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From his childhood, Sankar Dhar, the son of carpenter Pran Ballav Dhar, was fond of creating small statues and dolls with mud, wood, sometimes from recycled objects, or whatever he could manage from his surroundings, for the 'Roth Yatra' (chariot festival). Sometimes, he used to show his creations to his friends and classmates -- which were always admired!

"A few years later, I realised that the religious sculptures were more appealing to me than any other forms," says Sankar. "I began to follow Rajendra Paul, Jotindra Paul, Bolai Paul and many other famous artists". "Back then, they were the most famous sculptors, who would create the statues of goddesses." Sankar first created a statue of Goddess 'Kali', during the days of East Pakistan, for the then 'Chalachal Sangsad' Puja Committee (presently, Nabankur Sangsad).

In 1971, during the liberation war, Sankar along with his family went to India to escape the Pakistan Army. But, in Kolkata, the statue of Khudiram Bose,

Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and other legends added a new dimension to his passion. "Many like me had decided to permanently stay back in India. But my heart cried for Bangladesh, to revive my passion," he says. After coming back to Bangladesh, he focused once again on creating sculptures of goddesses.

Meanwhile, when his father died, the financial condition of his family worsened, which compelled him to discontinue his studies while in class 10. His dreams of studying at the Institute of Fine Arts faded away. But, all these bitter experiences pushed him further to practice and pursue with his passion, and also to support his family.

In 1974, when Sankar was only 16 years old, for the very first time, he created the statue of Goddess Durga at Shankhari Bazaar, which brought him into the limelight. Along with the goddess, he portrayed a statue, symbolising famine, depicting a mother holding her dead son on her lap. He tried to focus the then ambience of the



country so that Devi Durga would shower her blessings for the wellbeing of the country. This attracted the then law minister Manoranjan Dhar, who invited him to the Ramakrishna Mission, asking the reason for such creations. "Sir, this is the present situation of our country, and we cannot tolerate this anymore," Sankar had replied.

Sculptor Sankar and His Philosophy

Sankar mostly remembers working in Narayanganj, where he created statues of Durga for more than 30 years. His name and fame spread all over as he followed some distinct styles of making the goddess, in accordance with the Hindu



mythology. This may be the reason of the dissimilar appearance of Durga today, as sculptors now-a-days do not follow the same techniques.

He observed that many worshippers don't notice the artistic sides; rather they just come, pray and leave. So he tried to develop a way to hold the worshippers -- introducing distinct themes, lighting movements and sounds effects -- all with accordance to the myth.

Now-a-days, many Durga Puja committees of different areas prefer artists from India to create statues of the goddesses. But Sankar Dhar believes that if we can inspire our own artists and train them up in a proper environment they can bring a better outcome for our country. However it is sad but true that we have no such institution to train potters and sculptors.

Sankar Dhar, throughout his life, wanted to bring a sustainable change in the lives of others like him. He tried to train many poor students in this regard. When his students demanded a huge sum of money as apprenticeship wages, not only did he have to shut down his classes, he also felt pity for those who could not appreciate their elders, and the art form. That incident left him with a lot of grief about how people in this era

NOTABLE WORKS OF SANKAR DHAR

- Solo Exhibition in 1981 at UNDP Guest House
- The ordnance display weapons of the Army in 1986
- The Aga Khan Gold Cup in 1980
- Sheikh Rassel Smriti Tournament Cup in 1992
- Four constitutional ideological model in 1994
- The sculptures of Military Officers in 1983, at Military Museum

- The valuable *Astadhatsu* (a combination of eight metals) statue of Goddess in 1995 at The Dhakeshwari Temple
- National Wood Carving Contest'9 in 1999 at Alliance Franchise, Dhanmondi
- Dhaka Maître D'UNE Ville Workshop and Exhibition in 1997 at Dhaka City Museum
- Sculptural Exhibition SPACEFEST'99, at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET)
- Bangladeshi Folklore Exhibition and Fair in 2000, at Bangladesh National Museum

- Wooden Throne Exhibition in 2006 at Dhakeshwari National Temple
- SAARC countries SSI Conference and Exhibition in 2005 at Kolkata, India
- 14 astronomical scientists' portraits and different models with aluminium, religious sculptures and many trophies, display dolls with gold, gold plated items and wood.
- Different outdoor designs and models, clay and terracotta portraits of Goddess Saraswati, Goddess Shiba, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Galileo, Newton, Stephen Hawking and many more.

are not respectful about the 'Guru - Disciple Relationship'. Things have changed a lot as people don't want to learn, they just want to earn.

With his lifetime savings, he has been establishing a resort at Sreemangal named after his daughter 'Shata Bhisha Village Park', where he will create an institution for the aspiring sculptors, along with entertainment facilities for tourists. Also, he has licensed a non-government organisation named 'Shata Bhisha Crafts Foundation' which is sadly about to be closed for lack of funds.

In spite of the many obstacles, Sankar leads a content life with his wife Mitu Dhar and their two children Samit and Shata Bhisha. 30-year-old Samit takes care of his father's work, while Shata Bhisha (23) studies at the Dr. Sirajul Islam Medical College.

Sankar had always wanted to be a designer of sculptures and other art forms -- so that younger artists could follow. Despite him being flawless when it comes to designs on paper, he was never given proper opportunities, as he never had academic certification. However, he

received warm greetings in Holland, Germany, Belgium, Sri Lanka, and many other countries of the world and they never questioned him about certificates. He also had the opportunity to work in England during his last exhibition in 2007, to work on his art forms and exhibit them. However, instead of the first 8 years that were offered to him in England, Sankar stayed a mere 8 days and returned to Bangladesh. One might define this to be 'patriotism' -- and of course his unconditional love for his people and his land. ■