

under Form 4

Publication: Gallerie Publishers,  
Chambers, Kemps Corner, Mumbai 400 036  
Frequency: Bi-annual  
Editor: Bina Sarkar Ellias for Gallerie Publishers  
Editorial Board: Bina Sarkar Ellias  
Editorial Board: citizen of India: Yes  
Address: 26 Kalaniketan, 47/C B. Desai Road,  
400 026.  
Editorial Board: Bina Sarkar Ellias  
Editorial Board: citizen of India: Yes  
Address: 26 Kalaniketan, 47/C B. Desai Road,  
400 026.  
Editorial Board: Bina Sarkar Ellias  
Editorial Board: citizen of India: Yes  
Address: 26 Kalaniketan, 47/C B. Desai Road,  
400 026.  
Bina Sarkar Ellias, hereby declare that the particulars  
given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.  
Date: 03/03/2003  
Signature: Bina Sarkar Ellias, Publisher

Editor & Publisher  
*Bina Sarkar Ellias*

Art Direction  
*Bina Sarkar Ellias*

Administration  
*Pallu K. Newatia*

Marketing  
*P.D. Banerjee*

Digital Studio  
*Manjiri Kelaskar*

Processing & Printing  
*Pragati Art Printers*

Published by  
*Gallerie Publishers, Mumbai*

Distributed by  
*India Book House*

Website & e-mail  
*www.gallerie.net*  
*gallerie@vsnl.com*

Cover: *Couple with Umbrellas, detail*  
*Paritosh Sen*

ERRATA: Gallerie Vol 5 No 1 2002

Acknowledgements for three digital prints reproduced in the article 'Gukammohammed sheikh: The Artist & the Nationstate' by Gautam Rajadhyaksha, Pg. 5.

1. Talisman (Twins 2,3,4) Digital image, Inkjet prints Grateful acknowledgement of the artists and institutions of the source material used in the digital prints and assistance of GalleryArtUnderground, Baroda and facilitator, Snehal Nair.

2. Details of 'City for Sale' (detail), 1981-84, 305.2 X 223.5 cm. Oil on canvas. Coll: Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London

3. Title and details of Numens (After The Thebaid by Gherardo Starnina, circa 1420 A.D.) 2001, 108.3 x 220 cm. Oil on canvas  
International Gallerie is published by Bina Sarkar Ellias for Gallerie Publishers, 208 Om Chambers, Kemps Corner, Mumbai 400 036. Ph: (91 22) 367 3366; and printed by her at Pragati Art Printers, 17 Red Hills, Hyderabad 500 004. Reproduction is prohibited without the express permission of the publisher. Contributors to International Gallerie retain copyright to their work. Contributors' views are not necessarily those of the editor.  
RNI No. 70161/97

ART

4 Clouds & Lightning: Rain in Indian Miniature Painting  
*Dr. B.N. Goswamy*

13 Rain: Thirty-three Contemporary Artists

PERFORMING ARTS

72 Rain Rhapsodies  
*Madan Gopal Singh*

LIFE

80 Healers of the Amazon  
*Nigel Smith*

POETRY

90 Rain Moods  
*Gulzar*

91 Raindrop  
*Zhang Er*

PHOTO ESSAY

92 Rain Song  
*Mahmud*

ESSAY

106 A City Horized by Rain  
*Ranjit Hoskote*

PERSONA

110 It Rains Fishes  
*Kasma Loha-Unchit*

STORY

116 The Smell of Rain  
*Alastair Adamson*

CINEMA

120 Soaked in Metaphors  
*Meenakshi Shedde*





Photo by [unreadable] at [unreadable] in [unreadable] on [unreadable]



# Healers of the Amazon

Supernatural entities and conservation in a rainforest

By Nigel Smith

THE LARGEST RAIN FOREST IN THE WORLD STRETCHES OVER 6 MILLION SQUARE KILOMETRES OF LUSH VEGETATION ON THE AMAZON RIVER BASIN OF SOUTH AMERICA. HERE, AN AVERAGE 80" OF RAIN FALLS YEARLY, WHILE THUNDERSHOWERS OCCUR MORE THAN 200 DAYS IN A YEAR. FECUND WITH LIFE, IT SHELTERS TENS OF THOUSANDS OF PLANT SPECIES, AROUND 250 SPECIES OF TREES, MORE THAN 1500 SPECIES OF BIRDS, 3000 KNOWN SPECIES OF FISH, AND SOME 30 MILLION DIFFERENT INSECTS BUZZ AND CRAWL THROUGH THESE FORESTS. HAVING RESEARCHED AND DWELLED WITH THE JOYS AND PERILS OF THE RAIN FOREST, NIGEL SMITH REVEALS HOW TRADITIONAL HEALERS SUSTAIN A COMMUNITY VULNERABLE TO NATURAL AFFLICTIONS AND 'SUPERNATURAL ENCOUNTERS'.

For many inhabitants of the Amazon, both in rural areas and urban centres, modern medical care is difficult to obtain. Distances to clinics and hospitals may be too far for those inhabiting remote headwaters, and for others closer to towns and cities, the cost of medicines and doctors fees is prohibitive. While state-supported medical care has improved over the last few decades, demand for such services by the poorer segments of society still outstrips capacity. Millions of people thus resort to traditional healers in Amazonia to

deal with a wide range of afflictions, including disorders triggered by 'encounters with the supernatural'. These indigenous healers serve as intermediaries between those who hunt, fish, and gather forest products and the 'spirit protectors' of such resources.

Interestingly, this alternate system of healing functions parallel to modern medicine, rather than in competition with it. Thus, even relatively wealthy patrons are likely to seek traditional healers as an option. Although fundamental



Christian churches, such as the Assembly of God, are gaining ground in the Amazon, even though pastors typically regard forest and water spirits as manifestations of the devil, many believers seek out traditional healers. In fact, in Maués, a healer pointed out that Catholic priests often refer patients to him.

Healers, in turn, do not hesitate to recommend modern medication or hospital treatment if a condition warrants intensive care in cases of asthma or certain cancers. Or, they may suggest purchasing a medicine from a pharmacy to be taken along with a salve or tea prepared from herbs supplied by the healer.

Healers are popular not only because they are more accessible and inexpensive, but because they also have a human touch. Healers take a holistic approach to treating people, including body massage if necessary, in contrast to physicians who rarely have time to talk with their patients, much less have physical contact with them unless they are undertaking a procedure.

In the Brazilian Amazon, healers or blessers (*benzedeiros*, *benzedeiras*) mostly employ Christian prayers and incantations to help people deal with mild ailments or emotional concerns. They often prescribe teas or bathing solutions prepared with herbs or barks of forest trees. Curers (*curandeiros*,

*curandeiras*) incorporate elements from various religions, including Christianity, indigenous and African beliefs and even Buddhism. Thus, altars of curers typically contain a mix of Christian imagery (especially the Virgin Mary, Saint Sebastian and Saint George), African deities (such as Iemenjá, the goddess of water), Indian spirits (particularly Tupinambá and Jarena), and occasionally, figures of Buddha. Some curers have been trained in the Umbanda tradition, influenced by African concepts of spirituality, while others rely on spirit guides that trace their origins to indigenous beliefs. The latter curers are sometimes referred to as *pajés*, akin to shamans among indigenous groups.

Healers are scattered all along the myriad waterways and backwoods of the Amazon and in the lower income areas of towns and cities. In the countryside, they are indistinguishable from other folk, because they also fish, farm, and gather forest products for a living. Often, healers who attain local fame move on to urban areas where they are supported by gifts and voluntary donations. Curers rarely charge a fee for their services; their healing powers are considered a divine gift not to be exploited for profit.

Healers come from all walks of life and discover their calling by various ways. Manuel, a





healer from the southern part of the Amazon estuary, lives in a modest wooden house doing odd jobs in town to support his family. A polio victim now in his 50s, Manuel initially resisted his calling to be a medium. He says he knew he could communicate with the other world because he would sometimes slip into a trance and feel disconnected from those around him.

One day, his daughter was severely burned and they thought she would die. Manuel prayed that if his daughter got better, he would serve as a medium to help others. Sure enough, his daughter recovered within a fortnight. Thereafter, Manuel set aside a few hours every day to treat people, especially children, in a small, windowless room in his home.

Zé de Mexito is a 50-year-old butcher in a small town in Maués. Zé sees patients in a narrow consulting room at the back of his house. He recites incantations and goes into a trance so that the spirits that enter his body diagnose the condition of his patients and ascertain the appropriate remedy. He claims that a spirit

dolphin, called Apocuitaua Miri, helps him treat women with uterine problems and infertility. Irmão (brother) Tocantins is a spirit that helps him with coma patients and people suffering from eye cataracts. A spirit called José Bonfacio assists with impotency cases, while Penha Verde (green feather) comes from the forest to suggest treatments for victims of sorcery. Another sylvan spirit, João da mata (John of the forest) is particularly useful in resolving cases of panema, a condition that disables hunters from relentlessly hunting game and fish!

Zé knew he was destined to be a healer when he was ten years old. While suffering from a high fever, he became aware of ghosts around his bed who informed him that he would recover if he helped the sick. Zé's condition worsened, and he was declared dead. While his body lay surrounded by candles in preparation for a Catholic burial, a healer came by and touched him; she declared that Zé was alive, and he started breathing. Some ten years later Zé began his healing mission.











Another healer who was visited by spirits as a youngster is silver-haired Augusta, now 75 years old. She saw apparitions in her parent's home as a little girl. At first she was alarmed, especially since no one else saw them, but eventually she came to accept their presence. When Augusta turned 20, married and with young children, a supernatural dolphin-man visited her. When the dolphin-man entered the room at night where everyone slept, she lay helpless in her hammock, unable to draw help from her family.

The dolphin-man, sporting light-brown, wavy hair, would tarry a while in her hammock before returning to the river. To discourage further visits, Augusta put her pipe underneath her hammock (tobacco or alcohol is sometimes left to appease supernatural entities in the Amazon). Having aborted the nocturnal visits, Augusta realized that she had an affinity with the spirit world, and has since used this gift to heal people with health problems and matters of the heart. Augusta, who still enjoys her pipe or cigarettes, explained to me that her mission is to undo (*desenganar*) the harm caused by doctors misdiagnosing their patients.

Two species of dolphin are said to inhabit the waters of Amazonia: the small grey tucuxi which swims in ponds along the Amazon and reportedly helps people from drowning by nudging them to shore, and the larger pink boto dolphin, which inhabits the main branch of the Amazon as well as many of its tributaries and creeks. Boto can allegedly slip into the guise of a handsome young man with irresistible powers of seduction, thus providing a convenient scapegoat for some unanticipated pregnancies.

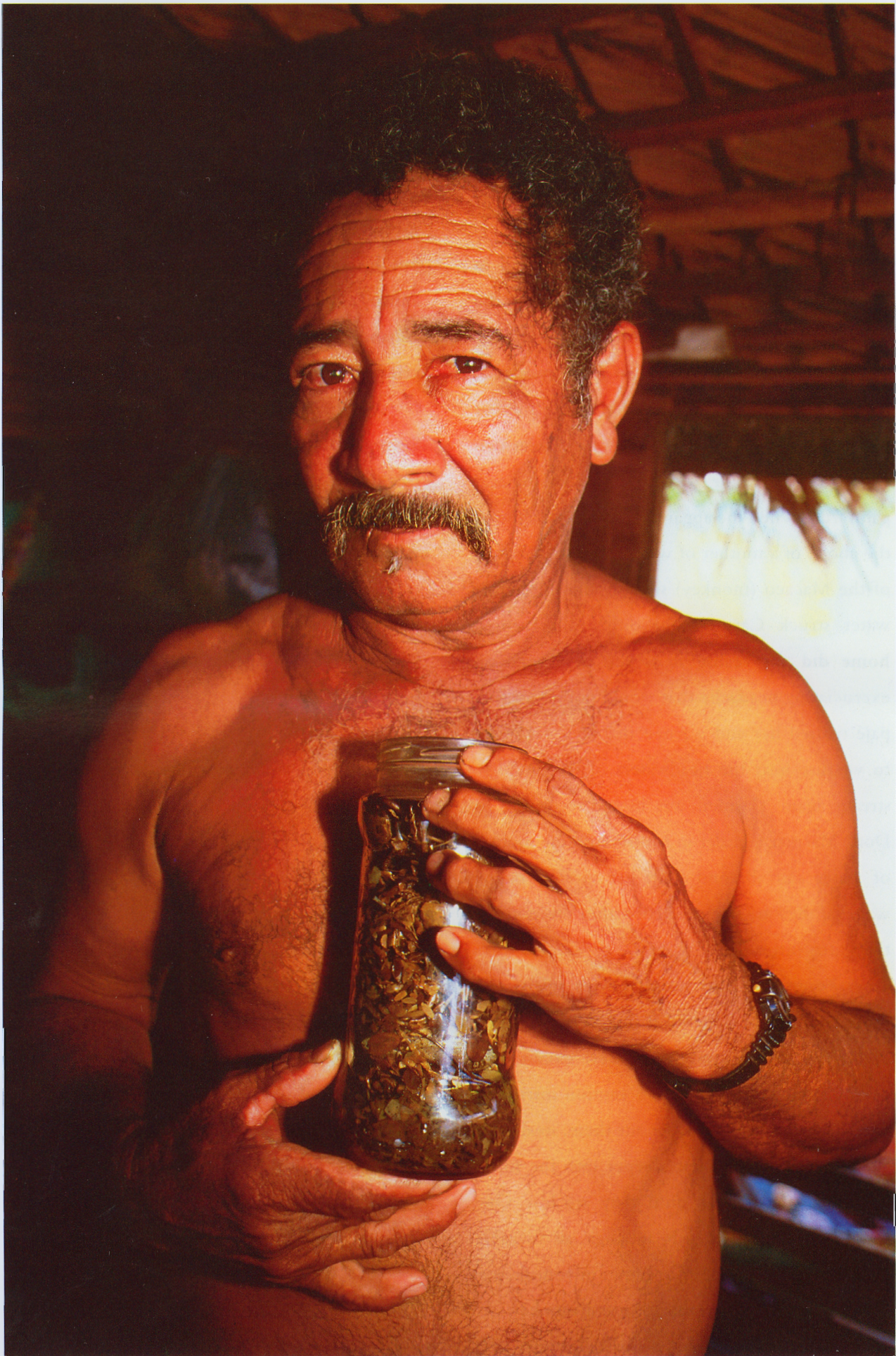
Toni, a passenger boat owner in his late 60s

who has lived his entire life in Muaná on the southern shores of Marajó Island, recounted the story of one insatiable boto that persecuted a woman who lived nearby in the early 1920s. Boto was wearing her out, visiting her about every night, so she sought refuge in the Muaná police station. But even there she could not escape the persistent boto who would slip into the jail undetected, only to be discovered when the woman screamed. Yet, when the sergeant on duty came to check the cell out, boto was gone. On several occasions the dolphin-man was chased down the street in front of the station, but always vanished into the shadows. The woman moved in to a friend's house in town, but the boto continued his crepuscular visits. The woman is said to have died soon after.

Sometimes an observant family member can nip a blossoming liaison with the dolphin-man in the bud. Geraldo, a 67-year-old farmer, recounted one close encounter with a supernatural boto in the village. During the festival honouring Saint Anthony on 3rd of July 1943, a boto befriended a young lady. The couple resolved to go to her house and he entered without seeking her parent's permission, a bold move, especially in those days. Although the couple was not caught in flagrant, the girl's brother became suspicious and sent the intruder packing. He chased the shameless suitor down the street, striking him several times. When the pursuant reached the river, he leapt in and vanished. The brother could only hear the sound of a dolphin releasing air through the blowhole on the top of its head.

Myths of spiritual entities inhabiting lakes, rivers and streams of the Amazonia help conserve natural resources by creating supernatural 'reserves' where few people dare to wander. Such







no-man's lands, patrolled by the likes of a giant snake (cobra grande – the mother of water), can actually be more effective than sanctuaries created by government agencies which are largely unprotected and sometimes constructed without considering the needs and aspirations of local communities.

An enchanted spring on Curuá Island in the Bailique archipelago at the mouth of the Amazon is one such danger zone. Carmen, a 68-year-old farmer and gatherer of forest products, recounted an encounter she had with the 'mother of water' (*mãe d'água*) when she was 17. Carmen was returning home with a basket full of açai palm fruits when she apparently came too close to the abode of a mother of water at the headwaters of the Macaco (monkey) stream. The mother of water struck Carmen but only on returning home did she realise it as she developed an excruciating headache that would not go away. A pajé treated her and warned that she was never to venture near the headwaters of the Monkey stream again. Carmen was lucky; according to Dona Martina, a healer in Murumuru, the mother of water can abscond with her victims below water. If they are not rescued within seven years, they turn into snakes.

Forests are also suffused with spirits and ogres that can be angered if one kills too much game or taps forest resources excessively. Mythical creatures are said to caution intruders, and if they pay no heed, devour them, steal their 'shadows' or entice them deeper into the forest by calling their name until they are lost. One such paranormal entity is anhangá, an invisible forest spirit that whistles or blows in your face as a warning and can transform into a monkey.

João, a 74-year-old river dweller who lives

near Igarapé-Miri, has had several encounters with anhangá. On one occasion, while hunting with a companion in a forest, he heard anhangá's distinctive harsh whistle. The anhangá also scratched the forest floor, and even though it was daylight, neither of them could see what was causing the noise. "It must be anhangá," said João, but his companion was unimpressed. "Let the anhangá come!" exclaimed the companion. The anhangá turned into a capuchin monkey and cried out. At that, both hunters took off running.

Anhangá also plays tricks on hunters. Several years ago a lumberjack set a gun trap in the forest along the Caju River. At around 5 o'clock in the morning, he heard the gun discharge, and went to investigate. When he got to the trap, no game was found; not even any tracks or blood. The lumberjack surmised that it was anhangá's doing and thought it wise not to hunt there anymore.

While such stories may sound fanciful to outsiders, they are clearly messages about respect for nature for the inhabitants of the rain forest. In fact, the rich lore of rural folk in Amazonia can be mined for ideas and inspiration about how bio-diversity and people can coexist in relative harmony. It reveals a pragmatism in the people with respect to different religious traditions and myths that inspire reverence and awe for nature rather than the inexorable need to exploit and destroy its bountiful resources.

NIGEL SMITH is professor of geography at the University of Florida, USA. He has been conducting field research on the natural history of farmers, fishers, and gatherers of forest products in Amazonia since 1970. A fellow of the Guggenheim Foundation in New York and the Linnean Society of London, he explores the impact of folklore and religious beliefs on the management and conservation of natural resources in several books including 'The Enchanted Amazon Rain Forest' (University Press of Florida), 'The Amazon River Forest' (Oxford University Press), and 'Amazon Sweet Sea' (University of Texas Press).

*Photos courtesy: Nigel Smith*