

# A Labour of Love Delayed & Rediscovered

*How many of us plan for a meaningful retirement, looking forward to a time that can be productive and purposeful?*

*I'll met Haroon Khimani who at 75 has not surrendered his dreams nor his passion.*

By: Deepa Ballal



*Haroon Khimani: Age is no bar*

**I**s there an age limit to realize one's dreams? Can one become a photographer, dancer, singer, actor or a painter at 40, 50 or say 60? Is 70 too late? Luckily there is no expiry date tagged to our dreams or aspirations. And for someone like Haroon Khimani, who is busy fulfilling

his dream these days, at just a little over 75.

A name to reckon with in the 1960's, in his pursuit to provide for his family, the artiste in him had to take a backseat. In 2005, thanks to the encouragement given to him by his daughter-in-law, Haroon Khimani, the artiste, was back.

Khimani shuttles between Mumbai, Dubai and Massachusetts overlooking his business and following his passion. His works deck the wall of prominent government buildings and houses of art connoisseurs all over the globe. He is dead against commercialization of art. He bemoans people using art with the sole purpose of making money. "My art is affordable to the common man, and that's how it should be."

What sets Khimani apart is his choice of subject. "The content of my paintings embody my search for aesthetics in nature's disheveled beauty," he says. "Generally beauty is misconceived by people. Even a crude or de-shaped body has its own beauty. Good looks and a fair complexion are often regarded as beauty, which is a very narrow definition," he adds.

His story is a fascinating one. Born on August 8, 1936, this Gujarati boy had no silver spoon in his mouth. Hard work, interspersed with timely luck and chance meetings with some people, changed the course of his life. "Art has given me a new vision and enhanced my attitude of seeing things



*Khimani's paintings: aesthetics in nature's disheveled beauty*





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positively," he says.

To begin with, the only thing that interested the young lad from Dhandhuka, Gujarat, was drawing and painting. As is the case with many great artists, Haroon's talent went unnoticed. "Had I been given proper guidance then, I could have become a master in painting," recalls Khimani. In those days, art was not the common man's cup of tea. Young Haroon followed the herd, took up commerce and passed it with no interest. "Dissatisfied, I decided to change my field of study and entered the Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University, Baroda, India in 1959." Not ready to give up, when paying the fees became an issue, he and his friend requested the college administration to outsource the labeling of benches to them and not to an outside agency.

His association with his friend and first guru Isabhai Nathubhai Talat, with whom he did sign board paintings to earn some money, proved lucky. "He encouraged me to go to Baroda as he was a faculty member in the Fine Arts department," remembers Khimani.

The next breakthrough in his life was his meeting with renowned artiste and writer, J. Swaminathan, who visited his first painting exhibition. "I didn't invite the media or any political figures, only 15 people attended," he says. But things changed on the third day when an awestruck Swaminathan rebuked the media for not giving due recognition to his work. Soon there was a beeline of reporters at the venue. Praise and awards followed, but the young artiste who never wanted to commercialize his art, or compromise, was soon bankrupt.

He returned to Madras where he served as an art designer in the government handloom sector. For 14 years he worked relentlessly as a designer for cloth mills like Mafatlal, Birlas, Kohinoor & Binny's. Eventually he established two companies of his own, which manufacture and supply luxury amenities to the hospitality industry, Artifact in Mumbai, and Rikan in Dubai. Now for over three decades they have supplied products ranging from coasters, tissue box holders and wardrobe organizers to mini bar trays and boxes to name a few. Their clients are some of Dubai's prominent hotels.

Nonetheless, all of this was achieved at the expense of his creativity. But unlike many

artistes, Haroon toiled, only to return one day when he was sure that he could now rest and pursue his interest. Handing over the reins of business to his sons, today he spends his time doing what he always wanted to do. Paint.

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*Haroon Khimani's family in the U.S. and Dubai*

Bureaucracy and the moneymaking strategies of various art galleries baffle him to some extent, but the artiste in him has stayed true. He spends 8-10 hours a day putting his thoughts onto a blank canvas. "This gives me the energy to survive," he reveals.

"To begin with I struggled real hard, sweated for years in Dubai running from one hotel to the other to grow my business and help my family. Now in turn they express their gratitude by supporting me outright for my cause. This, I feel is wonderful," says a jubilant Khimani.

At an age when many grandparents spend their time either baby sitting grandchildren or spending hours together reading editorials or sitting on a park bench, Haroon has chosen to live life to the fullest. "My relatives laugh at me. They ask me how many more years are you going to paint? And I tell them maybe I will live for another 30 years," he says with a new zeal. Like a toddler who finds a new toy, and is reluctant to let go off it, at 76, Haroon Khimani, shares the same spirit. He will not let go of the brush this time. Come what may.

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