

Dhaka Day by Day

The Wild and Wondrous Sannasee

by Fayza Haq

Mohammad Iqbal, who recently had his solo exhibition of the world of sannasees at the Divine Art Gallery, says he is fascinated by the mysterious and lonely life of these gypsy-like people. They are strange, he says, in that they avoid worldly greed and ambition and appear masochistic when they bind themselves with iron chains, and torture themselves by inserting knives and iron rods into their flesh. Iqbal explains, "The life of a sannasee may give a negative impression, but in fact, it is a life seeking truth with relentless passion and austerity. They are on a journey of devotion where their ideal is the negation of the mechanistic world."

He adds, "Their life makes me realise that many human beings have forgotten their path of devotion and sacrifice, and have gradually grown away from spirituality. Similar to the sannasee are the fakirs and bauls who are in pursuit of Ishwara or Allah and they also need self-alienation from social bonds. The philosophy of life of the bauls is opposite to Descartes' Cogito, ergo sum — 'I think therefore I exist'. Liberation is obtained by meditation and the medium for this is spirituality. This oriental idealism also created the hippyism of the 60s of the West."

The artist brings out the sorrows and sufferings of the hermits. His canvases are replete with these men of nomadic life. Their songs, their one-stringed musical instrument, the trident, the buffalo horn, the earthen pipe, the long hair, beard and half nakedness, and the smoking of hashish are all brought in. The faces of women, bisons and horses are worked into the composition as contrasts. Here red signifies the freedom of the people. Iqbal has actually spent days with the sannasees to grasp the reality of their existence.

"The Tantric Dance" shows a woman in a frenzy of a sannasee dance. The human figure is simply sketched while a buffalo is brought to the right. A square of greyish-blue holds the main

figure together. A dark woman in red is shown playing music in the backdrop. The lines and colours used in this expressionistic work are simple but powerful, as seen in all the canvases. "The Wild and the Mind" has the overwhelming figure of a dark buffalo charging at a man with a spear in his hand. He wears a head band and loin cloth in red. The sky and earth are brought in with slabs of burnt sienna. Highlights of startling white on the man's vest and the buffalo's horn play up the canvas.

A woman with beaded necklaces and her draped sari is included in "Shade and Memory". Her lips are full, her eyes are heavy and her hair long. A bearded barely clad figure of a sannasee is brought in the background. The shades of brown and red in the rest of the canvas are laid out with boldness and subtlety.

"Twilight and the Boat" has a boat in the background with a dark female figure done in red, brown and bold splashes of white. The background is mauve and black. At first the canvas looks a conglomeration of abstract shapes but looking closely one discovers the forms and figures involving man and Nature.

The sannasee theme is brought in very prominently in "Open Your Heart Wide" where the subject is brought in detail with his trident, pots and pans, loin-cloth and headband. The face is depicted in close-up in the front. The wild nomadic life is well depicted. Strokes of black and blobs of blue highlight the work.

A dark semi-circle outlined by snowy white hold numerous household objects and the sannasee in "Journey Through the Darkness". The economic use of red, black and white stun the viewer.

Iqbal, who has had 10 awards from Dhaka, including the '94 best award in oil painting, National Young Artists Art Exhibition, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, has had five solo exhibits and 33 group shows so far. As a freelance artist he enjoys depicting the miracle, mystic and magic of the wandering sannasees.



LIGHT AND DARKNESS EXIST TOGETHER: Every evening, as a matter of routine, a vast area in Katabon, Elephant Road and New Elephant Road plunges into darkness. But the adjacent (lighted shops) never goes dark. Perhaps they are lucky, or privileged people reside there, sigh the residents, including shopowners of the University Market that has become the hub of city's flourishing trade in flowers, pets and their feeds. Commerce apart, the residents wonder, why precisely in the evening the area near the campus, particularly the road, goes under darkness. Is it to facilitate some people who specialise in nocturnal ventures like robbing the rickshaw passengers, pedestrians or to facilitate movement of 'specialists' who thrive on other people's fortunes? —Star photo by Anisur Rahman

What's on today . . .

Nat'l convention on 'Women and Poverty': The Women for Women, a research and study group will hold a 3-day national convention on 'women and poverty', which will begin today. Chief guest: Minister for Finance SAMS Kibria. Venue: Academy for Planning and Development auditorium, Babupura, Nilkhet. Time: 4 pm.

Discussion on Sher-e-Bangla: On the occasion of the 123rd birth anniversary of Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Hoq, Sher-e-Bangla Jatiya Smriti Sangsad has arranged a discussion meet. Main speaker: Amir Hossain Amu. AL presidium members. Chief guest: LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Zillur Rahman. Venue: Sher-e-Bangla mazar crossing. Time: 8 am.

Discussion meet on Pavarana Purnima: On the occasion of Pavarana Purnima, one of the greatest Buddhist festivals, the Bangladesh Buddhist Federation has organised a discussion meeting and cultural function. Chief guest: LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Zillur Rahman. Venue: International Buddhist Monastery, Merul Badda, Gulshan. Time: 5 pm.

NASHAD meeting: The inaugural meeting of the National Society for Health and Drugs (NASHAD) will be held. Chief guest: Salahuddin Yusuf, Minister for Health and Family Welfare. Venue: Ballroom, Hotel Sonargaon. Time: 10 am.

Art exhibition: A solo exhibition of prints by artist Prof Abdus Satter will begin. Chief guest: Prof AK Azad Chowdhury, Vice-Chancellor, DU. Venue: Haque Art Gallery, F-43, DMCC, North Super Market, Gulshan. Time: 5 pm. The show will continue till Nov 3 and remain open daily from 10 am to 8 pm.

Dhaka Theatre discussion meet: A discussions on the book 'Madhyajuger Bangla Natya' (Bangla Theatre in the Middle Ages), written by Prof Selim Al Din and published by the Bangla Academy, has been arranged by Dhaka Theatre. Venue: Children's Auditorium, National Museum, Shahbag. Time: 4 pm.

Rotary Club of Ramna: Certificate and award presentation ceremony of vocational months and weekly meeting of the Club will be held. Venue: Leads Corporation Ltd office, Adamjee Court, Annexe-2, 115-120 Motijheel C/A. Time: 5 pm.

Chinese water colour show begins today



A ten-day Chinese water colour painting exhibition begins at the Shilpakala Academy conference hall today, reports UNB.

State Minister for Youth, Sports and Cultural Affairs, Obaidul Quader will inaugurate the exhibition at 5 pm and distribute certificates among the artists who participated in a water colour painting workshop, conducted by visiting Chinese artist Prof Wang Weixin.

A total of 36 colour paintings by 39 eminent Chinese artists will be on display at the exhibition, which will remain open from 2 to 7 pm daily.



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Scene: 10 am, Shamlinagar C/A, after a short downpour

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