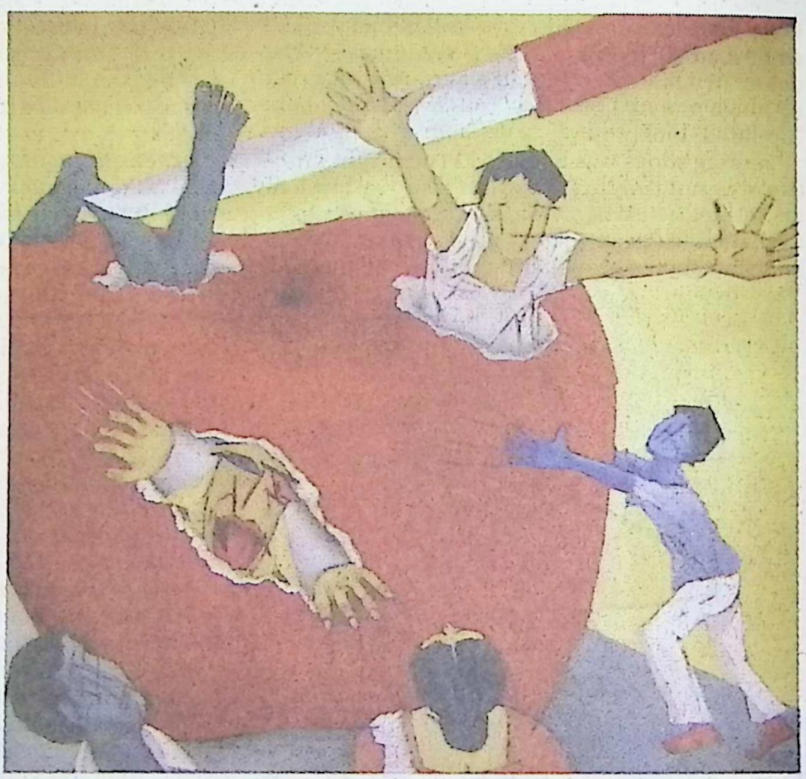
When Irony Cuts the Ice

FAYZA HAQ



Fruit Worms, oil on canvas.



Light, a few Roachmen and Woman, acrylic on canvas.

It was her father who often took her to the gallery to make her see and learn the wonders of art. Soon after her HSC Sulekha Chowdhury, sat for the enrollment examination at the Fine Arts Institute of Dhaka University.

At the Art Institute her teachers included established artists, each introducing to her to the wide range of styles, methods and effects of art. They included Shishir Bhattacharjee, Nisar Hussain, Sheikh Afzal and Jamal Ahmed. Other senior artists such as Rafiqun Nabi, Farida Zaman and Rokeya Sultana were her guides and philosophers.

During her university days she went with her friends to Kamalapur slums, Sadarghat, the Zoo and Botanical Gardens. "At that time there was a lot of emphasis on outdoor activity – and a teacher always accompanied us. We used to go to the Dubai market and to the stalls that sold chicken, fish vegetables etc. It was important that we studied the chickens to get a good idea of their shape and moods," she says.

When they reached the Masters level, the opportunity for outdoor work lessened and experimental work began. Doing that, she wanted to reflect what she found around her everyday. When a woman goes out, her place in society is questioned. She does not have the liberty of a man. She has dealt with political and gender issues in her art. Undoubtedly she has been drawn to conceptual work. For Sulekha it means that which is contemporary and through a concept portrays the feelings within her.

Asked to talk about the conceptual, experimental work, Sulekha says, "I worked on the canvas. In this I brought in the economical standard of life around me. I wished to portray how different the life of the common man is compared to the standard he wishes to maintain."