

# Living Art



**N**ATURE has always enthralled mankind, maybe because it is made up of living things, so much like man himself or maybe because man has a fascination for things which grow so naturally, nurtured by forces in ways almost miraculous, yet so logical. This fascination has definitely inspired improvisation, as in the case of the art of Bonsai, Japanese for 'nature in miniature'.

The art of Bonsai essentially involves growing a normal-sized tree (or any plant for that matter) in such a way as to diminish it in size to fit a drawing room corner or a balcony garden. Bonsai actually originated in China in the 5th and 6th centuries AD and was known as Penzai. It was brought to Japan by Buddhist missionaries, where it was developed and perfected. And this ancient art is being propagated and followed in our very own Pimpri by Sailaja Krishna.

A resident of Pimpri for the past twenty years, Sailaja came in contact with Bonsai around fifteen years ago at a friend's place in Mumbai, and the dye was cast irrevocably. Sailaja, incidentally was always interested in plants, most probably

inspired by her father who shared her passion. In fact, one of her subjects in B.Sc. was botany. On returning from Mumbai, her first move was to procure books and other literature on Bonsai, besides of course the pots and plants. Later she also attended several conventions and demonstration workshops variously by the South-Asian Bonsai Convention (SABCO) which was a five-day workshop and a similar workshop by Japanese bonsai masters.

According to her, "Bonsai is a predominantly male thing in Japan. There are 500-year-old bonsai plants which are passed down the generations as a legacy. This is not so in India where the majority of bonsai-lovers are women. Bonsai is a living art, unlike painting. The method involves using a very shallow pot, and constant trimming and pruning of roots and branches to give it the shape it would have naturally. It needs to be tended to very regularly. The soil also is special. A lot of moisturisers, conditioners and fertilizers are

added to it. Thus a huge banyan tree could be toned down to flower-pot size, looking exactly the same but in miniature. The fruit and flower size however remains the actual size, only the leaf size is reduced. For instance the bonsai mango tree in my house produced 8-9 normal-sized mangoes."

Sailaja has come a long way in the past fifteen years since she picked up the art. Since the last ten years she has been taking professional classes and



will also give them a hobby to relax with."

As a final tip she says "Always try to use ceramic pots for bonsai, as they ensure excellent air circulation. Earthen pots tend to have moss growing on them after some time which will stop the free flow of



has been holding exhibitions and demonstrations, and if all the shields and trophies are any benchmark, she has done a lot. She is also part of a local bonsai club for Pune called 'Kapilaas Bonsai Study Group'. She is a three-time 'Best Balcony' award winner from the Women's Council. She is also into professional landscaping for showrooms, corporates and private bungalows.

Says Sailaja, "I wish to teach this art to children. The world is facing a massive deforestation crisis, and an interest in bonsai should inculcate a love for nature. Besides it

air."

"When I grow them I communicate with them so as to give each plant a different and individual personality."

■KARTYK VENKATRAMAN

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