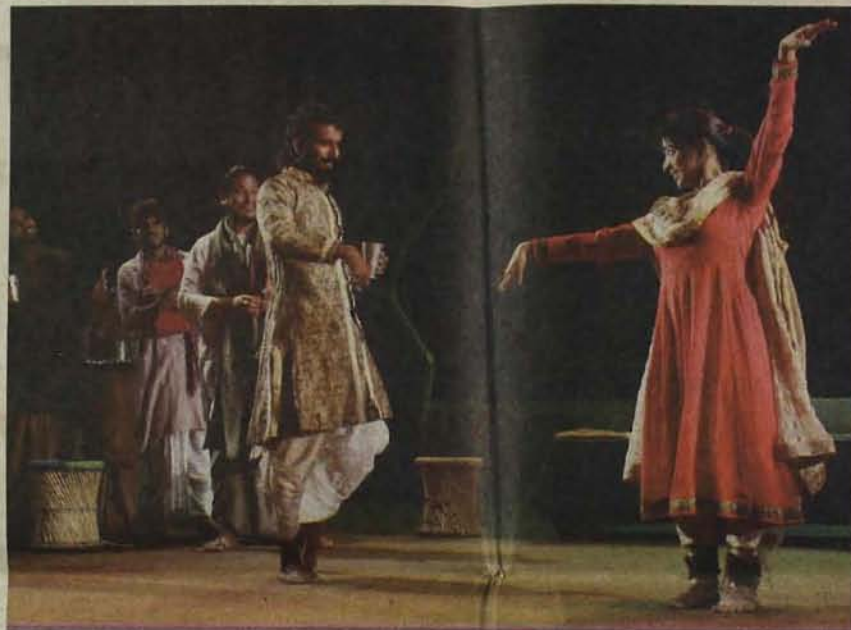


Written long before the October revolution in Russia, FAKIR MOHAN SENAPATI's book is the first Indian novel to deal with exploitation of landless peasants by a feudal lord in India. ROBIN DAS speaks to UTPAL K BANERJEE about his theatrical adaptation of the book

Can one have authentic telepor-  
tation by a quarter of a millen-  
nium, bang after the decade of  
India's first war of Independence? If one  
can, one would then find, a la Dickens,  
"the best of times and the worst of  
times." On one hand, after the blood-  
shed and the ravages of the Mutiny and  
its aftermath, a universal law and  
order regimen was established, a new  
legal system of revenue administration  
introduced, the judiciary — complete  
with magistrates and lawyers — came  
into force and a pan-Indian governance  
of the British India attempted with full  
vigour. On the other hand, the system  
of evil landlord had come up under the  
guise of long-term lease and tenancy,  
the whole class of "zamindars" created  
to exploit poor peasants and the  
entire legal machinery skillfully manip-  
ulated to create layers of irredeemable  
tyranny.

*Chha Maana Atha Guntha* (Six  
Acres and a Third) is an Oriya classic  
serialised in the closing years of the  
19th century and published in 1902 as  
a revolutionary contribution to the pre-  
vailing Oriya literature. It weaves a tale  
of wealth and greed, of property and  
theft, of affection and debauchery: set  
in those flawed times of the third quar-  
ter 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,



## Law and the land



social and political authority. *Chhau  
Vigha 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 nar-  
rators valiantly presenting the stream-  
ing of events to the viewers as they  
occur in different zones of the prosce-  
nium on a minimal set. Mangaraj  
mostly presents a stoic figure, as cir-  
cumstances are drawn and re-drawn  
around him: With indulged sons

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

Excerpts of an interview with the  
director.

■ **How does Senapati's work stand out  
in the Oriya literary scene?**

on a vision of social equality and cul-  
tural self determination. Senapati was  
no romantic nationalist and his con-  
ception of language was based on his  
progressive social vision. He sought to  
popularise an egalitarian medium,  
sensitive enough to draw on the lan-  
guage 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 *Pandavani*.  
The events progress in keeping with the  
flow of the novel. Some minor charac-

## 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 cog-  
nizance 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 *Print:  
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 jour-  
ney 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 me-  
dium. He captured rural, pastoral  
Bengal — cobbled streets, buf-  
faloes, 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* (wood-  
cut). His finesse in handling  
engraving tools to create fine  
details, perceptive treatment of



Chittaprosad's priceless works  
are hardly available today.

So, how are paintings selec-  
ted 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  
mother and child. We try to skip  
having themes as it restricts the  
artists participation in the ex-  
hibition. There are different pres-  
ervation techniques for different  
media. For instance, a water-  
colour painting cannot be dis-  
played against very harsh light  
and has to be double-mounted,"

cement mould out of clay) to his  
name, which is his own innova-  
tion. 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



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

mooring their society; the painted 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

writer long before the October revolution in Russia, his book is the first Indian novel to deal with exploitation of landless peasants by a feudal lord in India. It is set within colonial Indian polity, from the perspective of the ordinary villagers and peasants, the "foot soldiers."

**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

on the use of vernacular language and were 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.

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

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, Sher 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-

ronmental 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 Artist's 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* has 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.



## Mark of the master

The ongoing show at Grosvenor Vadehra art gallery in London showcases twelve latest works by SH RAZA. The exhibition is witnessing a major turnout of spectators

