

Requiem for Nitun Kundu : A token of remembrance



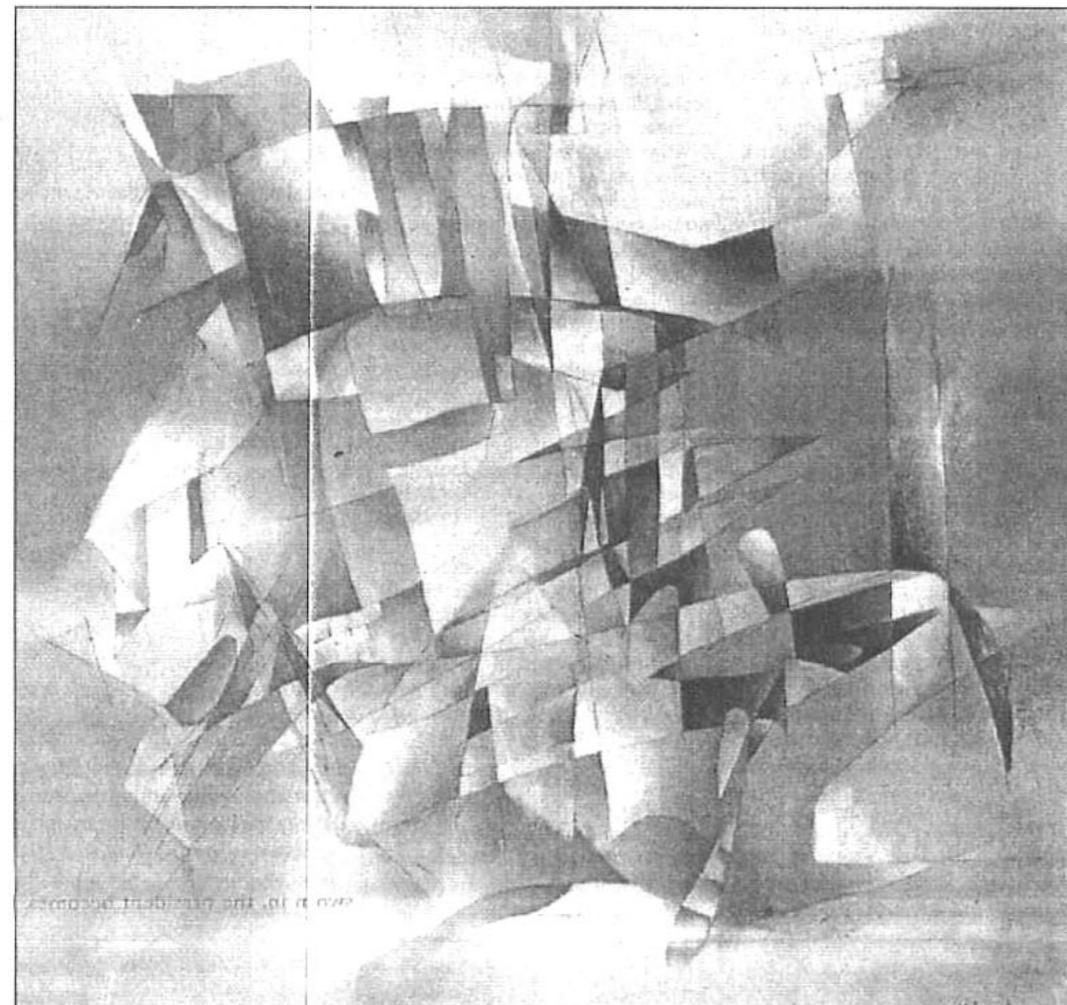
We who had the privilege of working with him will always cherish the most loving memories of the man who was as great as his wise counsel. A truly self-made man. All his life he lived a life of unfeigned simplicity. His innate humility was not only impressive but was also very inspiring to all around him. He had a wonderful ability (a rare quality, these days) to rejoice at the success of others in the profession.

FIDA KAMAL

HUMAN beings do not appear to be the most majestic of creatures. Tigers and lions naturally look majestic, magnificent, stately, splendid and grand. Quite often appearances are unreliable and misleading. However, it needs to be pointed that human beings have one faculty which no living creature possesses. Human beings are creative beings. Animals leave traces of what they were -- carcasses and things. Humans, on the other hand, leave traces of what they have created, such as paintings, literature and monuments. Some of these are really magnificent. That faculty alone is what makes humans splendid.

Originally named Nitay Gopal Kundu, he later adopted Nitun Kundu as his name. For me, however, he was just "Nitun Dada" or simply "Dada." That is the Bangla equivalent word for "elder brother" -- an affectionate address of respect. I cannot say for sure when Nitay Gopal Kundu became Nitun Kundu. But I remember Dada once told me that his loving mother used to affectionately call him Nitun. In other words Nitun was his nickname. Dada's love and devotion for his dear mother, perhaps, made him adopt Nitun as his first name.

Nitun Kundu was a grand man. Not in the least ostentatious in his life style. As a matter of fact, he was a very simple man with simple habits -- coming from the most ordinary background from the backwaters of Dinajpur in northern Bangladesh. He lived and looked like an ordinary man. However, what he has left behind -- his paintings and works -- are really remarkable and outstanding, magnificent and imposing, impressive and splendid, and grand and majestic. That makes him a magnificent and impressive person. His creative mind made him majestic.



Dance of colour -- an oil painting by Nitun Kundu

graduation from the then Art College (now the Institute of Fine Arts of the Dhaka University), securing the first position in his class. He often lamented the fact that he could not become a teacher in the Art College, despite his academic accomplishments. He so much wanted to be a teacher in his alma mater. This was one dream which remained unfulfilled.

During the time I was reading law in London, in the mid seventies, about the time when Otobi was being set up in Dhaka, Nitun Dada visited London. It was my privilege and pleasure to accompany him to the many museums, art galleries and theatres in London.

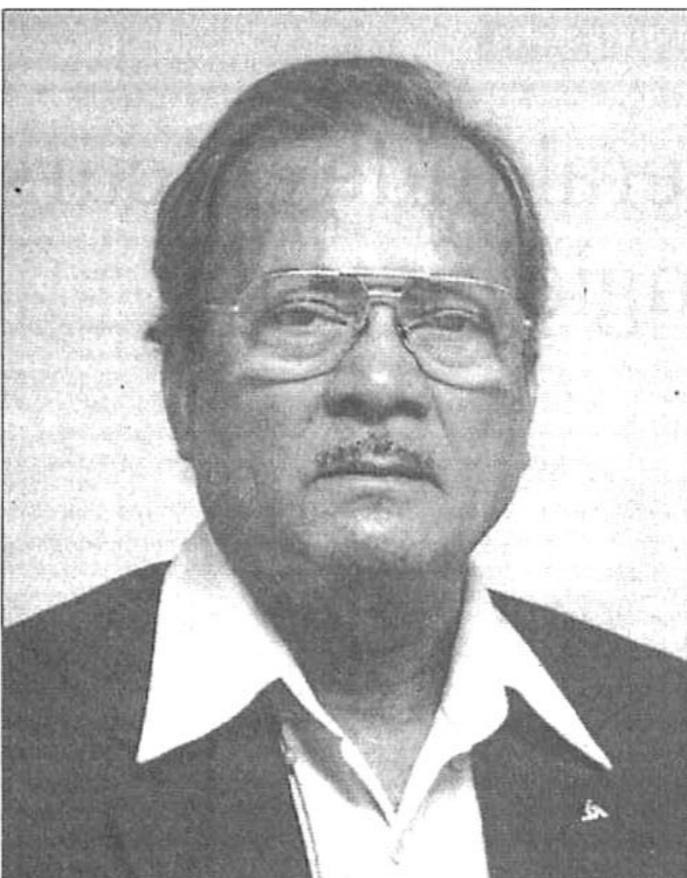
In many ways, Nitun Dada was like a Renaissance man. He distinguished himself in many fields of activity. He was a painter by training. He designed and sculpted many monuments. He designed

and produced many mementos and souvenirs. Later, he became an industrialist by dint of his merit and hard work. He was a leader in all that he did. All his life, he had worked always innovatively and with ingenuity. Moulder of his own environment and his future, his life and works had been an "undertaking." For all that he had accomplished during his lifetime he has always appeared larger than life. Looking at his works is always a wonderfully exhilarating experience.

On the basis of sheer hard work and physical vigour Nitun Dada set up Otobi, initially as a very humble enterprise in 1975. From Sukrabd to Topkhana Road and then to Mirpur, Shyampur and Gulshan, I am witness to Nitun Dada's unflagging devotion, superior intellect and unbounded creativity in the establishment of Otobi as a centre of excellence in modern living. In the formative stages and thereafter, he really looked after, as also carefully tended to, the growth of the organisation with loving care and attention. Otobi grew over the years under his tender loving care.

He was as careful towards Otobi as he was with his children Amity and Animesh. It is said that Otobi was as much his child as his other children, namely, Amity and Animesh. It may be noticed that all of them have the first alphabet of the Bangla language as the initial letter of their respective names when spelt in Bangla. It may sound strange, but a similar sounding word in English, "awe," evokes a feeling of reverential respect mixed with wonder. One is truly awed with the diverse talents of this gifted man of extra-ordinary abilities as he traversed his personal journey through the trials and tribulations of his life to the high points of his achievements and accomplishments.

He has ascended by discovering the fullness of his gifts, his talents and faculties. What he has created on the way are monuments to the stages of his understanding of nature and of his own self -- what poet W.B. Yeats called "monuments" of un-ageing intellect." It is always an exciting and rewarding experience to contemplate on the life and times of Nitun Dada. Such contemplation enables us to reflect and learn lessons from the luminous



light it throws on our own nature as human beings -- from the primordial infant from which the whole exciting and rewarding adventure of man began.

He was a man with a straight and strong spine. This was a result of his self-reliance all along -- from the lowest rung of the ladder where he stood many years ago, to the highest, which he occupied by his accomplishments at the time when he passed away a little more than a year ago.

By dint of merit, distilled from the midnight burning oil, he has climbed the spiral stairway of success. As he had deserved, he availed himself in more than one direction. He trusted his own right arm, however, more than the Alladin's lamp of magic.

Sturdy independence of opinion and idealism had been the chief characteristic of Nitun Dada's character. He could never bend his knees "before insolent might." He gave you, when you first saw him, the impression of a sun-kissed palm tree, the very apex of uprightness. His toil -- he believed in the logic of living laborious days -- is touched with tense tranquillity, as his temper. But his inherent sense

of humour, though restrained, serves as a searchlight and reveals his wholesome humanity. His capacity to face life like a wrestler or a warrior, come what may, leads one to think that he had a secret source of strength, though he may not have been aware of it. His humanity and helpfulness are next to kin to divinity.

Artist in the Bangla language is "shilpi." Closely related word is the Bangla word "shilpo," which also means "industry." Nitun Dada fused in himself the artist in him with the industrialist in him. What a wonderful and amazing fusion! By training he was a painter. He was truly an artist. In establishing Otobi -- the mammoth industrial undertaking he never failed to remember, or forgot, that he was an artist in his heart. In his designs and works of diverse nature, he had always succeeded brilliantly to make a happy fusion of the two aspects -- in the way he had lived and the way he had worked and created. He had a fairly long walk on the earth. He walked tall and with an impressive sense of dignity and honour.

He has fused art and industry and created "Otobi," hopefully to be endured, sustained and carried forward to its next logical development -- with regard to which I have no doubt in my mind of its success under the guidance and able hands of his other two children.

We who had the privilege of working with him will always cherish the most loving memories of the man who was as great as his wise counsel. A truly self-made man. All his life he lived a life of unfeigned simplicity. His innate humility was not only impressive but was also very inspiring to all around him. He had a wonderful ability (a rare quality, these days) to rejoice at the success of others in the profession.

His overall humanity makes one feel that it was indeed an honour and a privilege to have known the man -- a pleasure to treasure his memory. This thought makes me recall what I had read a long time ago: "If I have the privilege to meet you for a while, it will be to treasure a memory which will make me a little more richer than I am." The enrichment is abundant. And the rewards are plentiful.

On his passing away, his colleagues and friends have lost a very dear person, whom we all had learned to love and esteem; the world of fine arts and culture has lost an icon; the industrial and entrepreneurial arena has lost a fine industrialist and the country has lost an eminent Bangladeshi. He has done us proud. We are all privileged to have known him, seen him work. What a shining and noble person. May his soul blissfully rest in eternal peace.

Before I conclude, I would most humbly and most respectfully request all concerned to kindly consider setting up a "Lectureship" at his Alma Mater to honour Nitun Dada's memory -- by dedicating a certain sum of money, by way of establishing a Foundation which will organise a yearly "Lecture" on a suitably selected subject.

Rarely is it given to a person to attain such eminence in so many fields, and to render such public service for so many years. I wish we had more of such persons. What a difference he has made in our lives.

This is my humble homage to my Nitun Dada.

Fida Kamal is Attorney General, Government of Bangladesh.

Sidr and beyond



It is now getting clearer every day that the natural calamities like flood, cyclone and tidal bore, that Bangladesh is frequently attacked with are not all natural. They have a definite relation with the much talked about global warming caused by greenhouse emission of the industrialised and developed countries.

HUSAIN IMAM

SIDER, a tropical revolving storm (TRS), commonly known as cyclone in this part of the world, that hit the country on the night of November 15 with a wind speed of more than 230 kph will probably be remembered for quite some time as one of the fiercest cyclones the country has ever faced.

Although, in terms of loss of human lives, Sidr, with 10,000 to 15,000 dead according to unofficial estimates, may not be considered as deadly as the cyclones of 1970 (500,000 dead) or of 1991 (138,000 dead) in terms of loss to the national economy, it might appear to be the worst of its kind. The hurricane scale wind, with 15 to 20 feet high tidal wave that swept across the coastal districts and ripped through the heart of the country from south-west to north-east, affected almost one third of the country's population, nearly six million people, directly.

The loss and suffering to the people of the south-western coastal districts have been colossal to say the least. Dwelling houses have been blown off, trees razed to the ground, standing crops demolished, roads, bridges and culverts destroyed, and livestock washed off. More than 4000 educational institutes have been fully or partially damaged. Almost one-third of the Sunderbans, a world heritage, has been totally demolished.

A large number of people of the coastal belt, for obvious reasons, earn their livelihood by engaging in fishing or fish related business. Sidr has literally made them paupers. The fishermen

have lost their boats and nets, the shrimp cultivators their stock of shrimp, and the fish traders their business.

Estimates of loss to the

national economy, as usual, vary

widely in range. Some estimates

suggest Tk 5,000-10,000 crore,

others Tk 20,000 crore or more.

What is most alarming is the loss

of the standing crop. Almost half

of the aman crop, the only crop

for a year in this part of the coun-

try have

lost their boats and nets, the

shrimp cultivators their stock of

shrimp, and the fish traders their

business.

Extensive damage by natural

calamities, high fuel price, fall in

external demand for garments,

political chaos and instability,

and a massive anti-corruption

drive in the back drop of all

engulfing corruption spread in

the city last week.

It may not be, however, out of

context for Bangladesh, as a country

to be the ones to be worst

affected by climate change, to

draw the attention of our develop-

ment partners to the latest Human

Development Report released in

the city on November 27, and

request them to go beyond what

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