



Pankhā a collection of hand fans from the Indian subcontinent and beyond by artist Jatin Das



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JD Centre of Art

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This publication is an exhibition catalogue that accompanied the Pankha exhibition at the IGNC, May-June 2018

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Photograph by Raghu Rai



Collector's note: Jatin Das

One summer afternoon, 40 years ago, I saw a friend sitting depressed in my studio in Nizamuddin, New Delhi. I picked up a *pankha* (hand fan) and with mock seriousness said, "Let me stir the still air." It suddenly occurred to me that this would be the perfect title for a book on *Pankhas*. It was that amazing hand fan that gave me the impetus to begin the collection.

I am a contemporary Indian artist with a deep interest in traditional art forms. I took up this project with spontaneity and fervour – as I do most things in my life. When an idea is born in my mind, I try to visualize and see the larger picture. The journey of collecting *pankhas* that was envisioned that summer afternoon, has come a long way since. The collection now consists of more than six thousand fans.

Throughout my travels, whenever I visited villages or towns in the Indian subcontinent, one of my main concerns was always to scout for hand fans and traditional crafts. I also sketched them and took photographs. In each place, the *pankhas* were made of different things, using raw materials that grew in the area. They often had a variety of intricate designs. Traditional crafts have survived in India because in our villages people still make and use them.

I often asked chowkidars, cooks and peons for hand fans because they are the people who are still connected to traditions. At first they would laugh, but later would bring beautiful pieces made by their mothers, wives and daughters. The craft of fan-making is done mainly by women all over India. Every time I bought an exquisite fan from a home, I carried the guilt of depriving people of their personal heritage, but hoped that they would get another. Although the cost of making the *pankha* is minimal, the workmanship, effort and personal touch make these delicate objects invaluable. Antique dealers in Jaipur and Ahmedabad immediately smelt that I was a collector. They would not let me leave without some rare heirloom that had found its way from palaces and havelis into their stores. Of course the prices of these hand fans were sky-high.

I also collected hand fans when I visited different countries - Africa, Egypt and the Middle East; far eastern countries like China, Korea and Japan; Indonesia and South-East Asia - the entire region has a big fan culture in their everyday life as well as in their traditional dances. Fans come in different shapes and sizes. They are made of varied organic materials and are used for different purposes. Each fan has a story to tell.

The collection has a variety of fans. There are antique ceiling fans from the Mughal and Colonial periods that were pulled by *pankhawalas* from outside the room and used for large congregations in temples, royal courts and offices and aristocratic *darbaars*. Then there are fans called *phadh*, large hand fans held by attendants for groups of affluent men and women. There are ceremonial fans and of course a large variety of personalized hand fans. Many of them are centuries old and are priceless antiques. The collection also grew with gifts from friends from across the globe. They all knew of my obsession.

Fans are mostly available in the summer, mainly in old markets and weekly *haats* (village markets). Vendors sell them along with broomsticks and baskets. The hand fans are mostly made of bamboo, *khajur* (date palm) and palm leaf. The advent of electricity has made the use of *pankhas* in urban areas redundant.

In the countryside, people still have a need for them. Even now, on summer afternoons, men fan themselves to sleep on their charpoys. Women seated in a circle air themselves with a revolving fan as they talk. They buy such fans from the market and embellish them - little by little with beads, silk or satin and keep them under their pillows. They cool their husbands and their children at meal times or in bed. Fans are also a tool for romance; a language to appease, cajole and seduce.

Over the years, my passion became a collection that needed systematic research, documentation and archiving. It expanded to include paintings, prints, miniatures, photographs and poems on the subject, from the Colonial period to the present.

Methodical accessioning was followed by written and photo documentation. A bibliography was compiled with glossary of names of fans in different languages. Along with a film crew, I also travelled to many parts of India and made short documentary films on the craft of fan making.

In May 2004, all the fans came out of their trunks for their maiden exhibition, held at the National Crafts Museum, New Delhi. After a month, the exhibition travelled to the grand Victoria Memorial, Kolkata. Tens of thousands of people visited and looked at the fans carefully. At the close of the year a selected show opened at the Fan Museum in London for four months. It was followed by an exhibition at the Rietberg Museum, Zurich in 2005. Then the collection was displayed at the National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur and at the National Museum of Manila in the Philippines. In 2011, they were exhibited at the 'Maximum India Festival' at The John F. Kennedy Centre in Washington DC.

I am worried that repeated handling, mounting and dismantling of the exhibitions in different climatic conditions is going to make these fragile objects more vulnerable to damage. In the future, a separate collection of similar fans will be set aside for traveling exhibition only.

Painting is my only source of income and has alone funded this unusual collection without any support from outside. I have been collecting, studying, researching and documenting arts and crafts from many parts of India, and in particular, Odisha, which is my home state. I feel sad when a beautiful craft of India disappears due to lack of interest, utility or buyers. This collection of hand fans is a small attempt to draw attention to the rare and dying crafts of India.

This show is dedicated to the unknown craftspeople of the great Indian subcontinent.

में शाम से सँवार रही हूँ जूही के फूल
बालों से खेलती हुई पंखी को रोक दो
पंखी कलाई में तुम्हारी अच्छी लगती है
उसको हवा हिलाए तो हवा को टोक दो

गुलज़ार

میں شام سے سँوار رہی ہوں جُوہی کے پھول
بالوں سے کھیلتی ہوئی پنکھی کو روک دو
پنکھی کلائی میں تمہاری اچھی لگتی ہے
اس کو ہوا ہلایا تو ہوا کو ٹوک دو۔
طرہ دار



Craftswomen making golden grass fans, Odisha



Kaincha Binchana, golden grass revolving fan, Odisha, India



Golden grass revolving fans, from across India



Woven bamboo fixed fan, Punjab, India



Woven bamboo revolving fans, from across India



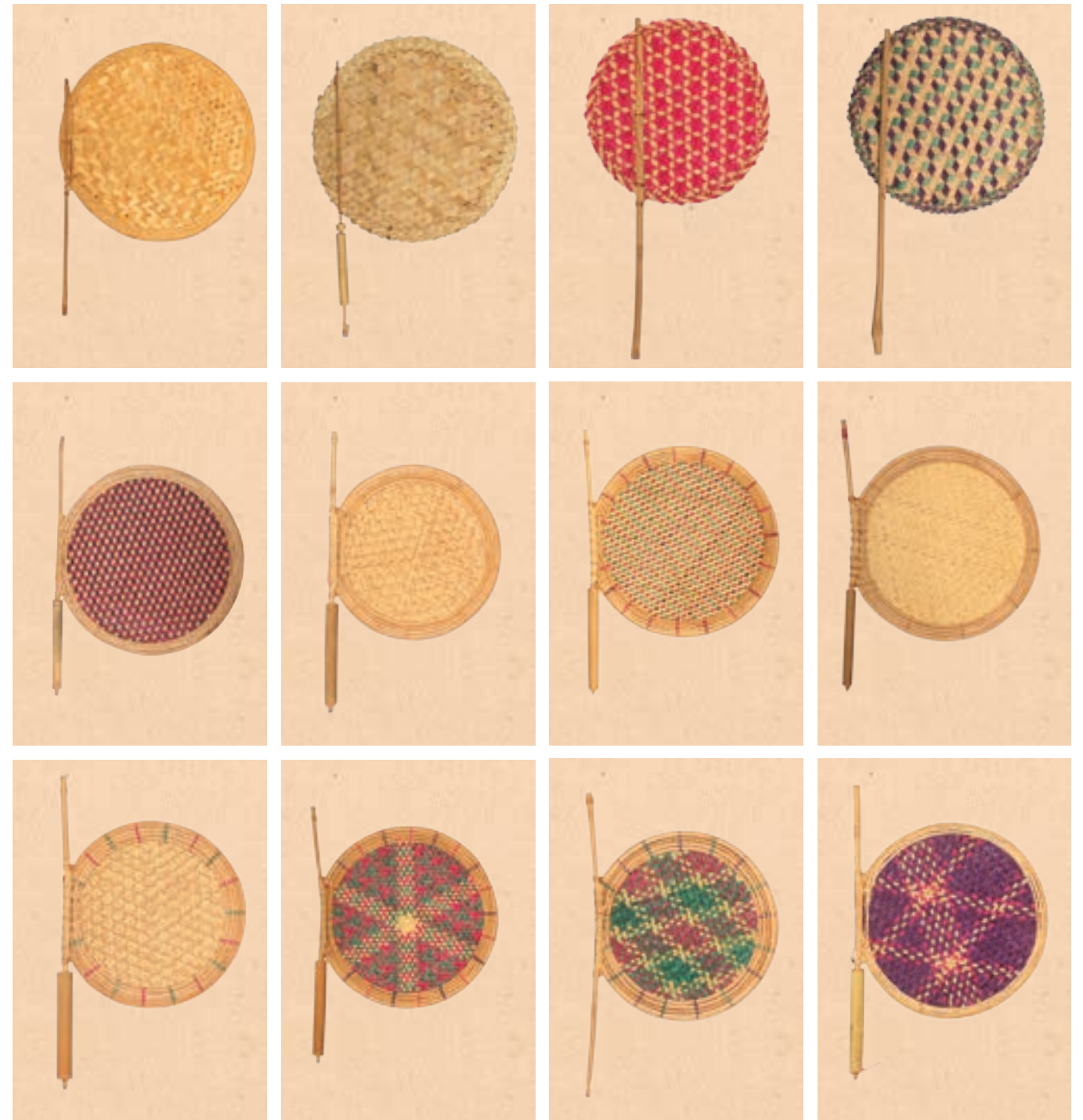
Bamboo fan, Agartala, Tripura, India



Bamboo fans, from across India and Bangladesh



Top: Woven bamboo revolving fan from Assam, India,
Bottom: Bangladesh



Woven bamboo fixed and revolving fans from India and Bangladesh



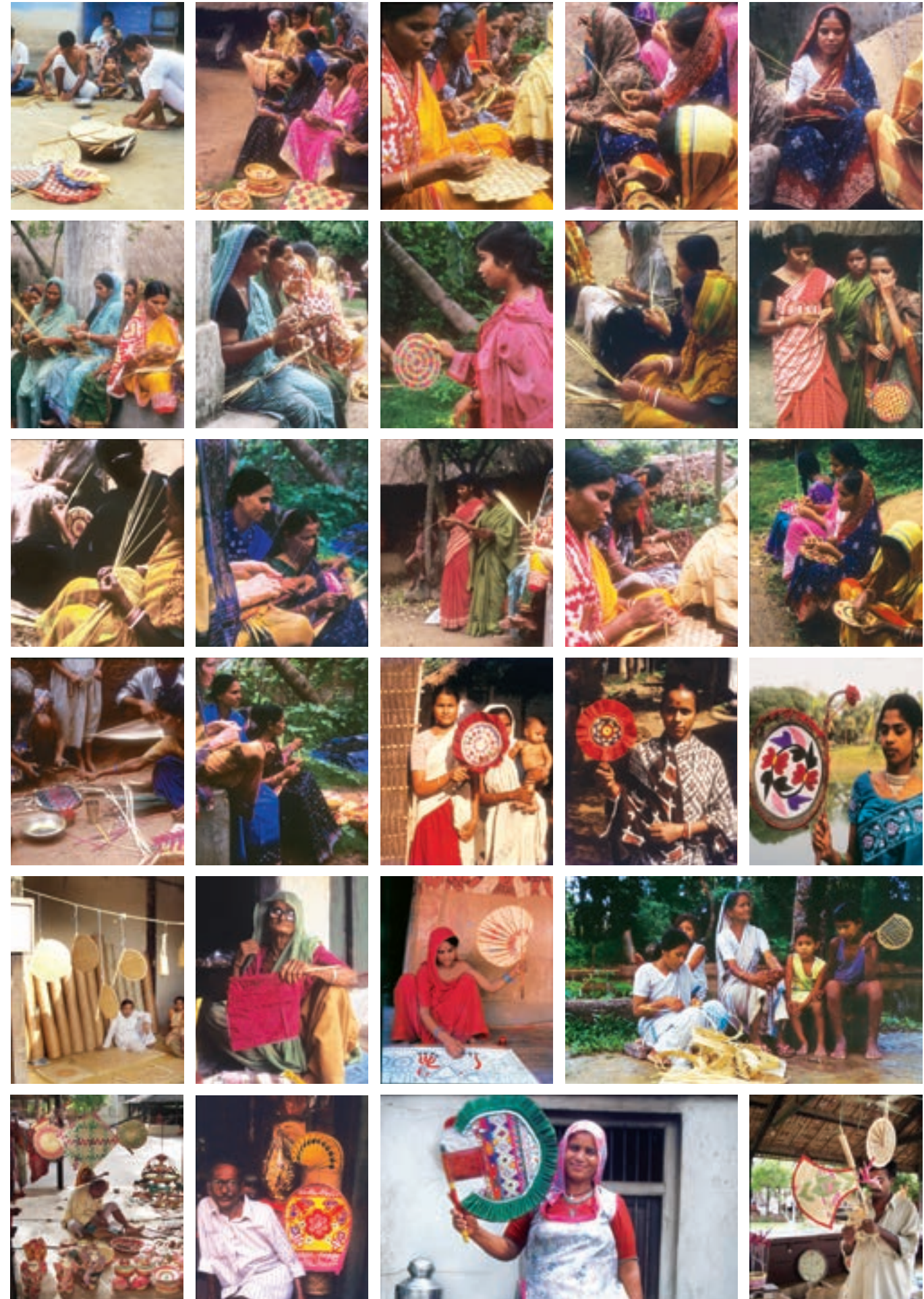
Painted fan on board, Rajasthan, India



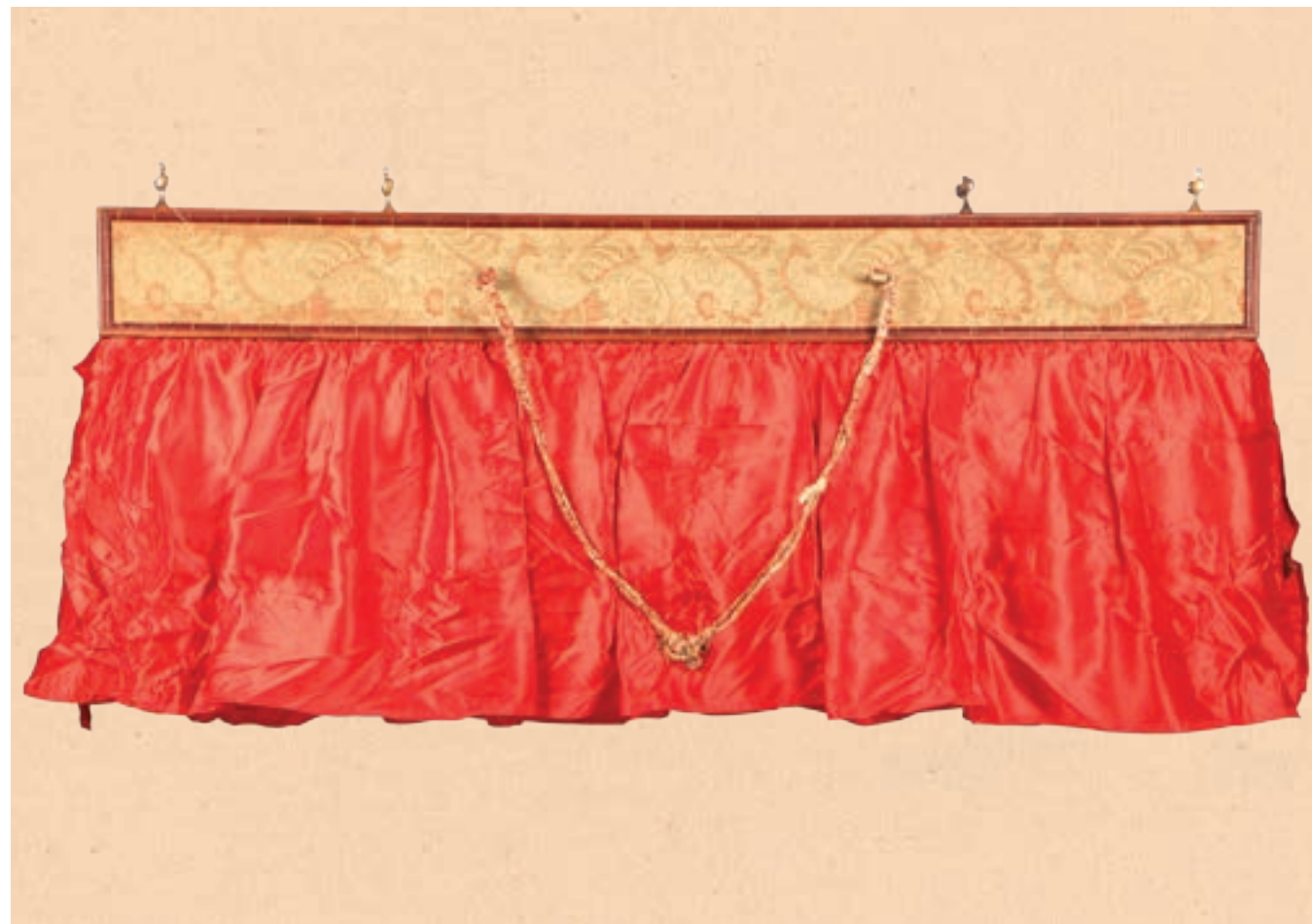
Painted fan on board, depicting Krishna and Radha, used in the Nathdwara temple in 19th century, Rajasthan



Stages of making woven bamboo fans



Craftspeople making fans, India



Hand-pulled ceiling fans from Bikaner, Rajasthan and elsewhere in India



Lithographs depicting hand-pulled ceiling fans



Craftswoman presenting a textile embroidered *pankha* she has made, Kutch, Gujarat



Embroidered hand fans, Rajasthan and Gujarat, India

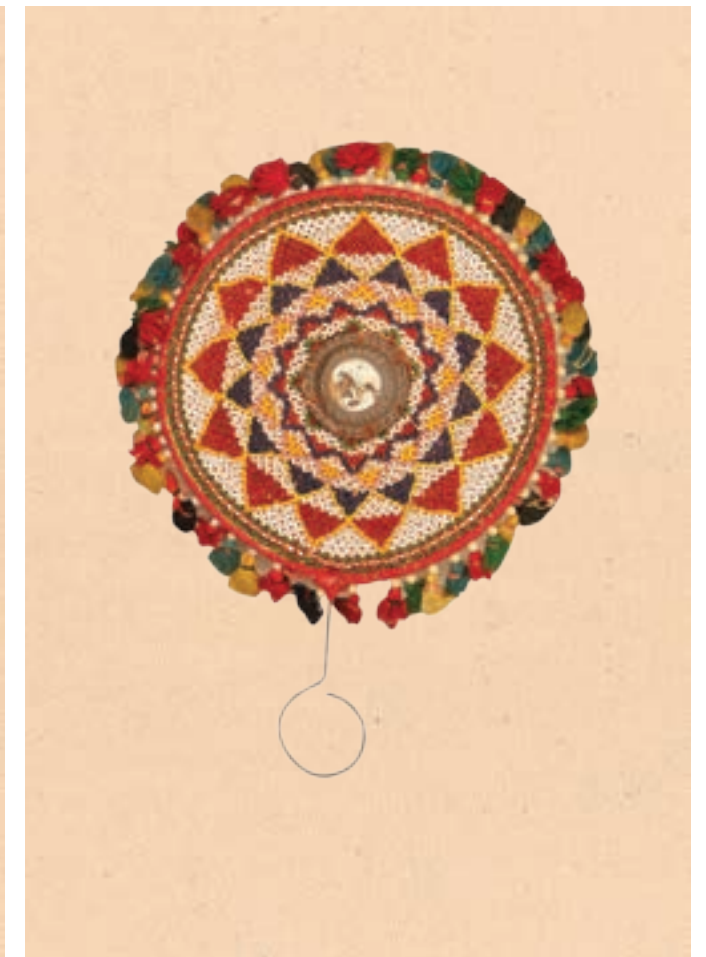


Embroidered hand fans, Gujarat, India

Large textile applique *Phad* fans, Gujarat and Rajasthan, India



Beaded fixed fan with lacquered handle, Gujarat, India



Beaded fixed fans, Gujarat and Rajasthan, India



Beaded fixed fans, Gujarat and Rajasthan, India



Beaded fan, Gujarat, India



Woven palm leaf fixed fan, Iran



Golden grass revolving fans, Nepal



Top: Semi-circular hand fan from Zanzibar, Tanzania
Bottom: Revolving grass fan, Bihar



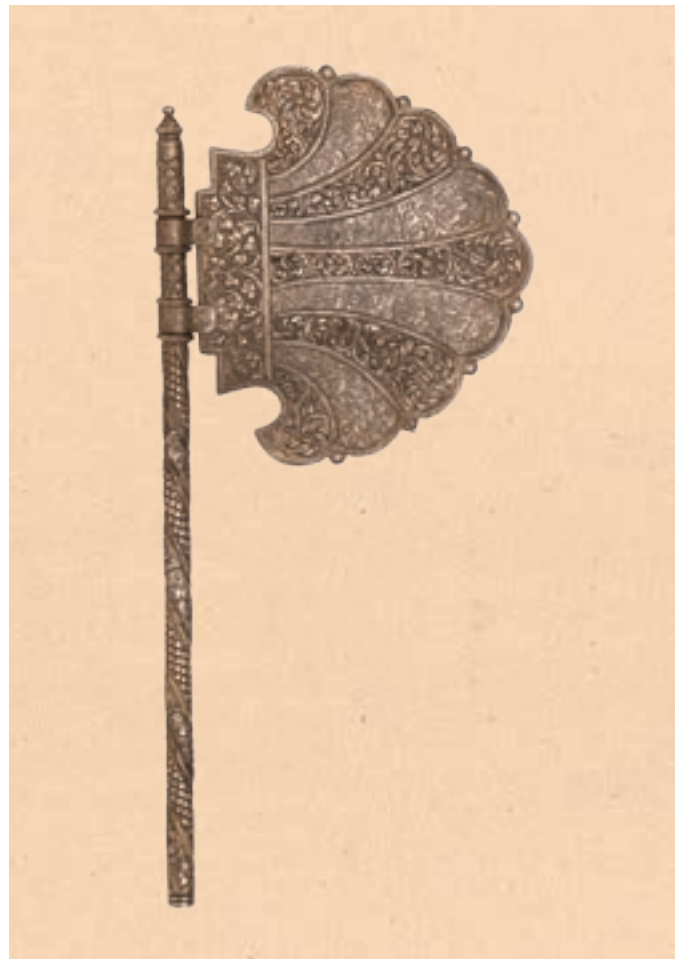
Grass and grass with palm leaf fixed fans, Jharkhand; Bastar, Madhya Pradesh; and elsewhere in India



Woven bamboo revolving fan, Odisha, India



Golden grass and textile revolving fan, Uttar Pradesh, India



Ritual temple metal fans, India

Ritual temple metal fans, India



Khajur date palm, Sindh, Pakistan



Khajur, date palm fixed fans from Iran (1), Pakistan (2, 3, 4, 6), North-West India (5)



Palm fan made by Alekh Baba monks, Odisha, India



Alekh Baba monks with their palm fans, Odisha, India



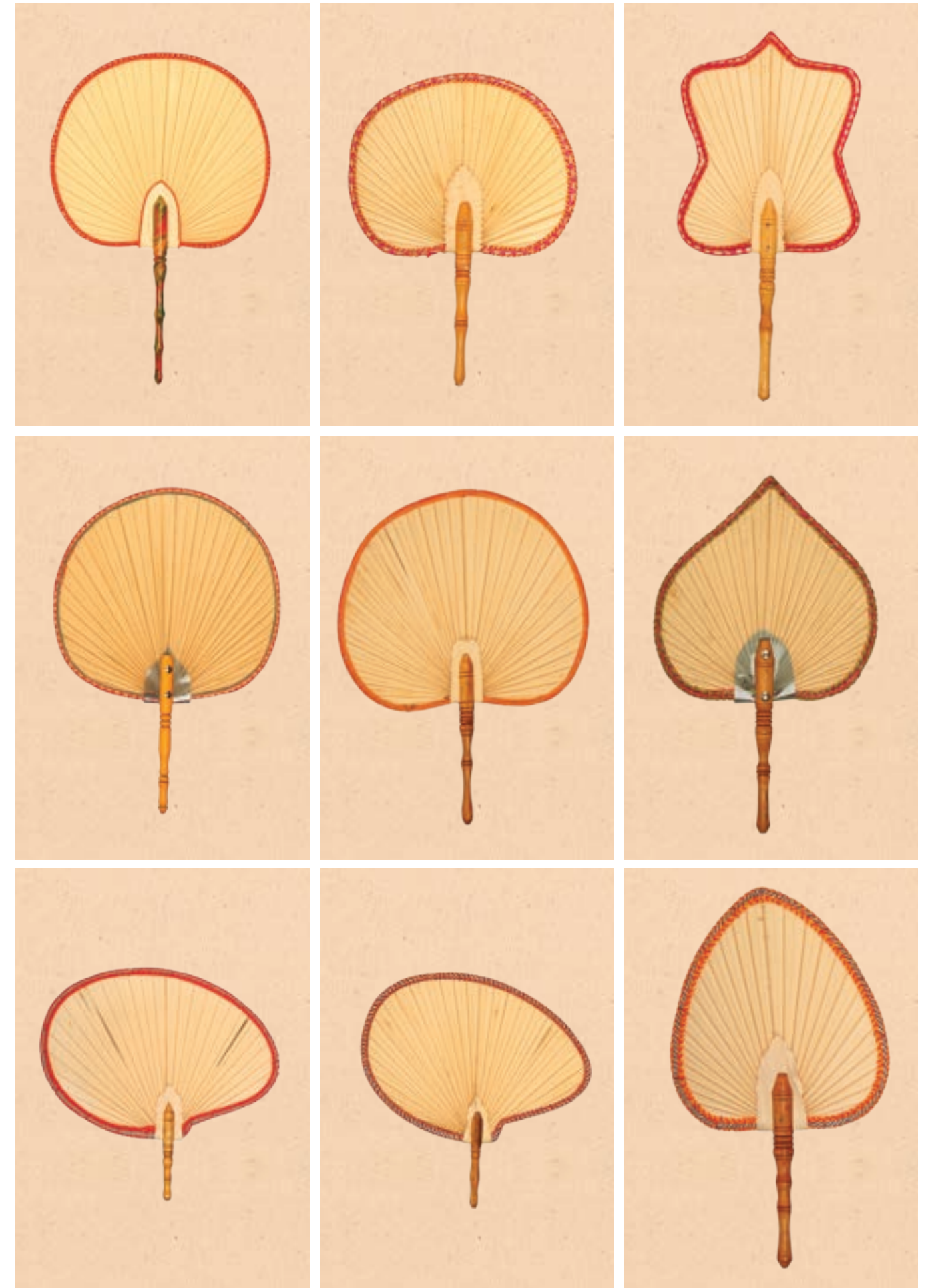
Painted palm fan, West Bengal, India



Palm leaf fixed fans from across India



Palm leaf Buddhist fixed fan, Sri Lanka



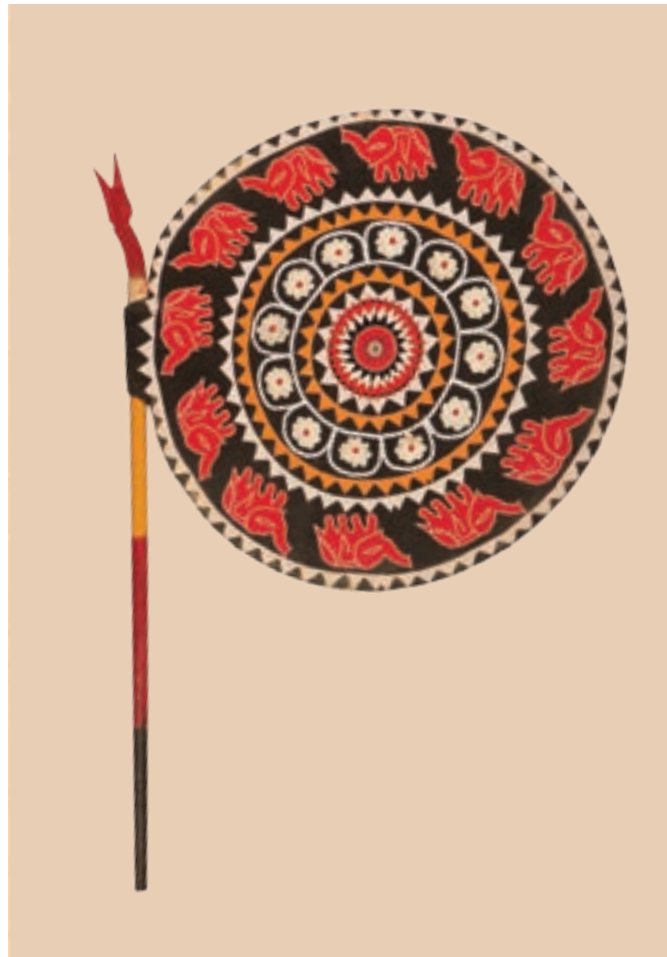
Palm leaf Buddhist fixed fans, Sri Lanka



Solapith, fixed fan made from the sola reed, offered to the deity, West Bengal, India



Solapith fixed fans



Top: Fans with *zari* or metal yarn possibly used by royalty and nobility, Gujarat, India; Bottom: Applique fans, Odisha, India



Top: Fan made of tree bark, Assam, India; Bottom: Ritual fan with lacquered handle, Majuli island, Assam, India



Royal woven *khus*, vetiver, fragrant roots of grass fans with frill, Uttar Pradesh, India



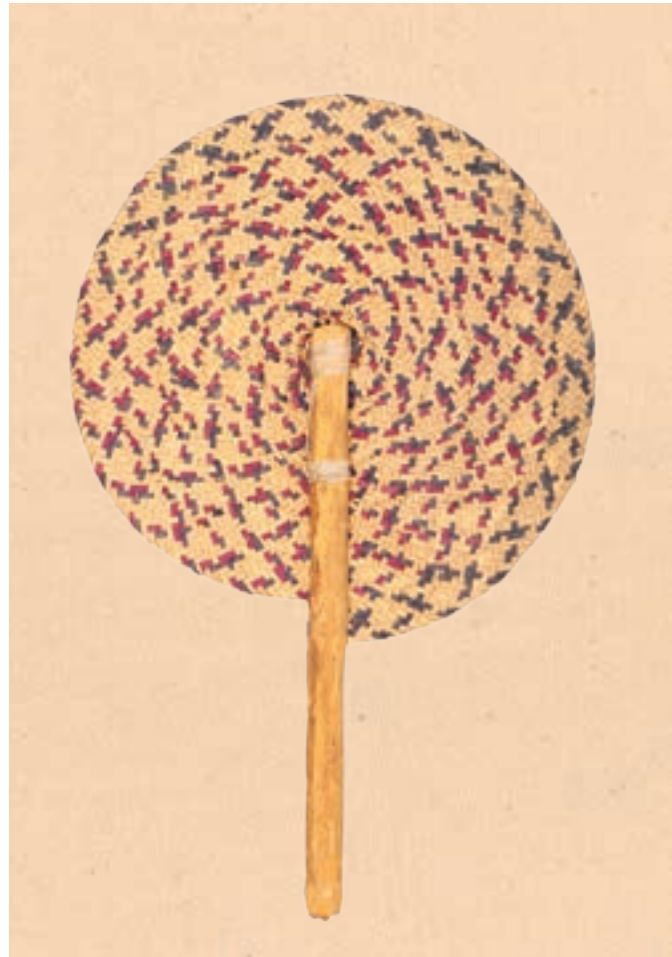
Textile *Phad* fans, Kerala, India



Palm leaf and grass fixed fan with central handle, South East Asia



Palm leaf and grass fixed fans with central handle, South East Asia and Far East



Palm leaf fans, Africa



Woven palm leaf fan, Philippines



Palm leaf fan, Cambodia



Paper folding fan; leather and horn fan; and parchment leather fixed fan, Indonesia



Top: A *chamar*, flying whisk fan, made of animal hair used in Gurudwaras, Punjab, India
Bottom: Fly whisk fan made from animal hair, Egypt



Fixed feather fan from Sophia Museum in Istanbul, only replica of the Turkish Emperor's fan, gold plated and jewelled



Top: Peacock feather fan from China
Bottom: India



Feather fixed fan, China



Top: Leather fan from tribal chief, Africa; Bottom: woven grass fan, Africa



Leather, feather and grass fans from tribal chiefs in Africa, some collected and gifted by Ambassador Lalit Mansingh



Bamboo and paper fixed and folding fans, Far East

Bamboo and paper fixed fans, Far East



Bamboo and paper fixed fans, Far East

Bamboo and paper fixed fans, Far East



Paper folding fans, China



Paper folding fans, China and Indonesia





Wooden folding fan



Carved wooden fan, Rajasthan, India



Top: Kalamkari painting on cloth, South India;
Bottom: Drawing on tussar silk cloth, drawn by the late Rabindra Nath Sahoo, Odisha, India



Pankha storage trunks



1.
Pleated, metrical folds
of dried palm-leaves fan
out in serene oval shapes

gently stirring the air –
hands in slow motion
calibrating power

of a nascent breeze,
softly soothing
our tropical skins –

trying to assuage the un-
forgiving unpredictability
of climate change.

2.
For now, I am happily
distracted by my modest
handmade pankha,

its intricate thread-work,
its simple woven stories
in natural organic dye –

taking me back
to childhood memories,
of innocence,

of fair weather –
and the spare simplicity
of pure clean air.

Sudeep Sen, Poet



Jatin Das
www.jatindas.com

The Journey of India, a mural by Jatin Das at the Parliament of India, to celebrate India's 50th anniversary of Independence, being inaugurated by the Prime Minister, Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee.

Jatin Das is an eminent artist and has been painting for over 50 years. He was the recipient of the prestigious "Padma Bhushan" award in 2012. Born in December 1941 in Mayurbhanj, Odisha, India, he studied at the Sir JJ School of Art, Bombay, under Professor S.B. Palsikar. Jatin Das has held 68 one-man shows, in India and abroad and has participated in numerous national and international exhibitions such as the Paris Biennale, Venice Biennale, and Indian Triennale. He has also designed postal stamps for Indian Philately. He works in oil, watercolour, ink, graphics and conté.

His mural, The Journey of India: Mohenjo-Daro to Mahatma Gandhi in the Parliament of India, was inaugurated by then Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Jatin Das has worked with a wide range of materials, creating several murals and sculpture installations including the welded steel installation at the Bhilai Steel Plant in Madhya Pradesh and more recently his mural at the Bangalore airport.

His works feature in several public and private collections in India and abroad and have been

auctioned by major international auctioneers like Sotheby's, Christie's and Osian's. He has also donated his works to several charities.

Jatin Das has lectured extensively at numerous art and architectural colleges, museums and public forums; sharing his art and his understanding of contemporary and traditional art forms. He is also an advisor to many governments and private bodies, which have housed many of his works in their 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 India, he has been on the task force for the preservation of arts and craft. His commitment to art and artists and towards creating sensitivity for art and aesthetics led him to a dream almost 30 years ago - the JD Centre of Art. His vision was to house classical, contemporary, traditional and folk art; all under one roof.



The sculptures at JDCA amphitheatre



The sculptures at JDCA amphitheatre



Monthly Meet the Artist programme



Tribal dance performance at JDCA's amphitheatre.

JD Centre of Art
www.jdcentreofart.org

Jatin Das is the Founder and Chairman of the JD Centre of Art. He has donated his entire collection of art and craft as the seed collection. The Centre is taking shape, after much effort, on an acre of land in Bhubaneswar, donated by the Government of Odisha. It is designed by the eminent architect B V Doshi, who was the recent recipient of the prestigious Pritzker Architecture Prize.

The vision of the JD Centre of Art (JDCA) is to preserve and promote traditional, folk, tribal and contemporary art, without boundaries. During the last 35 years, Jatin Das has built a personal collection of contemporary work, traditional art, antiquity and crafts that includes the enormous 'Pankha' collection, which consists of more than 6000 hand-fans. He is also donating most of his own works to the Centre. Currently under construction, the JDCA aims to open before end of 2019. Jatin Das started collecting beautifully crafted objects, much before the idea of the Centre came into being. As the idea grew, his

house and studio got filled with the growing eclectic pieces. He continues to expand the collection, acquiring unusual hand-crafted articles, both in India and overseas. The Centre will be a living, ever-changing example of sustainable, human-centered design. It will host a very diverse collection and aims to create a space and place for not only Odisha, but a nationwide-wide conversation about the power of art to transform, sustain, educate and empower.

The JDCA also has films on art: more than 1,700 films and 20,000 hours of audio and video recording on tribal and folk culture of Odisha and over 8,000 publications on art. The Centre already runs several programmes: an Annual Film Festival on Art & Artists for 12 years and monthly Meet the Artist Programme since 2001, which has resulted in recordings of 216 lectures on art. It has held exhibitions, seminars and workshops on art, architecture and conservation and community arts for children. Once the Museum opens, many more activities are envisioned.



पवन पंखा

नाव के पाल-सा फहरता हवा में
मुझी में लहरता
कितना लगाव।
पोंदता पत्तीने की बूँदों को
देता एक दौँव
गहराता गहराता और
अधिक पवन को।
डुबकी लगा उसमें
बार बार ऊपर आ जाता
लेकर कुछ जल-सा,
बन जाता पवन पंखा
पंखा।
कई कई रूपों आकारों का रंगों का
चित्रित हर मीठम को
सदियों से कर जाता।
अस्र यद्द प्रेम का
वस्र को उड़ाता कुछ, दृश्य किसी सुख का,
सितोष का दच जाता॥

- अयाग शुक्ल