Awe and Sorrow of the Padma

Monsur Ul Karim, winner of three prestigious awards including the "Ekushey Padak"-2009, talks about the changes in his work

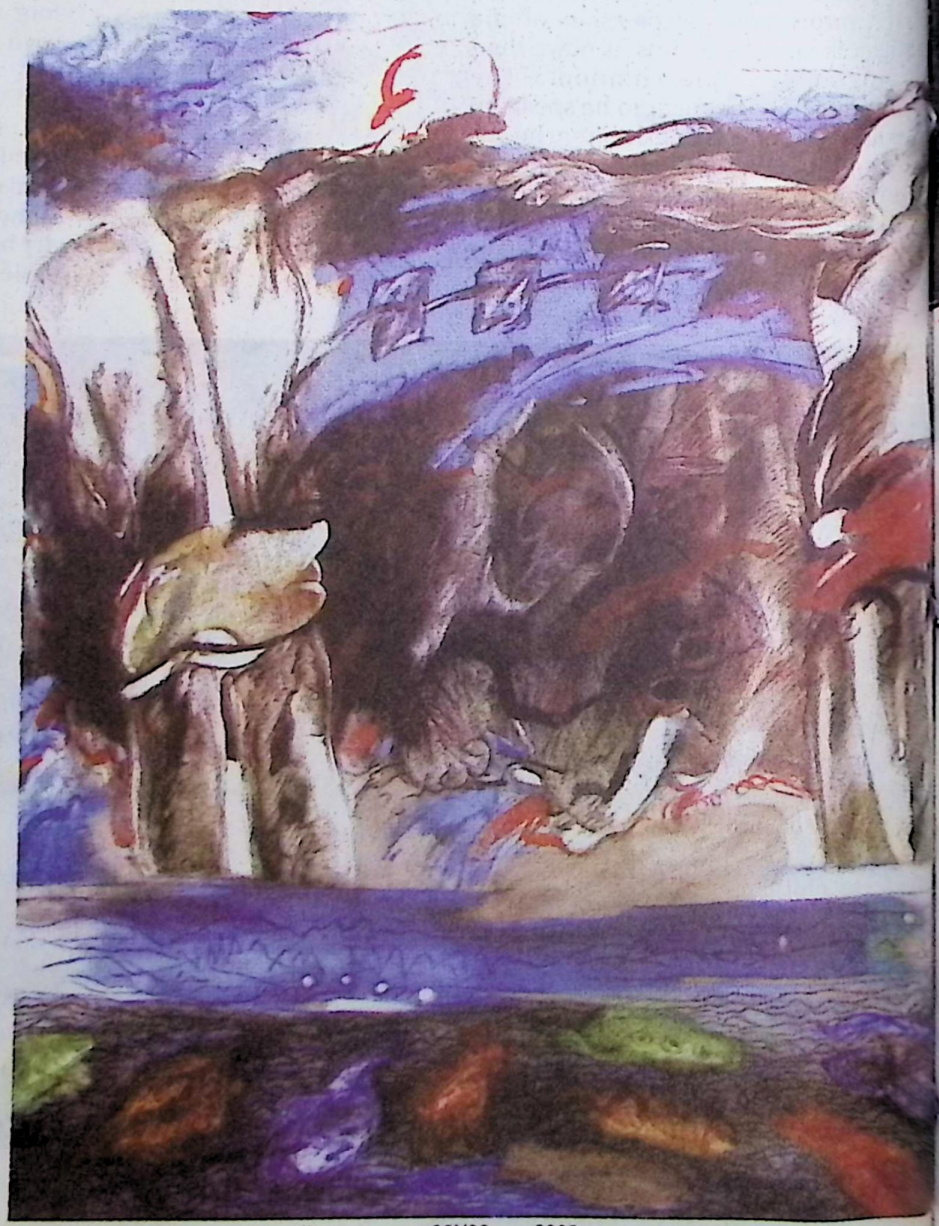
FAYZA HAQ

Born in 1950 in Rajbari, Mansr Ul Karim is one of Bangladesh's leading painters. The motif of his recent exhibition that is being held at Bengal Gallery of Fine Arts is the river Padma. It tells the tales of the once mighty river that has been an overpowering presence in the lives of the inhabitants of the Ganges delta. The river has been the muse of many an artist--Karim is the latest to depict the rhythm of life of the Padma, which from a distance now resembles a glittering silver ribbon carelessly dropped by a child.

Dwelling on the work seen in his ongoing exhibition at the Bengal Gallery, Mansur says, "There is a difference between the exhibit I had at Bengal Gallery in 2004 and this one. The reason is that I now dwell on what I call 'The Saga of the Padma'. I have dealt with the life around the Padma, the culture, the lifestyle, and the hardship of the people living around the riverbank. My own house is Rajbari, Faridpur, along the Padma, and I've spent a long time, my childhood and youth, studying the life of the people here.

"Earlier I did series such as 'Song of the field' and 'Source', which reflected uncomplicated rural life. All throughout I maintained the relationship between man and nature. Times have changed and this I tried to reflect in my work. There is less laughter and happiness as the river dries up. The aim is to depict the havoc and destruction of the times. Thus the work is less lyrical. My composition and thinking process is complex and contemporary."

In one of the paintings we see three semi-clad women who have come out for a bath along the river. This, incidentally, brings out the camaraderie that we find in the villages, where activities tend to be group orientated. This is in black and white, with touches of vermilion and tiny circles of green, to highlight the sensuous figure in centre. The figure on the right is sketched on lightly, while the third image has lashes of black.



The Saga of the Padma-5, Acrylic on canvas, 99X92 cm, 2008.