



## criticism

# Romanticism in Moniruzzaman's Poetry

by A Z M Haider

**M**ONIRUZZAMAN is one of those rare university wits who have operated in the field of teaching, scholarly pursuits, research, literary criticism and poetry with equal confidence, felicity and grace. It requires single-minded devotion to studies to achieve academic and scholarly attainments. But it is not possible to make a mark as a poet by virtue of scholarly attainments alone. One must have the mind of a poet to make a mark in the field of poetry. A blend of scholarly aptitude and poetic talent is a rarity.

In English literature Milton is known to be an erudite scholar. An outstanding Elizabethan, his wide range of studies helped him to draw on ancient classics for the enrichment of his masterpiece of an epic entitled "The paradise lost." In Bengali literature Michael Madhusudan Datta, known for his wide range of studies in English, French and Bengali literature, produced the greatest epic entitled Meghnadbad Kavya which has so far remained unrivalled in the history of Bengali literature. Bishnu Dey, Buddha Dev Basu, Shudhindranath Datta, Jibananda Das are noted names in Bengali literature of the thirties for their intellectual attainments as well as for their poetic excellence.

Professor Mohammed Moniruzzaman has been reading literature with students of the Department of Bengali

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in the University of Dhaka for the past three decades. At the same time he excelled many of his contemporaries as a poet. It is difficult to hem in his versatility in one feature article. In the lines that are to follow I propose to dwell on his romanticism which is only one of the many dimensions of his poetry.

In the first phase of his poetry beginning in mid fifties and ending in early seventies the poet used to remain under a romantic spell most of the time. That was the spring time of his life when his heart used to chase butterfly on the wings of romance. He then cried out in an inexplicably sweet agony.

She turned out to be a bouquet of Palash

when she presented me with one  
While within the green foliage of her heart

tender with passion  
trembled with silent whispers  
Waltzing in the warm south breeze

That was the first palash — the first love in Falgoun. The predominant note of his poetry during that period was love — love that tintured his outlook on life and his attitude towards women and nature. Romantic to his bones, Moniruzzaman is stirred to the depth of his being by love. He was swept away by amorous passion which finds exquisite expression in his poem, entitled Red Rose.

You look so pretty  
with that red rose  
Or perhaps you are its stem  
You simply are incomparable  
I told so  
When I saw you  
And was stuck  
By your lightening charm  
Edging the dark could of your hairs.

Moniruzzaman sublimated love and imparted to it immortality. To be precise, it is an undying spirit which guides and governs the whole human exist-

tence. He has described it in his characteristic lyrical style in a short poem entitled "The love-letter."

Today you and I are immortal  
for we have laid our eyes on the hart of the sun

After a million light years, the world of power

which reigned supreme in this decade will lose its sun and merge with the encrusted sand.  
Trampling the skin of this civilization

We shall enter the being of love  
Bathing onto our bodies in the cool fire of the Moon.

Thus Moniruzzaman's love poems give vent to lyrical outpourings of his love-laden soul.

Moniruzzaman's romantic love poems have lyrical sweetness of those of Shamsur Rahman, although not their literary excellence. One can feel the brightness of early dawn and silken

softness of moon-lit night in his love poems. But like Fazal Shahabuddin he has not sublimated love from eroticism to divinity.

Another important element in Moniruzzaman's romantic love poems is nature which like love sustains him. Nature not merely serves as the background setting for his poetry. It has a living presence in his mind, bones and blood and plays an undying melody which overflows his poetry. He views nature with the passion of a lover. It is an inseparable part of his being. The sailing clouds, fragrant flowers murmuring melancholy of falling leaves, crimson glow of the setting sun, splendours of rainbow — all these and numerous other beauty and grandeur of nature cast a spell of enchantment on his soul. In emotion recollected in tranquillity the poet recreates those soul-stirring images of nature in his poetry. His poem captioned "River beautiful", which is reminiscent of

Wordsworths "Yarrow visited" corroborates this assertion. Writing about a beautiful river he watched long ago, he said.

I never forget (nor can) the dear song she sings  
in varied stances  
Now deep and solemn, now serene like tune of dusk

She, her name, makes my eyes dance in delight  
in an intense flavour of flood  
Or in tired rest.

Nature lends beauty, fragrance and romantic hue to love as reflected in Moniruzzaman's poem. In his love poem "Red Rose" the poet said  
The blue sky is high above  
And down below the hills and the lake

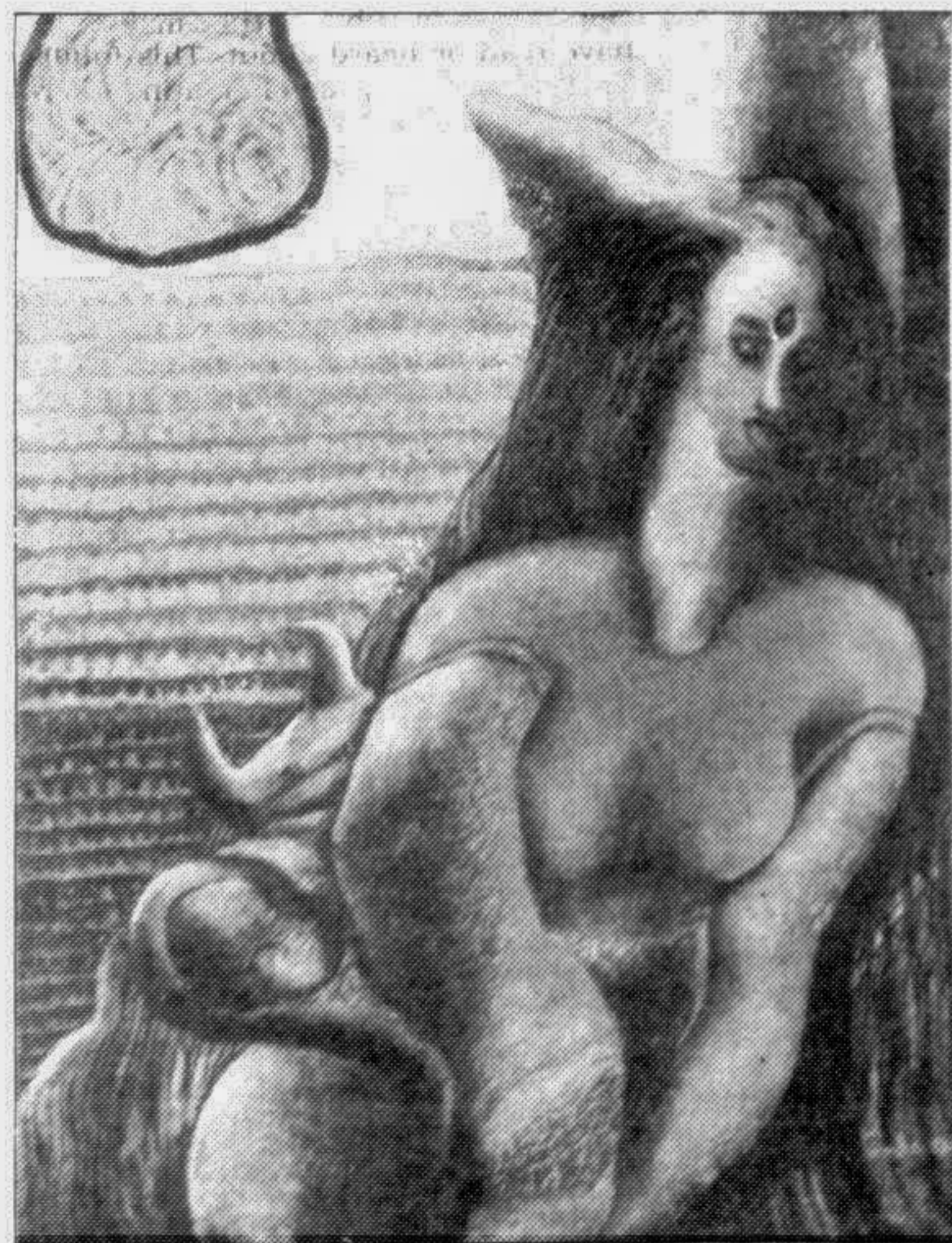
Shadows moving the day along  
Rhyming with the steps on the gravel  
You brought on the top of the hills  
And the pines are humming  
Are you hypnotised?  
Are you sleeping  
Or are you fascinated  
By the songs and the rose.

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## exhibition

# Myths and Mysteries Mingled with Naive Art

by Fayza Haq



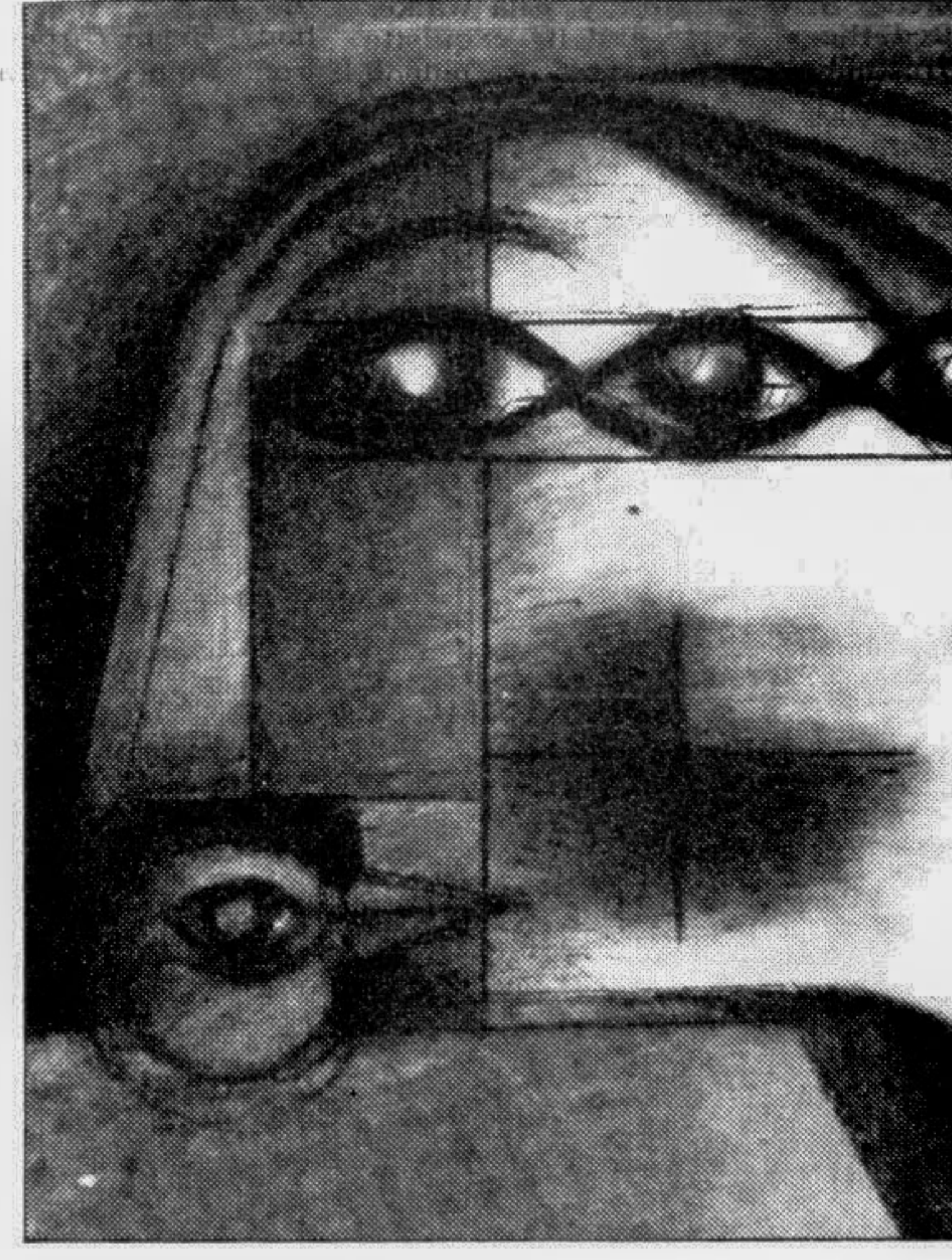
Nightmare, Acrylic on Paper, 1998



The Bathers, Oil on Canvas Paper 1996



Fingers Of Soil, Acrylic on Paper, 1998



Third Eye, Oil Pastel on Paper, 1998

**M**YTH and mystery are the primary preoccupation of Abdus Salam's recent display of paintings and sketches, held at the Alliance Franchise. He also wishes to glorify the naive art of ancient cave paintings in his works, which include 21 paintings and 8 sketches — combining modern existence with ancient lories." I would describe my style as semi-realistic although others may call it surrealistic. Meanwhile, I detest abstractions. The realism comes in the details of the human and animal figures. I want the ordinary viewer to understand my work. I don't want to shroud my work in modern abstractions which the viewer in Bangladesh often finds difficult to comprehend and appreciate in depth. In order to get the effect that I require, I have had to resort to distortion at times — to show the expression of what is in the mind and heart of my subjects, which are problematic in their integral existence", Salam explains.

"Women", an acrylic on paper, is an archetype of the gentle gender. It has a simplified delineation of breasts in circular forms which appear more like thick rings. The breasts and shoulders are brought in a convoluted oval shape, while the extending bent legs appear spindly formations — like some section of a wriggling snake's body. The main colors of the subject are variations of deep browns and greens, with a reddish black background to hold the composition.

"I want to glamorize the ancient and modern concept of the holiness of the maternal role. That is why I have brought in the simple single flower in the hand to the left. I have converted naive ancient concepts to something more acceptable today by adding more rhythmic lines. There is no child in the picture, but that is left to the imagination. I have originated from my mother so I am naturally fascinated by the Madonna role. Women are a gift to earth and so my fixation. I am 31 years old today, and hope to acquire maturity to reach out not only to the academicians but also the common viewer. Within the limitations of my skill, experience and artistic maturity this is all I can achieve. I shall endeavour to improve my ventures in future," Salam explains.

In "Fingers of the Soil" Salam has brought in his concern for the preservation of our environment, a preoccupation with many artists today. He has depicted human hands and fingers in the forms of red earthy mud. "The soil too has its soul, I believe, and I do not want it to be trampled upon," the sensitive Salam comments. "I want the viewer to have the same feelings in seeing the soil as what he experiences in seeing a human hand with extended fingers, groping for existence. Here I have brought in my heart-felt penchant for beautifying nature around us. "The fingers are vaguely outlined, while the black backdrop heightens them. Pink, white and brown shades with dots complete the composition. Salam's message is "nature is as important as

mankind." This is an acrylic too. A woman's face with two large but slanted uncut garnet-like eyes are depicted in "She". The cascade of straight jet-black hair comes from the front to lend a variation, while the eyes are placed more apart than normal. The hair is like a horizontal stream, while the eyes are dark, oriental and shining like seem-precious stones. On one side the face is shaded with dark green, while on the other side it is highlighted with pale green. The neck, similarly, is pale on one side and more deep on the other, thus adding interest to the composition. The portrait is offset by a deep black colour. "The woman is still beautiful despite her wet hair falling on her face. That is the object of this piece — so gorgeous are even the ordinary women of Bangladesh, seen off chance in any harum-scarum manner." Salam comments about this is oil pastel.

An intriguing composition is "Music at Midnight," with Lucifer playing a violin to lure an angel, who is trying to escape into a hollow of some unknown part in the universe. Once again an acrylic on paper the subject has ram-like curling savage horns and pointed ears, done in yellow and green, tinged with red. Meanwhile the hands are that of a young person, done in blue and highlighted with chrome-yellow. The demonic penetrating eyes and sharp fiersome nose is also in shades of gold, outline with blue-black. The statuesque body, seen from the back, is a mysterious and magical deep blue, slightly outlined at the left, bringing in the fold of

the right foot. The figure to his right is an angel whose brown and yellow wings are outlined in black scallops. The black sweep of the angel's hair and the shrouded faces tells one of her desperate effort to escape. The rest of her body is done in Rembrandt browns, as the artist's favourite painter is the Dutch master along with Rubens. The angel's figure is more hinted at rather than presented in graphic details unlike like that of Mephistocles. The backdrop remains a mixture of cobalt blue, vermilion, burnt-umber, and black.

"It is also necessary to use deep tones to create the illusion of midnight", Salam explains, when asked about his obsession for deep hues, where sometimes one has to grope and peer to understand the theme and the subject, although, undoubtedly the dark tones are there to heighten the effect of magical and mysterious undercurrents. "There is an ancient myth, I believe, that says that the greatest maestro of music is Lucifer, and that is why I have taken him as my subject. I want to depict how the devil's playing can charm even an angel, such is his nonpareil superior power. I have not played with texture but with detailed work; I have taken Lucifer's contours of the body from old paintings and illustrations. The blue hollow and the midnight blue surrounding has been appropriated with the black outlines. My colors go with the theme and subject. I had no other alternative in style or technique within my imagination and skill" Salam adds.

When asked why the ordinary viewer would be trembling with terror to study the details to view the this delineation of evil, ushering in fear in the minds of even a connoisseur, Salam simple comments, "That is my vision and the priority of my dreams — take it on leave it."

Once again we see a unique delineation of fear with woman in mind in "Nightmare in Monastery", again an acrylic on paper. There is nun with Praephelete beauty and conception, with a body almost like some green wrapped Egyptian mummy, hiding behind the horizontal folds of a mauve curtain, touched with blue and red. The nun herself has an angelic face, with short flowing hair. Her body is apparently frozen with fear and finely cracked at the centre. Along the beige and brown corridors of the nunnery comes the diminutive devil, once again, and this time his body is presented in an amalgamation of geometrical forms. The green and burnt-umber of his body is highlighted by yellow ochre, and he is easily recognizable by the pointed ears and goat-like face. He is seen atop of a varied shaded green mini-hippopotamus-like weird wild animal, taken from ancient myths. The pale beige walls of the rectangular nunnery and the myriads of opal-like moon, continued on to the head of the nun, brings in an imaginary stage presentation of ancient myths of the Middle Ages, where women in nunneries were often reportedly haunted and tormented by the devil at night. Strange and unnerving — that is the im-

pact of the piece.

"Third Eye" has once again Salam's meditation of women, and it includes a woman's face depicted with geometrical rectangles and a cross mark. Her hair is in deep blue sweeps, outlined with black. In front of her is seen a segment of a bird's body with sharp mauve beak and a massive emerald green humped and horizontal body. The third eye theme is to tell the viewer that there is some saviour to look at the pain and problems of women; while the bird brings in the flora and fauna that surrounds mankind, as does also the green backdrop that holds together the woman's face — done in a manner more modern than any other painting in the exhibit.

Salam makes a living by doing sketches for occasional books, posters and making the odd portraits whenever he gets the chance. Due to financial constraints, he has also had to swallow his pride and accept repeated hand-outs from his retired police father. His sale, he confesses, is not enough to keep and body soul together. He has studied Bengali literature and philosophy before doing his BA at the Fine Arts Institute DU. He feels that experimental work in Bangladesh is as good as anywhere else in the subcontinent. Among the masters in Bangladesh, Salam is inspired by the sketches of Zainul Abedin and the works of Monirul Islam. Salam hopes to continue to fascinate his viewers with his vision, which he says is not pessimistic, but simply inspired by Dutch masters and repeated reading of myths.