

# Culture cafe calling

KALYAN CHAKRAVORTY

## Filmstars & artists recall good times at Samovar that may shut down

By Archana in New Delhi

THE DISPUTE over Samovar, the café and incubator of ideas and romances on the premises of the Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai, will be heard by the Supreme Court on Monday.

The apex court will consider a special leave petition by Samovar's owner, Usha Khanna, against the eviction of the café from the gallery precincts. The gallery management's move, which has been in the eye of a storm since 2005, was upheld by the Bombay High Court on November 16 last year.

The café, housed in a narrow verandah since 1964, isn't yet another eatery at a fashionable address. It was this 700-sq-ft café where Amitabh Bachchan and Jaya Bhaduri would head to for "affordable meals" in the 1970s. That's where yesteryear's director of hit films, Basu Chatterjee, then a political cartoonist with the weekly *Blitz*, would head for lunch or for a bite after office. That's also where M.F. Husain, who wasn't famous yet, would have samosas.

Says M.F. Husain, speaking from Qatar, "If Samovar is shut down, it will be very unfortunate. It's a historical place where we've spent some very memorable years of our life."

### Gallery owners want cafe moved out

Adds Chatterjee, who even featured the café in his 1975 hit, *Chhoti Si Baat*, "When I was with *Blitz*, I used to visit it daily. I use to especially like Samovar's *paranthas*. When I was making *Chhoti Si Baat*, there was no question of choosing any other restaurant."

It's not just the older generation that has come out in support of Samovar. Two well-known couples of the art fraternity — Jitish Kallat and his wife Reena, and Subodh Gupta and Bharati Kher — have circulated open letters written by them and spoken out in Samovar's favour.

K.J. Menon, speaking on behalf of the gallery, refuses to talk to the media, saying, "The matter is

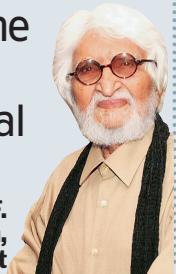


Samovar, owned by Usha Khanna, has been housed in the verandah of Mumbai's Jehangir Art Gallery since 1964.

GOOD OLD DAYS

It will be very unfortunate if Samovar is shut down. The cafe is a historical place

— M.F. Husain, artist



There was no question of choosing another restaurant for shooting the film *Chhoti Si Baat*

— Basu Chatterjee, film director

It is a seminal institution, full of creative vibrations. Gallery can be a little generous

— Jaya Bachchan, actress



adds, "It's like a mother's womb which houses so much creativity in it. Jehangir will become cold and unapproachable if Samovar were to go."

Khanna opened Café Samovar in the verandah of the Jehangir Art Gallery, which itself is built on the grounds of the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, formerly known as the Prince of Wales Museum.

According to Bhojwani, the genesis of the dispute can be traced back to March 2000, when the gallery and the museum got an exemption from the Rent Act through a notification from the housing department of the Government of Maharashtra.

Legal experts associated with the case say that by virtue of this notification, Café Samovar no longer had the protection of the Rent Act, so the landlord could throw it out at a month's notice without offering any reason. Says Bhojwani, "The apparent pretext is that the gallery needs more space. But when the gallery is spread over 15,000 sq. ft, what difference is a 700 sq. ft. verandah going to make? They've to be specific about what they need the space for."

in court so I can't comment."

Khanna's elder daughter, Devika Bhojwani, says she's inundated with letters of support from café patrons who are heavyweights in the world of culture.

"We were first served a show-cause notice by the Court of the Competent Officer, Mumbai, in 2005, and since then, people like Jaya Bachchan, Shyam Benegal, Charles Correa, Francis Wacziarg, Vivan Sundaram, Rekha Rodwitiya, Anjolie Ela Menon and many others have

come out in support of Samovar," Bhojwani says.

"We want to preserve the place as it is an important part of modern Mumbai's cultural heritage," she adds.

Jaya Bachchan, who was one of the firsts to write an open letter in a daily newspaper in June 2005, says, "It's an institution as seminal as the Coffee House of Kolkata, full of creative vibrations. The Jehangir Art Gallery is a big name with a lot of space; they can be a little generous."

Bachchan recalls the days when "we used to go to Samovar to have a good meal which we could pay for from our own pocket. It's like the Wisdom Tree of the FTII (Film and Television Institute of India) of Pune under which we would sit and discuss our future. Even now, whenever my son (Abhishek) is shooting in South Bombay, he calls me and asks if he can have *kathi* rolls from Samovar".

Bachchan says she's bereft of words to describe Samovar and

## Delhi woman gets baby delivered before due date for 'good luck'

By Neetu Chandra in New Delhi

MOTHERS, it seems, can go to any lengths to 'bestow God's blessings' upon their children. Even if it means risking their own or their baby's health.

A woman in the Capital chose to deliver her baby prematurely so as to coincide the birth with Makar Sankranti, a festival which is considered auspicious by Hindus.

Thirty-two-year-old Kanwal Preet, an administration official of the B.L. Kapur Memorial Hospital at Pusa Road, asked her gynaecologist to perform a caesarean section on her on Thursday, though her she was due to deliver on January 22.

She gave birth to a baby girl. I am happy that my daughter was born on the auspicious day," Kanwal said.

She was suffering from a rare condition called Placenta Praevia.



Kanwal Preet with her baby.

This is an obstetric complication in which the placenta is attached to the uterine wall close to or covering the cervix.

In the last trimester of pregnancy, the isthmus of the uterus unfolds and forms the lower segment. In a normal pregnancy, the placenta does not cover it, so there is no bleeding.

But if the placenta does overlie the lower segment, which is

what usually happens in this case, it may shear off and a small section may rupture and cause bleeding.

"Because Kanwal Preet was suffering from this condition, a normal delivery was ruled out for her. We had to deliver the baby through caesarean section. The mother would have bled a lot had she chosen to go for a normal delivery, which would have been very risky for her and the child," Dr Dinesh Kansal, head of the department at the hospital, said.

"We told her she could give birth to the baby through surgery any day after January 8 and she chose Makar Sankranti," Dr Kansal added.

Inderalp Singh Kanwar, Kanwal's husband, was also excited to become a father on the auspicious day. Kanwal said she did not want the baby to be delivered on Friday because of the solar eclipse, which is considered inauspicious.

## Degree course to cure rural healthcare rot

By Savita Verma in New Delhi

THE GOVERNMENT is deliberating upon a new solution to lift the rural healthcare system out of the poor state it is in. The Union health ministry has planned a new course in medicine and surgery to train doctors for rural areas.

The proposal is being worked out by the ministry in collaboration with the Medical Council of India (MCI).

The MCI has already prepared the syllabus and the proposal will be discussed at a two-day meeting beginning on February 4. Besides MCI and ministry officials, the meeting will be attended by vice-chancellors, deans of medical universities and the director of medical education and health secretaries of all states.

After a consensus is arrived at, the proposal will go to a committee of MCI officials and then to the central government for final approval.

"This will be a three-and-a-half

year course culminating in a bachelor's degree in medicine and surgery to train doctors who will work in rural areas. District hospitals with specified bed capacities can be utilised as medical schools," health minister Ghulam Nabi Azad said.

Two rounds of discussions have already taken place between MCI and the health ministry officials in the presence of Azad. The students will be trained to treat 300 common

### Doctors will be trained to work in villages

problems, in addition to knowing which patients should be referred to a superior health facility.

They will not perform surgeries, not even Caesarean births. The effort would help better implementation of national health programmes at the rural level, officials said.