

Dhaka Day by Day

Allegory in Intriguing Etchings

by Fayza Haq

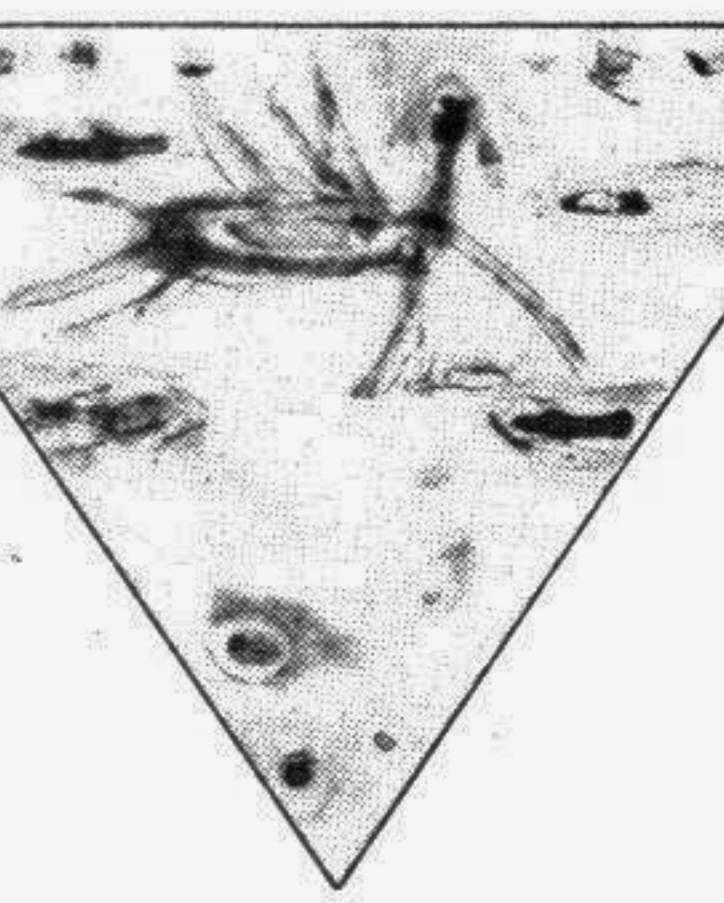
Dhali Al-Mamoon, 35, in his recent art show at "Ariyal", bases his etching aquatints on the myth of Behula, with "breaking and reconstructing" of the images of the myth. The folk tale, as is well known, builds upon the heroine losing her husband on her wedding night, and then praying to a snake goddess, while sailing on a bheela with her husband's corpse, and finally achieving rejuvenation for him, with her prayer receiving a favourable response.

Having returned from Berlin, after a six-months' scholarship, Dhali, who once concentrated on painting, switched to etchings. "Etching is traditionally rigid. My images are water-based. I wish to continue the fluidity into my etching works which is not an easy matter. I use the zinc plate as if it were paper and apply the acid on it directly. Earlier, when I worked with paints I dealt with concrete images, but now I put great stress on the depiction of emotions, and I try my level best to retain spontaneity in my work despite my technique," the artist explained about his work.

The entire exhibition carries the same theme of the Behula folklore. In "Etching-5" he dedicates his work to the death of writer, Sudorit Chowdhury in Chittagong, while the artist was studying in Berlin. The bheela of the myth is put in a semi-abstract manner, in the centre of the composition, while images of river plants and waves in different shapes, sizes and hues cover the rest of the paper. The effect is subtle and tranquilizing, as well as intrinsically poetic.

In "Etching 19" the bheela is given a more fascinating shape, while further colours have been added to it, the browns and greens subtly blending with the pale orange squares. The surrounding environment of water, with wriggling snakes and curling flowers has been included to depict, once again the artist's preoccupation with the age-old concept of a well beloved romance of the subcontinent. As the figures have been spaced apart, and the strokes applied with zest, the impact is a serene one. If one compares this to the depiction of the same myth, which had been displayed earlier at the same art gallery, one finds it far more subtle and sophisticated.

In "Etching 12", one finds Behula and Lakhai (or Lakhindar) presented as grey and white sweeps and splashes, with flamboyant strokes



Etching-30

Paris, Copenhagen and New York. About his German teacher Professor Helmut Otto, Dhali said that he found him extremely inspirational and understanding, and this urged him to work from 9 am to past sunset, every day. Most of the 38 pieces that were on exhibit had been done while the artist was studying overseas.

When asked why he worked with etchings, the artist explained that he originally obtained the scholarship for silk-screen printing, but later switched to etchings, as the earlier technique did not fascinate him long.

Dhali did his Masters from Chittagong University before leaving for Germany. This is his second solo exhibition in Dhaka, while he has held solo displays earlier in New York and Berlin. His works are included in Fukuoka Art Museum in Japan. The artist is an Assistant Professor of painting at the Department of Fine Arts at the Chittagong University.