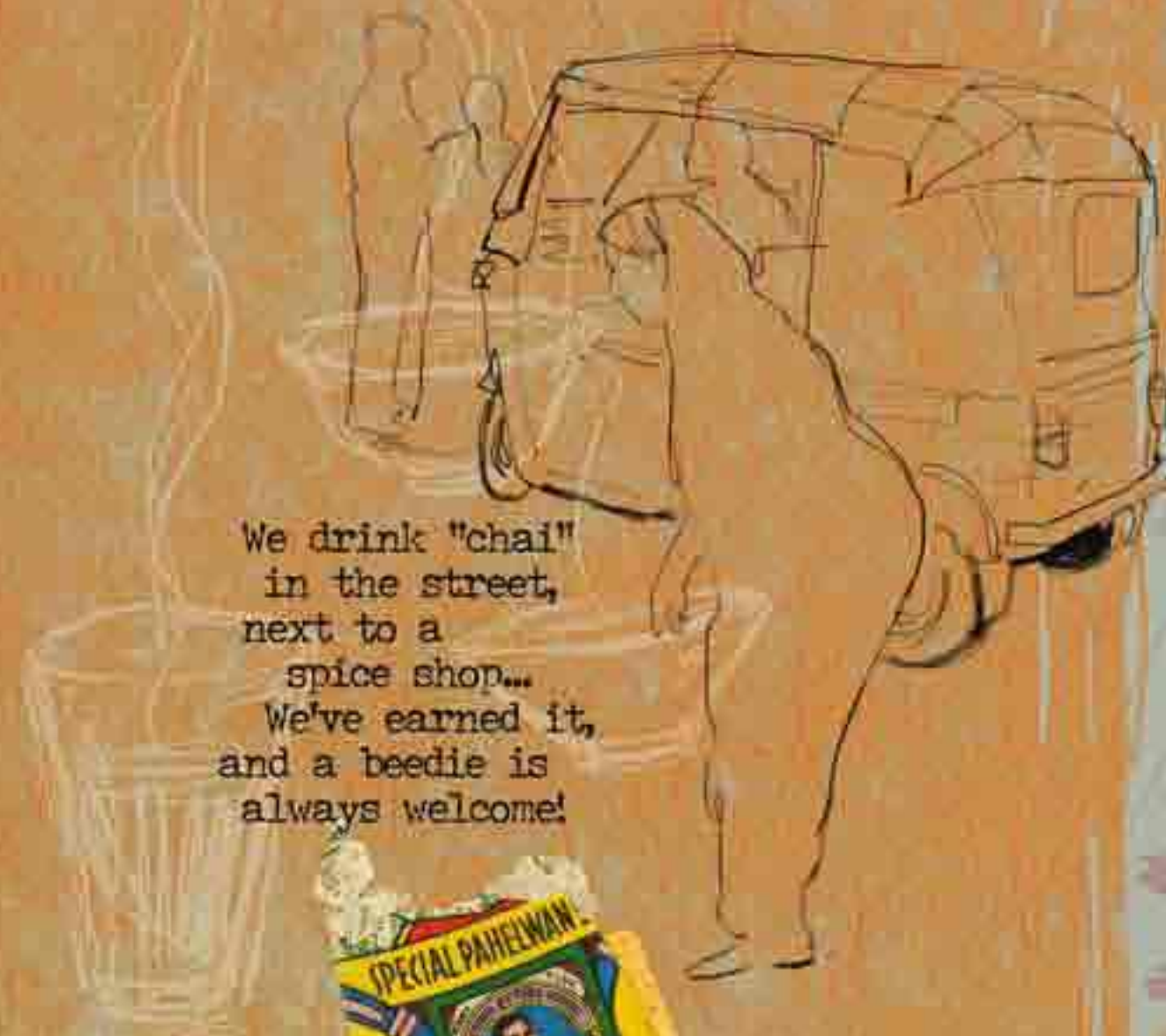
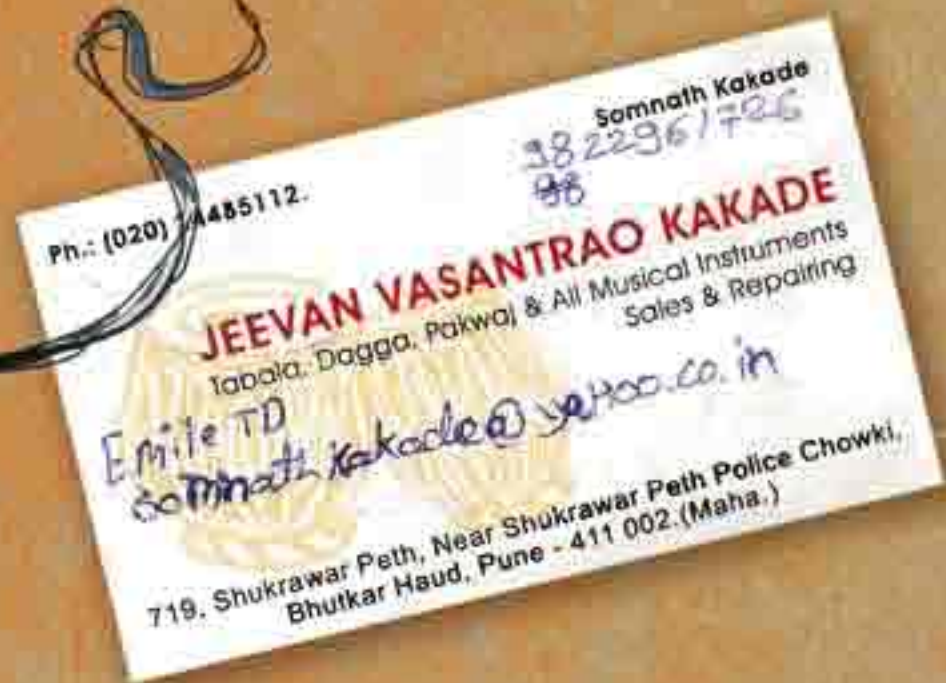
Using his hands and feet,
the tabla maker fastens the drumhead
to the shell by tightening a 40ft leather strap:
a real show of strength!

Ramdas Palsule sits behind the instrument. With the help of a "shrutti box", an electronic tanpura which gives the reference tone needed for tuning, he produces the required *Ch...*

The rhythmic developments are now in full swing, highlighting the quality of sound. Now comes Marc's turn to test the tabla... The sound is good...

A new encounter takes place during this exchange. The business is done: Marc is satisfied and Ramdas Palsule happily types our email addresses into his computer.

Buying a good instrument is never easy and having an introduction... instrument maker is...



We drink "chai"
in the street,
next to a
spice shop...
We've earned it,
and a beedie is
always welcome!



In Pune we adopt a normal lifestyle, far from the chaos of Kolkata.

The city basks in flowery light and vibrant colors. Tall, secular trees provide cool shade. The air is healthy. The network of wide avenues and streets has a "human" scale.

Pune is girded by dry hills, where the chiseled roofs of temples gleam under a harsh sunlight. Timelessly, beats of burden come and go, with painted horns and gentle eyes. The number of two-wheelers is shocking.

The population is young and motorcycles are the emblems of a new society. They represent freedom of movement but also enable boys and girls to meet freely and openly.



In this country steeped in tradition, they boldly challenge the established order by holding hands... They're charming!



Such scenes soften India's image, and young women wearing jeans and sunglasses are surely the goddesses of tomorrow's temples... striving to build fairer society for themselves.



Hundred of young students demonstrating for a "clean and green" Pune.





Walking in "chapals" (Indian sandals) is a continual pleasure.
We've now had to swap our jackets and sweaters for open shirts or T-shirts.
The heat pursues us right to the doors of fashionable, air-conditioned restaurants, where
we savor "Italian cappuccino and black coffee" amongst an international crowd.
All this feels very much like holidays.

It's easy to get around by rickshaw, and today we have a ton of postcards to send.
The post-office is spacious, crowded. After queuing endlessly under wobbly ceiling fans,
the clerk invites us to paste the stamps ourselves, using little pots of glue located,
over there, near a busy counter. Minor detail: there aren't any swabs to spread
the glue with... no matter, we'll just use our fingers!

It's a pageant of shimmering saris, swaying with the draft...
The women accent their femininity with a dazzling arrangement
of carefully chosen colors and motifs.

Pune's post-office suddenly becomes a monumental fresco in
which a handful of silent figures, young and old,
watch us pasting our stamps!

A tall, yellow dog strays in and out.

We enter the verdant park of one of the Aga Khan's many villas, where Gandhi was under house arrest for two years.

Anna, a Swiss-German student of Uday's, is with us. She is training as both singer and violonist.

Although I can hardly understand her blunt, guttural English, we enjoy this outing together.

It feels good to be walking and breathing on a well-tended lawn, surrounded by lofty trees.

We approach the stately mansion. At the end of an inner passage sheltered by a white colonnade, we discover, one by one, the three rooms in which Gandhi and his wife were confined. Emptiness is their main feature.

The high ceilings create a church-like acoustic. Furnishings are scarce. Inside the first room: the emblematic wooden spinning wheel, now mute; a small low table, for studying and reading, typically Indian; a long wall mirror. The second room is off-limits, but we can see on the floor a white linen mattress, in front of a sealed marble fireplace.

This is where Gandhi's wife and companion, Kasturba, passed away. Next door, a white-tiled washroom, totally bare save for the small water tap 12 inches above the ground; a feature of Indian toilets. Facing a large window is an unusual cast-iron bathtub, with rococo feet... quite unseemly for a couple whose needs were scant.

In a narrow display case, resting on a shelf next to his famous dark-leather sandals: the glasses, untarnished, of the "Father of the Indian Nation".

I fall silent, staring at the terracotta slabs on which the "Mahatma" (Great Soul) once walked... respectful of his wisdom, of his benevolence and dedication to justice. A sense of peace permeates this place; not just the objects or the architecture, but the air itself.

I catch up with Marc and Anna outside, leaning against the stone balustrade. We linger there, observing some birds in flight.

They are the carefree custodians of this peace.





CHEMBUR

Before leaving for Powai, I must pay a visit to Shrimati Pramila Dagar, whom everyone calls "Mataji". She is the wife of Ustad Zia Mohiuddin Dagar, and mother of Bahauddin, also known as "Bablu".

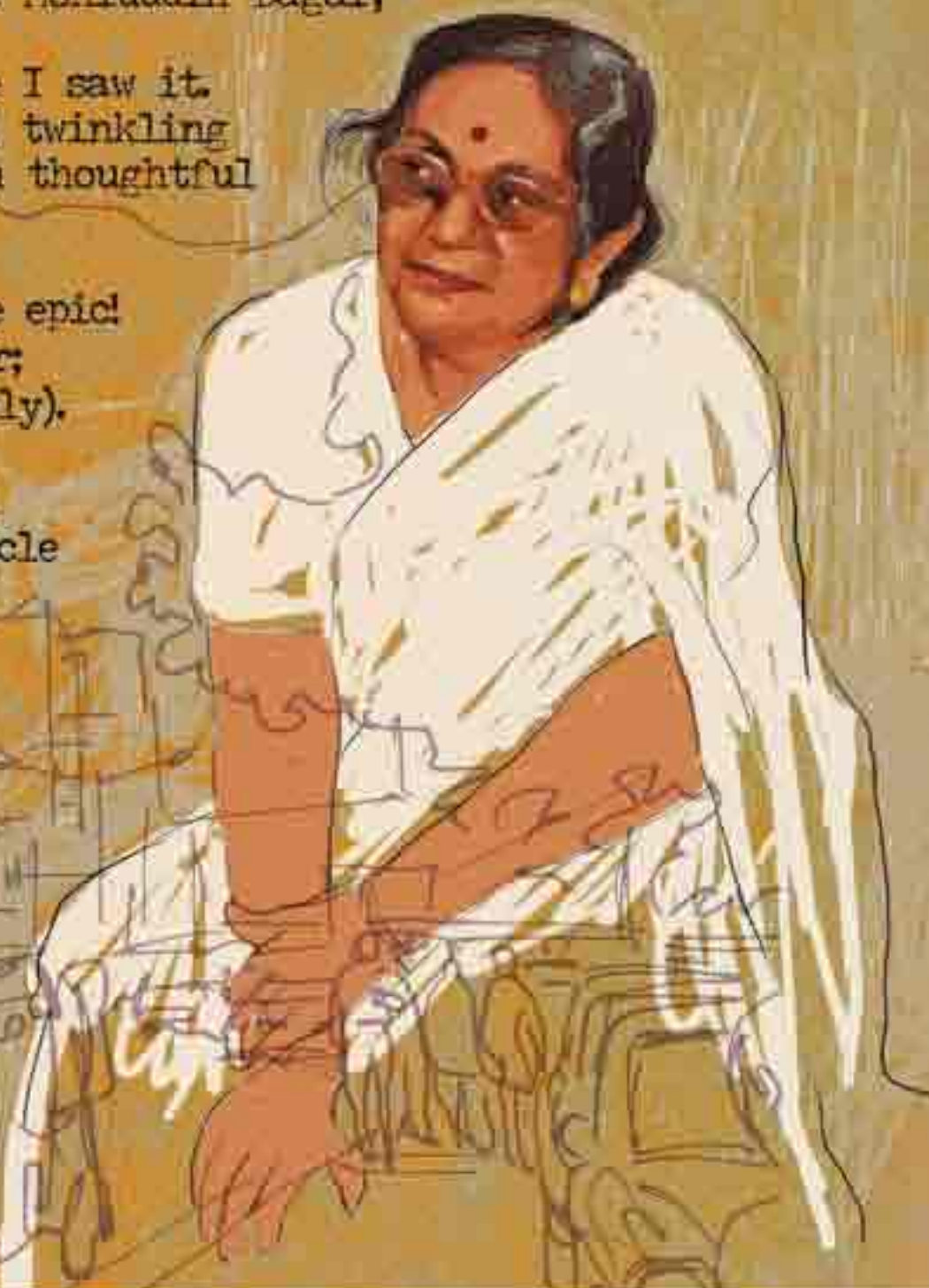
The building looks more weatherworn than the last time I saw it. The apartment door opens... Her hair is silvery; her eyes, twinkling behind big glasses, haven't changed. She has always been thoughtful to me. We're pleased to see each other again.

The short trip from Chembur to Powai promises to be epic!

Once again, the been and tabla fill up Bablu's car; a garish, metal gray Hyundai (a sedan, unfortunately).

Forced to sit in the back, Marc will have to endure his usual punishment... As for me, a different ordeal awaits: I'm assigned a passenger seat on a motorcycle

driven by Bablu's friend, and his young daughter, Chamila, aged 3, will ride between us.



Motorcycles carrying three or four people are a common sight. But in the ragtag afternoon traffic, now at a standstill, I'm troubled by my newfound responsibilities. From time to time, I catch sight of Bablu, smiling and waving at us through the scorching exhaust fumes. He doesn't seem to share my worries. I feel just like an ant carrying a grain of rice through a blast furnace!

To force a laugh!



POWAI

The sky is reddening over Lake Powai... Pushing end to end, thick, fiery clouds form a wide, incandescent flow which plunges, somewhere, way over there, on the other side of the world. Squinting under the glare, I feel its warmth caress my face.

In a sweeping ballet, crows and other birds are twirling over the molten waters. Seen together, they look like the dancing shadows in a grandiose theatrical performance.

Suddenly, a ray of light pierces the tawny fabric of the sky.

At last, the heavens are reflected in the overflowing lake. Each evening, I smoke a few beedies in front of this renewed spectacle. I am awed by the display of colors, orchestrated by some universal creative force.

A few of us gather to see the show.

Conversations are hushed, almost whispered... It's our respite from the day.

The algae-speckled water is hemmed in by exuberant tropical vegetation, which devours whatever space is left.

On our morning walk, we met a band of young boys, shouting and brandishing crowbars and clubs. They were beating the bushes for a tiger that had attacked livestock during the night. Childhood memories instantly resurfaced of "The Lives of a Bengal Lancer" (an American film): the British soldiers in quaint, colonial attire; man-eating tigers roaming the land...

Just like Powai today, in the heart of suburban Bombay.



The "Dhruwad Gurukul" (Dhruwad School) is located nearby. A large, two-storied stone house, with a huge terrace leading off into the jungle. The school is directed by Ustad Zia Fariduddin Dagar (Chote Ustad), with the assistance of his nephew, Bahauddin Dagar.



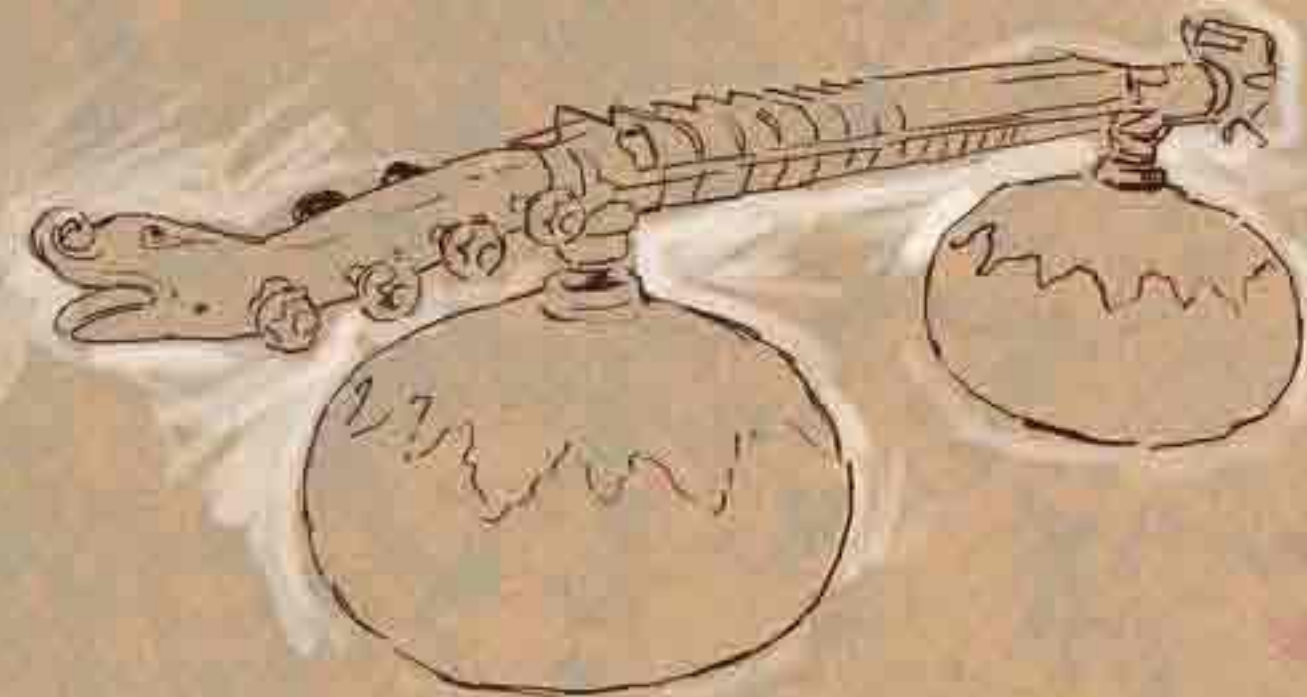


Chote Ustad

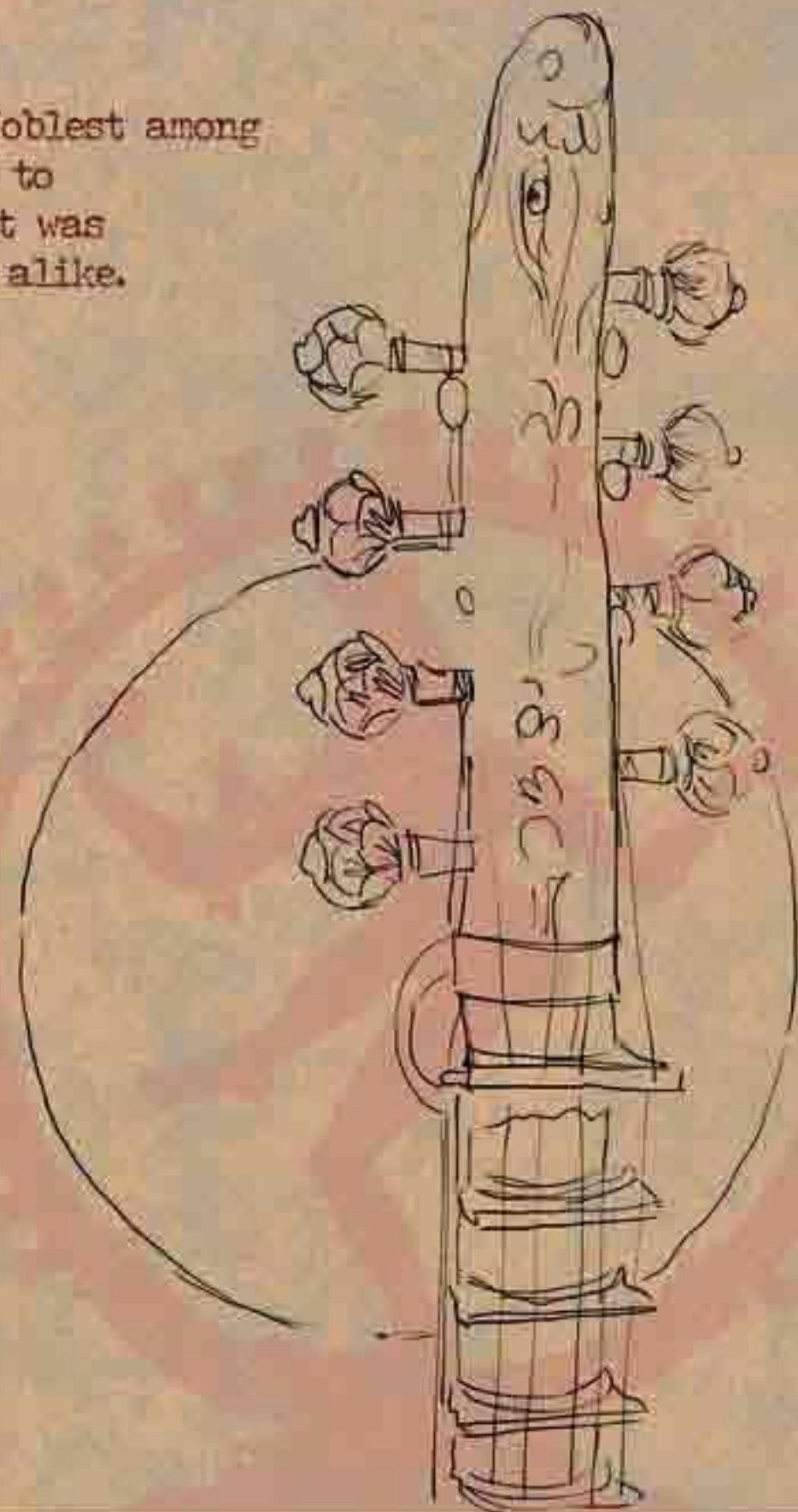
During our stay, we practically live inside a single, spacious room, flooded with light and opened on the lakeside. This is where Ustad gives his lessons, in the morning or late afternoon. His method is informal, spontaneous. We wait our turn among the students.

Tanpuras line the wall, hanging behind various "pakhawajs" (horizontal, two-sided drums). To the right of the entrance sits a massive shrine dedicated to Sarasvati, gaudy and trivial with its gilded candlesticks. The only redeeming thing about it is a picture of Bare Ustad, standing with his arms folded. Even when the students forget about him, Chote Ustad is listening, mostly from his room, to their exercises and ragas. Discretion is an intrinsic part of his teaching. This indrawn attitude encourages self-expression and improvisation on the part of the students, often intimidated by the master.

In Hindu mythology, the **Rudra Veena** (or been) is attributed to the god Shiva, creator of the universe. Noblest among the instruments, the rudra veena is exclusively associated to the dhrupad style. From as early as the 16th century, it was appreciated by the Hindu aristocracy and Mughal emperors alike.

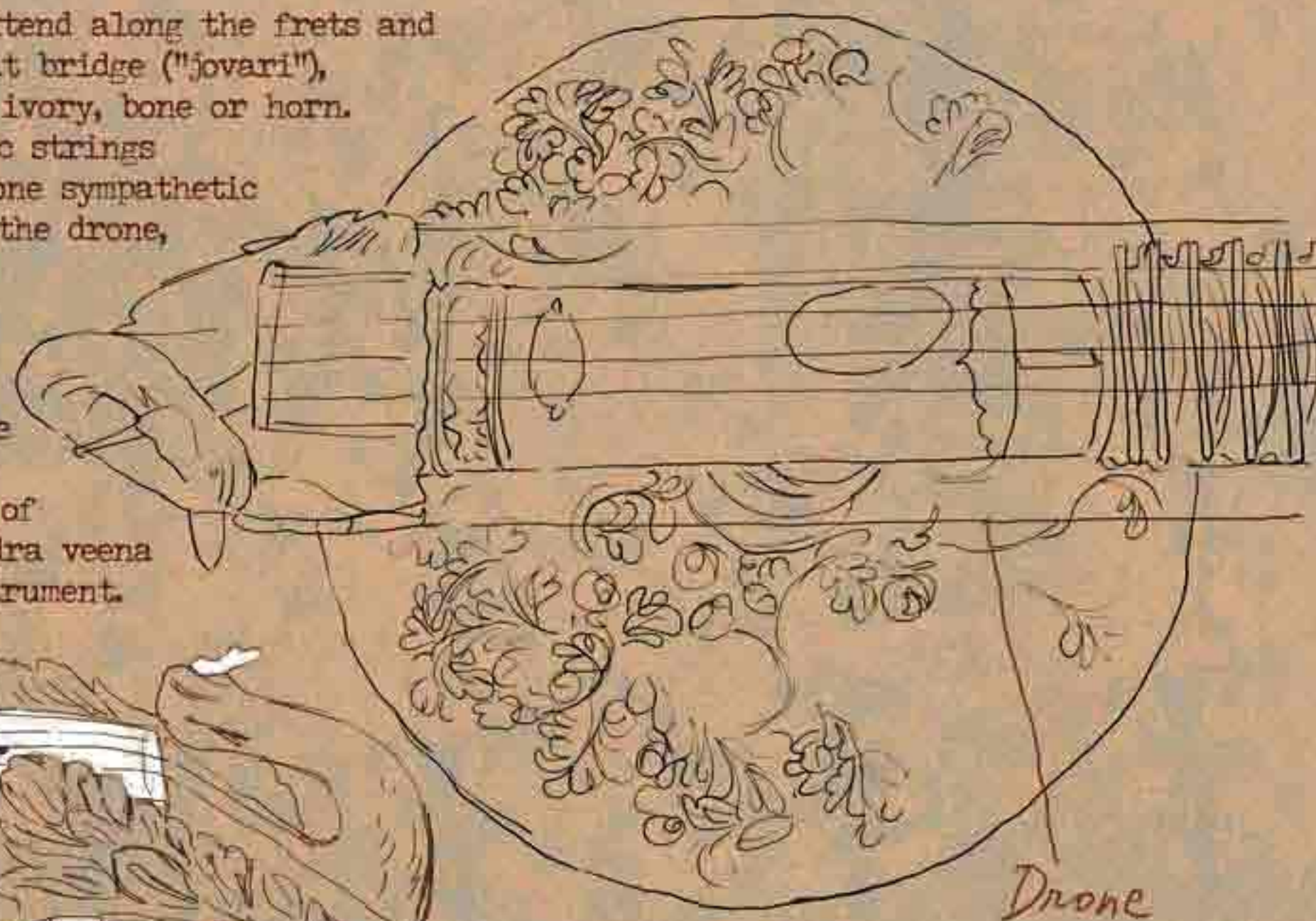
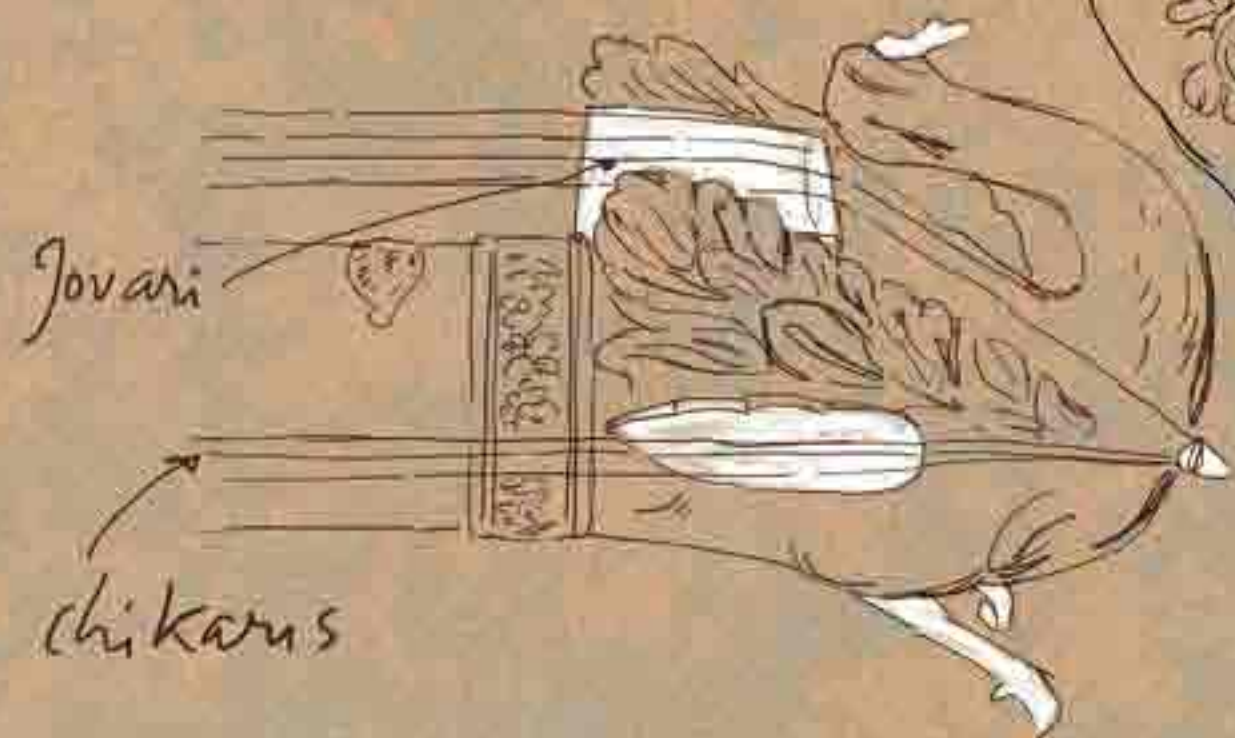


The rudra veena belongs to the family of tube zithers. Its current shape is characterized by a long, hollow cylinder (the "dandi"), made of teak or bamboo, beneath which are fastened two large gourds (the "tumbas") acting as resonators. The 24 frets (thin metal slide mounted on a half-circle of wood), are adjustable. Each is fixed to the dandi by a cord, which now replaces the resin used in the past.



Four melodic strings extend along the frets and are connected to a flat bridge ("jovari"), carved from a piece of ivory, bone or horn. Two or three rhythmic strings (the "chikaris") and one sympathetic string, which produces the drone, lie on either side of the dandi.

With its depth and range of sound, and delicate resonances reminiscent of the human voice, the rudra veena is an exceptional instrument.



In 1992, thanks to a Franco-Indian scholarship, I joined Bahauddin Dagar, son of the late Bare Ustad, at the Dhrupad Gurukul of Palaspe, a Bombay suburb, in order to pursue my musical training. Four or five intensive practices per day were the norm, including a nightly session, which Bablu never spared himself.



I practice here in the morning and afternoon. Bablu listens without interfering, thoroughly absorbed in other things, such as bathing his daughter on the terrace or spending hours on his computer... I explore the different sections of the raga without attracting the slightest comment on his part; just barely a glance as he walks by, neither sympathetic nor approving. I know, however, that he's all ears.

After several days of listening, he examines my instrument inside-out, before tuning it by adjusting all the frets (which indicate the note intervals). The veena's frets are mobile, which allows extremely fine tuning.

In order to improve the sound quality, he also sands down the "jovari", using a rasp and ultra fine sandpaper.

As for the sound, we will polish it together.



One morning, Bablu stops to sit in front of me, less than 3ft away, and asks me to develop Raga Todi in its three sections: alap, jor, jhala.

Eyes closed, he focuses on each note, absorbed in the rhythm of my breathing...

Mindful of everything, I disclose several years of work...

He listens, without judgment, without criticism, to the story I'm telling...

His presence is inspiring... Little by little, I unwind, gradually freeing myself, bolstered by my training and the power of the raga.

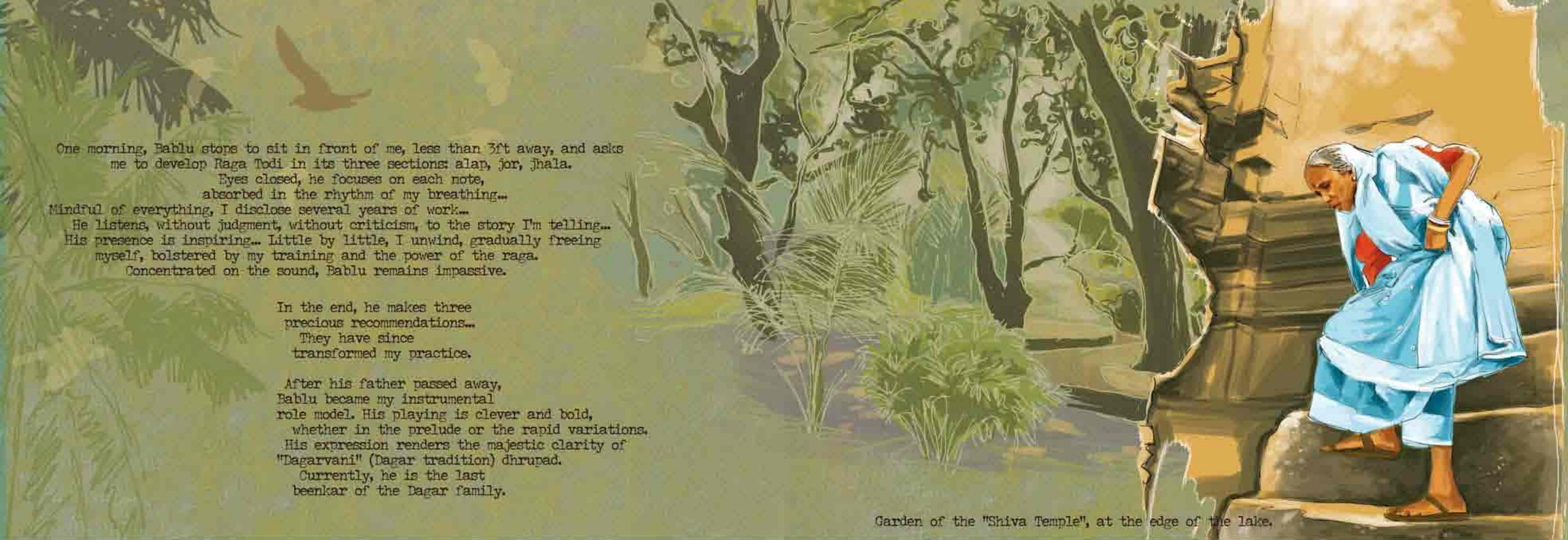
Concentrated on the sound, Bablu remains impassive.

In the end, he makes three precious recommendations...

They have since transformed my practice.

After his father passed away, Bablu became my instrumental role model. His playing is clever and bold, whether in the prelude or the rapid variations. His expression renders the majestic clarity of "Dagarvani" (Dagar tradition) dhrupad.

Currently, he is the last beenkar of the Dagar family.



Garden of the "Shiva Temple", at the edge of the lake.



At night or come naptime,
we lie down against
the tiled floor on thin, folded carpets.
The conditions are monastic, almost Spartan!
All the students sleep in the same area.
We are often five, sometimes more.
We share the "bedroom" with three
young women, including the enchanting
Pelva, who is training as a singer
with Ustad for five years.
I dread snoring like a freight train.
Since our arrival in India, Marc hasn't
been too upset by my snoring,
but here, among these young,
delicate women, I fear the worst.
It would be terrible!



The women sleep in their
day clothes, wearing all their
jewelry. Only in the morning,
after "karaj" and tea,
will they shower
and change into new colors.
Pelva always wakes up
fresh as a daisy...
and we are not
indifferent to her feline looks,
or the delightful way
she wraps her shawl...
She runs the school
with efficiency
and talent.



Meals are taken in the kitchen, on the same floor. Marc and I usually sit at Ustad's table, while the rest of the group sits on the floor; preferring to leave the available chairs to us. Despite the whirling fan, Ustad swelters in silence, his face melting.

Suddenly his eyes go blank; he seems unaware to us. He has always been addicted to chili and strong spices... with a preference for small green peppers, which he bites off like radishes.

To us, they are simply inedible. As for the rest of the meal... we do have to brace ourselves!

It's hot, very hot!!!

Ustad's computer, tucked into a recess outside his room, is a vital asset to us.
I've had such memorable screaming fits in Indian cybercafés,
releasing a phenomenal amount of pent-up rage...
The number of times when I couldn't connect myself, or send or receive emails...
enough to fry my brain!
What a blessing to have a computer at hand!



PANVEL

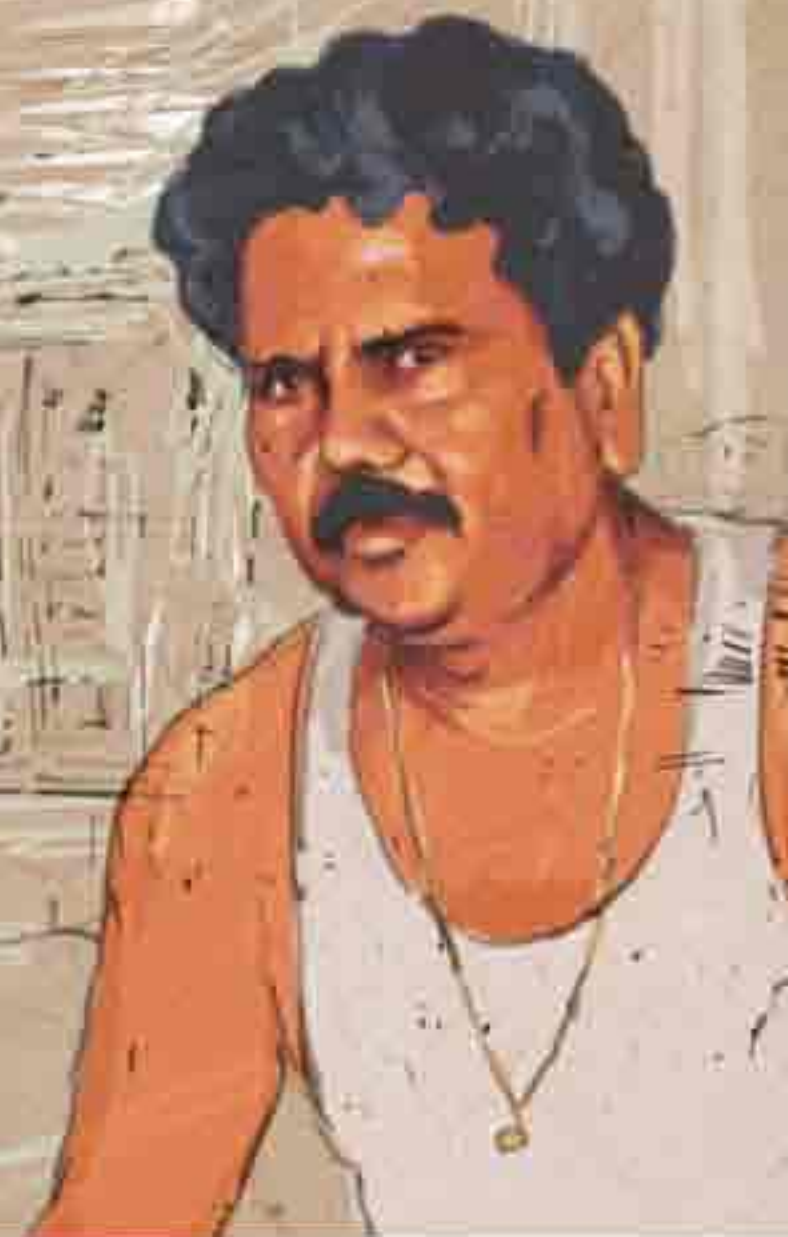
Relocating has become a ritual!
This time, a big, sand-colored Land Rover has been provided: it takes us to the megalopolis recently nicknamed "New Bombay".

Within the last decade, Bombay, now Mumbai, has literally exploded.
Where there used to be only arid, uninhabited hills, housing has now sprung up as far as the eye can see, linking what were merely villages. Panvel is one of these.
As a consequence, there now exist two Panvels: Old and New Panvel.
We take a right onto a four-lane main road, divided by huge, tropical flamboyants in bright-red bloom.
Cows are grazing on the traffic divider, lulled by some inner tune.

At the crossroads stands an old banyan tree, full of jittery birds.
We have an appointment with Manik Munde, a musician friend who frequently visits me when touring Europe. I call him from a big, red taxiphone, planted in the middle of the crossroads. The neighborhood has changed so rapidly that taxis hardly know their way around!

I spot him standing on the curb of a sidewalk under-construction, in front of a shop packed with aluminium ware...
He's wearing a blue and green striped "lungi" and thin cottonmuscle shirt.
He welcomes us in a joyous embrace, mirthfully chewing his "pan" (a mix of sweets, rolled in a betel leaf) and gauging our luggage. With his thick moustache, he has the look of a Maratha warrior in Mughal lands (tenant tête).
Manik is Marathi (a native of Maharashtra) and likes to say so.

A magnificent raga has sprung from this meeting: the raga of life, of the joy of being together, of sharing, of giving and receiving.





Perched at the top of a four-story building, the Munde family's apartment opens onto a canopied terrace overlooking the neighborhood. Each apartment in the building has a carved, wooden front door, which is doubled on the inside by a massive grille. During the hot season, the door is left open while the grille, with its huge padlock, provides measures are widespread.



The living room is a hodgepodge, unmistakably Indian... It contains a shoe cabinet, with light-caramel varnish; a bed, also serving as a round-the-clock couch; an old Singer-type sewing machine, propped against the wall, in front of a computer desk connected to internet!

A portrait of Manikji's spiritual guide, Sakshat, faces us when we enter: a bright-faced holy man, apparently liberated from all human constraints. Manik introduced me to him in 1992, during a trip to Purli village, in the heartland of Maharashtra, where his entire family lives.

"JAISAKSHAT" is the family mantra, repeated several times a day (depending on the circumstances) by his wife Vidya, his son Shukad, and Prerna, his daughter.



We scamper down the stairs, like children eager to get back to the street...
Night and day, the markets are always a thrill to discover.

Such an incredible profusion of fruits and vegetables!
In addition to those available back home,
there's a wide range of tropical varieties.
Each market, whether huddled underneath
an overpass, or stretched along a row of blossoming
bougainvilleas, has its own character,
its own atmosphere.

Strolling between the stalls
is like visiting an art gallery.
Each vendor creates an ingenious still-life
of lemons, okras or papayas: piled in pyramids,
polished one by one, hung in garlands or neatly
arranged inside hand-woven baskets...
Everything is consciously esthetic.
Sales results seem to depend on this.

Onions are peeled, as much for the buyer's
comfort as for the bony, mascara-eyed
"garbage cows" who wander about in search of food.
Diligently, they rid the marketplace of all
vegetable leftovers, as well as cardboard boxes,
newspapers and, worst of all, plastic bags!



Large cones of incense burn here and there, among the stalls. They are everywhere:
beneath a sumptuous wall of cabbages, inside ginger roots, in front of bunches
of green bananas... even next to the man roasting peanuts, cashews and pistachios.

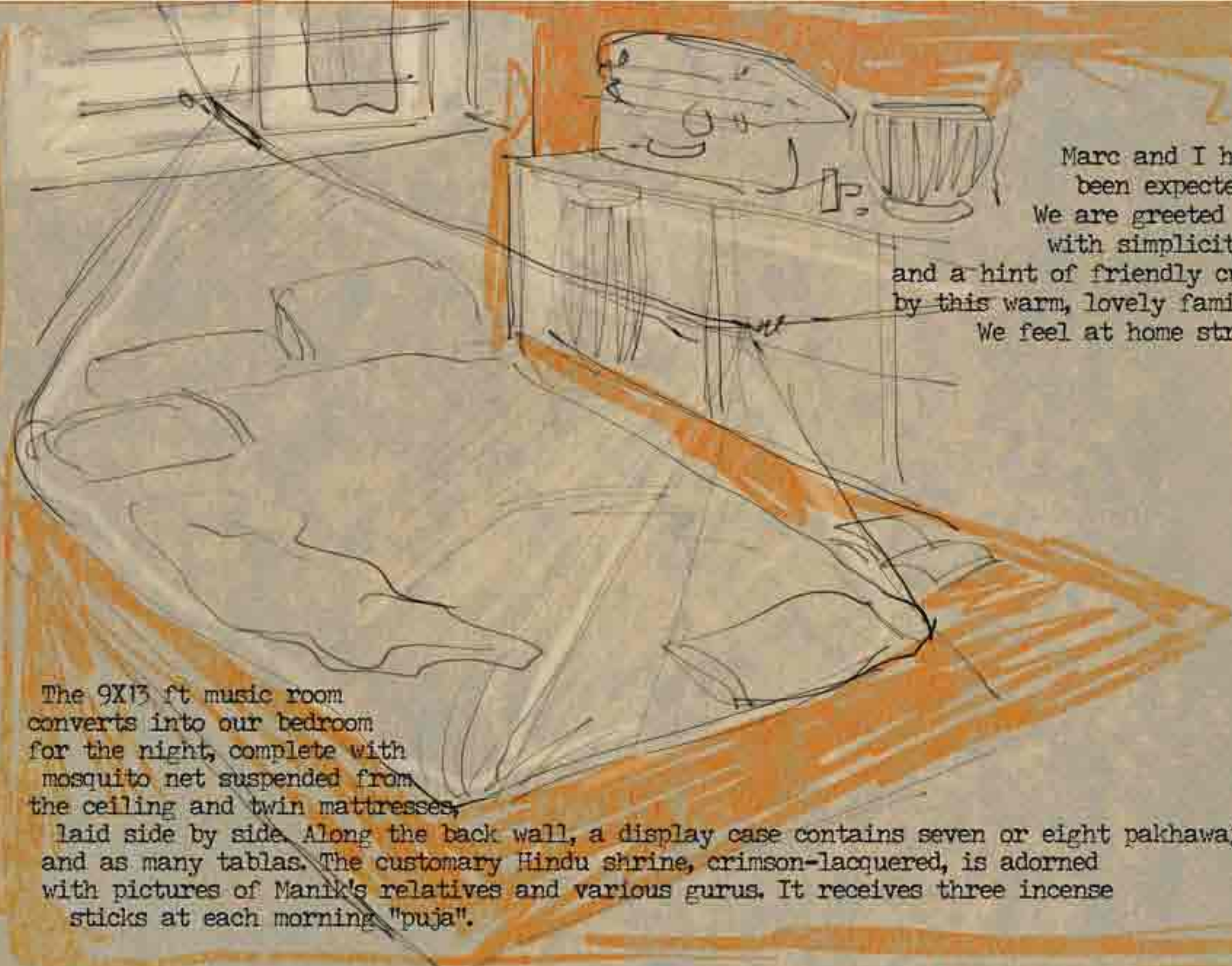
Useful against insects, they are
also placed as offerings in the
small shrines: a guarantee that
business will be brisk.

This spectacle is further brightened
by the colored movements of saris...
Indian women dominate the hubbub.
Arms bare, stomachs showing, they
stand proud and ready
to bargain.

Each time we walk
through this colorful,
ever-changing
patchwork, we are
seized with the same
amazement.

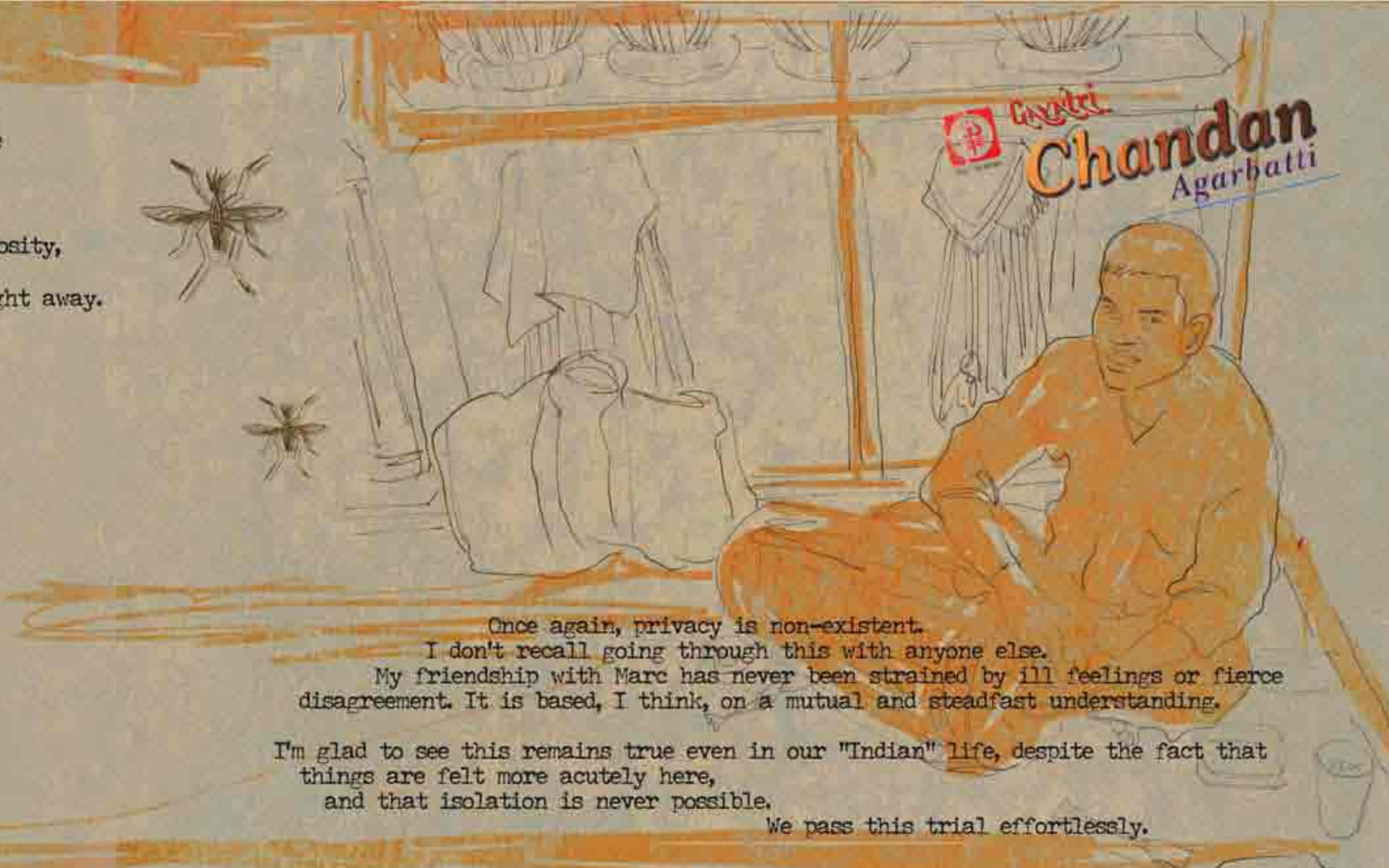
Dressed all in white,
an elderly Marathi
man sits on his cart,
examining some
fresh coriander!





Marc and I have
been expected.
We are greeted
with simplicity,
and a hint of friendly curiosity,
by this warm, lovely family.
We feel at home straight away.

The 9X13 ft music room
converts into our bedroom
for the night, complete with
mosquito net suspended from
the ceiling and twin mattresses,
laid side by side. Along the back wall, a display case contains seven or eight pakhawajs,
and as many tablas. The customary Hindu shrine, crimson-lacquered, is adorned
with pictures of Manik's relatives and various gurus. It receives three incense
sticks at each morning "puja".



Chandan
Agarbatti

Once again, privacy is non-existent.
I don't recall going through this with anyone else.
My friendship with Marc has never been strained by ill feelings or fierce
disagreement. It is based, I think, on a mutual and steadfast understanding.
I'm glad to see this remains true even in our "Indian" life, despite the fact that
things are felt more acutely here,
and that isolation is never possible.
We pass this trial effortlessly.



Ballapur ...
New Suburbs ...

Shri Manik Munde is a pakhawaj maestro. He has accompanied the Dagar family throughout the world for over 20 years. Today, he ranks among the leading figures of dhrupad.

Utterly selfless, he is so unlike those capricious, overrated Indians stars.

Born into a modest Maharashtrian family, he initially studied tabla with Ganesh Anna Chaudhary, who remains his guru.

He later spent many years in Banaras, under the tutelage of Pandit Amarnath Mishra, a famous pakhawaj player.



Prior to receiving his master's support, Manik was too poor to invest in a pakhawaj. He used to practice by beating his fingers on his chest.

A gifted and enthusiastic teacher, he transmits precious techniques which we can freely use for improvisation.

After several days, guessing my mind, he sets about translating the language of the pakhawaj for my right hand; revealing the carefully chosen conversions adaptable to each "bol" (group of rhythmic syllables).

My rhythmic practice thus becomes similar to that of the pakhawaj, and to Marc's.

From now on, we'll both be able to train on common, solid ground...

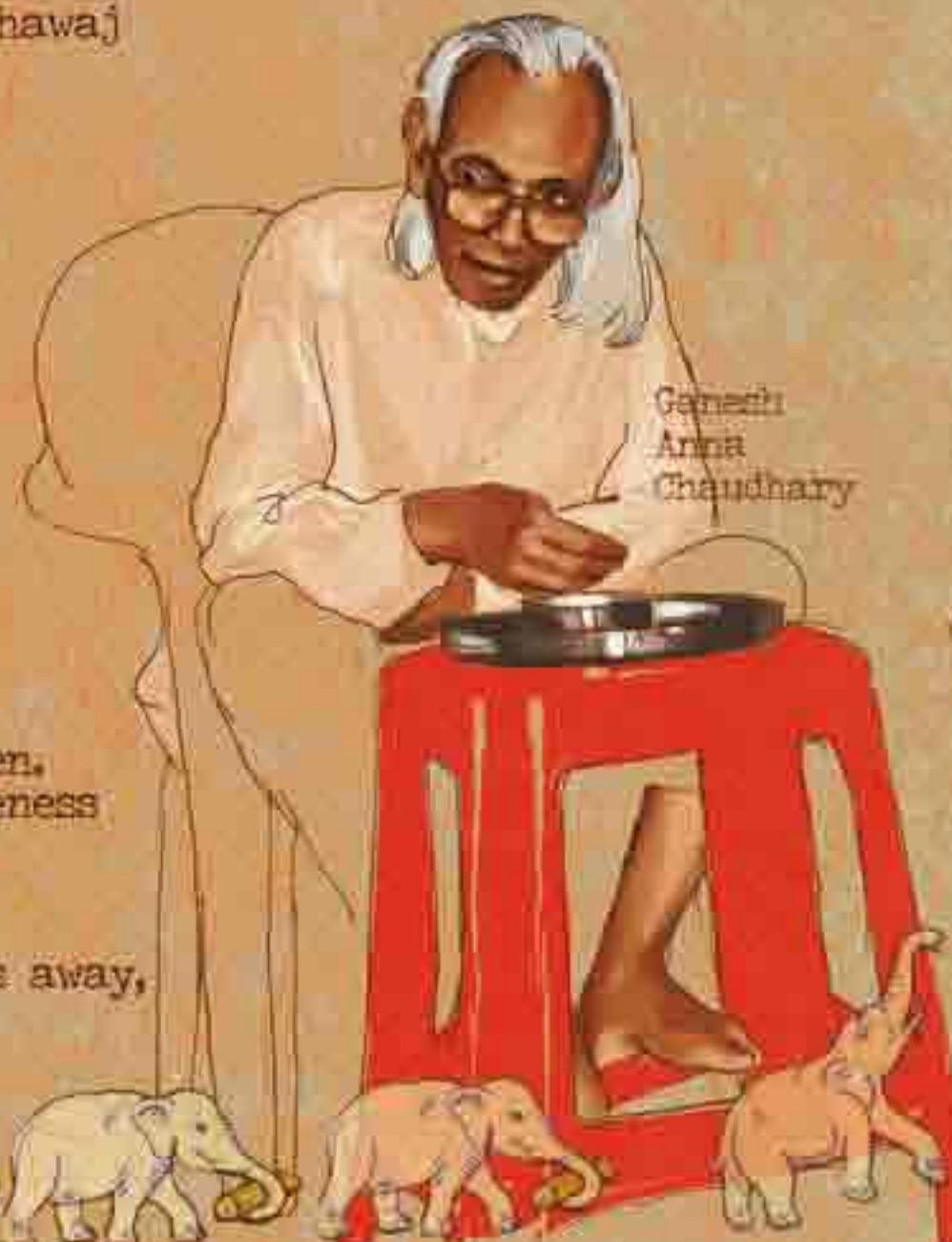
The horizon is in sight!
We have work for several months and more...
and we're overjoyed!

Three times a day, we savor Vidya's boiling hot, sweet latte. It's the best in India.

Manikji was present when I started learning the been. Today, he still by my side... The teaching's effectiveness

lies, in part, in the continued support given by the master to his student; and the affection which arises.

So, although I practice on my own, nearly 4000 miles away, his "presence" inspires me.



Ganesh Anna Chaudhary



India wakes up early!
 Our days are so busy that before going to bed, I sometimes feel saturated with information.
 Time feels different here... elastic, frozen, relative...
 Manik's metrical and rhythmical exercises are grueling;
 a real challenge to our wits.
 He inflicts them on us as soon as we're out of bed.

Disheveled, wrapped in his shawl,
 he stands holding a glass
 of caffe latte,
 taunting us with a "bol".
 With his thumb, he starts counting
 the "matras" (time units) in the
 rhythmic cycle (tala), which vary
 in number according to the mood
 and desired complexity.

He's starting again...
 we'll have to listen closely!

11.02.05
 Parel

Aisakshat

1	A	Ta Di Thum Na	Takita Di Kita
2	B	Thum Kita Nah Kita	Tak Kitata Ka Di
3	C	Kitata Ka Thum Kita	Tak Nam Kitata Ka
4	D	Tak Ita Kitata Ka	Di Kitata Kitata Ka
5	E	Thum Kita Kitata Ka	Nam Kitata Kitata Ka
6	F	Tak Ita Kitata Ka	Tata Ka Kitata Ka
7	G	Di Kitata Kitata Ka	Tata Ka Kitata Ka
8	H	Thum Kitata Kitata Ka	Tata Ka Kitata Ka
9	I	Nam Kitata Kitata Ka	Tata Ka Kitata Ka

A+B+C+D+E

Marc catches on quickly. Proficient in tabla bols, he can grasp the pakhawaj's subtleties.
 Manik devises an endless number of bols. Each time, we have to memorize the structure
 in order to repeat it, to sing it, to drum it against our thighs, or better yet,
 to pick it up, spin it around and turn it on its head.



..... Dha Dha Dhin Ta
Tite kata gadi gene Dha
Kata Dha
Tite kata gadi gene Dha
Kata dha
Tite kata gadi gene Dha
Kata dha

He sets us free once the formula has taken root,
or when I'm exhausted.
Throughout the day, as long as we can absorb it,
the teaching continues. Marc transposes on
the pakhawaj. Even as we jot down our notes,
Manikji can't help creating
further improvisations.



Here, pakhawaj practice takes precedence over everything else.
Family life revolves around it, but mostly with it, without clash or tension.
The drum's deep sound is part of their existence;
a source of joy mingled with respect.
I catch sight of Vidya going to and fro, managing the housekeeping.
Each morning, a servant takes care of the cleaning and dishwashing.



The Pakhawaj

Often described as a forerunner of the tabla, the pakhawaj is probably one of the oldest drums, along with its South-Indian cousin, the "mridanga".

It is carved from a single block of wood. Both drumheads are made of several hides, skillfully layered and taut by leather straps. The smallest head displays a carefully polished black spot, made from iron filings and rice paste.

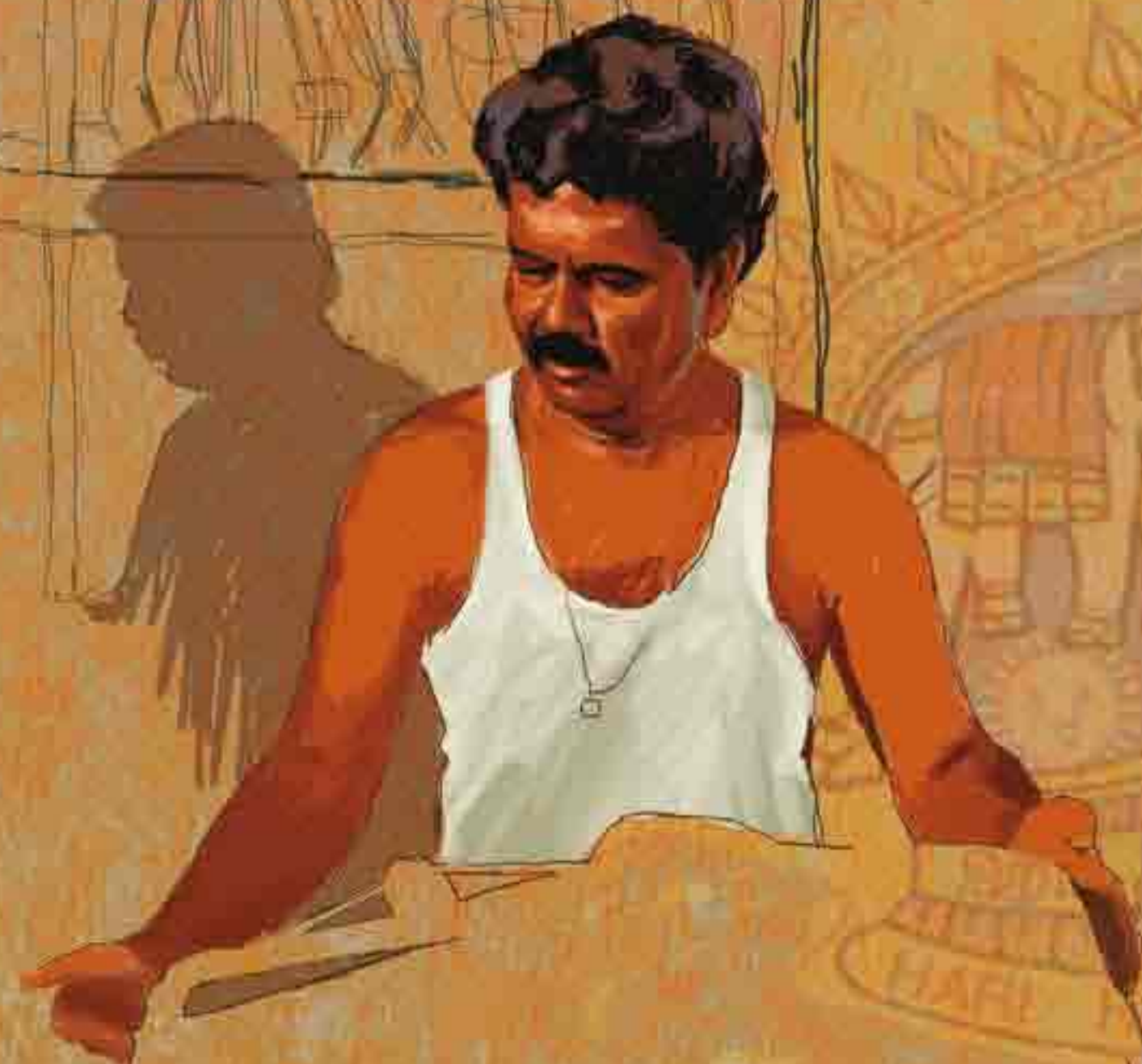
To the second head, the musician applies a freshly prepared dough made of flour and water. This produces low, prolonged resonances, which are perfectly suited to the regal aspect of dhrupad. The instrument is tuned with a hammer, by knocking on the small cylinders of wood inserted under the straps.

The Indian metrical and rhythmic system is the most elaborate and scholarly in the world.



In the receding light of the evening,
Manikji plays his pakhawaj like no one else.
He has both the strength and gentleness of the elephant:
a slow, powerful bulk, grasping a peanut with its trunk.
The sound is velvety, supple, deep, refined.
We are speechless with admiration as he performs complicated rhythmic
sequences with an effortless, almost mathematical precision.

Eyes closed, turned inward, or staring into boundless space...
he embodies the pulse of dhrupad.



One morning, Marc gets up with a violent toothache, looking pale and worried. The lower half of his face is swollen; he's feverish and hasn't slept. An old, neglected abscess has returned, like a piece of unfinished business... reminding him of the cost of dental care in France. Immediately, a battle plan has to be drawn up! His condition isn't serious, but in India, this sort of problem takes on a whole other aspect. Over the next ten days, Marc will undergo constant treatment, including the extraction of two decaying molars and ceramic bridgework. And what an adventure!



सर्वोत्तम स्वास्थ्य के लिए संचालित है।

SARASWATI

MEDICAL & GENERAL STORES

CHURCH & BUNGLOW

सुखसती

DR. JYOTI N. KOTICHA

DENTAL SURGEON & ORAL IMPLANTOLOGIST

गुरुमीत डायग्नोस्टिक सेंटर

DR. TAPAN KOTICHA

DENTAL SURGEON & ORAL IMPLANTOLOGIST

Groggy from the painkillers, commuting to the suburbs during rush hour in the most insane transports we'd ever seen... Passengers caught in the human maelstrom, jostling to get in or out of the train, intent on securing a place at all costs, desperately, violently... Marc, squashed upright between the would-be gladiators, holding an icepack to his cheek, looking oddly comical... Getting to the "Total Dental Care" clinic, housed in a derelict building in Chembur, is more than just a hassle... it's like hand-to-hand combat. The climax is reached when, right in the middle surgery, the power goes out! Marc's operation continues by candlelight, without fuss. "Just relax" says Jyoti Koticha, the young dentist, as water overflows from Marc's mouth, trickling down his neck, back and arm! Knocked out by 3 shots of anesthetic, he maintains an Olympian cool.



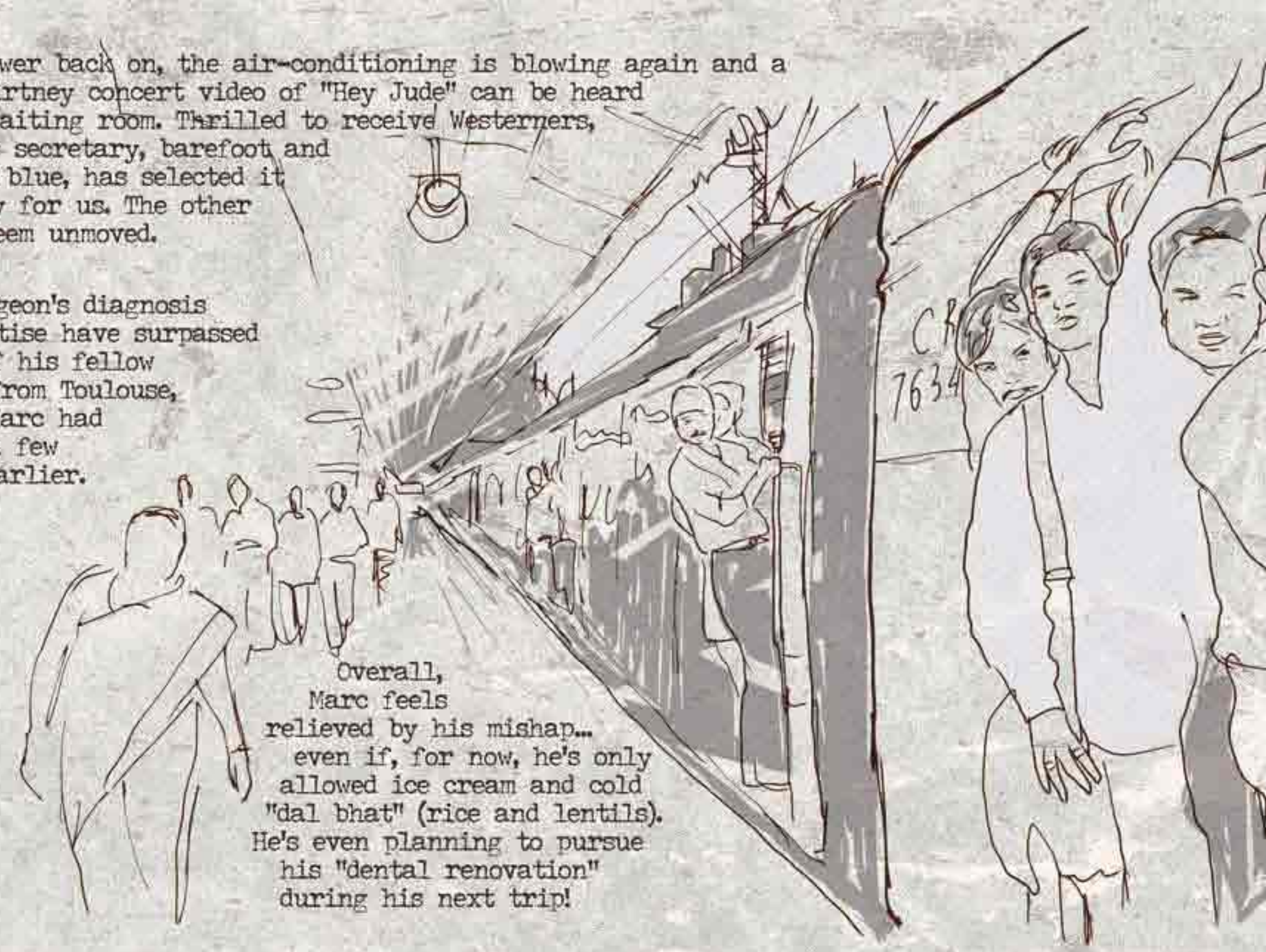
10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
11	21	31	41	51	61	71	81	91	101
12	22	32	42	52	62	72	82	92	102
13	23	33	43	53	63	73	83	93	103
14	24	34	44	54	64	74	84	94	104
15	25	35	45	55	65	75	85	95	105
16	26	36	46	56	66	76	86	96	106
17	27	37	47	57	67	77	87	97	107
18	28	38	48	58	68	78	88	98	108
19	29	39	49	59	69	79	89	99	109
20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100	110



12-21

With the power back on, the air-conditioning is blowing again and a Paul Mc Cartney concert video of "Hey Jude" can be heard in the waiting room. Thrilled to receive Westerners, the young secretary, barefoot and dressed in blue, has selected it especially for us. The other patients seem unmoved.

The surgeon's diagnosis and expertise have surpassed those of his fellow dentist from Toulouse, whom Marc had visited a few months earlier.



Overall, Marc feels relieved by his mishap... even if, for now, he's only allowed ice cream and cold "dal bhat" (rice and lentils). He's even planning to pursue his "dental renovation" during his next trip!

CR
7634





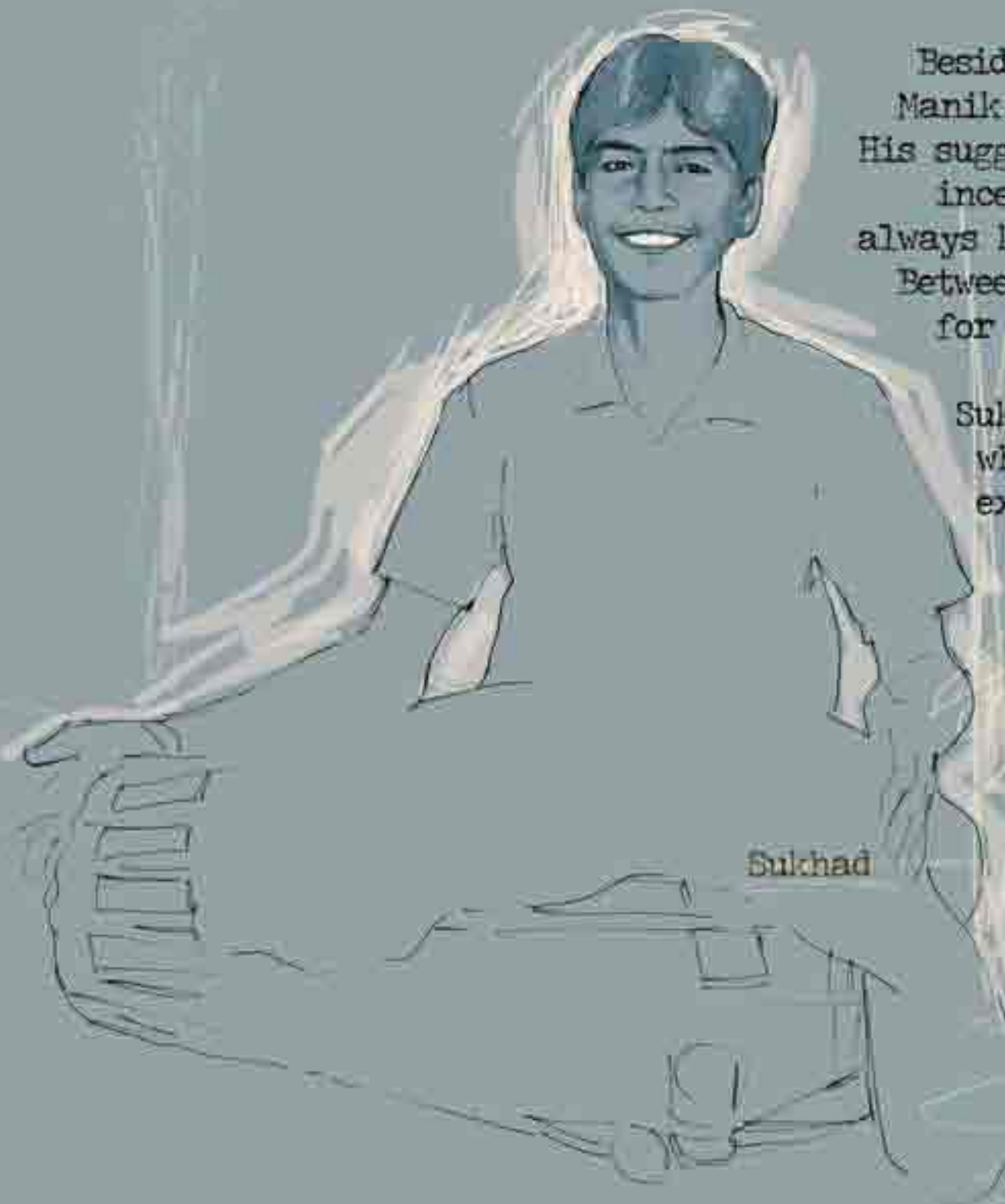
Sukhad, the son of the family.

Each morning, Sukhad goes to the local school, dressed in the brown uniform reserved for boys; whereas girls wear navy blue and white. The effect is a bit boy-scoutish, but he doesn't mind... that's just the way it is. To him, school is unavoidable but not essential. At the end of the day, he comes home, puts on his shorts and t-shirt and discreetly heads for the practice room.

In mind and body, Sukhad has a rare elegance about him, like some young Maratha lord. From behind his computer (stocked with concert recordings and video games), he watches us practicing at his father's side. Normally shy for a 15-year old, he's careful not to disturb us, but at the same time he's waiting for his cue: the moment when Manik, with a sign of the head, will ask him to sit behind the pakhawaj.

With disconcerting ease, he launches into inspired rhythmic cycles. Elation shines on his face, making it handsomer still: the astuteness in the eyes, flashing white teeth, disclosed in frequent, infectious smiles.





Sukhad

Besides being his father,
 Manik is also Sukhad's teacher.
 His suggestions are a powerful
 incentive for the boy,
 always keen to integrate new information.
 Between them, there is no place
 for hesitation or debate.
 Action predominates.
 Sukhad is a skilled and talented musician,
 who promises to become one of the main
 exponents of this difficult art.
 Manik has reason to be proud.
 His teaching has succeeded wonderfully.
 He doesn't insist much on pedagogy,
 on prescribing specific exercises
 at given times. Rather, his approach
 is to immerse the student in sound,
 in a daily training environment,
 and the joy this provides.

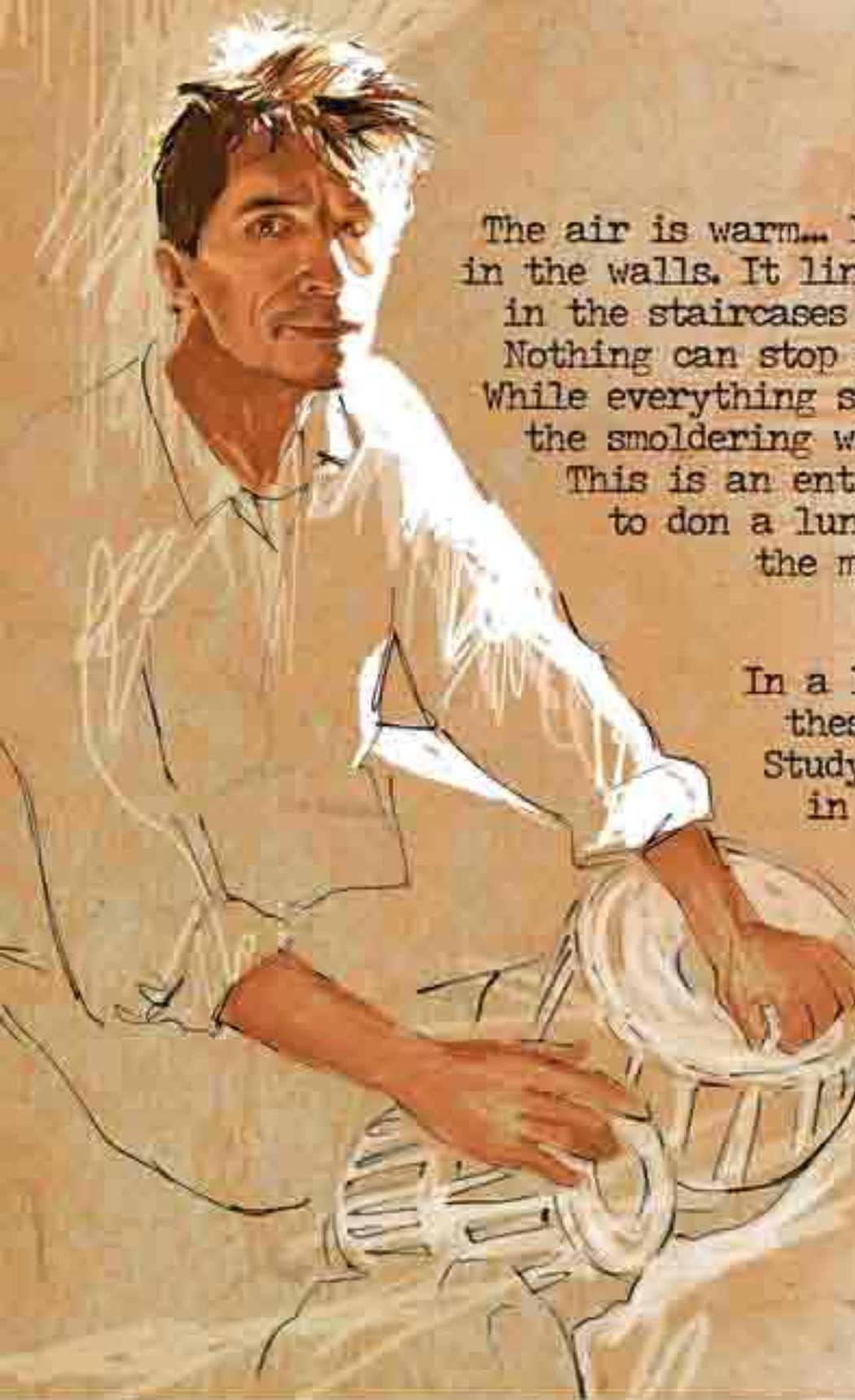


Sulba
a singer friend

Vidhya

Prerna





The air is warm... It creeps under the skin and through the cracks in the walls. It lingers behind the rocks, in the green of the leaves, in the staircases and streets, and in the temples, also. Nothing can stop it from spreading, from invading on a whim. While everything seems to languish in a haze of cumin and chili powder; the smoldering wind roams free.

This is an enticement to wear chapals and light cottons, to don a lungi indoors, to shower before and after the mandatory chai.

In a life centered on intense musical training, these quiet moments are my reward. Studying here, in India, in the traditional way, has brought me tremendous joy; sometimes verging on the mystical. In those rare instances, a sense of bliss envelops the body, the heart, the mind...





Marc is in
the bedroom, drumming softly
on his new tablas... I spread out my
clothes after showering... Sound echoes
within me: the raga I've been practicing now
plays by itself, not just inside my head or chest
but also on the rooftops and the patios, in the sky
and clouds. The engulfing sound has become a thread linking
everything... everything that makes up my universe,
my "here and now"... I feel at peace, liberated, at one with
the world. Heavy tears cloud my eyes. My entire body feels alive,
right down to the minutest cells. The satisfaction is overwhelming.

The magic of the raga, the time of day, the surroundings,
the people present... all contribute to these blessed moments.

Experiencing this artistic fulfillment is an added reason to practice.

In such moments, the concept of "rasa" (flavor) becomes
immediately intuitive. Sharing this, here, with my friend Marc,
is such a privilege! It's a true gift of life.

नमस्तेऽस्तु भगवः ॥ ५२ ॥
यास्तेसुहस्रं ॥ ५३ ॥
योन्न्यमस्मन्नित् ॥ ५४ ॥
णिसहस्रशोषा ॥ ५५ ॥
नो भगवः परा ॥ ५६ ॥
ङ्घ्यातासुहस्र ॥ ५७ ॥
ॐ सहस्रयोजन ॥ ५८ ॥



अस्मिन्महान्तरे ॥ ५९ ॥
विष्णुर्गणविन्तारिथे ॥ ६० ॥
प्रवाड आया तेषां ॥ ६१ ॥

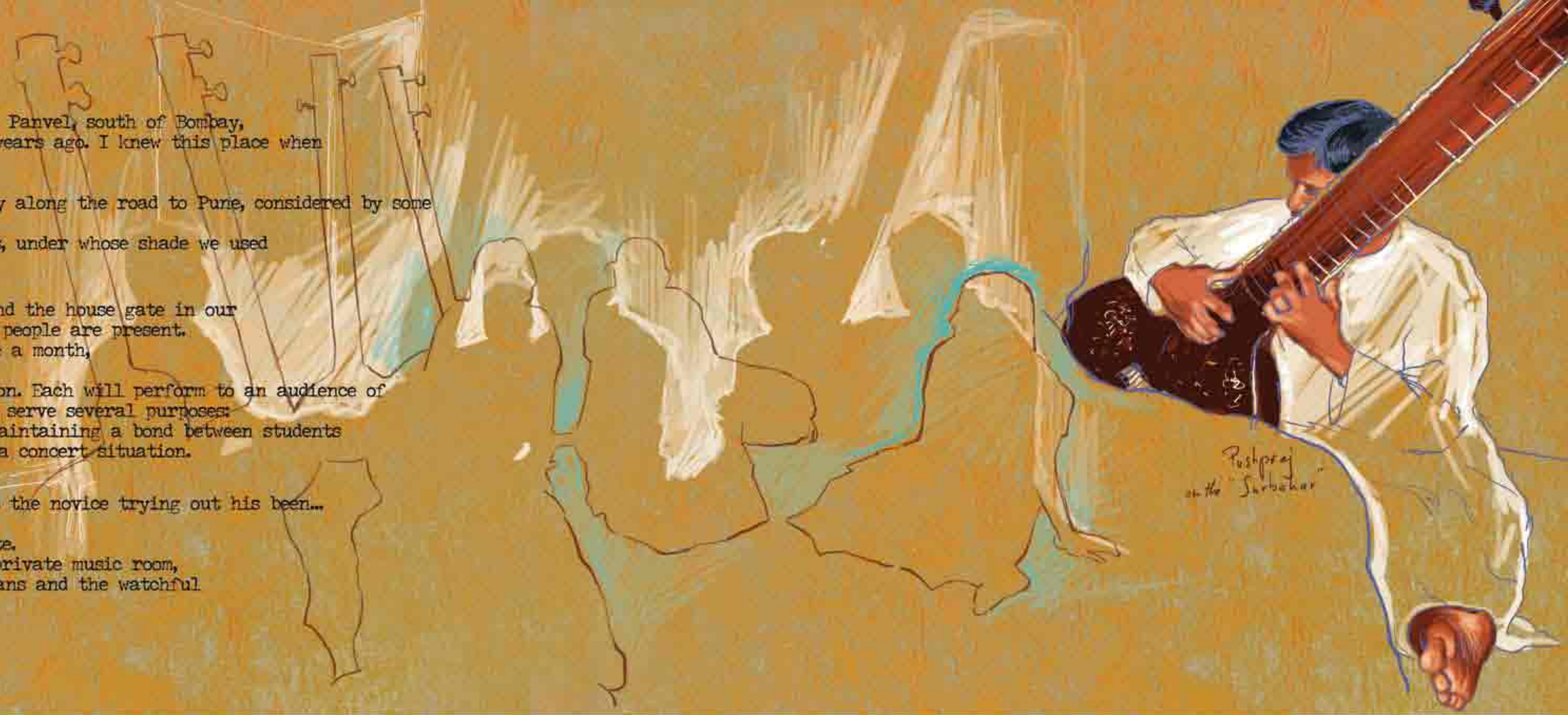


PALASPE

Palaspe is a village on the outskirts of Panvel, south of Bombay, where Bare Ustad built his house some twenty years ago. I knew this place when it was relatively quiet and lush, with a vista of virgin hillsides. Nowadays, dubious high-rises spread chaotically along the road to Pune, considered by some as the most dangerous road in India! It has replaced the fragrant eucalyptus trees, under whose shade we used to wait for passing rickshaws.

We reach Palaspe in the morning, passing beyond the house gate in our white-curtained Toyota. Forty, perhaps fifty people are present. The Dagar family of Bombay gathers here once a month, around Mataji and Chote Ustad. Indian and Western students attend the reunion. Each will perform to an audience of regulars and connoisseurs. These encounters serve several purposes: cultivating a collective, fraternal spirit, maintaining a bond between students of different levels, and also, placing them in a concert situation.

This time, everyone is curious to listen to the novice trying out his been... This isn't like playing to an ordinary crowd; more like auditioning in front of the elite. I take my place on the carpeted stage of the private music room, surrounded by a family of illustrious musicians and the watchful portraits of their ancestors.



Pushpraj
on the "Sarobahar"

My recital is well received.
Mataji gives me with a gentle,
concentrated look.

Kindly, she praises me to her guests,
before and after.

Uday sits
among the
listeners,
encouraging
me from
time to time
with a
head-shake
or a
disceet, but
audible,
"kya bat hai!"
(expression of
satisfaction).



Concealed in the dark crowd, Marc is holding
a minidisk recorder... I'm grateful that he's there,
a participant and witness...
Right now, he is my best ally.
The concert lasts well into the night;
ten or so ragas being interpreted...
Except for Pushpraj Koshti, a surbahar player,
and myself on the been, it is entirely devoted to
singing, with almost as many female performers as male.
As usual, Chote Ustad has hidden practically all night,
so as not to distract his students...
He concludes the evening with
a masterful performance.

One important detail: at diner, we are served
the finest meal I've ever had in India.

*All the chairs are taken
Impromptu feast in
the staircase!*



The Dhrupad Gurukul once had a garden, tended by a faithful servant, Bolai. It no longer exists. Nowadays, it seems the house only opens for these monthly gatherings.

Bare Ustad's memorial stele has been completed. Near the grown papaya trees, it's now covered by red-tiled roof.

En 1992, I had stayed here for three months as Mataji's guest. Alongside my training, Bablu bid me to undertake the restoration of a veena dating from 1963, and particularly the renovation of its frets. Sitting alone, in the shadowy light of the living room, observed by a line-up of ancestors, I adapted the metallic strips to their wooden supports, one by one.

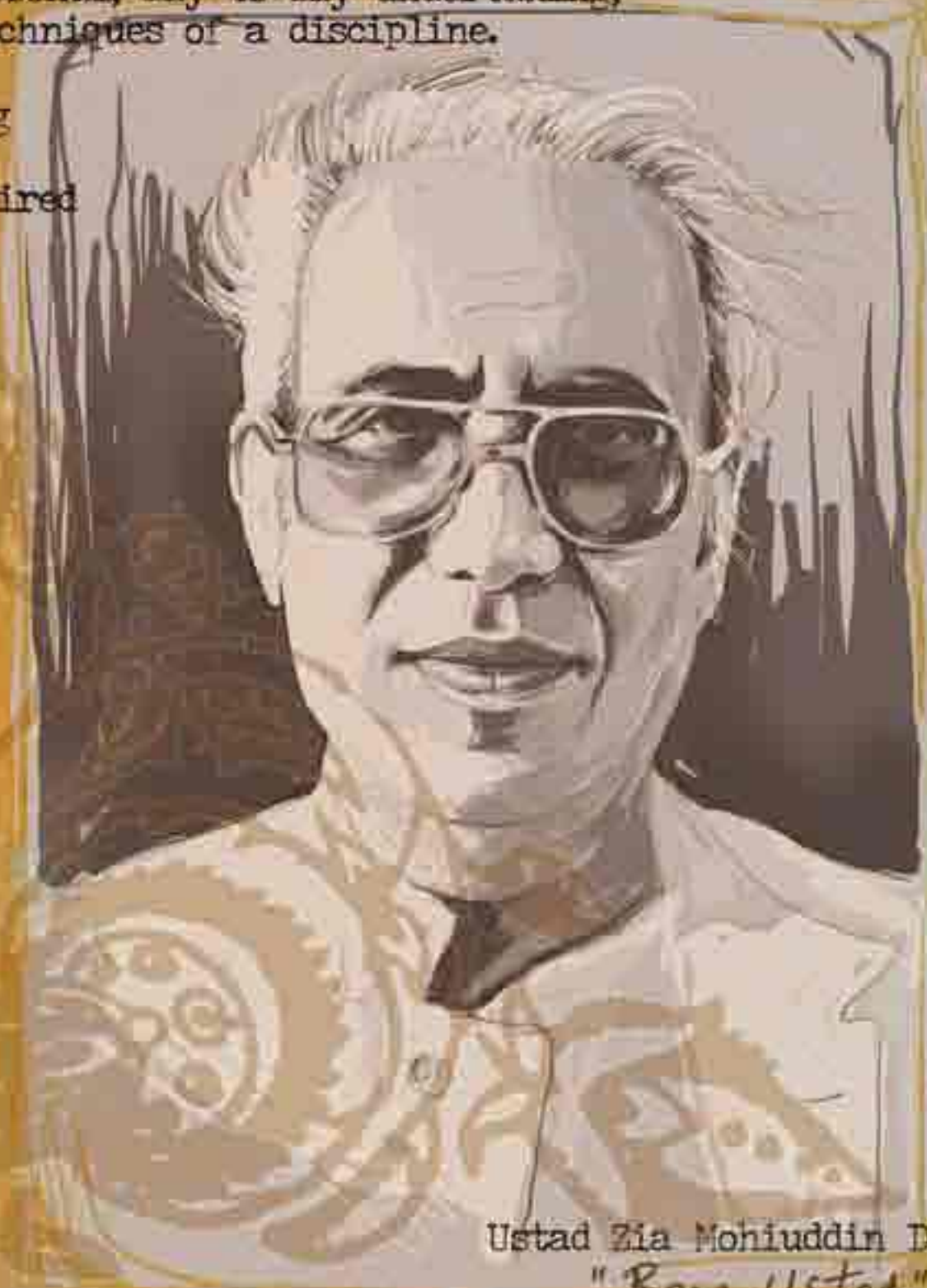
Specific moments with Bare Ustad come back to mind: our common life in Amsterdam, during two consecutive spring seasons, in a double-room apartment overlooking a canal. Our time was spent tuning the instruments, endlessly repeating alap phrases... and cooking. As with music, he taught me the various steps necessary for each recipe. I took care of the everyday shopping while Bare Ustad, wearing his lungi and chewing Pan Parag, kept himself busy indoors. Sometimes, he would prepare diner alone, correcting my exercises while continuously stirring his delicious chicken massala... I've never encountered this atmosphere again.

The most important thing he said to me then, being the father of two young daughters, was not to worry about my training, because I still had a lifetime ahead of me! One phrase a day... but every day! Years have passed and the been is still part of my life. His method worked!

As it is understood in India, "sadhana" is a personal, day-to-day undertaking, aimed at mastering the specific modes and techniques of a discipline. It isn't restricted to instrumental practice. In the broadest sense, its goal is the awakening of consciousness, the discovery of one's own self or "atman". It develops the faculties required for spiritual growth within each art form (music, dance, poetry, painting...).

The advice I received from Bare Ustad, during our all too brief relationship, has influenced me far beyond my musical training. It has guided me throughout my daily life. This, also, is the virtue of a "master".

As we walk, Marc and I smoke a few Kolkata beedies; my favorite!



Ustad Zia Mohiuddin Dagar
"Bare Ustad"

The cyclic round

The cyclic rhythms of the "composition", played on the pakhawaj or the tabla, constitute the final section of the raga. Like the other sections (alap, jor, jhala), it transports the musicians and the audience beyond time and space.

Mastering these cycles requires utmost concentration. In return, this self-control gives the musician access to unlimited path of discovery.

Train journeys provide time to practice, to hum the notes of the ragas, or the phrases derived from "bandishes" (chanted poems), while simultaneously marking the stressed beats in rhythmic cycles of 7, 10, 12 or 14 beats. In India, the human voice is justly considered the ultimate instrument.

Each note inspires the one that follows; each note sustains the next. Gradually, melodic patterns emerge, obeying a true language; confirmation that dhrupad singing, as an oral tradition, is alive and well.





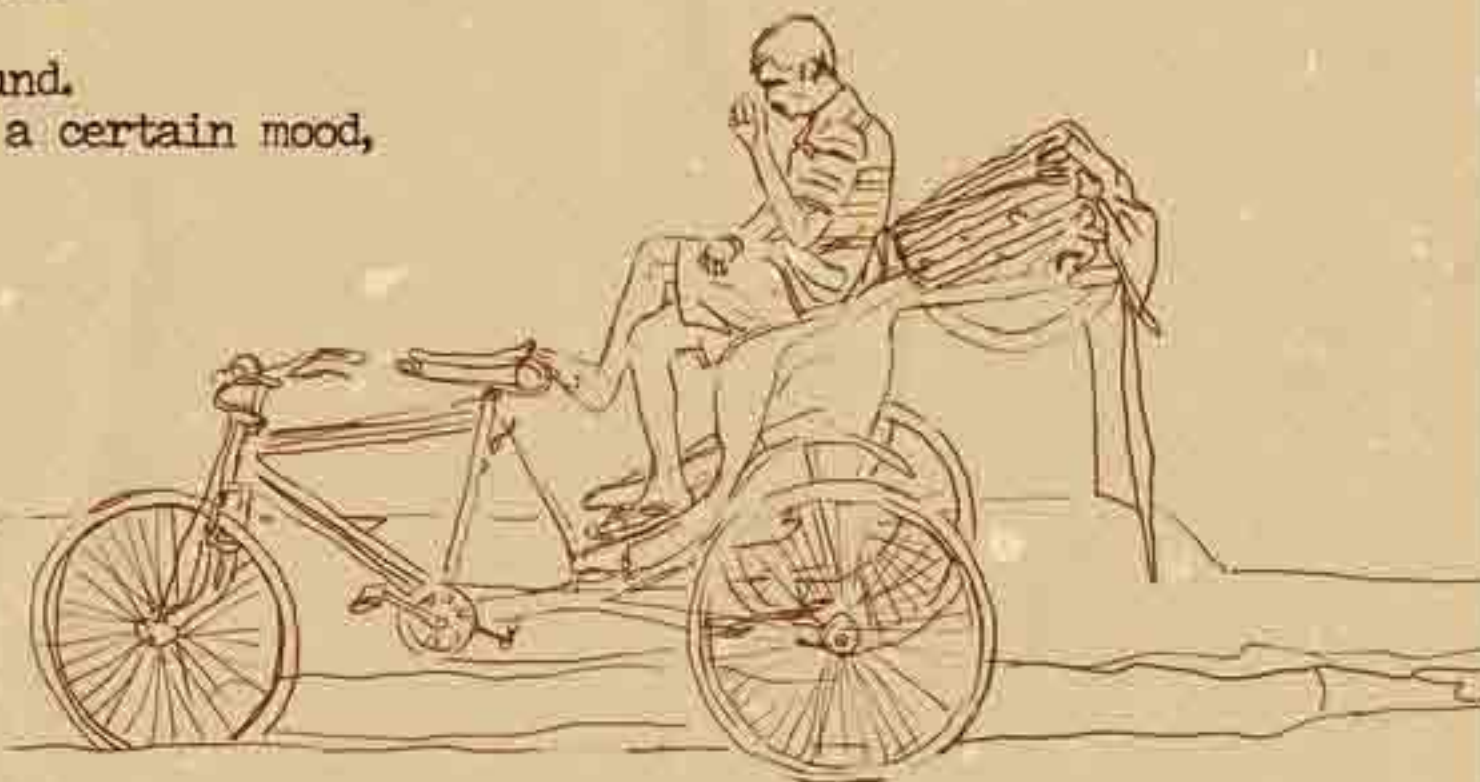
With each rendition, the raga is reborn and reinvents itself.
Methodically, it gives shape to the silence,
endlessly enhancing and renewing it.

Painstakingly the raga crafts impermanence into eternity, suspends time,
dissolves the quandary of existence.

When I first heard it, during a concert 25 years ago, I experienced an emotion
("bhava") I'd never known before... I felt as if I was listening to
a universal music of the soul. It was like coming home after a long absence,
or a mirror, into which I recognized myself.
It was a pause, in the irrevocable flow of time.

Since then, I've chosen to study this difficult art,
intent on upholding its tradition.

The vibration is all around.
It only takes a single note, a certain mood,
for the raga to begin...



Philippe Puget

Born in Paris in 1955. At the age of 24, with a promising career in computing under way, he decides to quit a leading international firm to settle in Provence, where he has ties.

He soon starts refurbishing an old apartment, unaware that this marks the beginning of his new trade:

property management and renovation.

In 1981, he discovers "dhrupad", which gradually becomes his main focus.

Dedicated to his training, he has already studied in India several times on a Franco-Indian scholarship

(French Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

In the meantime, he organizes concerts of classical Indian music in the Provence-Côte d'Azur region.

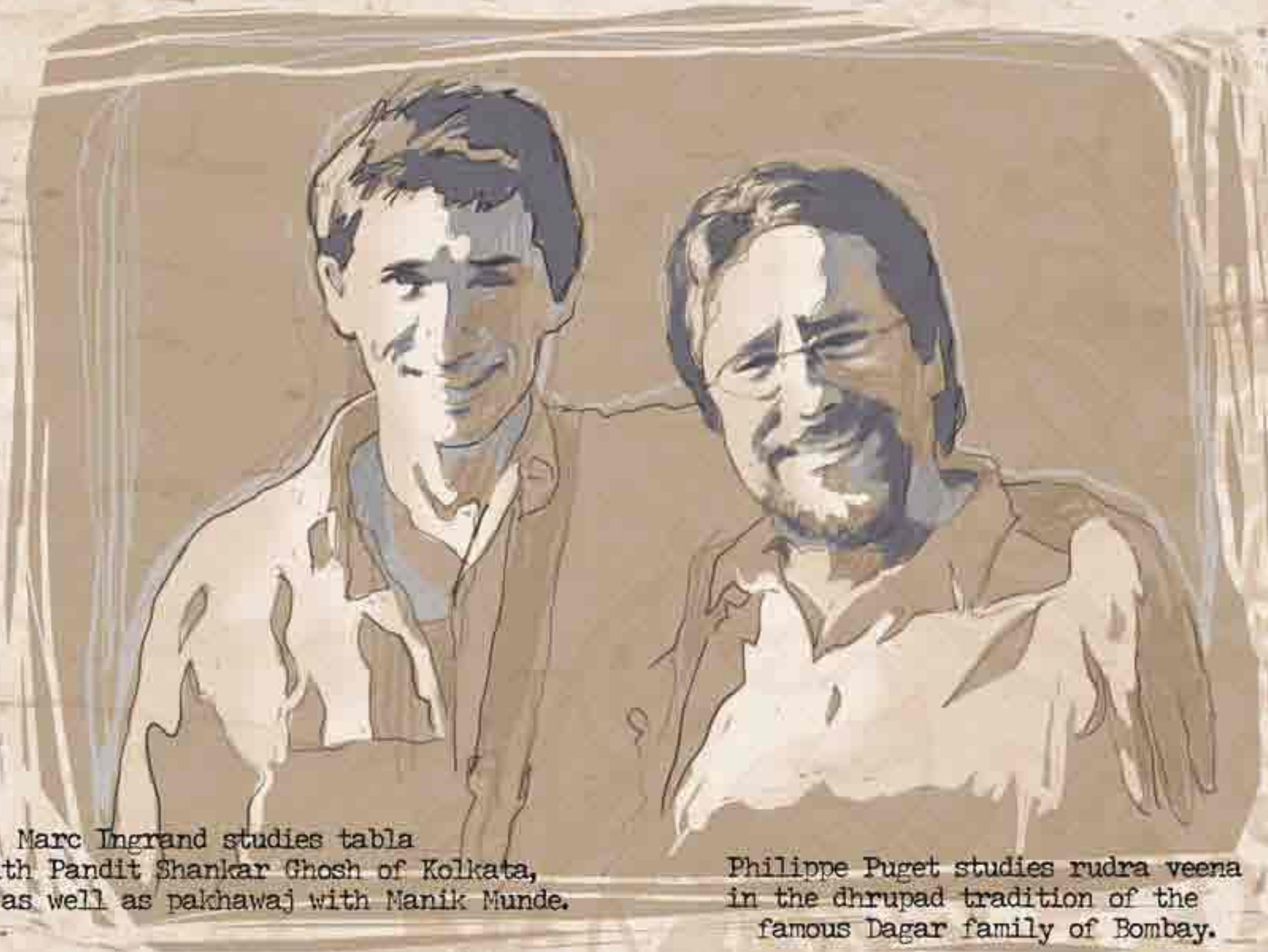
Marc Ingrand

Born in 1958 to a Vietnamese mother and a French pilot; a child of love and war...

After training in the applied arts in Paris, he moves to southwestern France.

He starts traveling to Asia at an early age, fascinated by India and its multiple facets: a source of artistic and spiritual inspiration...

For the past 20 years, he has worked in the Toulouse area as a freelance painter, illustrator, graphic designer and musician.



Marc Ingrand studies tabla with Pandit Shankar Ghosh of Kolkata, as well as pakhawaj with Manik Munde.

Philippe Puget studies rudra veena in the dhrupad tradition of the famous Dagar family of Bombay.

CD AUDIO AU RYTHME DU RAGA



©2008 EDITIONS BACHARI
25, rue des Grands Augustins - 75006 Paris
Tel/fax : +33(0)1 44 07 23 06
www.editionsbachari.com
ISBN : 978-2-913678-44-6

Dépot légal juin 2008
Imprimé en France (Imprimerie de Champagne)

CALCUTTA

1. Traffic.....	2:33
2. Bols chez P. Shankar Ghosh.....	0:28
3. Tabla lesson chez P. Shankar Ghosh.....	2:17
4. Howrah station.....	2:46

PUNE

5. Rudra vina - Philippe Puget Raga Multani Jor.....	7:19
6. Chant - Jday Bhawalkar Pakhawaj - Sanjay Agle Raga Handsadhvani Jhala et bandish en chautal (12 temps).....	15:51

POWAI

7. Saregama.....	0:46
8. Birds.....	0:20

PALASPE

9. Surbahar - Pushpraj Koshti Pakhawaj - Manik Munde Raga Champakali Bandish en chautal (12 temps).....	10:47
10. Chant - Jstad Fariduddin Dagar Bandish en chautal (12 temps) Pakhawaj - Sanjay Agle.....	4:20

PANVEL

11. Pakhawaj lesson - Manik Munde.....	3:45
12. Sarod - Smt Zarin Sharma Raga Bhairavi Alap et Gat en Teental (16 temps).....	12:18
13, 14. Rudra vina/Pakhawaj Philippe Puget & Marc Ingrand Raga Puriya Kalyan Jhala & bandish en chautal (12 temps).....	8:08
15. Jugalbandi Chant/Rudra vina Jstad Fariduddin Dagar & Bahauddin Dagar Raga Jog Jhala.....	7:02
Extrait du concert donné le 24 mars 2005 à la Médiathèque de Mouans-Sartoux.	
16. See you soon.....	0:19

Enregistrements «live» réalisés sur mini-disc en 2005.

Nos sincères remerciements à tous les musiciens
pour la confiance qu'ils nous ont accordés
en nous offrant leur aimable participation.

