

Pulak Gogoi



Artist-filmmaker Pulak Gogoi has left an indelible impression on Assam's cultural landscape.

Be it canvas or behind the lens, a relentless passion for art, a creative eye and perseverance have earned him name and fame over the years.

Painting was his first love. "Art is something which is beautiful and capable of entertaining people. As a child I was passionate about painting and my love for art even led me to quit a government job back in 1961," he says.

Born to Soneswar Gogoi (an actor) and Gunabala Gogoi in 1938 at Jorhat, Gogoi did his schooling at his birthplace before becoming a student of the Bandra School of Art, Mumbai.

Ask the septuagenarian about his first break and he turns ecstatic.

"It was in the late forties and at the All Assam children art competition in Guwahati. I was a student of Class VI then and my friend, Bijoy Borthakur, encouraged me to take part in the competition. I sent one of my paintings to the organisers, and to my pleasant surprise, won the first prize," he says.

The feat was a turning point as Gogoi also nurtured a dream of becoming a teacher after being influenced by the personality of litterateur Syed Abdul Malik. "I also cherished a dream of becoming an Assamese teacher. Malik sir was a tenant at our Jorhat house and also taught us at JB College. He was my role model," he says.

But as luck would have it the painting competition changed the course of his life. "The painting was even published in a popular daily at that time. I became famous among friends. The positive vibes encouraged me to become a painter," Gogoi, now a resident of Dispur, recalls.

But Gogoi had his share of struggles after leaving his job for art. "In 1967, I went to Calcutta in search of greener pastures. But I ran short of funds. I was forced to put up in an abandoned car garage with my wife and 11-month-old daughter as I did not have the money to pay rent. I had to even mortgage the jewellery of my wife to publish a cartoon magazine. I am grateful to Bhupen da (Bhupen Hazarika) who helped me get a part-time job in a film studio. I was paid a remuneration of Rs 1500 and in those days (sixties) it was decent sum," he recalls.

But circumstances forced Gogoi to leave Calcutta in the same year itself. "The socio-economic situation in Calcutta wasn't conducive at that time, which prompted me to come back to Guwahati where I associated myself with Amar Pratinidhi, a magazine.

The young artist soon got his creative act together on canvas as he devoted his heart and soul to art. "In 1966, artist Pranab Baruah had gifted me a spatula out of endearment, which I religiously used on canvas. I preserved the token of love for 10 years. In the same year, I organised my first solo exhibition at the Nabin Bordoloi Library hall," he says.

The young painter did not look back since. From Tezpur to Duliajan to Washington in America, each of Gogoi's "subjective" oil paintings earned adulation.

"I exhibited my creations at Tezpur (1968), Duliajan and Dergaon (1969), Shillong (1970), Delhi (1971), at the Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai (1972), Academy of Fine Arts in Calcutta (1972), Washington Hodges Gallery, America, (1972) and Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi (1976), State Art Gallery (2007) and Jorhat Fine Arts Society (2008)," he says.

Gogoi's tryst with films dates back to his Bombay days. "I happened to meet art director A.A. Majid through an acquaintance in the late fifties. My interest in film-making grew after I met Majid under whom I worked as an art assistant for a few weeks," he says.

His interest in caricatures too started at the art school. "R.K. Laxman's brief visit to the Bandra School of Art inspired me to caricatures. The short statured cartoonist had an amazing personality," says Gogoi, who also earned the privilege of being Assam's first political cartoonist. He was briefly associated with The Assam Tribune as a cartoonist.

But his journey as a filmmaker began with a sacrifice. "I had to sell some of my paintings for funds to make my first film Khoj in 1975," he says. Interestingly, Gogoi, who has to his credit several short stories and a novel, has written all the scripts of his movies.

A string of films came his way and the late seventies saw the director hog the limelight. Srimoti Mahimamoyi, Sadori, Sendur, Suruj, Relor Alir Dubori Bon, Morom Nodir Gabhoru Ghat and Patni directed by him were popular. Besides, Gogoi directed several tele-films, short films and a television serial — Hridoy Jetia Nodi Hoi — telecast by Guwahati Doordarshan.

The filmmaker is now planning to make a movie based on a Maithili short story. "The film is based on ties between the Bihari community of Assam and the local populace," he adds.

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