Village Flute

A Carpenter's Journey

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It begins with an idea. There's planning to be done: a sketch in pencil completes the start. It requires concentration. There's never been a journey of substance when it's been relentlessly easy to plot the best course. There are always obstacles. Always.

Some travellers rely on maps. Others chart their distances with compass or strategy; or alternatively follow an intuition-based path. Gobindra Chandra Halder, 55, has found in flowers, birds, trees and people the key to his way forward. He has enlisted into his service the curves, repetition and symmetry of regal design. For his is the journey of a carpenter – a carpenter with more than thirty years of experience.

"The throat is four fingers," Gobindra says, explaining how he measures each body part to give his carved figures proportional accuracy. Everything is measured.

The sawing and sanding are his setting out. It's after that he proceeds further, commencing the painstaking carving phase that will bring to each design its life, its third dimension. He inches onward, slowly, slowly – towards the destination of the finished piece.

"With delicate work," he says, "there is no time limit."

From his two-room, mud floor home-and-studio in College Road of Rajapur in Jhalakati he's made his name in handmade furniture manufacture. The medium he found for his each successive journey is wood and Gobindra is a respected artisan in it.

Things are never that easy. There's never been a journey of substance that's been free of challenges. Sometimes such roadblocks are relatively minor and easy to negotiate; at other times difficulties of the seemingly insurmountable type appear – enough to tempt any weary traveller into hanging up his hiking boots for good. It's in the nature of a journey: problems can arise at any time, well into a long ago established voyage or, as in Gobindra's case, right from the start. He had little choice but to face his situation. There was nothing for it but to persevere.

"He was good at school," says his brother, high school teacher Kitish Chandra Halder, "but fate did not reward him."

There came a night when Gobindra was about ten years old, when he dreamt that robbers were looting their household. Driven by fear the sleeping child climbed out of the window and fell from the first floor.

At first it seemed as though he had overcome his injuries – that his nightmare would be recorded as no more than an amusing anecdote among various childhood mishaps. But from age fifteen Gobindra started to lose power in his legs. The movement in his neck, back, arms and legs started to decrease: the delayed result of a possible spinal cord trauma he had sustained.



Although his movement has been restricted since a childhood accident, Gobindra Chandra Halder has made a name for himself as a carpenter.

His family took him to Dhaka. But after visiting many hospitals not only were the doctors unable to offer much more than the hope his injury would right itself over time, they were unable even to name his affliction.

His parents took him to the pond for swimming, which a doctor had suggested. They even tried