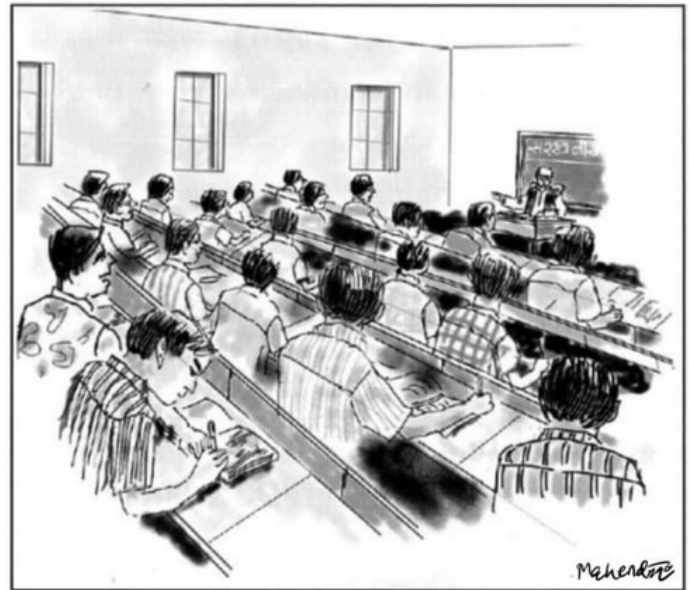


MY PATH TO BECOMING AN ARTIST

When I was in the 10th grade our Gujarati literature class was studying Saraswatichandra, an epic four-volume text written by Govardhanram Tripathi. The story is about love, wealth, business, and family. Once a week our teacher, who was also our principal, taught a chapter one at a time. He narrated the story in such a lively fashion that you felt as if the entire scene was being played out right in front of you.

Growing up, I was shy and somewhat reserved. I preferred to sit in the back of the classroom and avoided answering questions aloud. I would often wander off into my own thoughts.

The teacher began reading a part of the story in which Saraswatichandra was going to meet his fiancée from his native village to her village. He was walking through a wooded forest and ran into a poisonous snake. As I was listening to the story unfold, my mind began to wander in its usual fashion. I began to doodle in my notebook, at first somewhat aimlessly, but then, the teacher's words grabbed my attention.



As he began describing the poisonous snake and how it crept closer and closer to Saraswatichandra, I started imagining and drawing the whole scene. All of the other students were mesmerized by the teacher's reading of the story. They were frozen in their seats in anticipation of what was to come next. The room was still except for me. My eyes were glued to my notebook as my fingers were busy doodling and drawing out the scene that the teacher was narrating.

Suddenly, the teacher's eyes set on me, and he noticed that unlike the other students, my attention was not fully on him. He stood from his chair and gazed at me with a stern look. I was so scared! I was certain I was in an enormous amount of trouble. I don't think I had ever been this frightened in my life. He called me to his desk. As I rose from my chair, he demanded, "Bring your notebook too. I want to see what is so important that it drew you away from my lesson." He knew I was doing something in the notebook. I approached the teacher with my notebook and was terrified of what would come next. Immediately, he asked me to hand over the notebook and opened it to the page full of my doodles. As he looked closer and closer at my notebook, his face stiffened. I grew more and more afraid of my fate. To my great surprise, when he finally began to talk, he showed the entire class my sketch of the story. He praised my drawings and said that they were the best narration of the story! I felt such a sense of relief. Not only was I not in trouble, but from that day on, I was known as the "Resident Artist" of the school. I was commissioned to execute all art related projects (posters, banners, etc.) for school events.



After I completed my education, I got married and immigrated to the United States. The responsibilities that came along with work and family made put my art on the back burner, but you could always find me doodling or sketching in my spare time. Our children had grown and started lives of their own.

Many years ago my daughter and son-in-law were visiting us. They had just moved to a city only a couple of hours away from us. When I returned from work in the evening, I was surprised to find my daughter exploring my art portfolio. It had been sitting in the attic for years, and I had nearly forgotten about it. In fact, we were preparing to move to a new house, and it was meant to go in the unwanted trash pile! My daughter asked if it would be alright for her to take a few pieces of my artwork with her. "Of course, be my guest!" I answered. "I was going to throw those away anyway." A few weeks later, we went to visit them at their new house. To my surprise when we entered the house I saw a few of my paintings and drawings hanging nicely on the walls. They were framed and hung beautifully. I was so touched. It felt wonderful to have my art appreciated again after so many years. Her simple act of appreciating my forgotten paintings inspired me to return to my childhood passion for being an artist.

What a delightful journey from doodling in a Gujarati literature class to becoming the "Resident Artist" of the school! It's heartwarming how my daughter's appreciation rekindled my passion for art. Life has a way of bringing unexpected joys and rediscoveries!

Please enjoy a few more of sketches in the following pages.

Mahendra Shah







Bahumali Bhavan, Amdavad



Amdavad from 8th floor window of Bahumali Building, Lal Darwaja.



