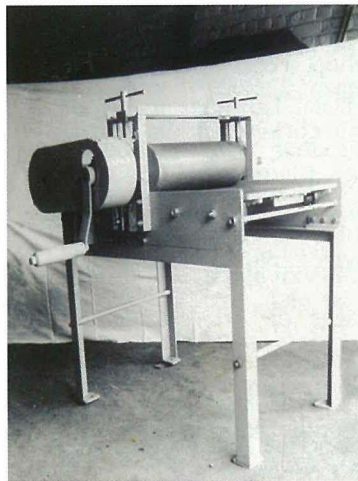


Machines in the Service of Artists

Most print reproductions, popular in India till the 1950s, were lithographs – the country did not have too many presses designed to produce etchings, woodcuts, and linocuts in those days. Dilip Patel's Ravi Engineering Works is a workshop located in the congested Nagarwada area, Baroda. This was where India's first etching press was painstakingly built in 1967, by Dilip's father, Bharatbhai Patel, under Jyoti Bhatt's supervision. In 1966, Bhatt was at the Pratt Institute, New York, where he had the chance to make a number of etched plates and get them printed. The authorities at the Institute, well aware that etching presses were unavailable in India, were so struck by his commitment and flair for printmaking, that they offered him one press *gratis* to take back home at the end of his stint. However, the harsh custom duties those days made it impossible for Bhatt to accept the gift. Instead, he made meticulous drawings, from every possible angle, of the press he was most comfortable working with, and brought them with him.

In Baroda, Jyoti Bhatt's neighbour, Bharatbhai Patel, a music aficionado and Sanskrit scholar, ran a modest engineering workshop. Bhatt showed

Sandhya Bordewekar draws our attention to the significant contribution made by an inventive engineering workshop initiative to the growth of printmaking in India.



The first Etching Press to be built in India at Ravi Engineering Works, Baroda. Photograph courtesy Jyoti Bhatt.

him the drawings he had made and asked him if he could manufacture a press like that. Bharatbhai agreed and estimated the manufacturing cost at Rs. 3,000/-. It took nearly a year to build it. Bharatbhai could construct the outer shell of the press based on the drawings; the machinery that ran the press however was enclosed inside – Bhatt had not been able to examine it to capture it in his drawings. Assembling the innards was tricky as Bharatbhai had to work the mechanism out himself, based on the artist's descriptions of its working. On completion, it cost a total of Rs. 6,000/- to build the press but since he had estimated it at Rs.3,000/-, that was the amount he accepted from Bhatt.

As this was the first indigenously manufactured etching press, Bhatt presented the first print he made on it to Bharatbhai, as a token of his appreciation. This print still occupies pride of place in Dilip's office at Ravi Engineering Works. The press was installed at Jyoti Bhatt's house, and the artist worked on it for a number of years. A couple of years later, Bhatt was visited by printmakers, Fritz Eichenberg and Michael Ponce de Leon from Pratt. Both Eichenberg and Ponce de Leon worked on this