

bengal variety

> THE MORNINGS ARE MISTY WITH COLD WINDS. THE TEMPERATURE FALLS DRASTICALLY AT NIGHT IN PAREN AND THROUGHOUT THE DAY IT REMAINS COLD.

PHOTOS: SOMEN SENGUPTA



WBFDCC cottages in Paren.

IN SOLITUDE

COLD AND GREEN In the small village of Paren in Darjeeling Hills, silence of the nature rules the world

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Before returning to their nests, the small birds land on the edge of the building wall to rest their wings. After a long day, the birds are perhaps exhausted but their rainbow-colored back on which the sun rays glistened made them look beautiful.

On the horizon, dry leaves were falling from tall trees and dew drops were kissing the blades of the grass. This is no ordinary place. This is Paren in Darjeeling.

Even a decade back, this village was unknown to the world, but today thanks to some fair planning Paren is gradually becoming popular as a place for enjoying solitude.

The deep, green jungle and the blue sky makes Paren looks serene. This small village of Darjeeling sinks into deep silence as soon as the sun sets and the sound of cricket takes over the night. And in that magical moment, a steaming cup of tea is possibly the best companion for a tourist in the guesthouse.

People claim that one does not need to be a honeymooner to enjoy the beauty

of Paren. One just needs to be a lover of nature to enjoy this beautiful place.

West Bengal Forest Development Corporation (WBFDCC) provides decent accommodation facilities and food in Paren. Passing through the green forests of north Bengal, Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary and the narrow road on which elephants pass every now and then, takes one to Paren from Siliguri by car.

This is a car ride where you enjoy to the full the beauty of the Dooars and the fresh air of the Himalayan foothills. By lunchtime, one enters Paren.

The four wooden cottages made by WBFDCC are the only accommodation available at Paren. It is advised to book the cottages from Kolkata and not risk being roofless at Paren after reaching there. For, there is no other shelter for the tourists in this place.

The cottages are simple yet provided with all amenities. Hot and cold water are supplied. Though the fare for the lunch and dinner is limited, but it is tasty and healthy. So is the breakfast. A typical breakfast comprises tea, *puri*, *aloo sabzi* and egg.

"There is no mobile signal in Paren most of the time. Do not blame the administration, if there is no power for hours. Nights are long and chilly. It is the kingdom of silence," said a tourist.

The mornings are misty with cold winds blowing across the place. The temperature in Paren falls drastically at night and throughout the day it is cold.

"At the back of the WBFDCC complex is dark deep pine jungle. When the wind blows, the sound of leaves and songs of birds create a symphony. The clouds seem to touch the tree tops and dew drops drench the grasses, flowers and bushes," said a tourist.

The village nestled on the green lap of lower Himalaya constantly produces a soft whisper of falling leaves from tall pines. And if you like watching birds, then Paren is the place.

Be prepared with your camera to capture rare Himalayan birds like scarlet minivets, blue throated berbet, silver eared mesia, black chinned yuhina and many more who often pay a visit. Also, do not miss the colourful butterflies.

About 10 km from Paren is Bindu or Jaldhaka. There is a hydel power station here and the border of Bhutan is visible from this place. Another location is Godak just 15 km from Paren. This beautiful village has a small river and rocky landscape.

For adventure enthusiasts, a trekking in Rechela pass is suggested. But if you are in Paren, you need not do anything else, but just soak into the solitude of the place.

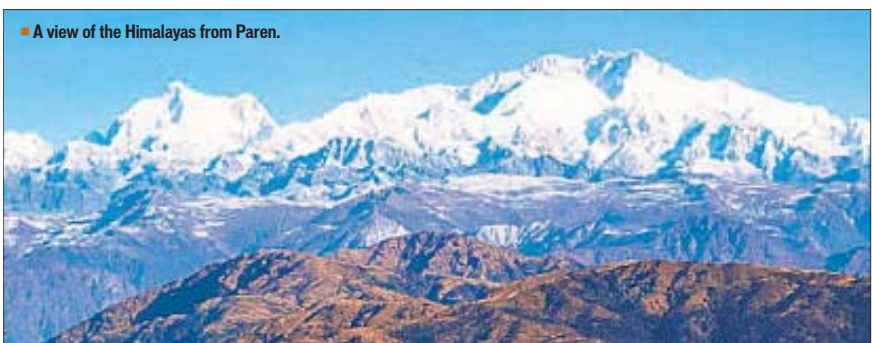
Not more than 100 people live in Paren. And the only sound that breaks the silence of the nature is the speeding jeeps carrying tourists from the plains to the Hills.



(Above and below) Himalayan birds



Paren is surrounded by dense forests.



A view of the Himalayas from Paren.

HOW TO VISIT PAREN

- Take a car from Siliguri.
- Paren is 112 km from Siliguri town.
- Book West Bengal Forest Development Corporation cottage in advance from Kolkata.
- Check availability in www.wbfdcc.com
- Trekking should be done with the help of local guide.
- Jaldhaka, a hydel power station, is just 10 km from Paren from where the border of Bhutan is visible.
- Stay alert for bird watching
- Do not forget to take your camera.

BRUSH STROKES



CHHATRAPATI DUTTA

Convinced of the important role it could play towards reaching out to the people as well as help generate discourse on issues related to Theatre – the one and only love of his life then – one of the first initiatives he took

Ebrahim Alkazi's tryst with theatre had begun much earlier

up just after his return from England in 1952 was to publish a small theatre/arts magazine called the Theatre Group Bulletin. But Alkazi's tryst with theater had begun much earlier.

It was when Ebrahim Alkazi was completing his schooling at Poona's St. Vincent's that he first acted in a few of Shakespeare's classics that were produced as school plays. It was also during this time that the repercussions of the second war was felt in the hitherto tranquil middle class life of Poona – one fine morning, when two of Alkazi's teachers, Jesuits of German/Swiss origin were abruptly picked up and detained for questioning by British forces.

This incident sent ripples of fear down the corridors of the

school, reminisces Alkazi. By the time Alkazi shifted to Bombay in late 1941 to pursue a university degree at St. Xavier's, he had already subconsciously imbibed the tremulous grace of the Natya Sangeet Dramas sung by veteran actor/singers Bal Gandharva and Keshav Rao Bhosle, immortalized on gramophone records and introduced to the vernacular theater that Poonaites still responded to. But by then, neither the Natya Sangeet nor the Parsi theater in Urdu and Gujarati had any appeal in Bombay.

It was rather the new medium of cinema that had captured the imagination of the nation that even the financiers of the commercial Natak companies were drawn towards; theatre groups



Poster of the show.

resorting to all sorts of melodrama and gimmicks to sustain their financial ruin.

In the Bombay of the 40s, Alkazi thus stood at the threshold of the

old and the new while Gandhi had taken over the national stage. Witness to the final phase of India's struggle for Independence from the launch of the Quit India movement in Bombay in 1942, Alkazi was greatly drawn towards the austerity, discipline and singleness of purpose exemplified by Gandhi.

These were values he sought to emulate throughout his life. The other brilliant young man whom Alkazi fortunately befriended; who fuelled Alkazi's interest in theater with his fiery-experimental ideas on theatre was Sultan Padamsee, his college mate. Not only did Alkazi join his circle, he soon became one of its key participants.

Before long, Alkazi gathered

his own team around to debut as director. Alkazi's directorial ventures in Bombay between the 1940s and the early 60s, when he left for Delhi, included practically the entire pantheon of western dramatic literature. In his own words: "...from the Greeks to Beckett".

They included Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Euripides' *Medea*, Shakespeare's *Richard III*, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, Moliere's *Tartuffe* and *The Miser*, Ibsen's *Ghosts* and *Hedda Gabler*, Strindberg's *Miss Julie* and *The Father*, TS Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, Anouilh's *Antigone*, Jean Paul Sartre's *No Exit*, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Tennessee William's *Suddenly Last Summer*.

All this and more comes alive

through photographs, blow-up of posters, video projections, real objects, mockup of sets designed and transcripts of the life and times of this stalwart of Indian theater; through a meticulously edited and grandiosely displayed retrospective exhibition, spread out through the sprawling floors of the Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi, titled *The Theater of E. Alkazi*.

One not only feels indebted to The Alkazi Foundation and Art Heritage, the presenters of this comprehensive show, one soon realizes the vision and foresightedness of Ebrahim Alkazi himself, for having preserved all this material to the finest little detail of his tumultuous theatrical journey.

(to be continued)