

'Harmony of colours is fundamental to my composition'--Mansur Ul Karim

ERSHAD KAMOL

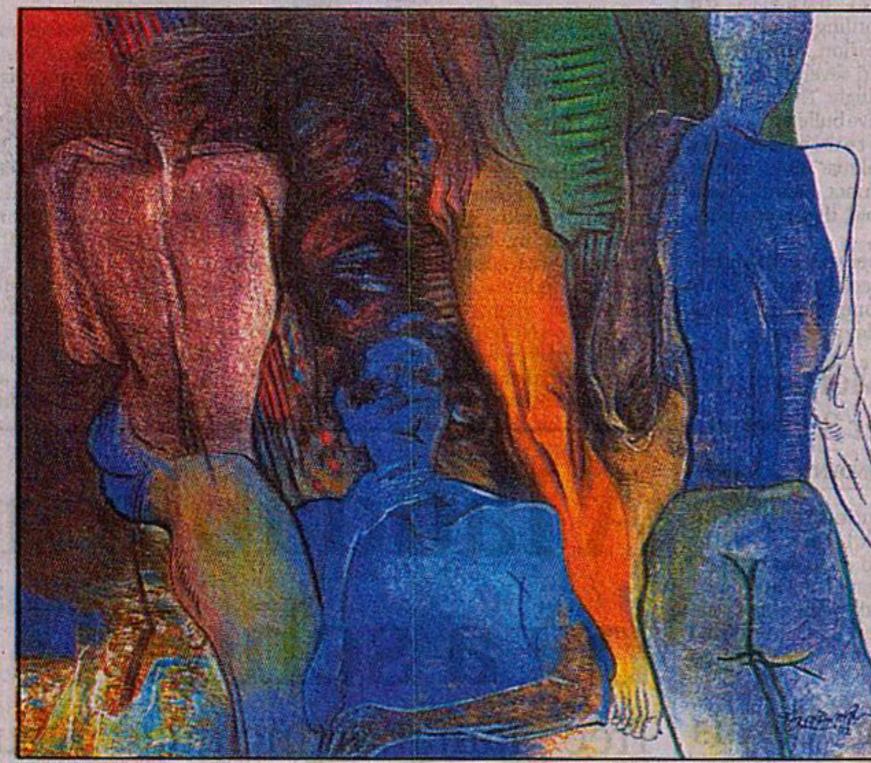
MANSUR UL KARIM's artistic perception has grown and developed over the years. The exceptional natural beauty and the life of the rural Bangladesh permeate his canvases. His bond with the humans and their surroundings shines through the predominant colours. Nature and humans intermingle to announce their interdependence and they seem inseparable in his works.

The paintings of Karim, a Professor of Fine Arts at Chittagong University, are neither mere expression of love for nature, nor any subjective or metaphysical reflection on it. Nature is not even used as a mere background for the human figures in Karim's canvas. Inspired by a passionate sense of deep physical and spiritual bond that exists between nature and man, Karim strives to illustrate the truth in simple terms.

"My works from the 1980s onward use bold lines, textural surface and economical use of colours and human figures, birds, animals and what I call my 'organic forms' that crowd the intensely interactive space," says Karim. Initially he used to follow the common abstract mode, while playing along with the trend of the 1970s. But reflection of the sociopolitical turmoil of the time was a mainstay. A number of artists swerved from that trend path in search of newer artistic means, as we were willing to confront the reality that we lived in," says Karim.

Paintings took a new shape in the hands of these artists and Karim certainly played a pioneering role in the transformation of the abstractionists into exponents of social consciousness. They received a good grounding in abstraction, that is why their works combine the spontaneous embodiment of structures, colour plains with recognisable abstractionist elements. Karim, like his friends, started his career in the '70s and was inclined towards the abstract trend of the time. 'And then I came out of it and went back to nature,' he asserts.

Harmony of colours, for Karim, is fundamental to his composition. Of men, women, and nature, the great unity that is expressed in subtle, deep, or even bright shades of colours, come together to form the final imagery. With the poetic play of scratched lines, his images



In Today's Context, Oil

are lent its most concrete element of all -- the suggestive humans and natural elements. He applies minute details in certain areas, adding to the atmospheric beauty.

Karim stresses that his female figures are the embodiment of nature. The main subject matter of his work is the rural scenery of hilly Chittagong, and he draws an analogy of those curvilinear landscapes with the female form, though a few male figures also surface in his paintings. Karim says, 'I always imagine the sky in multi colour. It has a great impact on my artistic work. The female form, sometimes alone sometimes in a group, as a rule, merges with the background that depicts nature.'

I have rediscovered the magic of light and shade. My palette has become sparse over the

years, but the principle of chiaroscuro -- the way light and shade are shown, the contrast between light and shade -- remains the same,' he adds.

Most of Karim's paintings are done in acrylic; some are even done in oil. His signature surfaces in his use of large, spatial colour fields marked by their contrasting shades. His recent works were done in two different series. Six of the paintings constitute the first series. Titled *The Six Seasons*, they exude visual energy. The rest of the paintings have no such theme to express, but also are related. The series is on our time, which he sees as 'arid, aimless, and oppressive.' The paintings have banished nature altogether; even in *The Six Seasons* series, nature is a mere suggestion, not shown in terms of

any interruption.'

Mansur Ul Karim has received many awards. Of those he considers as the most remarkable, the Grand Award at the 8th Indian Triennial International, New Delhi organised by Lalit Kala Academy, India in 1994 and the Grand Award at the 6th Asian Art Biennale organised by Bangladesh Shilpkala Academy in 1993.

Moreover, he has taken part in many solo and group exhibitions at home and abroad.

colours that are compatible with the mood of particular seasons. Colours used are bold and splashy -- but not in a celebratory sense. There is hardly any presence of nature in the rest of the works. Instead, figures occupy the central space; the strong use of color is something new for Karim and shows his penchant for innovation.

In the paintings where human figures are prominent, lines are minimised and figures are marked by a simplicity that allows for a direct interaction with the viewer. Karim has left a blank space in many of these paintings and painted the background white to 'see if the open space communicates his thoughts and feelings to the viewers.'

Done in 2003, these paintings describe the cruel turns of events and express the pains of living in these uncertain times.

In *The Freedom Fighters Now*, for example, the focus is on the plight of the freedom fighters. Their mutilated appearance emphasises their helplessness. Karim has especially concentrated on the eyes. The eyes of the human figures do not focus on any particular object or sight, but bear the lost looks of the denizens of a world devoid of humanity.

In *Those Seven*, all the figures slant in one direction, showing the oppression of uniformity. In another, which shows only human feet pointing endlessly at an uncertain destination, the main concern is the loss of direction in our times.

Mansur Ul Karim has never faced detection in his more than three decades of artistic work. Karim says, 'I am always inspired by the work of painter Rashid Chowdhury, whom I consider my mentor. When I do not get any new idea, I take cues from his paintings. That is why I could go on for so many years without any interruption.'

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Jolbalika: Bringing the village to the stage

FAYZA HAQ

Jolbalika by Padatik, written by Masum Reza and directed by Shamsul Alam Bokul, focuses on rural Bangladesh. The play depicts the joys and sorrows of the rural people where the upper classes do not compromise with the lower ones in times of crises. The play also lays emphasis on the gender issue where a male child is given priority over a female one. When a storm faces Joy Baul, one of the main characters, it is his son that he saves from the waves rather than his daughter. Ghonoshayam, a mental patient, loved by the entire village, saves everyone but is himself bitten by a snake. An element of romance is brought in by the relationship between Chandboden, the son of the village head, and Chunkibegum, Joy Baul's sister.

For 27 years the group has focused on village-based plots, although they have done other plays too such as *Maxim Gorky's Mother*, *Manasher Pala*, *Teen Rustomer Goppo*, *Shojonbaddhiyar Ghat*, *Jolbalika*.

Nurur Rahman Bachchu, assistant director, talking about the problems that confronted the group, said that though the theme was village-based, some of the actors had never seen a village. 'To recreate the ambience of rural life was not easy,' Nurur Rahman said.

Towards the latter half of the rehearsal, the members were compelled to practice for many hours every day. It was again not easy to bring the young ones on par with the mature actors, said Nurur. There are also the hard decisions that the characters have to take. These inner conflicts heighten the element of

A sequence from *Jolbalika*

tension in the play such as when Joy Baul has to choose between his son and his daughter.

Shamsul Alam Bokul, the director, said that he had to deal with the same handful of actors. As a consequence, he had no choice but to compromise in his selection of the same limited characters. 'It was a big challenge for me. I have not dealt with this theme before. I have done work on the Liberation Movement and translated Shakespeare plays. For this work I had to do research on my own on boat races and songs that accompany them,' he said.

Nasiruddin Sheikh, the music director, had to be careful about providing the tunes for the songs. He said that he had to keep the traditional songs in mind while catering for this play. 'The songs we've used are folk songs but they are not common,' Nasiruddin said.

Sabil Reza Chowdhury, who acted

as Ghonoshayam, said he had acted in *Shojonbaddhiyar Ghat*, *Khetmojor Khoimuddin* and others. He said that he worked all evening on the play after a long day's work as a banker. Nilmohi Aitch, a teacher of English, said he acted as Joy Baul and this role was different from the ones he had done before in plays such as *Shojonbaddhiyar Ghat*. Farouk Prodhan acted as Gunin, the character who prophesies that flood waters will overwhelm the village. He had played a larger role in *Khetmojor Khoimuddin*. For Rokhsana Akhter, a student of class eight, this was her first play. She got all the family support as her father was also in the play.

For viewers, accustomed to the theatre based on urban settings, *Jolbalika* with its rural ambience, will prove a draw.

Jolbalika will be staged tomorrow (December 19) at the Experimental Theatre Stage, Shilpkala.

CULTURAL FEAST

National Zainul Festival 2004

Occasion: 90th Birth Anniversary of Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin

Organiser: Bangladesh Shilpkala Academy, Bangladesh National Museum and Bengal Foundation

Time: December 10-30

Schedule:

December 12-January 07

Special Exhibition of Zainul Abedin

Time: 11am to 7pm on weekdays and 3:00pm to 8:00pm on Fridays

Venue: Bengal Gallery of Fine Arts, 27/5, Road 27, Dhanmondi, Bangladesh Shilpkala Academy and Bangladesh National Museum,

December 17-30

Handicrafts Fair

Time: From 11am to 7pm on weekdays and 3:00pm to 8:00pm on Fridays

Venue: Bangladesh Shilpkala Academy

December 22-24

Folk Song Festival

Time: Everyday at 6:00pm

Venue: Bangladesh Shilpkala Academy Premises

December 24

Seminar on the life and works of Zainul Abedin

Time: at 9:30am

Venue: National Experimental Theatre Hall, Bangladesh Shilpkala Academy

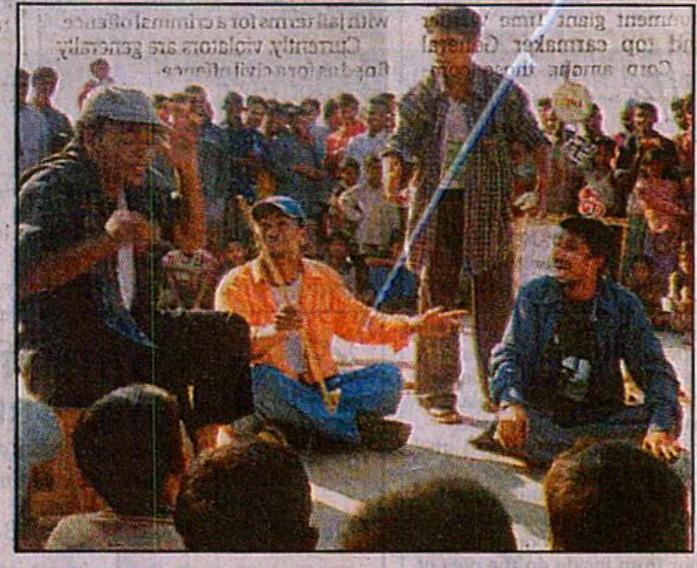
Patha natok played an important role during our Liberation War

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

CULTURAL activists in our country played a major role during our Liberation War. A well-known case is the stellar contribution of the cultural activists at the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra. Another popular medium, *patha natok* (street theatre), was also active at the grassroots level in the Independence struggle.

To generate awareness on social issues among the audience through some explicit messages, *patha natok* has been practised in Bangladesh and other parts of the world for many years. During the Pakistani period, as full-fledged theatre was still nascent in Bangladesh, drama devotees basically staged *patha natok*. Their aim was to rouse public opinion against the oppression of the then Pakistani regime. As their aim was to grow awareness, the dictum of the *patha natok* was easy and communicative.

Patha natok practice in those days was not organisation-based, rather it was centred on a few people.



Young theatre activists present a street play

Mannan Heera, the current President of Bangladesh Patha Natok Parishod (BNP), says, 'Patha natok practice in those days was Dhaka

ing and staging street plays. Muneir Chowdhury's play *Kabor* was a sharp weapon against the Pakistani regime.'

From 1969, this genre of theatre, along with *Gono Sangeet* (songs of the masses), became a powerful tool against the oppression of the Pakistani regime. *Patha natok* in those days basically dealt with some important political issues, which motivated the students as well as the common people to march for the Independence. And from the late '70s, Mannan says, 'Cultural activists of Dhaka and Chittagong regularly staged *patha natok* on trucks, which ultimately became a process of fighting freedom fighters in 1971.'

In the refugee camps, cultural activists regularly staged *patha natok* to encourage the frontline fighters for the Liberation War.

Even today the performing art of *patha natok* has a universal appeal. It is staged regularly in the open air to protest against evil as well as to enable people to fight for their rights.

TV GUIDE

PICK OF THE DAY



ANIMAL PLANET

12:30 Deep Into the Wild
1:30 Deep Into the Wild Costa Rica
2:00 RoboRoach
3:00 Inspector Gadget
4:00 The Kumars At No. 42
5:00 Koffee With Karan
6:00 Cops
7:00 Hit Filmen Hit
8:00 Sangeet- 20 M
9:00 Anjion Mein Tum Ho
10:00 Star Bestsellers
11:00 The X-Files
12:00 Barking Mad
1:00 Aussie Animal Rescue 2
2:00 Marine Rescue
3:00 The Crocodile Hunter
4:00 The Outback to Hollywood
5:00 Genius
6:00 Stupid Behavior
7:00 Baachpan Ka
8:00 Yatra
9:00 Piya Bina
10:00 When Hidden
11:00 Piya Bina
12:00 Main Hoon Na
1:00 Camerass Attack
2:00 Mutant X
3:00 Caught On Tape
4:00 The X-Files
5:00 Coupling
6:00 Baboons: The Battle of Braveheart
7:00 Animal's A-Z Pygmy Chimpanzee
8:00 Life of Birds, The To Fly Or Not To Fly
9:00 The Edge of Mad Mike And Mark 2 Bushman's

5:30 Holiday
6:30 The Most Extreme The Body Parts
7:30 Deep Into the Wild Costa Rica
8:30 Nightmares of Nature
9:30 Animals A-Z Space
10:30 Barking Mad
11:30 Aussie Animal Rescue 2
12:30 Marine Rescue
1:30 The Crocodile Hunter
2:30 The Outback to Hollywood
3:30 Animals A-Z Spiders
4:00 From Mars
5:00 The Crocodile Hunter
6:00 The Outback to Hollywood
7:00 Animals A-Z Spiders
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