

Shining Stars of the Lake City

Udaipur as a Learning City
(ULC)
Resource Book 2008

Shining Stars of the Lake City

- a contribution to the multiversity <www.multiversity.org> -

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Introduction

Every place is full of treasures. We usually notice and appreciate its historic sites, its special gardens or parks, its cultural gifts. But its local people are treasures too, though we are rarely taught to see them as such. Indeed, the dominant education system and mass media tells us to look down upon the local and instead favor those who are far away and who we will likely never meet (celebrities, sports figures, politicians, etc.). In Udaipur as a Learning City, our focus has been the opposite: appreciating the potential and the real strengths of our city, and especially of Udaipur's people: the wonderful work they do, the inspiring lives they lead, the meaningful contributions they make to the city.

We made this book to introduce our families, friends, guests, youth and children to the amazing people who live in our midst and who we have learned (and are learning) a lot from. They cover a wide range of fields of work -- from the arts to health -- which stem from their personal concerns and passions (not something they are paid to implement). They are creative, resourceful, and they care about Udaipur and its people. They are our *shining stars*!

We also felt that the more people get to know and appreciate these living treasures, the more it will motivate them to continue to do what they do. After all, in this day and age, oftentimes what we most need is simply love and support to continue walking the path less travelled. We also hope it offers more young people a diverse network of learning resources that they can tap, especially those who are disenchanted with the dominant education system.

Lastly, we hope this book excites people in other cities to put together something similar. Taking the time to appreciate the wonderful people who live in our place and share them with others, is a great step in regenerating the learning commons. Please contact us if you have any questions or want to know more about getting started.

Best wishes,
the Shikshantar family



in loving memory

(1919-2008)

Dayal Chand Soni

Affectionately known as maatsaab, Dayal Chand Soni was a special elder. He had published nearly 400 articles and 25 books, and what's more, he would recite wonderful poetry and sing beautifully. He had been affiliated with Vidya Bhawan and Sewa Mandir, and worked extensively on Gandhiji's basic education (nai taleem) for about 60 years. Up until his passing, Dayalji was active in sharing his stories, experiences and views on education and development. He and his wife ran a small flour-grinding mill in their home. His home and library are still open for visitors.



If you have a disconnected bone, or a twist in your neck, or a catch in your back, don't rush to an allopathic doctor. At any time of day or night, you can meet Mana Ram Dangi in village Loira (about 8 km from Udaipur). He has a natural gift for healing bones and muscles. His wisdom first appeared when fixing goats' disconnected bones; later, he started healing human ailments. Mana Ram often suggests herbal remedies alongside his 'massage' treatment; he also lets you know if your injury is beyond his scope. Unlike allopathic doctors, he never requests any money for his services but accepts whatever contributions are offered.



Mana Ram Dangi



Mr. and Mrs. R.C. Mehta

It's rare today to hear of people leaving the city and returning to a simpler life. But for Mr. and Mrs. R.C. Mehta, the ashram is the right place to spend one's later years. Together, they set up Tapovan Ashram, a herbal and organic farm outside of Udaipur, in Naya Kheda. Mehta saab was formerly dean at the Agricultural College; today he is an advocate of organic and 'do-nothing' natural farming. Inspired by the ideas of Japanese farmer Fukuoka, he walked of chemical practices and has spent 15 years nurturing Tapovan Ashram with natural methods. Husband and wife are often in good spirits, open to sharing their knowledge and wisdom with all those who visit the Ashram. They invite young people to spend time working on the farm and learning about herbal plants.

Tapovan Ashram



From Monday to Saturday, he appears a simple seller of shoe repair supplies. But on Sunday, he transforms into a healer. Hakeem Hatimbhai specializes in unani (Arab) and herbal medicines. He collects all the herbs and prepares medicines by himself. His diagnosis comes through checking acupressure points, and his knowledge comes from experiences in Arab countries and reading ancient texts. Over 150 people come to see him every Sunday, but he never takes any money from them. He offers fresh herbs, bark, etc.; nothing comes packaged. Hatimbhai also has a steady group of volunteers, who come on Sundays to help him. These volunteers have been cured by Hatimbhai's medicines and want to contribute with their time and energy. Hakeem Hatimbhai is ready and willing to share what he knows with those who seriously want to learn.

Hakeem Hatim Ghai



You'll find him at the SIERT office, though his room is unlike most government spaces. Full of art pieces, ethnic dolls, toys and handicrafts, Jagdish helps to manage the art education and training component at SIERT. He has been doing miniature painting since he was 13 and enjoys working with clay, collage and waste materials. Jagdish's interest in kabaad se jugaad started out of his work with clay modeling; he was trying to create more unusual models and started incorporating waste materials into them. He later met Sreenivasan Iyer, who became a good friend and further inspiration to him. Now Jagdish's family knows him for never throwing anything away!

Jagdish Kumawat

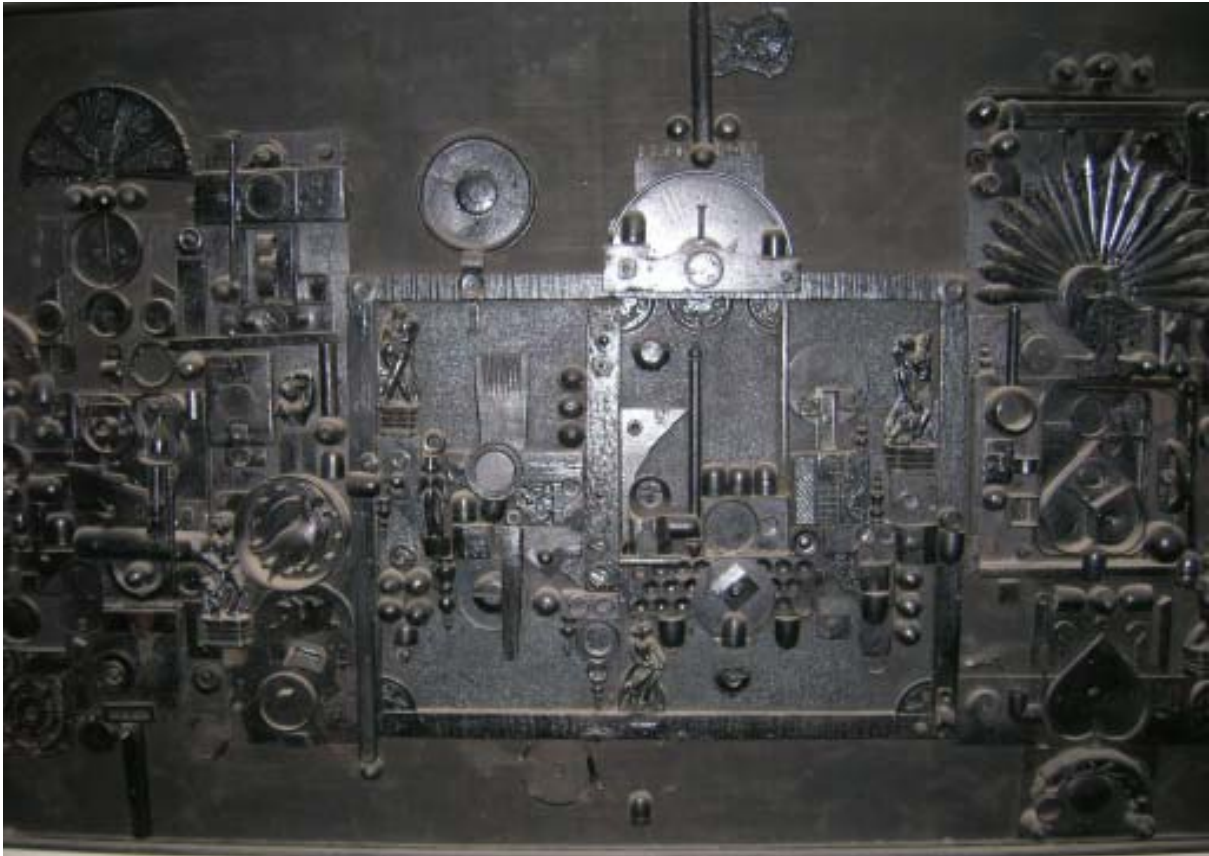


Jasmine John



Lately, you can find her in her family's café restaurant, though her hands are more likely to be engaged in making beautiful *jugaad* than in cooking food. Jasmine has been creating a wide variety of items over the last four decades. Since childhood, she has been interested in creative expressions of *kabaad*. Jasmine has a mastery in paper-cutting, block printing, cast and dying, murals and mosaics. Most recently, she has been making vases, bowls, frames, sculptures out of marble slurry which she collects from Sukher. Jasmine's work has been exhibited all over India and she has shared her art with thousands of people over the years.

Sreenivasan Iyer





You wouldn't imagine a professor of Sanskrit to have a secret life, would you? But Sreenivasan is no typical professor. He is full of the creative spirit and life energy! Sreenivasan's interest in *kabaad se jugaad* started at a young age. His father died when he was young, so there was never much money for toys. So, he used to make his own toys out of waste – the first one was a toy transistor! Sreenivasan's work with waste expanded with the help of his mother. She was a teacher who needed various kinds of models and teaching aids for her students. Sreenivasan would create them for her all out of waste materials. His allergy to oil kept him from painting, but he continued with his art by making more *jugaad* and collages. Now, his interest is in the intersection between art, literature and religion – both in Sanskrit and in today's world. Sreenivasan has created an entire home out of waste, from the furniture to the decorative pieces. He welcomes visitors and enjoys sharing his creations with them.





*in loving memory
(1933-2008)*

Dhault Ram Lohar

To spend 35 years on an art is no small achievement. And to spend it on an art that is unusual is even more surprising. But that is exactly what Dhault Ram had done. His thermocol creations are a site to behold – replicas of Chittorgarh's fort and Saheliyon ki Badi, intricate doors, peacocks, a life-size chariot... the diversity is endless. And they had all been painstakingly carved by Dhault Ram's hands. His proficiency with electric motors and metalwork made his work even more complex. He had hoped to continue to share this art with the people of Udaipur and visitors; his granddaughters are carrying on the process.



Devi Lal Prajapat

To change a small clay pot into a large vessel for drinking water is a kind of magic. And Devi Lal Prajapat is a master magician. Using simple tools, he gently taps the pot and stretches it out to vast sizes. He and his wife, and their youngest son, Dinesh, work together in making pottery, particularly different kinds of vessels for food and drink. For Diwali, they also create *dias* (small candle holders). Devi Lal has refused to get an electric potter's wheel, saying that he might be able to produce more and faster, but the quality of his creations would suffer. Devi Lal is light-hearted and open to having visitors who want to learn this traditional art. You can visit their home in Bedla and get a chance to throw pots on the spinning wheel.



Shahid & Shariq Parvez



These two brothers enjoy being with kids because this is where they get inspiration from. Shahid appreciates colorful elephants. Shariq takes pleasure in experimenting with different shapes and colors. Their family is a family of artists. Shahid has been experimenting with different backgrounds like newspaper and handmade paper and revels in painting large pieces. Shariq also does paper mache masks and enjoys sharing his musical creations with others. They both have beautiful galleries near the City Palace and love to exhibit their world all around the world.

Meena Baya love to paint, play the sitar and do yoga. She comes from a family where no one has professional artist. Despite the extremely business oriented environment in her family, she chose the bold path of creating her identity through her paintings. Her artistic vision is shaped by a spontaneous response to the hard-working people of Rajasthan. Meena has been experimenting a lot with natural colors and dyes for many years. She enjoys working with young people and also loves spending time in Nature, be it on cycle yattras or in long birdwatching sessions in and around Udaipur. She has her own little workshop at home, where one can see a lot of her artwork. Meena's work is also exhibited in art galleries all over Udaipur and in many different parts of the world. Check out her website — <www.meenabaya.com>



Meena Baya

From the age of 12 onwards, Deen Dayal Dashottir has been spinning the charkha (spinning wheel to transform cotton into thread). He wears only that cloth that comes out of his own labor. Deen Dayal believes in Gandhian values and practices. He feels each person should grow the food they eat, spin the thread for the clothes they wear, and build their homes with their own hands and labor. Today, at 90 years old, he is still spinning the charkha and maintaining a garden. In Kardia village, he manages a Go Seva Sangh (shelter for abandoned cows and bulls). He cares for these animals that no longer produce milk and have therefore been left behind by their owners. Deen Dayal welcomes any personal donations to this work; he doesn't accept government funds. Anyone interested in spending time with him or learning how to use the charkha are welcome to contact him.

Deen Dayal Dashottir



Kiran Murdia



Kiran Murdia gets so inspired by the different scenes and landscapes of Udaipur, that once she has something in her mind, she just puts it out to colors and canvasses of all shapes and sizes. Kiran's style is rather unique, and it's amazing how she paints without brushes and creates all kinds of different textures. Her tools are rollers, combs, erasers and other objects of day-to-day use at home. Many of her themes originate from places in Mewar — be it Neemach Mata Mandir or the fisherfolk's boats in Badi ka Talab. She is also very inspired by the colors of the earth and enjoys dirtying her hands with clay and mud and creating new images out of it. Kiran, with her sister, Abha, loves music and enjoys spending evenings with friends who like to sing and listen to lovely old melodies.





SANDEEP BORDIA

Sandeep Bordia is no ordinary farmer. He first spent ten years working in a computer production company when he realized he had no control over his work. He decided to do something local, with nature, and by his own hands. He began by growing his own family's vegetables to lessen their dependency on the market. As his interest grew, he moved over to a small plot of land nearby. He cleaned out the garbage dumped in it by the neighborhood, began vermicomposting, and then growing more vegetables. Without any resources, with little family support, Sandeep continued to learn by attending workshops and meeting knowledgeable local people. Today, his organic city farm recycles waste water, prepares vermicompost, uses natural pesticides and feeds many families in Udaipur.

Don't turn the page just because he looks like a young boy. Jagdish Prajapat, age 20, is from a traditional potter's family. He grew up playing with mud in his village, Molela, which is famous for its terracotta work. As the youngest child in his family, he practiced his art on the mud base made by his father, just for fun. By age 16, he learned all needed to know to make good pieces of art. "There are two kinds of clay work," he says, "wheel work and plain work. Though I am not that good at wheel work, I have developed plain work nearly better than my father." Jagdish is open to sharing this art with those who are interested. He himself is experimenting with it too. He also wants to learn woodcarving and making murals, in order to apply his art in these forms as well. You are welcome to visit him in Molela on Saturdays and Sundays.



JAGDISH
PRAJAPAT

Shyam Lalji



Most of us think that aluminum could be nothing more than a cooking vessel or a can of soda, but Shyam Lalji transforms ordinary aluminum into works of art! The style of his art is known as *meenakari*; it involves creating intricate designs on an aluminum metal plate. The metal is pressed upon with different small molds, which leave beautiful markings in the metal. These are then filled in with special colors, which stick to the metal. Shyam Lalji has been working with this art for over 20 years ago. He started out at Mewar Arts and then, after a short stint at employment, decided to get back into it full-time. His entire family, including the smallest children, is involved in *meenakari* work. They make large and small tables, chairs and photo frames. As a friendly and outgoing person, Shyam Lalji wants more people to come and learn *meenakari* and work with him.

Mukesh Ganchi

In the quiet morning light, an empty side street slowly transforms. One by one, ladies come into the street and sell their long bamboo logs... and the place is soon bustling! The street fills up with people — bamboo basketmakers, vendors, fruit-sellers, tourists — and soon the morning light gives way to market noise. There in a corner, you will find Mukesh Ganchi. His whole family works together to make bamboo baskets of all different shapes and sizes. They also make blinds, boxes, umbrellas, etc., all of out bamboo. What's great is that the children are always around doing small experiments with bamboo and creating new things. Mukeshji lets it be known that anyone is welcome to learn. He will show you what to do twice; the third time he puts the tools in your own hand to cut the bamboo yourself and begin weaving. He never worries about his tools being ruined! Mukeshji is always offering chai, extending a friendly hand, chatting with you, enjoying small jokes to himself. It feels like you are sitting at home, not in the street, and definitely not in a basket-making class!



In the veranda outside of their home, Laheri bai's family is busy making wooden furniture. Her son, husband and grandson are all carpenters. But Laheri bai has an interest in another product of trees... paper! and more specifically, baskets from paper maché! Her curiosity started in childhood, and she learned the art of paper maché by working alongside her mother. She has made a huge number of paper maché creations at home, and consistently repairs any of her older products that have gotten worn down. In the community, Laheri bai is known as a caretaker. She freely distributes different things, like the sawdust from her family woodshop to be used in peoples' *chulas* (earthen stoves). And she invites people to be with her as though they are her own family members. While these days, because of her age, it is getting more difficult to make the maché, Laheri bai is willing to share her skills and knowledge with anyone who has strong hands to put it to use! She participated in a paper maché basketmaking workshop hosted by Shikshantar, and everyone learned a lot from her — especially in terms of energy and how one is as young and able as one feels!



Laheri bai

Young at heart, and wise in years, Ajay Paul is a special homeopath. From his small and simple abode, Parivar Homeopathy Clinic, he has helped many people in Udaipur to get over their dependency on doctors and hospitals. He tries to encourage people to not take medicine, but rather change their diets and lifestyles to promote healing. Ajay celebrates illness as a necessary part of the body's functioning. He has informed many people of the dangers of vaccination and has faith that children's immunity builds through natural means, like playing with animals, eating mud and being around others who are sick. He doesn't claim homeopathy is the best or only medicine, but he feels that it is not poisonous (unlike allopathy). Ajay also doesn't believe in mixing too many medicines together: "One remedy can cure better than many remedies." Of course, his friendly, joking and smiling manner chases away half the illness! Ajay is a practitioner of classical homeopathy and is open to sharing the art and practice with any who are interested.

Ajay Paul





Tucked into the upper corner of a tall building in the Panchwati neighborhood, a musical treasure trove awaits you! Strings, drums, pianos, horns... Hind Musical Instruments is a music-maker's delight! And there, on one side, you'll find the unassuming yet extremely talented owner, Bhagirath! An artist since the age of five, and part of the sixth generation of musicians in his family, Bhagirath is a renowned Sarangi player. He learned first from his father and then later from a guru in the guru-shishya parampara. Bhagirath has won national awards for his artistry and has performed in various venues all over Udaipur and India. In addition to Sarangi, he plays the Santoor, violin, flute and many other instruments. Bhagirath is always available to talk about music and can be approached for freely sharing ideas and experiments. He also takes lessons for playing various instruments at a negotiable charge.

BHAGIRATH



Dharamnathji

What do chairs, harmoniums and drums have in common? They are all made and repaired by Dharamnathji! For the last several decades, Dharamnathji has been making harmoniums and *dholaks* (a kind of local drum) by hand. He takes pieces of wood and transforms them into musical masterpieces (or repairs them back into chairs, as the case may be! J) He is primarily a self-learner; his interest began in his youth when he worked in a music shop. Dharamanathji is open to sharing these instruments (both the making and the playing) with others. He has done a lot of workshops in schools and colleges. Though elder in years, and affectionately called Bousa (grandfather), he has a ton of energy and acts like a young friend. He also has a musical group for singing *bhajans* (devotional songs).

Mahavir Jain

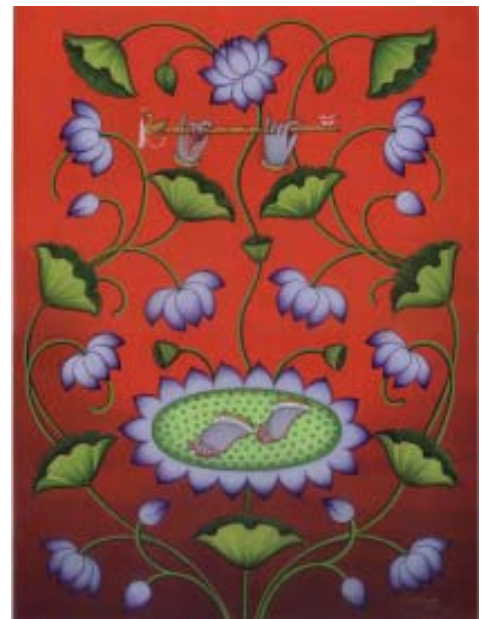
Though it comes from Japan, reiki has gained a fairly large following in India. It is a healing practice that involves channeling the universe's energy; no medicines, gadgets or technology is required. Mahavir Jain is a reiki master who lives in Ayad. He doesn't take any fees for his reiki healing sessions. He hosts free camps and programs on reiki and yoga. Mahavir ji is open to partnering with anyone, sharing his ideas and experiences in lectures, or offering yoga and reiki to wider audiences. He is a nice and friendly person, who is also willing to teach the art and practice of reiki with whoever want to learn it.



He left school at age 13, in sixth grade, and has gone on to become one of the most well-known artists of the region. Rajaram Sharma is a *pichwai* artist. Pichwai is a miniature art that is associated with the Shreenathji Temple in Nathadwara, Rajasthan. Rajaram learned the art for 15 years through the *guru-shishya parampara* (tradition) that exists in the artist community of Nathadwara. From start to finish, the entire *pichwai* process is hand-done: from preparing the cloth canvas, to making the brushes, to grinding the earth stone colors, to painting the creations. Right now, Rajaram has two apprentices with him. He is always open to taking on serious and dedicated students, who will spend the minimum of five years to learn the art well. He never charges any fees for sharing the *pichwai* tradition. Rajaram is very sweet and mild-mannered, a delight to get to know and spend time with!



Rajaram Sharma



He read about it one day in the newspaper. Dewas, a city in Madhya Pradesh, had decided to do something about their chronic water shortage. The entire city embarked on a massive rainwater harvesting program and had phenomenal success in meeting their water needs and recharging their severely depleted groundwater. PC Jain was inspired. He wrote to the organizers of the work in Dewas, received positive feedback, and got to work in Udaipur to promote rainwater harvesting. This makes PC Jain, a doctor of allopathy and homeopathy, one of the most unusual doctors you will ever meet. His passion for water has led him to encourage all kinds of local citizens to install rainwater systems in their homes, businesses, schools and community buildings. PC Jain also has a passion for aloe vera, whose properties he promotes in everything from shaving to deep healing. He and his wife, another homeopath, are big fans of solar cooking as well. You'll find their home-cum-clinic in Sunderwas always buzzing with action.

P.C. Jain



Madan Prajapat



Udaipur is known for its art and none more famous than its traditional miniature painting. Painstaking detail, fine brushwork, brilliant colors, courtly scenes... it is a joy to behold miniature art! While most artists are located in the city, Madan Prajapat makes miniature paintings out of his home in Dewali. He first learned the art through another miniature artist who lived in the neighborhood, but over the last ten years, he has experimented a lot to develop his own style. A large part of this evolution has come through his family, as his brothers and sisters are all involved in the creative process. The Prajapat household is open for any who want to come and work alongside them to try out this exquisite art. Be warned though! The work requires a steady hand, strong attention to detail and a ton of patience!

A piece of wood can become anything... a table, a door, or a face...! Prakash Bhatt would take a single block of wood and transform it into a special character. You would often find him working on more than 12 puppets at the same time — carving their faces, painting their eyes, their hair and lips, stitching on their clothes...By the end of the day, many new friends would have entered the world! Prakash's whole community consists of puppeteers, but his family is special as they are puppet-makers as well. He learned this art from his uncle. As a puppeteer, Prakash played *dholak*, sang, and danced traditional Rajasthani puppets. He performed all over Udaipur and India and received many awards for his art. A gentle and friendly man, Prakash was always sharing his work very openly. Children and adults were both welcome to visit his workshop to learn how to make puppets, as well as to learn how to make them dance. He will be greatly missed.

His 15-year-old son, Shilpu, continues the tradition of puppetry and music.

in loving memory

(1969-2008)

Prakash Bhatt



Vilas Jahnve



“Jai ho! Jai ho!” With welcome and loud enthusiasm you will be greeted by Vilas Jahnve. Vilas works with the West Zone Cultural Center, but his real passion is miming. It started in college when he saw Shail Choyal (another Udaipur artist) perform. After that, he started to observe people and situations closely. Vilas feels that miming is a universal vernacular language, that everyone — from Kashmir to Kanyakumari — is able to understand. He is able to make even non-living objects come to life, through his facial expressions, emotions and characters. Vilas is concerned by how the mass media affects us, and feels that theater and miming enable us to come back in touch with our true selves and real people (as opposed to stereotypical characters). He especially loves working with ‘specially abled’ children and runs an annual program in ShilpGram to expose them to the arts.

Professionally, an auditor and a photographer in one! Dinesh Pagaria enjoys both numbers and images. He enjoys traveling around and taking realistic photographs, especially of wildlife. His interest began in childhood, when he began noticing images on TV and in magazines. Dinesh felt determined to become a photographer, and once a camera fell into his hands, there was no stopping him! Dinesh is a quiet and easygoing person. He and his studio are open and welcome for anyone who wants to learn photography or print their own pictures.



DINESH Pagaria

Shailendra has loved being in nature, ever since his schooldays. In college, he studied ecology, agriculture, and entymology, in order to understand how small insects help to balance nature's life cycles. He worked in on environmental awareness issues and came in contact with lots of new mentors and inspirations. Shailendra has found a special joy in birdwatching — and takes the opportunity to do so in any season. He feels that the closer we become to nature, the more content and peaceful we become, and the better we understand our place in the world. Shailendra is open to taking individuals or groups out for birdwatching around Udaipur.



Shailendra

stay tuned...
more to come!