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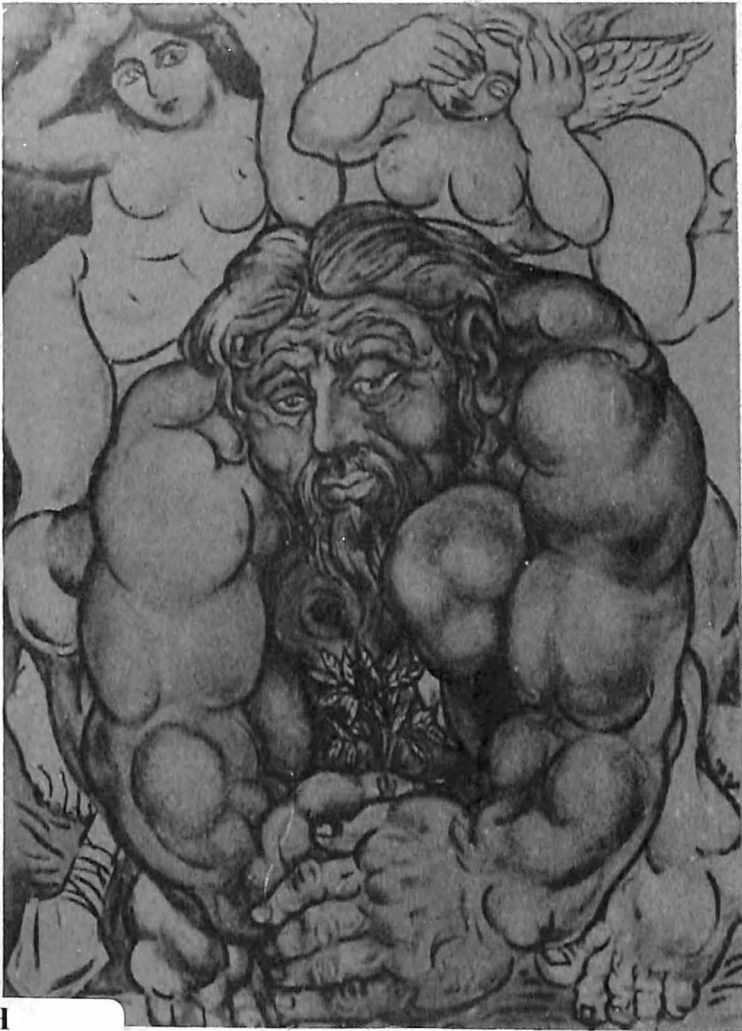


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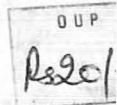
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CONTEMPORARY ART SERIES OF BANGLADESH-I



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S. M. SULTAN



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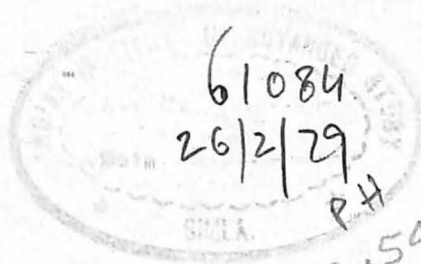
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Edited by DR. MUHAMMAD SIRAJUL ISLAM

Published by the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy on the occasion  
of a Solo Exhibition in its gallery by S. M. Sultan.

PRINTED BY UDAYAN PRESS



## S. M. SULTAN

Sheikh Mohammed Sultan, a doyen in erstwhile Pakistan Art Circle was born in the Masimdia village of Jessore in 1924. The child prodigy was initiated into aesthetics by his mason-father. Hardly eleven, he showed promises as a painter by life-portraying Dr. Shyama Prashad Mukherjee in 1935 at Narail. It was around this time that the favours of the art-loving Zamindars of Narail fell on him and soon did the talents of this teen-ager freelancer impressed a connoisseur like Prof. Shahed Suhrawardy. Professor Suhrawardy wanted the talents inherent in Sultan to combine with the discipline of formal art education. This would mean admission to the College of Arts in Calcutta but the required academic background for it did never fall on the way of Sultan. Despite this handicap, however, Professor Suhrawardy saw that the boy was admitted to the College whereas the Zamindars of Narail continued their favours on him. In only three years of his college life in Calcutta Sultan earned a name in the Art circle there and in no time he won over the master-painters like Mukul Dey, R. N. Chatterjee, Ramen Chatterjee and, so also, Zainul Abedin. At a moment when

so much was expected of him, Sultan disappointed his admirers and disappeared from the college in 1945. The bounds of the four walls of the college with all its rules and regulations, formulae and principles, proved too much for Sultan whose entire growth had taken place in the lap of Nature and who came to believe in complete freedom and virtuosity for the cultivation of art. The child of Nature returned where he belonged to. He was now to be seen down the river banks, deep into the forests, high on the hill-tops and far into the meadows and orchards. Like a wandering Darvesh he kept on roving now on foot and now on a mule. He would prostrate on the spot for a meal or, say, sketch for a bed. His wants were extremely limited as they are now. With the simplicity of a child he sang and danced and played on flute as he went on painting straight from the Book of Nature. Sultan, thus, became primarily a landscape painter in oil as well as water colour.

S. M. Sultan held his first Solo Exhibition in 1947 at Simla which was opened by the Maharaja of Karpurtala. Chequered as his career has been, he associated himself with the Khaksar Movement of Allama Mashriqui in 1947 and he continued his association with the movement till 1949. He, then, settled in Lahore and held his second solo exhibition there at the Y. M. C. A. in 1950. Malik Firoz Khan Noon inaugurated the Exhibition. In the same year Miss Fatema Jinnah opened another one-man exhibition of Sultan's in Karachi. In 1951 he represented Pakistan in the seminar sponsored by the Institute of International Education in New York. During his visit to the United States he held numerous exhibitions at various cities and cultivated close contact with the distinguished art critics there. While in London, he held an exhibition at the Leischer Gallery alongside the paintings of Matisse, Picasso and Dali. His second exhibition in London was held at the Art Equity of Hamstead. His contact with the painters and art historians of the United Kingdom was also very close and intimate. Widely acclaimed abroad as a versatile painter in 1952 Sultan returned to Karachi where, indeed, a host of his admirers received him so well. But in 1953,

beyond anybody's guess a homesick Sultan retired to his village home and took on himself the onerous task of imparting art education amongst the village boys and girls. With this in view he founded the Nandan Kanan School of Fine Arts in Jessore. He, however, continued to live the life of a recluse. He almost withdrew himself from the worldly life so much so that he renounced his palette and brush for quite sometime. In 1968, however, we find him back to painting, his first love, as he starts the Institute of Fine Arts at Narail. A confirmed bachelor, Sultan may well be said to have been wedded to painting. Just like him, he suddenly appeared with a number of 4'x8' spatula works in oil and took the art lovers by surprise in an exhibition at the Khulna Club in 1969.

After an isolation and detachment for about two decades S. M. Sultan chose suddenly to participate in the First National Art Exhibition organised by the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy in 1975 which spoke of the great potentialities in him that might choose to remain dormant at times but, to be very sure, knew no death. By organising in September, 1976 an exhibition of some of his very recent works, the Shilpakala Academy meant to arouse this mendicant painter (who otherwise would have preferred flight from the society) again to the art of painting. Outstanding has been the result. Here is a display with difference in the sense that never before had any artist dared to wield masterly strokes on such a large canvas and in such a large scale (as many as seventeen 4'x10' oil paintings within three months). Besides, his characteristic mannerism is eminently displayed through other medias like water colour, charcoal works, ink and pencil sketches as well. Disciplined and dedicated, detached though, as an artist, Sultan has revelled in folk motifs, obtainable from the typically innocent and unassuming genre chores of the village folk. By harmonious and skilful combination of delicate lines and pigments, Sultan has succeeded in depicting underlying emotions of the toiling masses, their joys as well as sorrows. In his engaging subject matters like ploughing, sowing, harvesting, winnowing, husking, struggling for land occupation and the like, he has proved himself to be a past-master by capturing the dynamic movement of the robust menfolk as well as the delicate charm of the extremely coyish village belle. Pathos of the

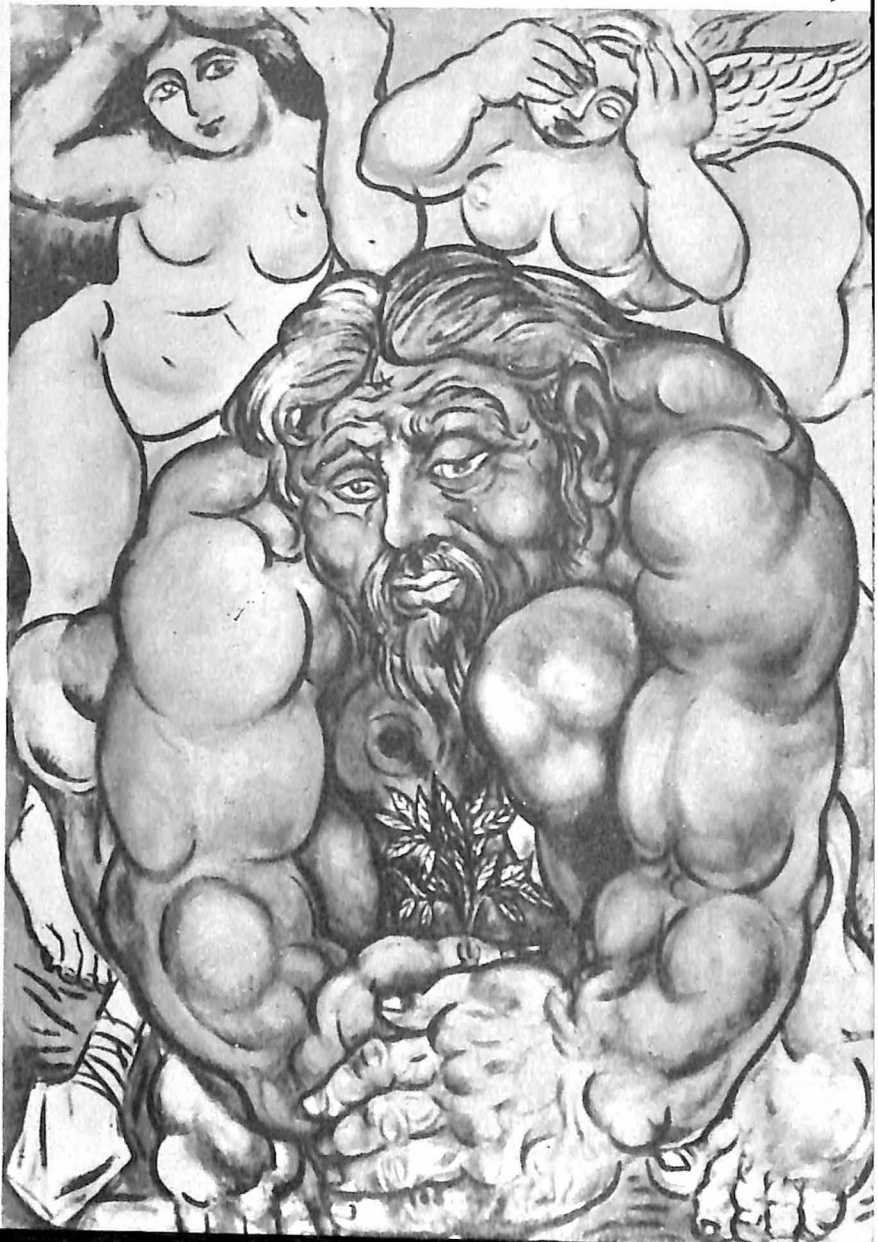
anguished soul is writ large on the facial expressions of the 'Martyrs' representing the youth tortured to death during the War of Liberation in Bangladesh. On the other hand serenity and self-contentment is depicted with the same amount of skill in the faces of the boldly drawn muscular figure of a peasant dragging on with his wife and kid. S. M. Sultan is pre-eminently a realist but his style is post-impressionistic and treatment eloquently expressionistic. He is a great composer for he never misses the meticulous details of the landscape and pictorial compositions are instantly enlivened by the tonality of colour and his masterly strokes. In the 'Morning Bath', his figures assume rhythmic pose, and colour appears in variegated contrast.

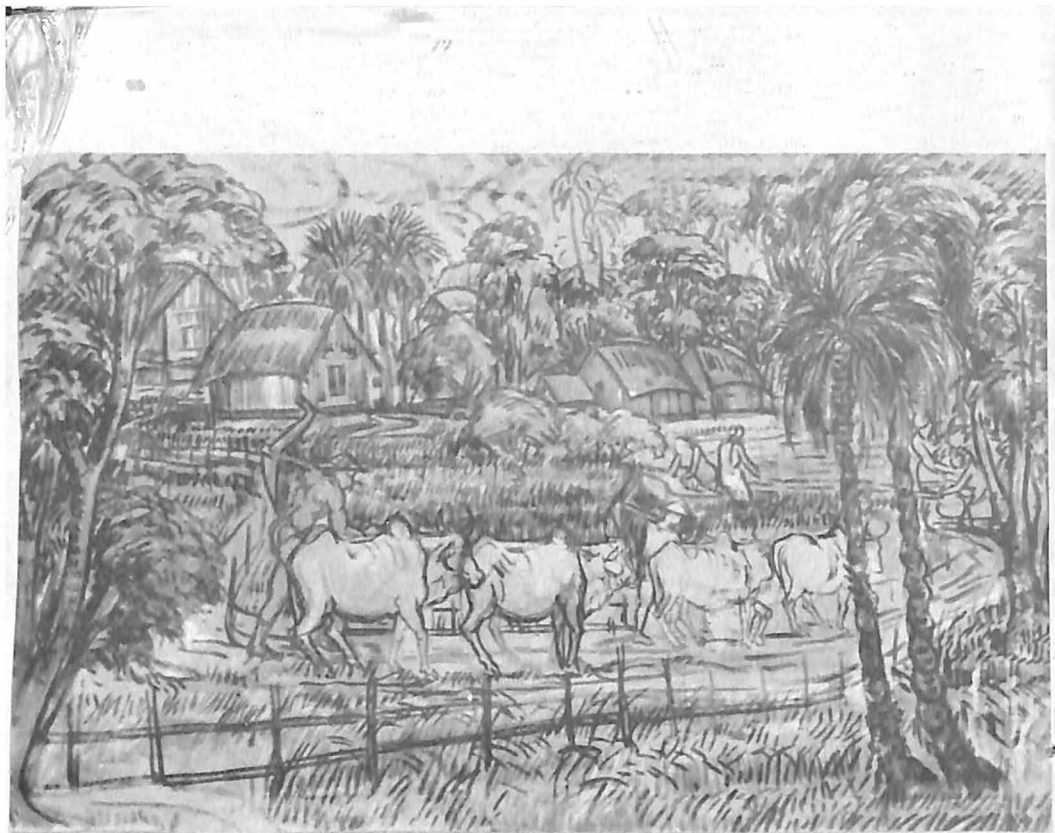
In introducing some primitive motifs, depicting Adam and Eve, such as 'Adam's First Plantation', 'Eve offering milk to her children', 'Adam drinking out of a clay pot shaped by Eve' and so on, S. M. Sultan provides a moral and spiritual touch in his exceptionally powerful and vigorous paintings. In fine, S. M. Sultan's paintings are not only aesthetically satisfying but also deeply moving in its human significance.

M.S.I.



THE PLATES

































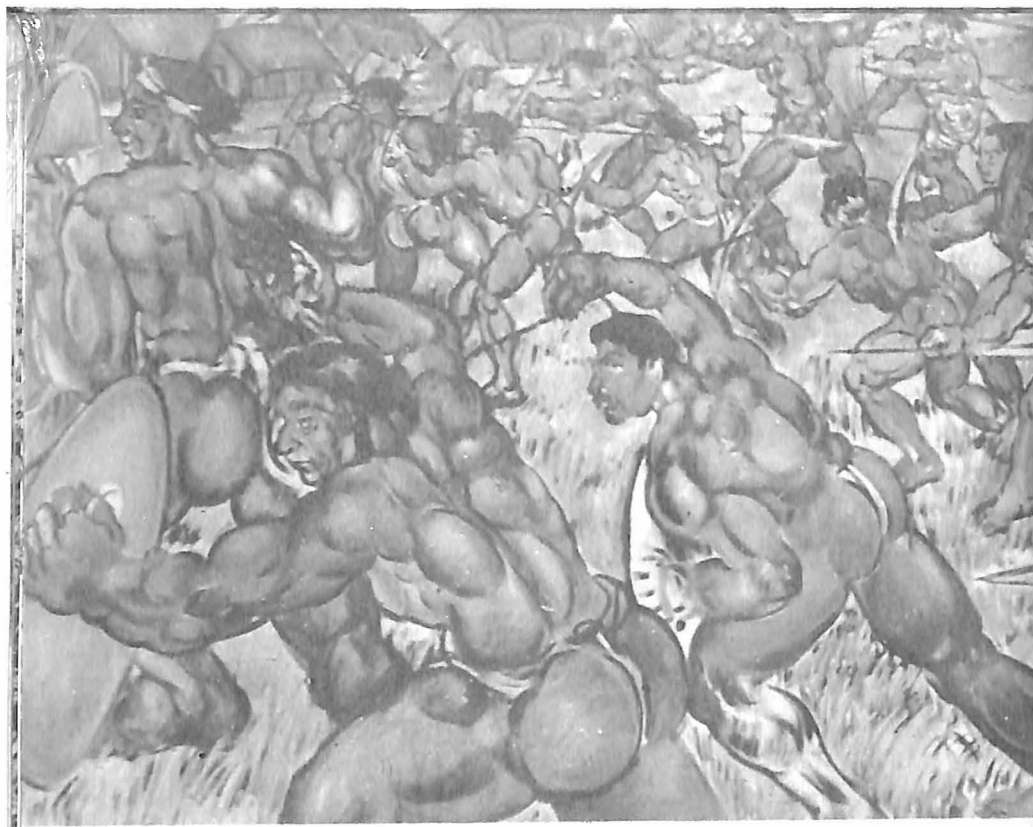


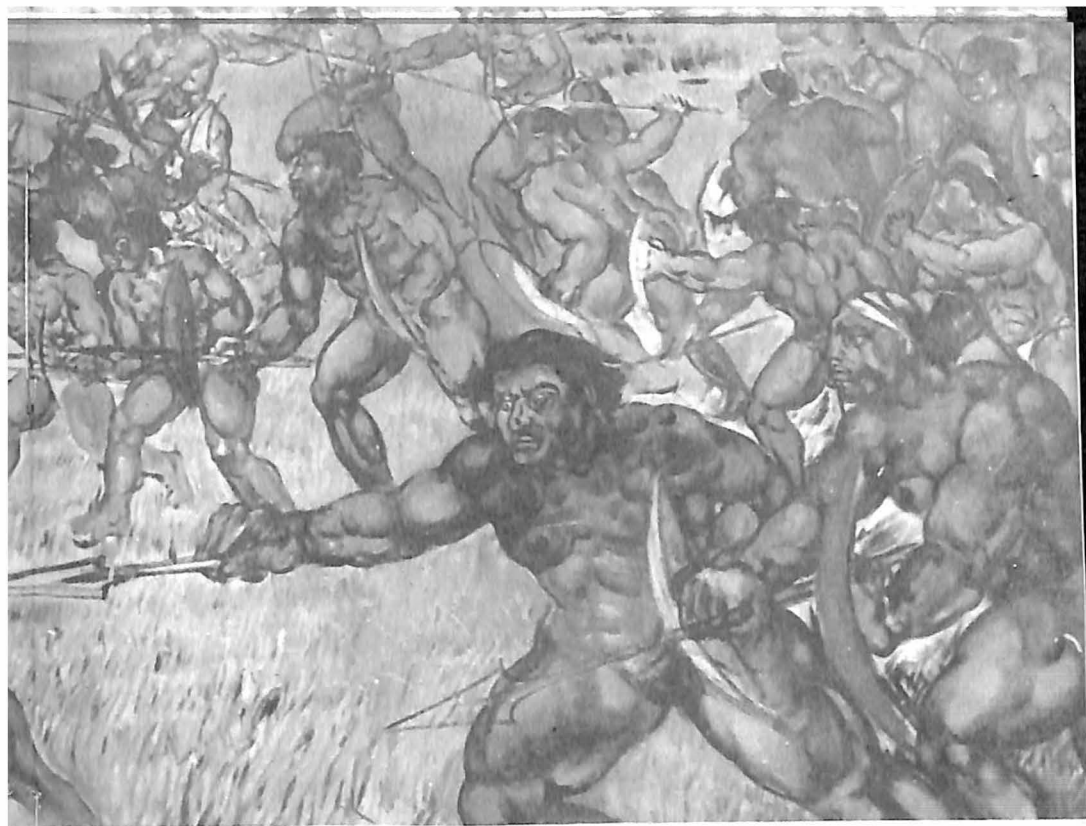


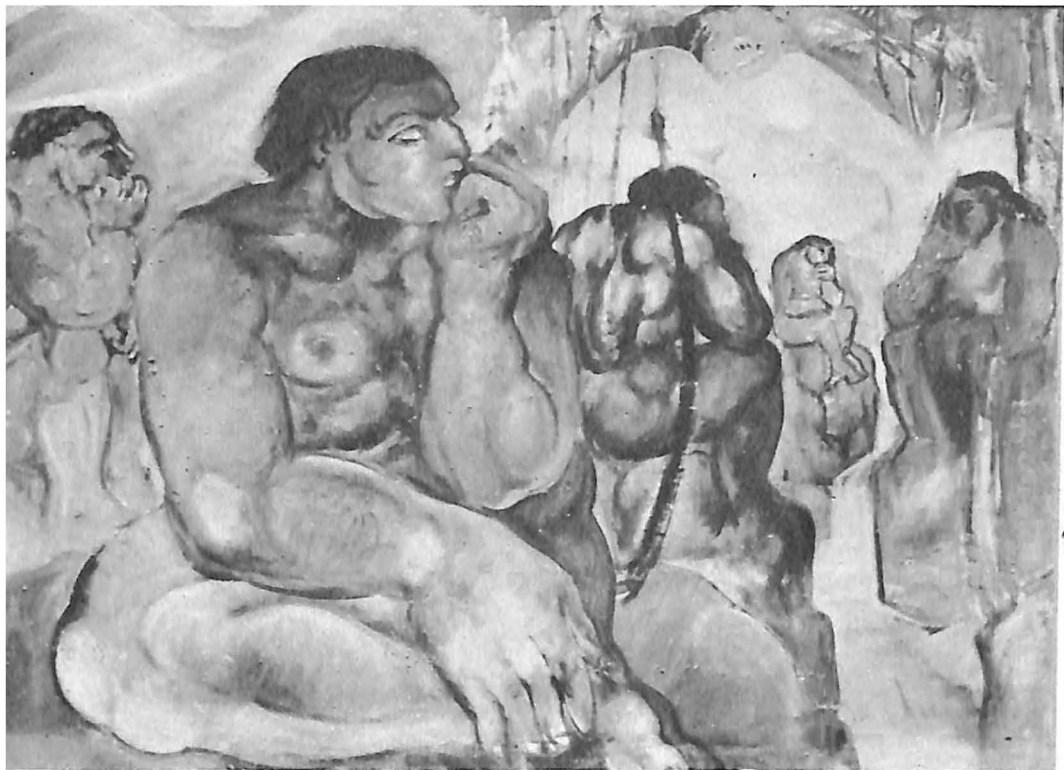












## THE PLATES

No.	TITLE	SIZE	MEDIUM	YEAR
1.	The First Plantation	146x107 cms	Oil on Canvas	1976
2.	Farmer after Work	120x75 cms	Oil on Canvas	1976
3.	The Ashamed	24 x 19 cms	Pen & Ink	1959
4.	Village Life in Autumn	303x120 cms	Oil on Board	1976
5.	Carrying the Burden	303x120 cms	Oil on Board	1976
6.	The Village Canal	71 x 38 cms	Oil on Canvas	1976
7.	The Frightened	20 x 16 cms	Pencil	1959
8.	Carrying Water	120 x 96 cms	Oil on Canvas	1976
9.	Farmers at Fishing	120 x 75 cms	Oil on Canvas	1976
10.	Behind the Plough	71 x 38 cms	Oil on Canvas	1976
11.	While Winnowing	303x120 cms	Oil on Board	1976
12.	Plucking Shapla	120 x 90 cms	Oil on Canvas	1976
13.	The Chased	20 x 16 cms	Pencil	1959
14.	At Harvest	71 x 38 cms	Oil on Canvas	1976
15.	Fishing	71 x 38 cms	Oil on Canvas	1976
16.	Processing Jute	71 x 38 cms	Oil on Canvas	1976
17.	The Contented	20 x 16 cms	Pencil	1959
18.	Capturing the 'Char'	303x120 cms	Oil on Board	1976
19.	Retrospect	146x107 cms	Oil on Canvas	1976



## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

- 1924: Born at Narail, Jessore.
- 1935: Painted portrait of Dr. Shyama Prashad Mukherjee.
- 1942: Left for Calcutta.
- 1943: Admitted to Government Art School, Calcutta.
- 1945: Left Calcutta Art School.
- 1947: First Solo Exhibition at Simla inaugurated by the Maharaja of Karpurtala.
- 1947-49: Joined the Khaksar Movement.
- 1949: Reached Lahore.
- 1950: Second Solo Exhibition organised by YMCA and inaugurated by Sir Feroz Khan Noon at Lahore.

Third Solo Exhibition organised by YWCA and inaugurated by Miss Fatema Jinnah at Karachi.

- 1951: Represented Pakistan in the Seminar organised under the auspices of the Institute of International Education at New York.

Held 17 one-man shows in different cities of U. S. A.

Held several one-man shows in London. Also participated in the Group Exhibition along with the works of Picasso, Matisse and Dali.

- 1952: Returned to Karachi.
- 1953: Returned to native village and established 'Nandan Kanan School of Fine Arts' at Narail.
- 1959-68: Lived with village folk drifting away from the world of art.
- 1968: Back to the palette.  
Opened the Institute of Fine Arts at Narail.
- 1969: Exhibition at Khulna Club.
- 1975-76: Participated in the First and Second National Art Exhibition at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, Dacca.
- 1976: First Solo Exhibition in Bangladesh sponsored by the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy inaugurated by Kazi Anwarul Haque, Member of the President's Advisory Council, Govt. of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and the inauguration presided over by Professor Abul Fazal, Chairman, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy Parishad.

