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NRI collectors in the US organise exhibitions to enrich society

The art czars on the East coast

Much has been said about the expatriate collector in the recent past. The image of the Non Resident Indian collector that has been created is fairly stereotypical — they're the ones who have raised the bar and pushed up the prices of contemporary art. Every now and then we, in India, read about some techie who paid an exorbitant sum of money to buy an average Husain. Though this new breed of collectors is seen by its Indian counterparts as competition with deeper pockets, and by dealers as god's gift from heaven, there is much more to them than meets the eye.

On a recent trip to New York I had the good fortune of meeting up with several collectors who I had only heard about earlier. To my amazement, I discovered that many of them have built some excellent collections in a rather short period of time. One such couple is Umesh and Sunanda Gaur.

One of the most well-known collections of post Independence Indian contemporary art in the US is that of Umesh and Sunanda Gaur. The couple who began collecting a little over a decade ago have chosen to concentrate on some two dozen artists, mostly the Progressives. Umesh who moved to the US in 1974 to get a Ph D in chemistry now runs a highly successful money management firm in New Jersey. His wife is a paediatrician.

The Gaur's are not your average private Indian collector. Like most American art collectors, they too have a penchant for enriching society. They have taken the initiative of organising exhibitions such as "India: Contemporary art from North Eastern private collections" which was shown last year at the Zim-

merli Art Museum at Rutgers University. It included more than 100 works from 20 collections and was a major success.

In 2003, *Art + Antiques* magazine voted Gaur as one of America's top 100 collectors. Since then the Gaur's have put together a smaller show exclusively from their own collection which will travel to various locations across the East coast.

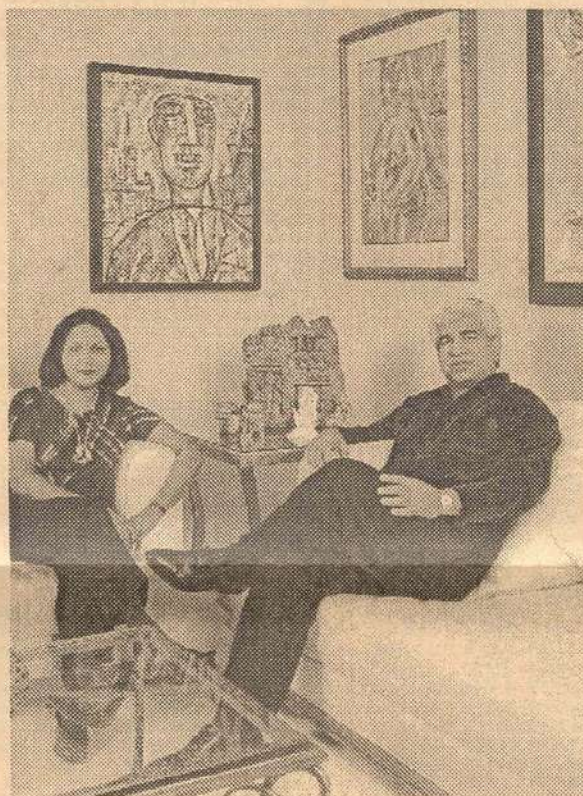
Other important collectors based mainly out of the East coast are Sharad and Mahinder Taq from Washington DC who had a considerable headstart and acquired works of art aggressively throughout the late 1980s and 1990s. Arani Bose, the neuro-surgeon turned

art dealer is another collector who has built a vast collection of mainly younger artists. There is Kent Chitlangia who became famous for buying Husain's "Lightning Horses" for a record Rs 2 crore. Among others is the new age guru Deepak Chopra who is known to collect for some time now.

Although one would imagine Indian collectors to be scattered all across the US, strangely enough, most of them are living on the East coast. That's not surprising as the auctions happen here and at least half a dozen exclusive Indian galleries have

opened in New York city. Most of these NRI collectors have been pretty focused on trying to acquire high-value blue chip artists but with the art prices hitting a record high, some like the Gaur's, have begun to look at younger artists like Atul Dodiya.

In an art world where investors are growing and collectors shrinking, many could learn from collectors like the Gaur's and hopefully give back something to their community.



The Gaur's are among US' 100 top collectors