

The Saga of the Padma-31, Acrylic on canvas, 64X82 cm, 2008.

Another painting holds out the pain and suffering of people, especially women and children, when the embankments of Padma break away. The feeling of insecurity, the desperate search for food and shelter is seen in the tortuous faces of the children and the hapless, care-worn partially clad mother-- wandering about the banks of the Padma to make ends meet. The bluish green used in the painting stands for sorrow.

Another work brings in two boats, which are sketched in, with the sails being clearly visible. The sky is a bright yellow, with two bits of clouds and the sun being a collection of dots. There is a lot of space. "I always try to leave a lot of white space for the viewer to make of what he will, and for the eye to rest," says Monsur.

Yet another painting presents a woman's torso in red. Bubbles depict the destroyed hopes of the people. This work remains sketchy and suggestive. "Lines, dots and forms are essential for a painting if one wants to depict abstract elements like hopes and desires. Colour alone cannot express these feelings. The colour is distributed all over the canvas. I have not tried to mix and merge the colours. If I've used red in one place, that alone dominates in that space. Despite the lack of blending, there is harmony in the composition on the canvas," the painter says.

In his present paintings the colour zones are clearly marked. His lines again, are bold , with textured space, in between. There are no elements of sentimentality, even though he depicts emotions and feelings.

Asked when he became seriously involved in painting, Monsur says," Before 1992 the works were individual art pieces. After that there was a mental change in me. From then on I wanted to focus on emotions and feelings and for this a series is requisite to drive home the point. In 1992 I recovered from a car accident and since then I feel my work has been more serious and complex."

Asked if he feels that artists are properly evaluated in Bangladesh, Monsur says," Although I respect the critics, I feel that critics do not always go into the unconscious mind of the artist. They do not always go into the depth of the working method of the painter. In 2004, in my exhibition at Bengal Gallery, I had left a lot of white space around the images of my work on the canvas. This was interpreted as a way of presenting an illustration, when, in fact, the work was a complete painting. The critic should try to speak with the artist and analyse his complete mentality. There would then be no room for miscomprehension."

Dwelling on his teachers who built the base for this painter nonpareil Monsur says that it is the guidance and encouragement of Rashid Chowdhury and Rafiqun Nabi who brought him to the level of what he is now. "They taught me what was the essential quality of a good painting, and I'm grateful to them," says Monsur.

Talking about whether promotion of painting in Bangladesh tends to be Dhaka based Monsur says that most art dealing is done in Dhaka, no doubt. However, he says art coming from places like Chittagong and Rajshahi should also be considered. There are no good art galleries there, he says, and so no adequate patrons.

Asked about evaluation of the Bangladeshi art market-- whether it is good enough for an artist to make a living-- Monsur says that without contacts our artists are not given their true value. A few artists, it is seen, sell their paintings within days of the exhibit, while others, no matter how talented and persevering, fail to make a living without resorting to commercial art. Good work, without adequate publicity has failed even in the days of Van Gogh: "Today there's computer art. Architects and interior designers use the knowledge of fine art. Thus, of late, art-based work is expanding," says Monsur.

Does he believe in "Art for art's sake"? Monsur feels that art should have a social and economic reason behind it and should not just have decorative value.

Touching on his role during the Liberation War, Monsur says that all he could contribute, having fled to his home on the banks of the Padma, was to be an informer to our people, as he was busy sheltering his younger siblings, hiding from village to village.

Monsur's exhibition, which began on March 20, ends on March 31.