

exhibitions

Byzantine Utility and Bengali Eloquence

By Ekram Kabir

SET YOUR FOOT IN THE L'ALLIANCE Française's second-floor gallery and you'll find Sayeed Talukder's ten-day-long pottery exhibition, his fourth solo, in its midway. The entire elbowroom is orchestrated with delightful ceramic handicrafts. And if you happen to have someone, an aficionado kind of admirer, clamped with you — every piece of the exhibits is a feeling of sheer Byzantine eloquence.

There is a lot of elemental value attached with this eloquence, because he escorted his way of making this "ancient craft" different to the utility level. If you are tempted to buy, after taking a closer look at the sleight of hand Talukder has accomplished, you may hesitate for quite a some time. But after a while, you will have to stop wondering — visitors are cutting according to their coats.

Talukder does not mind calling him a Studio Ceramist, and after all these years while practising the craft, he even accepts if somebody labels him as a 'potter'. He feels proud about it. He will further answer your questions if you ask: "what is so new about pottery?" and "what is all this fuss about Studio Pottery?"

"Well, this craft is nothing new; you — everybody — can trace down its record; pottery is as old as the beginning of the civilisation when humans came to know about life and living," says the ceramist, adding: "and in the modern times, after the Industrial Revolution in



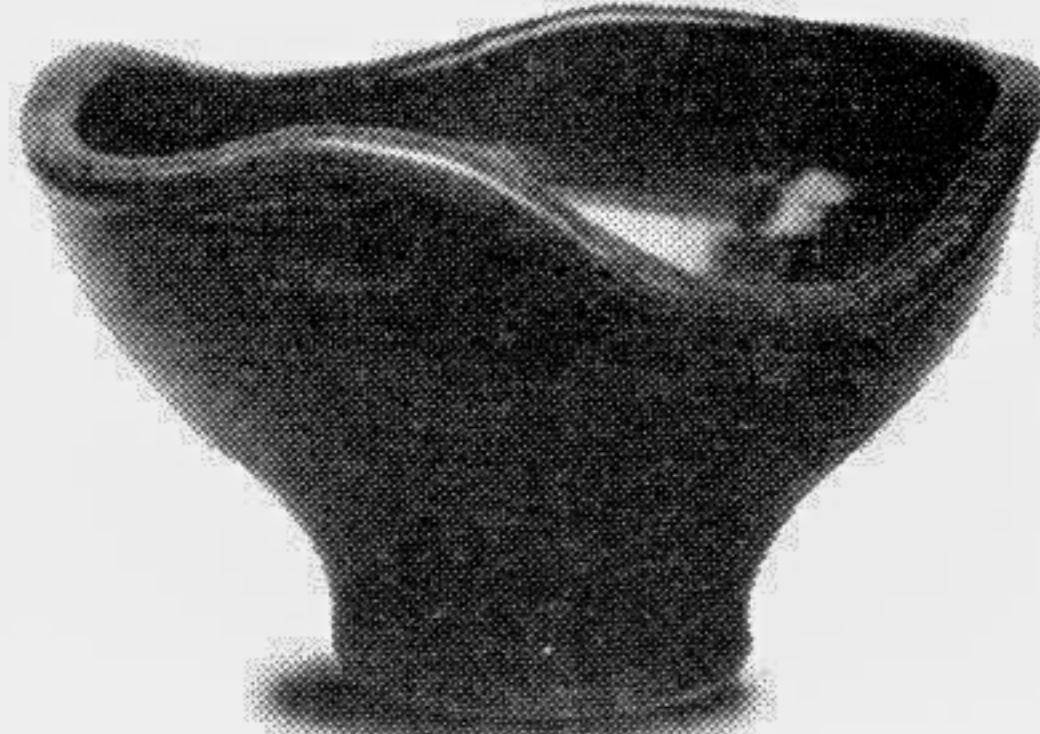
the late last century and early this century, it was given a commercial ring side by side with its adorning aspects of *art nouveau*." "That is how you got your crockeries; didn't you?"

What Talukder does is also like the olden days — he bakes all those with clay. The only difference of his creations with those of *Kumars* and industrial producers is that he cannot go for a large number of same item putting them in a matrix; items of 'studio pottery' are given their final shapes one by one, and there is no way the studio ceramists can deck out the same thing again, because of the craft's experimental nature. "I do it in a little bit different way than our age-old potters did and are still doing," he says.



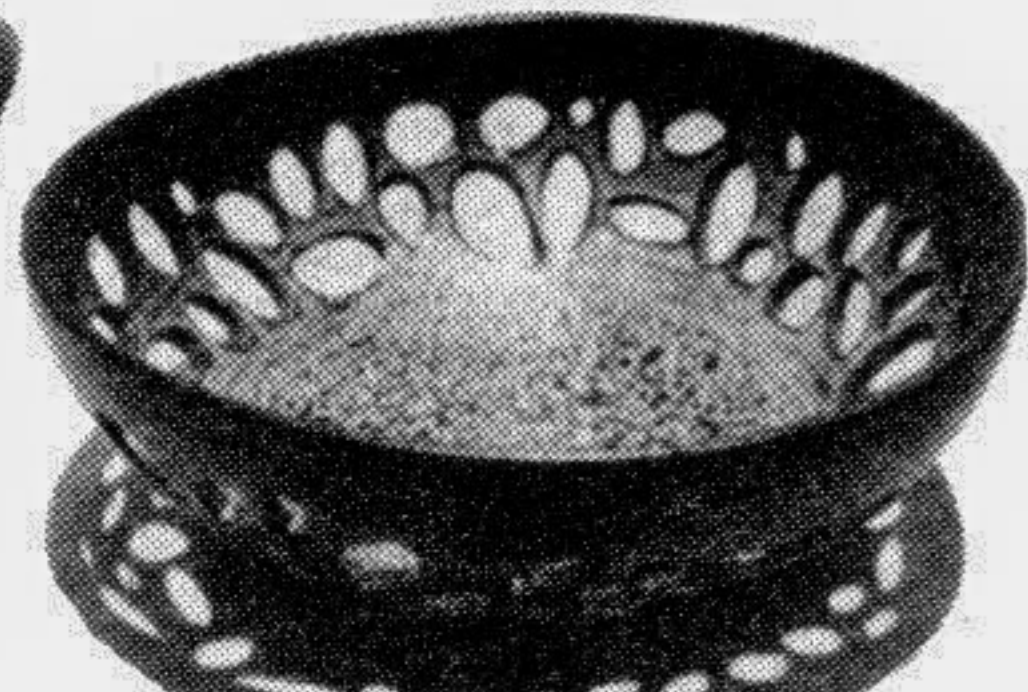
Giving the required finesse to every item takes about a month. There is a lot of homework to be done. First, Talukder has to acquire the right kind of clays from different places of the country. The clay, then, has to be seasoned for at least three weeks before it goes on the throwing pad to get the envisaged shape. Talukder's slender, debt fingers take not more than one hour to give a particular contour, but he needs at least three days for 'firing' it in a furnace and cooling it down for furnishing the inner and outer walls of the object with 'glaze'. And then again it goes into the furnace for the glaze to be permanent.

All the 87 pieces objects on display, one bowl is not for sale for personal reasons, at the Alliance Francaise can



exist in your living room, appearing as decorative flamboyances, and at the same time, can be utilised as parts of your household applicability. Take the fruit dishes and platters, moulded in soft stonewares and neriage patterns, for easier examples. Except one earthenware cylinder, all the items like vases, dishes, bowls for different use, etc., are stonewares. And the very Mediterranean look of the exhibits may not seem new to those who already have seen their use in the everyday life of the people in the countries like Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and even these can be seen at the Italians dining tables.

Those who visited the artist's studio may have a certain extent of dismay, for he has done injustice by not bringing



his other creations like coffee mugs, ashtrays, beautiful little tubs and whole lot of other articles. A passionate Talukder defends himself saying: "I did not bring those down here because I myself did not feel enchanted with the glazes I put on them."

Well, that is what Talukder thinks; but admirers would have loved to see them on display. Some of his off-hand creation, back at his studio, would attract the visitors and many would have ordered for those. Take an ashtray for an obvious example: anyone, even a non-smoker, would have harboured to keep one of those on his/her centre-table for the item's absolute magnificence. Well, Sayeed Talukder expects to take more of his splendid pieces to

Karachi next month where Kunj Art Gallery is sponsoring his fifth exhibition.

As far as the glazes are concerned, Talukder uses a couple of chosen oxides, chemical compounds to dye the walls and brims of the pots, which would render a softer textures on his utensils. Explaining this mildness — which makes him different from others — the ceramist says that he preferred them to so. "And there is another rationale for them to be soft. The clay that I use is gray in nature; most of the time, this grayness helps my creation to be eye-soothing, unlike the flashy, coloured ones you see on the shelves of porcelain shops." Educated extensively in China, there is also a flair of touch on his creations.

Sayeed Talukder, the Head of the Ceramics Department at Charukala Institute, who also has an excellent track-record both at home and abroad — has some future plans of his own while working tirelessly in his humble studio, now located considerably far from the metropolitan hullabaloo in Mirpur. The only noise can be heard is sound of shuttles of *Katan* factories, for his place of work is surrounded by a large number of those factories, but that does not seem to confuse his concentration while he is at work. His ultimate dream, as he says, will come true when he will be able to establish a set-up, fitting for a Studio Pottery on a much larger scale. ■

Harking Back to Cave Drawings

by Fayza Haq

GO LAM RABBANI SHAMIM, WHO had his exhibition at Cezanne Art Gallery goes back to drawings of cave artists in France for his inspiration. He has used cave drawings of bisons, reindeer and horses for his themes and moulded them to designs and motifs of his own.

"Harmony" has cave paintings of hunters going for their daily pursuit. There is an animal form along with skull and horns of a bull. The semi-abstract body of the blue dancing bull occupies a major part of the canvas and is set off by the smaller delineation of the hunters in front. The foreground has a mass of black which in reality is a bull while splashes of turquoise bringing the grass. The light orange on top and bottom is for composition and balance.

"Fantasy" has a horse with its head plunging down carrying four figures. This image is a combination of the artist's childhood memories and cave drawings. The clothes are red and they contrast sharply against the cobalt blue saddle. Part of the horse is pure black while the rest is dappled. The background has the effect of rough hewn rock. Part of this is covered by a brown rectangle, some of it with white while the rest contain brown and orange rectangles. The red in the picture symbol-

ises freedom.

"Elephant" has a huge elephant with five people sitting on it. The people are shown as primitive forms of lines, dots and squiggles. The saddle has abstract *nakshi katha* patterns in vermilion, touched with blue and yellow. The tusk is a shining white rectangle. This is off-set by beige and grey. Dots continue into the back of the animal.

"Source" shows movement of buffaloes, cows and deer. Far to the left are

spindle — like figures of hunters in black touched with white. The animals appear to be in a slow-moving whirlpool. Blue and beige are used with dramatic strokes. Light touches of vermilion are brought in along with white. White provides the contrast. This won the Best Experimental Award '95 from the Institute of Fine Arts DU.

"Madonna" has a black she — goat with its little kid set in almost a geometrical pattern. This is heightened with

specks of gold set off by shades of light colours. The background has rocks and cave walls. Thin human figures are blended into the work.

"Life and nature" shows figures in a boat going for a hunt. A figure to the left forefront is depicted by a hand print. Figures of pre-historic cave art come into the background. In the centre is a dark from that divides the canvas.

"Looking Back" has another dazzling depiction of horse riding. The animal is

lean and looks almost like a deer or a dog. It has a single rider. Forms of cave drawings finish this creation of simple strokes.

"Life Cycle" has a figure standing near a horse surrounded by a car tyre. This is to represent the continuation of culture in our life. This is done with a spatula using green and black.

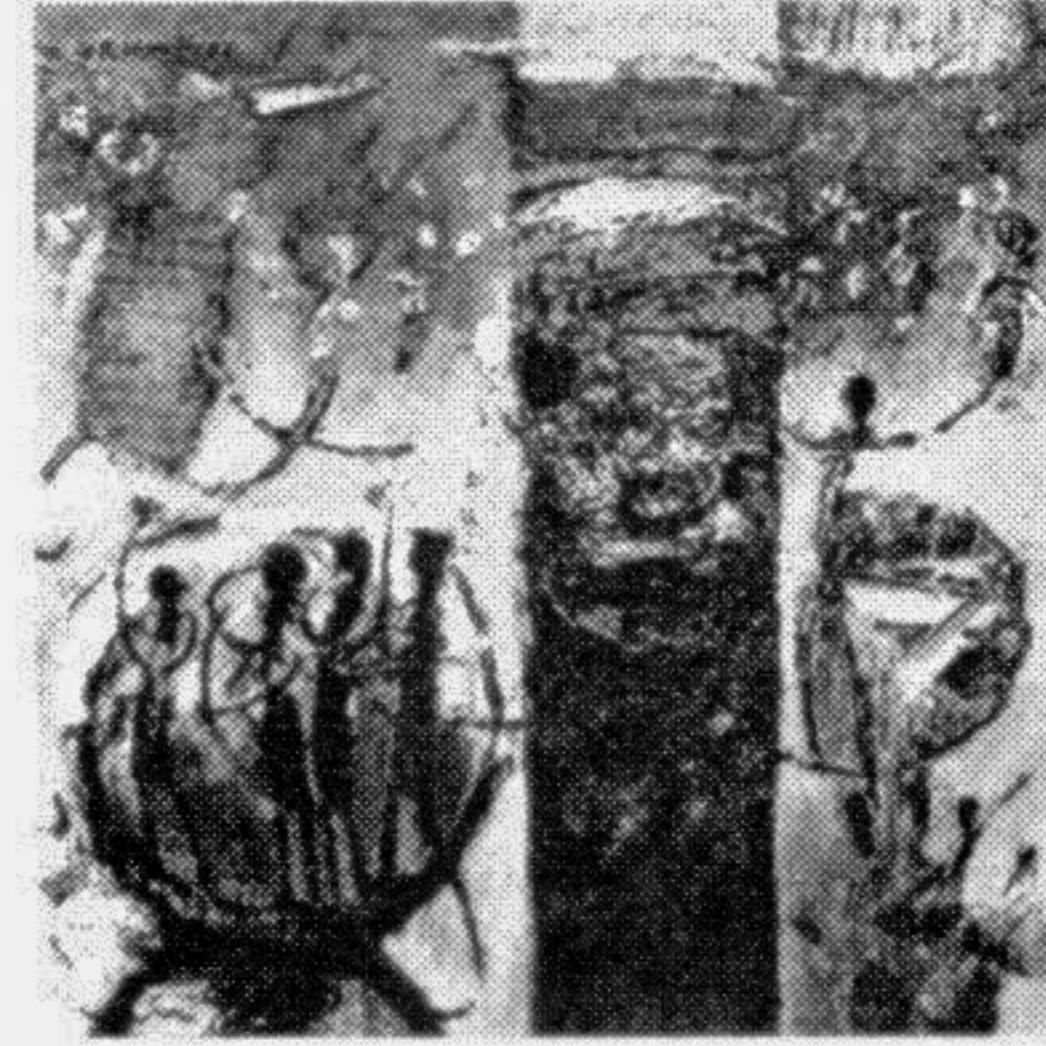
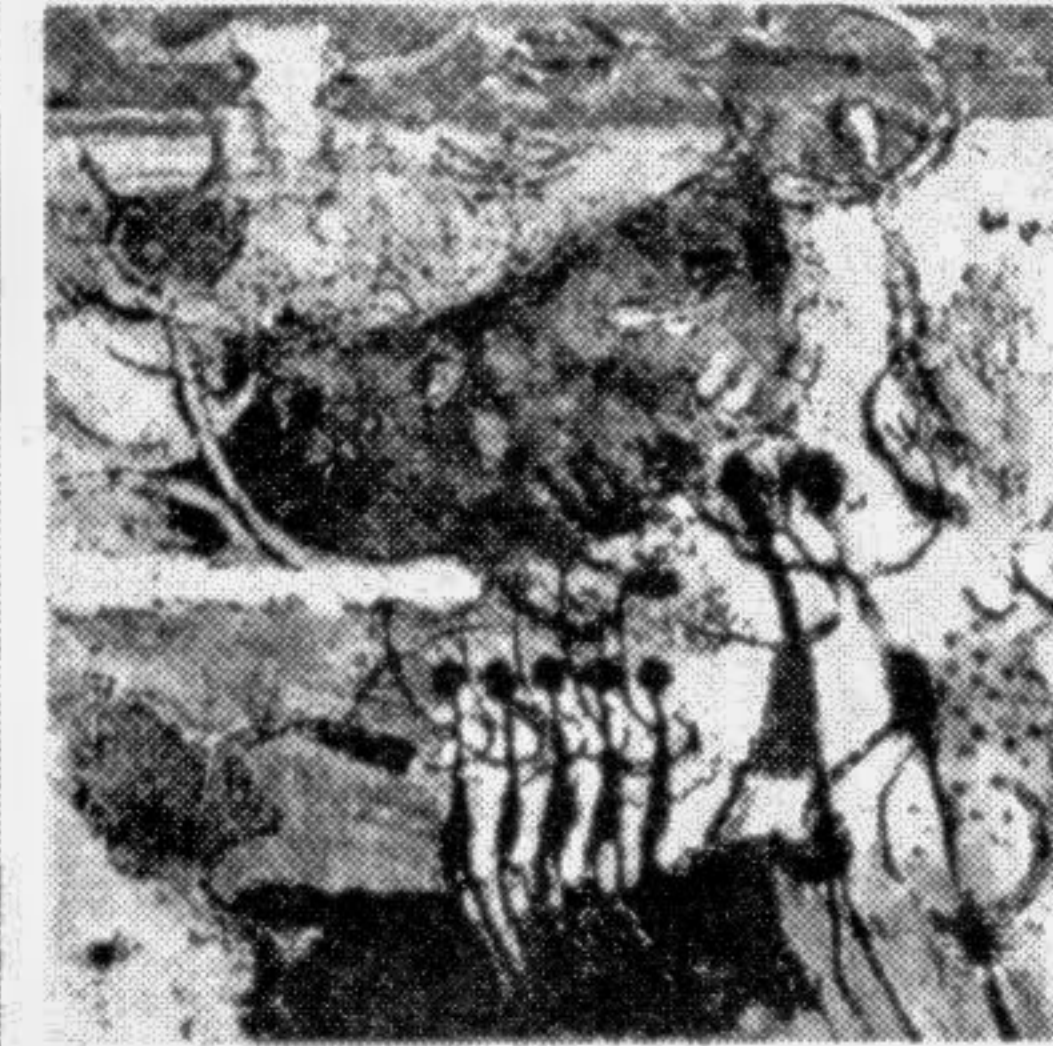
"Ghorey Phera" shows a *shauntal shikari* coming home from a hunt. The man is a gorgeous blue black in colour.

He is bearded and his hair is tied with a scarf. He has on a red *lungi* and has come back with birds which are depicted in an abstract manner. A woman is seen standing on the *shauntal's* path. The background is a light haze so as to accentuate the subject. The painting is a mixture of black, red and white.

"Hukkah" contains *hukkahs* of different colours placed together in a happy balance. Red, black and yellow ochre are used to depict the various motifs. "The *hukkah* is slowly dying out. My attempt is to capture this form in our traditional past", Shamim says.

Shamim went to North Carolina for his first solo in '96 and plans to have his third solo there again this year. The artist was specially impressed by the work of the Chinese artists in USA. He plans to go into mixed media as he wants to go into quick compositions of plastic emulsion. Professor Rafiqun Nabi says about Shamim, "He has done a commendable job in discovering his style the reflection of which is evident in his paintings — mostly in oil."

Shamim has taken part in more than 24 exhibitions while being still a student of Fine Arts. He has won two awards in '95. He has his collections in USA.



poems

Jibanananda

by Abdul Mannan Syed

I observe Jibanananda from time to time on the street.

Stout of body, a somewhat soiled *kurta*, stained *dhoti*

Hitched up to his knees, nondescript sandals,

Or maybe moccasins on his feet; in his eyes

Shine to shards of a green prison

From my childhood, now lost.

I saw him one day at the head of Greene Road.

Another day, it was in a bookstore, second floor, outside the stadium.

As I headed up the stairs, he brushed by me on his hurried way down.

Still another day I saw him pacing by the lake,

Absorbed in his own thoughts.

And yet another time, through the fish market's raucous din, making

the rounds.

Hopeful, I started,

But he disappeared among the crowd, before my very eyes,

Slipped into that human void.

Just once, as he walked by,

He cast a momentary, distracted glance my way,

Seeming to convey those words of welcome.

"Where have you been so long?"

But not waiting for an answer

He blended into stark reality.

On another day — it was after dark — I saw him

Standing chagrined, like a captured star,

In Dhaka's most deserted spot —

I was on a rickshaw, going by that field — I see the night, caught in his hair.

From within green prism eyes grasshoppers leap.

His feet, held fast by pins of autumn dewdrops

Like gray men knelt before some primal god.

I see his *kurta*, his *dhoti*, threaded of fog,

I see that from his mumbled words of welcome

Come all the evening stars.

I watch the moon peek out from loose and flowing pockets of his

kurta.

Then Bliss-of-Life began to walk away

Nonchalantly, aimlessly

Away from my life's sorrows — far, far away.

Translated by Clinton B. Seetj



Grass

by Jibanananda Das

Light, soft and verdant like tender leaves of green lemon trees flood the morning;

Deer nibble at grass, green as grape fruits and as fragrant.

I too would like to drink the essence of this grass, glass after glass,

Revel in its body, rub it in my eyes, make it my feather-bed,

Sprout out of it as grass, as from some beloved grass-mother's womb,

and issue out of its delectable darkness.

Translated by Fakrul Alam



In the Midst of the Grass

by Jibanananda Das

In the midst of the grass a sparrow's egg lies cracked —
I love its silent pensive shape — who knows when it broke?
Dust and straws cling to it — I gaze at it for a long time.
I see white specks of dust in the grass; grains of paddy too
Scattered in silence. Soft sad smells rise from the pond;
Listen! you'll hear the sound of sharpuri and chital fish leaping—
Mermaids whose abodes shimmer through the emerald water—
Marvellously mysterious — silvery, deep, and distant in their watery world.

They dart away — knight marshal, minister of state, and prince regent—
In quest of a dream! I gaze at them for a long time.
Is it afternoon? Kingfishers fly by, iridescent in the sun, wings aglow;
Evening will arrive soon — as twilight descends on this earth
The river's soft face will show — its face and body full of soft curves
Just like yours; and yet I'll never behold you anymore.

Translated by Fakrul Alam