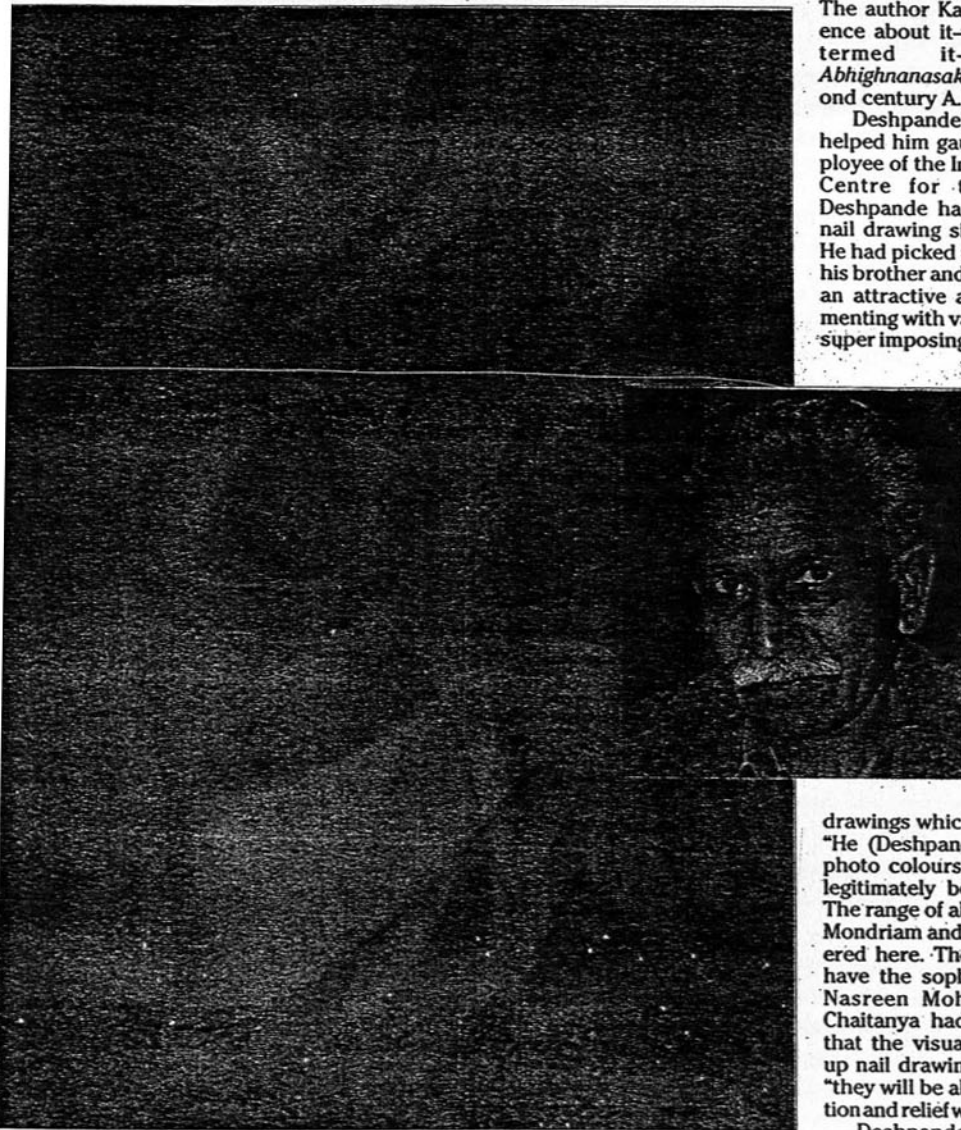


An eye for detail

Deshpande revives a long-forgotten art form to help the sightless



The master's touch. Nail art by P.T. Deshpande (inset)

It could have been another of those Sunday afternoon movies for P.T. Deshpande. But it wasn't to be. When he came away after seeing the Shabhani Azmi-Naseeruddin Shah starrer *Sparsh*, Deshpande knew that his life had been irrevocably touched. Moved by the plight of the sightless in the film, he began his mission to bring out a long-forgotten art form from its obscurity and develop it into the hope of the vision-impaired.

Nail drawings, the medium which Deshpande chose, is an ancient one. The author Kalidasa makes a reference about it—Nakshta is what he termed it—in the play *Abhigyanasakuntalam*, in the second century A.D.

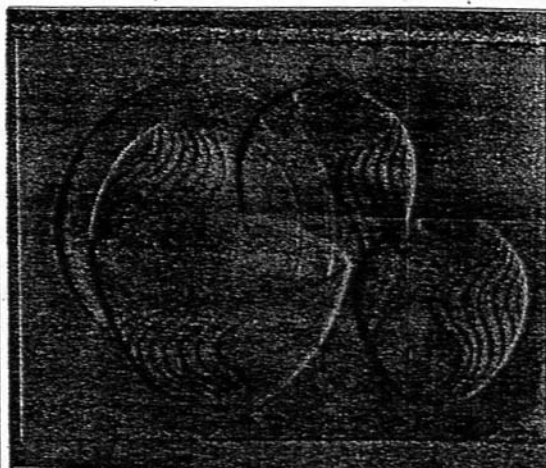
Deshpande's artistic background helped him gauge its worth. An employee of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), Deshpande had been interested in nail drawing since his school days. He had picked up its rudiments from his brother and had developed it into an attractive art form after experimenting with various techniques like super imposing. His penchant for the non-conventional helped him too.

After his training at the Nagpur College of Arts he had explored the possibilities of oil and water colour mediums. Before long, he also tried sculpting on coconut shells.

But nowhere has he succeeded so well as in nail drawings. Said renowned art critic Krishna Chaitanya after Deshpande's exhibition of nail

drawings which he had held in 1987: "He (Deshpande) uses transparent photo colours in very light washes legitimately because of sensitivity. The range of abstract expressions in Mondrian and Ben Nicholson is covered here. The line work abstracts have the sophisticated delicacy of Nasreen Mohanedi's creations." Chaitanya had then recommended that the visually handicapped take up nail drawings as an art because, "they will be able to feel the indentation and relief with the sense of touch".

Deshpande obviously took the advice to heart. His research in the



Still life and not-so-still life. Etchings of frisky fish and domestic utensils

field made him realise that there was almost no relief pictorial books available for the blind. It was then that he started coining photo stories on the lines of comic books. Louis Braille, the inventor of the blind's written language, had brought out an embossed history of France in 1837. Deshpande went one step further. He incorporated Braille text and made captions and storylines to go with his embossed story. Thus he recreated the tale of the thirsty crow. With deft hands, he raised on the paper surface the various elements of the story—bird, pitcher, flower, sun and mountains.

For six months he experimented

Deshpande plans to popularise a new art concept called 'Feel Art'. For the moment, however, he is concentrating on its utility value.

with this art form with the visually handicapped pupils of Delhi School. They learnt to draw geometrical forms like straight line, triangle and square and combine these forms to create various motifs. Soon, the children went three-dimensional and began

drawing birds and flowers.

Deshpande plans to popularise a new art concept called 'Feel Art'. For the moment, however, he is concentrating on its utility value. He plans to teach it to social organisations, so that they can teach the visually impaired a means of livelihood.

Nail art doesn't cost much and is aesthetically appealing. In fact, so attractive were the nail drawings made by the students of the Delhi School that, at first, nobody would believe that the pictures had been made by sightless persons, says Deshpande. A case of seeing and not believing.

—Dr GAUTAM CHATTERJEE



Thumb rules

NAIL drawing is an art that one can master only in stages. The materials that one would require are three well-manicured nails, paper—and plenty of patience. The nails to be used are those of the thumb, the middle and the ring fingers. The thumb nail should be grown to a length of 5 mm while the nails of the other two fingers should be 2.5 mm long. Any paper which can stand the pressure of the nails without tearing will do for etching out the drawings. Hand-made paper is recommended since it has rag content. Not being hand-pressed, the relief comes out well on it. For beginners, a small strip of paper will suffice to practice on. Ensure that the nails are dry before etching.

Unlike other methods of drawing, where the paper is fixed on to the board, in nail art, the paper rotates in one hand while etchings are made on it with the other. Hold the paper in such a way that there is a gap of 1 mm between the tips of the thumb and other fingers. Press the paper up from the back with the finger nails and down with the thumb nail from the front and start making marks. One can begin by drawing sharp, straight lines, later graduating to curved lines. Complete figures like flowers or leaves can be then drawn.