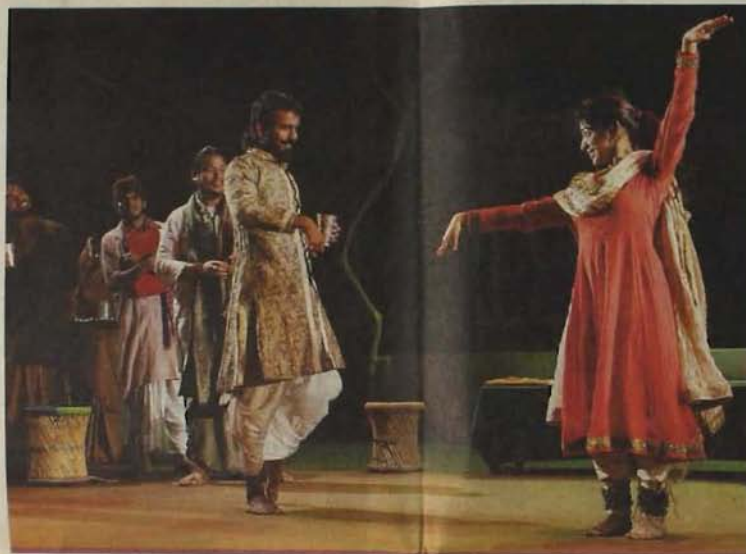


Written long before the October revolution in Russia, FAKIR MOHAN SENAPATI's book is the first Indian novel to deal with exploitation of landless peasants by a feudal lord in India. ROBIN DAS speaks to UTPAL K BANERJEE about his theatrical adaptation of the book



Law and the land



social and political authority. *Chhau Vigra Zameen*, presented recently by NSD's final-year students under the baton of thespian Robin Das faithfully brings the novel up front, literally chapter by chapter. There are two narrators valiantly presenting the streamlining of events to the viewers as they occur in different zones of the prosecution on a minimal set. Mangaraj mostly presents a stoic figure, as cir-

estate — his "zamindari" — to be snatched away. The spirited defence by Champa was to no avail and the meek did inherit the earth, Biblically speaking. Only the sudden symbolism of divine grace, redeeming the devastated Mangaraj into her fold, seemed a mere surrender to the superstitious belief system of 250 years ago.

Excerpts of an interview with the director.

on a vision of social equality and cultural self determination. Senapati was no romantic nationalist and his conception of language was based on his progressive social vision. He sought to popularise an egalitarian medium, sensitive enough to draw on the language of the paddy fields and village-markets. I belong to North Balasore district in the neighbourhood of Mayurbhanj district. The book uses their dialect, which has been retained.

■ Does your play's dialogues reflect the nuances of the original Oriya?

The play is in a mixed Hindi and Hindustani, Senapati was well-read in Shakespeare and European literature, with his novel reflecting social realism of his time. I think we have kept this flavour, which resembles that of Gogol.

■ What is your comment on the style of the play?

We have made it as narrative drama, as is done, say, in *Pundavani*.

Read the print

An exhibition at Art Indus gallery displays works of CHITTAPROSAD BHATTACHARYA, HAREN DAS and SOMNATH HORE on the Bengal famine. SAMIKSHA RAJ reports

You don't make art, you find it," Pablo Picasso had once remarked. The trio — Chittaprosad Bhattacharya, Haren Das and Somnath Hore — couldn't agree more with Picasso as it was the state of Bengal where they found their mojo and forced the society to take cognizance of their uplifting themes in works of art. "All the three artists' works share a common thread which is the Bengal famine period and the everyday life of the people there," says Vijay Laxmi, owner of gallery Art Indus, where the works of the three artists are being showcased in a group exhibition titled *Three Masters* (to continue till June 28).

Bhattacharya, India's most recognised political artist of the mid-20th century, is known for his reformist concerns. His works depict life of poor peasants and the feudal system in Bengal. His preferred medium are water-colour, pen and ink sketches and printmaking — linocuts and woodcuts. One of his finest works is *Hungry Bengal*, a unique first-hand narrative of his journey through famine-gripped Midnapore which also features sketches depicting misery due to the natural calamity — carved faces, barren trees and lined rib-cages. One of its copies is now in the possession of Delhi Art Gallery. Das is known as one of the finest graphic artists of the country who worked almost exclusively in printmaking medium. He captured rural, pastoral Bengal — cobbled streets, buffaloes, women with pots on their heads are a reflection of his own childhood spent at the place. He excelled, particularly in woodcuts and wood engravings, in addition to linocuts, etchings and lithographs. Some of his best works include *The Pigeon's Home* (woodcut), *The Santhal Girl* (wood engraving) and *The Nuliah in Puri Sea Beach* (woodcut). His finesse in handling



cement mould out of clay) to his name, which is his own innovation. It was used to create his popular art series, *Wounds*, which was inspired by what he witnessed during the famine

Chittaprosad's priceless works are hardly available today.

So, how are paintings selected for an exhibition and how does an art gallery preserve its prized possessions? "If it's a solo event we go with the artist's themes, otherwise we've also held events on themes such as colour and child. We try to skip having themes as it restricts the artists participation in the exhibition. There are different preservation techniques for different media. For instance, a water-colour painting cannot be dis-

...theft, of affection and of property and... set in those flawed times of the third quarter of the century when the Queen Victoria's imprimatur was being drawn on the prevailing script of turbulence and chaos. Penned by Fakir Mohan Senapati as his earliest literary oeuvre, the story of Ramachandra Mangaraj, the petty landowner, reveals several layers of nuanced implications in a fractured society where Mangaraj places mistress Champa far above the wedded wife, tweaks the law to add on his already considerable land-assets, curries favour under the fast-fading Nawab-rule by offering the potentate a dancing damsel and continues to project a benign figure for himself to all around. In a complex web of literary text, Senapati — although remaining a critic of the British colonial rule — also offers a powerful indictment of

...ly brings the novel up front, literally chapter by chapter. There are two narrators valiantly presenting the streaming of events to the viewers as they occur in different zones of the prose-nium on a minimal set. Mangaraj mostly presents a stolid figure, as circumstances are drawn and re-drawn around him: With indulged sons mouthing their soliloquy; the pampered brides-in-law playing cards all the while; the trespassing in the cousin's yard at dawn and ensuring illegal possession; the brief fight with the rival Bagh Singh and its solution by surreptitiously setting Bagh's house on fire and the encounter with the Nawab's corrupt representative to overwhelm him with gifts and extract fabulous concessions.

The tables are turned with the British legal paraphernalia overtaking his sinister doings and at the end the "judge sahib" ordering his landed

...In your dramatisation, have you closely followed his idiom?

Indeed, the linguistic innovations of his novel inaugurated the age of modern Oriya prose. They were based

...of time. I think that was the key flavour, which resembles that of Gogol. ■What is your comment on the style of the play?

We have made it as narrative drama, as is done, say, in *Pandavani*. The events progress in keeping with the flow of the novel. Some minor characters and insignificant incidents are omitted, otherwise the main flow has been kept in Toto. The beauty of the original is that it easily lends itself to the *Paalaa Gaan* format, which has been our style, too.

■What about costume and music?

It is period costume, when *dhoti* and shirt were freely blended. Music has been kept as prevalent in our districts, within the limitations of availability of musical instruments in the Capital. Sarengi has been a boon.

in addition to linocuts, etchings and lithographs. Some of his best works include *The Pigeon's Home* (woodcut), *The Santhal Girl* (wood engraving) and *The Nuliah in Puri Sea Beach* (woodcut). His finesse in handling engraving tools to create fine details, perceptive treatment of light and usage of vignette make his works a sight to behold.

Recognised not only as an artist but also a social-activist, Hore is one of the pioneers of the 20th century Art Movement and a prominent printmaker (mainly lithograph and intaglio) and sculptor. The agonies of Bengal famine and wars and the anguished human form formed the crux of his artworks. He also has a printmaking technique, pulp-prints (made by using

...ment moulded out of clay) to his name, which is his own innovation. It was used to create his popular art series, *Wounds*, which was inspired by what he witnessed during the famine period. Another of his popular work, *Mother with Child* — a large sculpture that paid homage to people's struggle in Vietnam, was stolen soon after it was completed. It was the plight of the common man during the colonial period, that Bhattacharya, Das and Hore wanted the world to take notice of.

The gallery owner adds that the response to the group exhibition has been tremendous. The collection has rarity associated with it; especially artist

...having themes as it restricts the artists participation in the exhibition. There are different preservation techniques for different media. For instance, a water-colour painting cannot be displayed against very harsh light and has to be double-mounted, explains Laxmi.

A picture is worth a thousand words. "When you stand in front of a painting, it should bring out strong feelings and emotions. The emotions may be repulsive in nature but the painting should have that emotional connect with the viewer," says Laxmi.

She also differentiates art and craft. "Craft is more about skill, art always has a concept to it," she says.

Summer special

Paintings displayed at Art Life Gallery convey messages on women and child exploitation. By ANANAYA BANERJEE



From fiery red to burnt orange and ochre shades, there's a range of colours welcoming you at the Art Life Gallery. The theme for the ongoing exhibition is shades of summer and the collection of paintings hint at the variation of colours that the earth dons during summer. At a glance, the exhibition looks like a kaleidoscope of unique expressions of artists who have come together to give a physical form to their creative instincts.

A veteran in his field, Sherv Singh Kukkal has dabbled in every form of painting. He graduated from a renowned institute in Lucknow in the 60s and received formal training in photography later. His recent works have been diverse as he likes to keep switching to a different medium. His works being featured in the exhibition, showcase nature in its full glory.

Chitra Singh, who is an associate professor and a doting mother of two, took up painting as a hobby once her children grew up. Her work has clear feminist leaning as she tries to capture the state of women in our current culture. She usually displays her paintings with a poetic subtext. "I always leave my paintings a little raw so that they look natural and edgy," she comments on her displayed work which shows women waiting in the



dark for the sunrise to bring some hope to their lives.

Another female painter and a feminist, Timsy Banati, is an autodidact when it comes to art. With no formal training in art, Timsy took up the study of various disciplines on her own. Her work heavily draws from the horrific tales of rape and torment that women in Delhi face. Featuring dark shades of red and women in miserable conditions, her paintings show pain through the eyes of a victim. Her images are strong so that they do not get washed out from the public memory.

Anirban Khamaru is a trained artist from Kolkata and has an experience of over a decade in this field. His paintings are mostly abstracts but find a form if you delve into the thought behind them. He's an envi-

ronmentalist and deeply cares about the harm we are inflicting on nature. His paintings depict the loss of green cover, growing industrialisation and city's conversion into a concrete jungle. Whenever he finds time, he teaches underprivileged children. One of his paintings depicts a small boy in rags. Half of his face is dark and the other has intrepid blotches of ink, as if in a bid to fight against his circumstances.

A disciple of Kukkal, Acharya Biswajit is an accomplished sitar player, yoga teacher and a versatile artist. Biswajit's paintings are full of bold strokes and clashing colours that bring to life his imagination. He says that to show force in one's painting one needs to be fast and aware of motion around oneself, creating a spiritual connection between art and the artist. His paintings give a sense of latent motion where one feels a great potential for movement without actually moving.

"We have used art as a medium to convey something important to people. Usually art galleries don't see a regular footfall but with such work we really expect people to take a keen interest in art," says the curator and co-owner of Art Life Gallery, Priti Bajaj.

Twelve recent paintings by SH Raza, who has been painting for nearly 70 years now, are on display at the show, *SH Raza: Pyas*, in the Grosvenor Vadehra art gallery in London. "The exhibition which began on June 2 has received a phenomenal response. Two of his most appreciated works have been *Yoni* and *Bindu*. Although Raza could not attend the opening of the exhibition due to his ailing health, Conor Macklin, the director of Grosvenor Vadehra, attended the event which witnessed a major turnout of spectators," said Suresh Nigam from Vadehra Art Gallery.

Raza is among the pioneers of the modern art movement in India. He co-founded the Progressive Artists' Group in 1947 in Bombay with FN Souza, MF Husain and KH Ara.

The exhibition showcases some of his latest works portraying the artist's long-held aesthetic ideals, the paintings that reflect his strong connection with India and its heritage. "Raza is India's greatest living artist and rightly holds a place as one of the pioneers of modern art in India. Raza is an artist whose works are in constant demand and we expect strong interests from both Indian and Western buyers," said Macklin.

What she comes across while travelling usually forms the base of Rouble Nagi's installations. Being an army officer's daughter, Nagi has travelled extensively and she draws her inspiration from people she meets while travelling. One of her largely appreciated works, *The Lovers*, is based in Panchsheel park, Delhi. "The Lovers" have been carved out of white marble weighing six tonnes," she says.

Nagi has studied fine arts in London and has been working extensively in mosaic installation which is largely influenced by the works of the famous architect, Antoni Gaudi. "His designs are



Carved to impress

ROUBLE NAGI's installations are inspired by the works of famous architect Antoni Gaudi. She talks to TRISHA MUKHERJEE about her public art works

radically different and largely drawn from different forms of nature," says the artist. Nagi's art installation at the Bandstand in Mumbai is a work of mosaic in bronze.

Emphasising on the importance of these installations, especially in the public spaces, she says, "Art can lift up your mood. After a tired day at work, it always feels good to

look at something beautiful on your drive back home."

Art installations can be made out of variety of materials. From bronze and marble to fibre and textured glass, almost everything can be carved into beautiful installations. The weather, however, is an important factor while choosing the material. "A lot of things have to be taken

care of while working on an outdoor installation. One should always pick up a medium that is suitable for the weather as well as topography," informs Nagi.

"Considering that India is an extremely polluted country, the installations have to be made out of materials that can be easily cleaned and maintained. For instance, *The Lovers* is made out of marble which can be easily cleaned with soap water and the one at Bandstand only needs to be wiped with a dry fabric," she adds. A lot of experimentation is being done in installation art and motion art is gradually coming into picture in India.

