

# 'Husain had the innocence of a child'

Bangalorean painter Gurudas Shenoy remembers his Baba, known to the world as Maqbool Fida Husain, on his third death anniversary

by Reema Moudgil

**Bangalore:** Maqbool Fida Husain passed away on June 9, in 2011 and left behind a legacy that is misunderstood by a few but loved and celebrated by many. Many years ago, he was visiting Husain Sankalana in the city and sat chatting with journalists. Bare feet, a long brush in hand, eyes twinkling with laughter. Despite the white beard, he had the energy of a child. Trusting, open and full of innocence. That really was the time of innocence because by 2008 things had changed. The Sankalana had to be closed and Husain would spend the last few years of his life away from the country that had made him an iconic, globally recognised artist. Senior artist G S Shenoy and his son, also a well-known artist, Gurudas Shenoy shared a close relationship with Husain. It was Husain who would frequently remind Gurudas to document his father's vast body of work in a book. The book came out last year and according to Gurudas, it would not have happened if Husain had not been watching over it. In an exclusive chat with *City Express*, Gurudas Shenoy, shares some rare photographs and a first-person account drenched in nostalgia.

"Husain being a close family friend would come home often even after my father's death. They went back a long way and spent hours discussing art and life. He once accompanied my father to the Karnataka Kala Mela and made a beautiful work called *Luv Kush* that was used to raise money for the fair. In 1990, when I had finished my art degree from Baroda, Husain insisted on driving us all to see his new passion, the Husain Sankalana in Koramangala where he wanted to document his graphic works, lithographs, silk screens and etchings. I ended up taking care of the space in his absence and it was a vibrant meeting place for architects, musicians and creative people.

We would have concerts, jazz evenings, children's workshops there. Once we had a retrospective of Wahida Rehman's films and the space was converted into a theatre

and a studio for the occasion. Husain wanted it to be a place for freedom of expression. He began the Gaja Gamini Club and we once had Manna De over who sang and shared anecdotes.

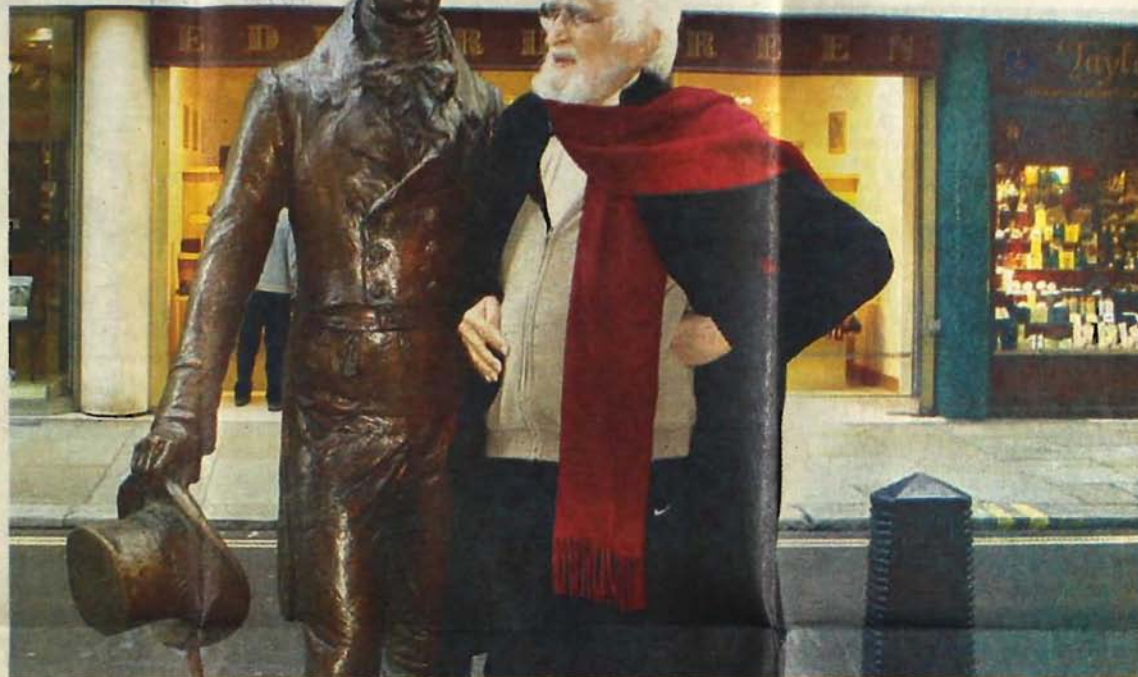
Husain was one of the most sensitive human-beings I have ever met. He never had a negative thing to say about anyone. He wanted to celebrate life and help others to do the same. When the Sankalana had to be shut down, he said, "I don't want to hurt anyone. Let it be." There was such innocence and love for simple things. He loved to have coffee at the Manipal Hospital canteen on the old Airport Road. Once, he came back from the airport without boarding a flight. When asked why, said, "*Arre yaar, main MTR ki idli khana bhool gaya.*"

Once I handed his boarding pass to him and went back thinking that he will board his flight. A few hours later, I saw him wandering on MG Road and was shocked! I stopped and asked him, "Baba, what happened?" He said nonchalantly, "The flight was delayed aur mera mood chala gaya. Now, we will walk around and have fun. I will have *dot wala banana* (spotted banana)!"

He also called me in the middle of the night from a taxi once and said that he couldn't find my house. Finally when he was home, he said, "*Bahut bhookh lagi hai!*" My wife dished up some quick *dosas* and he relished them and we were up till the wee hours of the morning, talking.

Once he heard some classical CDs of Rashid Khan in my house. He used to love raga Hamsadhwani and fell in love with Rashid Khan's voice and told me, "Guru, *mujhe bhi Rashid Khan chahiye!*" So we went to a music shop to buy every single Rashid Khan CD they had! A few days later, he called me from Kolkata and said, "Guru! Guess, who I am with! Rashid Khan!" He had actually gone to Kolkata to meet the singer. He was like that. Enthusiastic and guileless and fluently unrestricted in whatever he did.

Even when he was in London, away from his country, his joy for life did not fade. He invited me to



During a stroll across London Gurudas Shenoy made Husain strike a pose and he sportingly did so



Shenoy and Husain worked closely at Husain Sankalana, the museum in Koramangala, to make it a creative hub

London to his penthouse overlooking Hyde Park and took me, my wife and daughter for a walk to Oxford. It was cold and he was not wearing footwear but just a pair of woollen socks. He was walking around like a child, showing me this and that, taking us to his favourite food places and cafes. His energy and love for life was bound-

less. He used to say, "One life is not enough for all that I want to do. I want two more life-times."

He also told me, "Picasso has done everything but I have done something that he has not!" So I asked, "What, Baba?" And he smiled, "Films!"

He was the only artist who was recognised even by the people on

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— Gurudas Shenoy, artist

the streets. Once he went with me to a corporate building in Bangalore to see my mural but the security guy would not let us in. Then suddenly, he veered towards Husain, pointed a finger and stuttered, "You...you are famous. You are an artist...you are Zakir Husain! No... Saddam Husain?" And Husain just kept smiling calmly.

He loved India and even after so much negativity, never complained. I saw him being interviewed in Dubai by an international paper and he said, "I love my people. I miss my country...I want to go back."

I would not like to remember that he never could. I would like to

remember him on MG Road during India's semi-final win in the cricket world-cup. Everyone was dancing and Husain bought loads of balloons and started releasing and distributing them. He became one with the crowd. Then someone recognised him and there was a mini stampede with people pushing each other to get close to him. To take his autograph. That outpouring of love, is something, I hope he took with him.

He called me in May 2011, wanting to see me but I could not arrange the visa early enough. He said, "Come before June 8, if possible." On June 9, he was gone. Yet, he hasn't left. Not really.