

Marrying tradition to technology

For all that you wanted to know about Banaras but did not know whom to ask just get across to Ranjit Makkuni whose multimedia presentation promises to bring the whiff of Banaras to your doorstep without so much as the click of a mouse!

ZIYA US SALAM reports...

IMAGINE A computer that blends with the woodwork. Or think of possessing one without a keyboard or a mouse. Or let your imagination run a little wild and try to stitch a computer into the jacket you wear to picnic or even to meet your sweetheart!

First things first, these things are no longer just a part of the world of make-believe. In fact, for an intrepid man answering the name of Ranjit Makkuni they stem from belief. And gaining from his belief are you and me, for Makkuni brings to us all the magic of Banaras sitting in any corner of India.

And that too without the click of a mouse. So speak to the sadhus on the ghats of the holy city, visit the lanes of Ustad Bismillah Khan, get an insight into the temple architecture or the mythical origin of the city with 'The Crossing', a unique experiment in multimedia presentation which takes communication beyond desktop-mouse and static documents. It aims to open up the next wave of digital document experience by creating a 'living document'.

Makkuni is a research scholar at Xerox Palo Alto Research Center, USA, popularly known as Xerox PARC. Based on PARC's decades of

multimedia expertise in developing tools for cultural learning, Makkuni and his team of designers are engaged in putting together thoroughly interactive exhibits that will allow the learners access into Banaras' world of transformation.

Hence the project is titled 'The Crossing'. It is actually a blend of tradition and technology. You may not agree with everything that the sadhus reel out to you or the narrative support for the visuals, but they are still worth spending a few minutes on.

Makkuni's innovation shifts the documentation presentation paradigm from screen-based presentations to digital presentation in 3D, a richer and more dynamic form of surround sight and sound. The interface gadgets (including a specially made coat) which when held in hand and touched unfold the desired environment of Banaras - the ghats, the temples, Shiv lingas, flowing river, the priests, the cremation points and what have you



Ranjit Makkuni... new endeavour.

- that you want to see, to learn more about the mythical, philosophical aspects that are associated with them.

In fact, the guys have designed a

mouse in the shape of a Shiv linga whereby one gets to see only a few black switches atop a finely decorated contraption. Similarly, one can create music with the wheel of