

LASSI WITH
LAVINA

There is a lot happening here in the Big Apple, and we don't just mean the sad, bad news of the economic crisis. *The Indian Express* keeps an eye on all things that softly turned, while we rushed past, with this fortnightly column that carefully blends in the exclusive with the everyday



Homeward Bound

By LAVINA MELWANI

A JOURNEY THROUGH FIVE CONTINENTS

MINAL Hajratwala has given a new meaning to keeping up with the family. Not for her is the occasional call to India or annual trip to meet brothers and sisters — she has spent almost eight laborious years tracking down all her family members on five continents! In *Leaving India: My Family's Journey from Five Villages to Five Continents*, journalist, poet and performer Hajratwala has recounted her visits to countless towns, cities and villages and interviewed over a hundred family members.

The book is hard to put down; in many of the pages and stories of her extended family, you will see glimpses of your own relatives. After all, as immigrants we have connections with diverse parts of the Diaspora, family we have sometimes lost contact with. It is an engaging story of how one rural family spread to different parts of the globe and how the new generations have been changed and transformed by these journeys.

In a larger sense, it is the more complex story of political and social factors which made that migration possible, and how the world has become smaller. For Hajratwala, a lesbian, it is also about the discovery of her sexuality, woven into the drama of family life. All these diverse worlds intersect in a powerful telling which keeps you glued to the page. Hajratwala had wanted to write since she was seven, and now she has eloquently put down the story of her life, and the issues of identity, loss and gain that swirl around us.

Her travels made her realize how “each life is a tangle of push and pull; how each immigration opens up further directions; and how my own journey, which I had come to believe and been made to feel was so unusual as to be selfish and freakish, was in fact continuous with a long heritage of moving from the known to the unknown, from tradition into modernity, from village India into a cosmopolitan world”.



Minal Hajratwala

SATYAJIT RAY UNSPOOLED

TO HAVE not seen the films of Ray is to have lived in the world without ever having seen the moon and the sun,” so said filmmaker Akira Kurosawa about the masterpieces of Satyajit Ray. You can check out the sheer veracity of these words as film buffs are in for a treat coming up this month — a bumper crop of the master's films. If you have never seen a Ray film, now is the time to make amends. Once you journey through the Apu Trilogy — *Pather Panchali*, *Aparajito* and *Apur Sansar* — you will see the whole aspect of life and live with new eyes.

The 16-day feast begins with *First Light: Satyajit Ray* from the Apu Trilogy to the Calcutta Trilogy at Lincoln Center's Walter Reade Theater from April 15 to 30. The bonus is rarely-seen films — over 20 films, with six in new 35-mm prints from Satyajit Ray Preservation Project at the Academy Film Archive, including *The Expedition* (1962), *The Coward and the Holy Man* (1965), *The Hero* (1966), *The Adventures of Goopy and Bagha* (1968) and *Two* (1965). The programming also includes the Calcutta Trilogy.

For those who really want to get their full dose of Ray, there's an in-depth conference on Satyajit Ray at Columbia University on April 25 with noted academics and critics, film-makers Shyam Benegal, Mira Nair, as well as Ray's son Sandip Ray. Only in New York City can you go so deep into Ray Country!



From top: Satyajit Ray; stills from *Aparajito* and *Apur Sansar*. Courtesy: The Film Society of Lincoln Center

Meet the boy dancers

YOU live and learn something new every day. Until I met Birendra Pani, the genial artist from Mumbai, I knew nothing about *Gotipua* dance or that it was performed only by young males in female garb. Pani, who is from Orissa, has had a long career in art but was always fascinated by this dying breed and wanted to rejuvenate it with a dynamic combination of dance, music, photography and art. Several eras merge together at Gallery Espace in Delhi, as live dancers perform the ancient *Gotipua* dance, which predates even *Odissi*, in a very modern contemporary art gallery setting, with large portraits of the dancers on the walls.

Painting from childhood,



Birendra Pani(center) with Christina Naithani, Peter Louis, Pratima and Mahesh Naithani

Pani has the heritage of Shantiniketan and Baroda School of Art in his veins, and has always been attracted by the Eastern aesthetic unlike, he says, metro artists who are drawn more toward a western sensibility.

Born in Orissa, he has spent time in villages with the *Gotipua* dancers. His powerful paintings in 'Re-Vision', his solo exhibition at the RL Fine Arts gallery show supple bod-

ies and animated faces awash in vibrant colors.

Gotipua dance filled a need at a time when women weren't allowed to perform in public. Now that women on stage are commonplace, is there a need for this? There is because when any part of the human experience is lost with the passage of time, that loss affects all of us. One wonders about the lives of these boys and their unique world which is fast vanishing.

Pani, through his vivid paintings, gets a dialogue going between the past and the present, and also with the future. It's about awareness and the dangers of ignoring or neglecting the past. Painting, he feels, is very abstract but combined with dance he takes the story further.

Hoop dreams

THE world — it's a shrinking! Indeed, in this globalized world, some Indian-Americans are making the reverse journey — back to the land of their parents, taking Americana with them. Who would have thought that the thoroughly American sport of basketball would now hit Indian streets?

Neel Pahlajani is a young Indian American who has ventured boldly into Cricket Country, proclaiming the wonders of basketball. Pahlajani, who is a graduate of Carnegie Mellon, was working in technology in New York

when he decided to take the plunge and follow his hoops dream to India.

Pahlajani has started Hoops India, promoting basketball through tournaments and fun events. They have managed to get major sponsors including Nike and E-Source to help popularize basketball in India. At a recent event in Noida, enthusiastic fans and media made it a fun event, with a Slam Dunk Contest, 3 Point Shootout, a Mobile Shoot Around, and a full court all-star game.

Hoops India is now taking the series to Mumbai, Banga-



Pahlajani with team

lore and Kolkata and unearthing the local talent in a vibrant atmosphere with DJs, Hip-Hop music, film crews and fans swarming the place. “Hoops India is a movement to showcase the talent and excitement of the game in India,” says Pahlajani. “We are broadening the audience for the sport by appealing to those who may not be familiar with the game but are interested in Bollywood, music, fashion.”

(Lavina Melwani is a New York based journalist who writes for several international publications. You can check out her webzine and daily blog at www.lassithlavinia.com which launches this month.)

