

Husain pens an unfinished portrait

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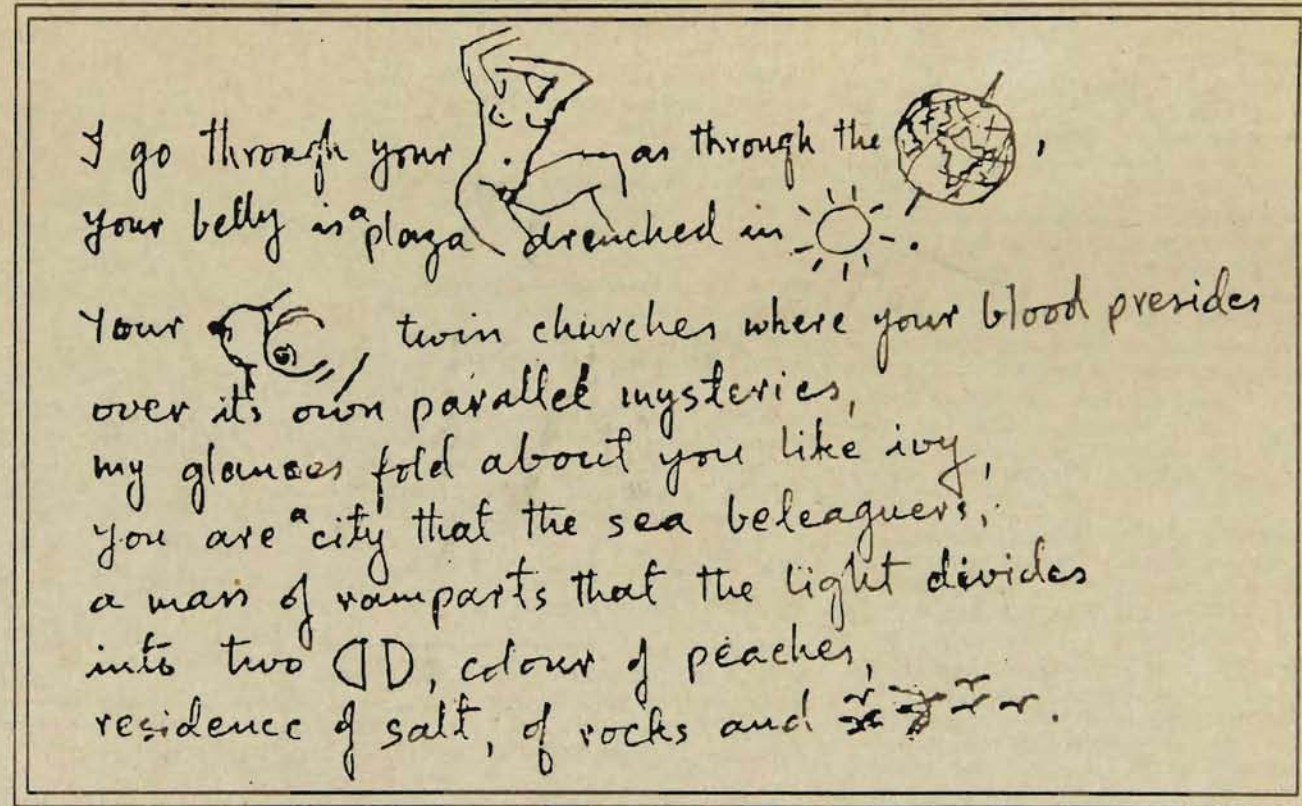
PRAISED and panned throughout his brilliant, eclectic career, Maqbool Fida Husain has decided to kiss-and-tell in a new biography. The book, out this week from Harper Collins, is guaranteed to stir salacious interest in the life and loves of India's best known painter.

Beyond the Canvas: An Unfinished Portrait of M F Husain is a melange of memories, candid conversations and intimate letters that sometimes reads like the randy recollections of a man possessed. And possessed he was by a series of nubile nymphets and an assortment of *desi* and *angrezi memsahibs*.

There was Maria, a linguist with a doctorate in theology, to whom he besottedly gifted an entire exhibition in Prague in 1964. Maria inspired him to master English without formal tuition, so he could compose the following description of her kiss: "In the neighbourhood of your breath/ I have travelled close and far/ Under that shadow/ How wet are our naked words."

But for all his ardour, his similies are a little off the mark sometimes such as when he tells a later lover, 'Nahid': "You caused tremors so strong they felt like the delayed reaction of the Hiroshima explosion." He re-employs the same theme with a younger mistress, Namrata, whose bosom is like "twin 'anatomic' bombs."

MAID'S DAUGHTER: Husain, then in his



50s, had come a long way from his first tentative gropings with the maid's daughter, Butul: "One day while she was going up and down on a swing in the courtyard, stealthily I came and stood behind...and when the swing came close, I caught her. The feel of her body and her rounded bosom aroused such an intense passion in me that in the days that

followed I tried to be as bold and courageous as my cousin Tej who had succeeded in taking her to bed. It was of no avail... I could never go beyond the first caress with her."

The frustrating experience was to be repeated with a prostitute helpfully supplied by two thieves with whom Husain shared ac-

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