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New Culture Center Creatively Showcasing Both the Old and New

Located on a gently sloping plateau overlooking the Upper Lake with the historic city of Bhopal across the water, Bharat Bhavan has acquired an incomparable eminence despite going through some ups and downs. What has brought it increasing popularity among both the artists and the common people is its constant efforts to bring them closer to India's ancient art and culture.

The more the people draw near India's arts and culture, the more they become fascinated with them. Why? "Because there is an eternal India which lives in its traditional paintings, classical dance and music, folk songs and theater," says Mr. D.P. Sinha, the Director of the Bharat Bhavan, adding, "It is this India every one of us here likes, no matter how modern we may have become." "The speciality lies in a unique kind of dharma, spiritual vibrations created by Siva and Krishna, pervading the length and breadth of India." Mr. Sinha explained in an interview with HINDUISM TODAY.

You get a definite feel of this speciality as soon as you enter the complex. You do not walk into a huge palatial building. You, in fact, step down through terraced gardens to enter into halls and galleries hardly visible from the gate. You cannot help experience being in contact with a world which is far different and far removed from the maddening world we have enveloped ourselves in. Physically, Bharat Bhavan is the creation of eminent architect Charles Correa. He explains," Right from the first, the project designed itself. The possibility of a series of terraced gardens, cascading down to the lake, immediately came to mind. One would enter at the highest level and walk down a pedestrian spine. Each of the spaces one

travels through would be clearly defined - yet they would interrelate in an easy, meandering one. So that the overall experience is not of a stiff and formal museum.

The gardens and courtyards serve another purpose. Usually, when one visits a museum, one is confronted with so many objects and relentless information that even the most conscientious scholar is soon suffering from museum shock. But at Bharat Bhavan, galleries are interspersed with courtyards and gardens, which save the visitor from this trauma. In the words of Correa, "There is always a moment when the eye can rest and the mind contemplate." No wonder a visitor will rarely escape a hint of the ecstasy one experiences in meditation."

The idea of setting up the Bharat Bhavan came from the former Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi. In early 1981 she had made a call at a public function to take appropriate steps to revive India's ancient art and culture. Some of her close political supporters responded. They emphasized the need that galleries be part of the center where exhibits could be put on display bringing to life India's past glory. A plan was immediately drawn up, and it soon took the form of the Bharat Bhavan. Mrs. Gandhi herself inaugurated it in February, 1982.

Mr. Sinha described the Bharat Bhavan: "It is a multi-arts complex providing interactive proximity to the verbal, visual and performing arts. It aspires to provide a creative and productive milieu to those who would like to contribute something new and meaningful but still holds ties to what is eternal in India's culture and art." Bharat Bhavan consists of the following four units: Roopankar, a museum of fine arts; Rangmandal, a repertory theater; Vagarth, a center of Indian poetry; and Anhad, a library of classical and folk music.

Roopankar is the only museum of the arts in India which houses both contemporary folk and tribal art. Attached to it is a fully equipped print-making workshop, ceramic workshop and archival section. There are also facilities for stone carving and painting. Roopankar provides opportunity for a dialog between urban artists and their counterparts in the countryside. It is also involved in the global movement in art and holds group exhibitions from time to time from abroad. The first such event was the one-man show of the Mexican painter Manual Fulguerez.

Rangmandal has produced dozens of plays of ancient India's playwrights like Shudrak and Kalidas. The plays of some contemporary playwrights, like Jay Shanker Prasad, who have been inspired by India's heritage too have also been staged. Plays of some eminent foreign writers like Shakespeare, Isben, Jean Paul Sartre and Samuel Beckett too have been staged.

During December and February of 1992, Bharat Bhavan organized festivals of dance, poetry, painting and folklore. About 500 artists from 10 states participated. An international conference of printing art was held from December 9, 1991 to January 19, 1992 in which representatives from 36 countries participated.

Among the programs lined up for the months to come are an international festival of Ramayan and a festival of musical instruments. The festival of Ramayan will be the first of its kind in India, modeled after Thailand's beautiful multi-nation production last year.

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