

# *Le Mohabbat*



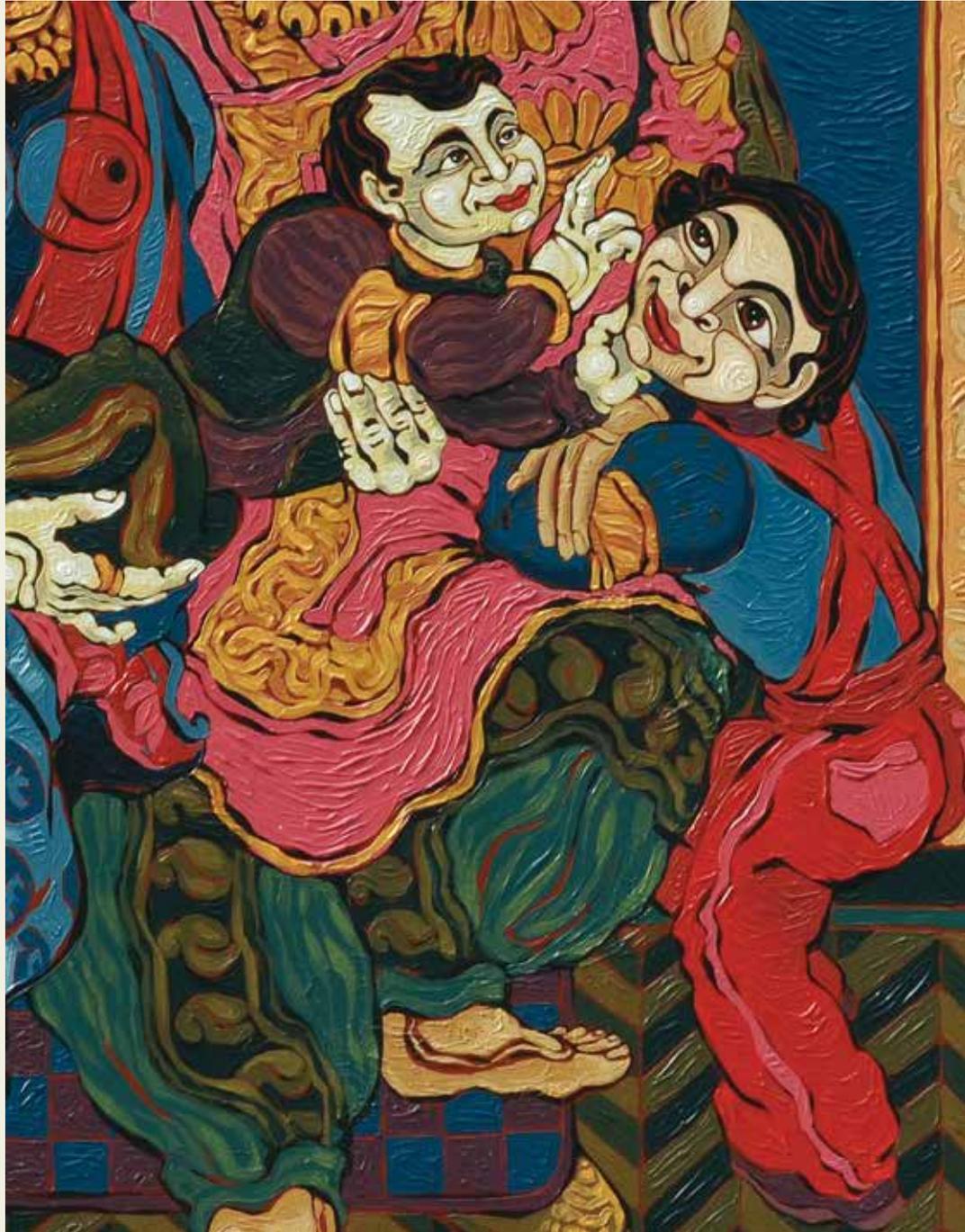
**Pradiptaa Chakraborty**



# *Ae Mohabbat*

*ae mohabbat tere anjām pe ronā aayā  
jaane kyuun aaj tere naam pe ronā aayā*

~ Shakeel Badayuni ~



# Paintings

by

**Pradiptaa Chakraborty**

*Curator*

**Uma Nair**



## From the Director's Desk

My dear patrons, artists, collectors, family and friends.

A very warm welcome to all. We are immensely grateful for your support through the years as Alturaash Art proudly embarks on its 11th year of being in existence. It is only through your love and support that we came this far. I have always looked at art and its market in a very different prospect and always wished to take our artists on a global platform, my intention to open the wider gateway of international patrons and connoisseurs for Indian art and artists has helped me explore a lot of avenues.

This is our first exhibition after the COVID-19 breakdown, our Indian gallery space in Delhi opens with this unique show of historical romances called "Ai Mohabbat" by artist Pradipta Chakraborty. In a world of deep despair and the shadow of deaths due to Covid, I feel, this is the time to showcase love and humanity as the world needs it more than ever.

These 6 works by Pradipta depict different love stories to shower the love of India to the world. I thank Curator Uma Nair for her historical commentary on these works. *Ae Mohabbat* must be an experience that touches the hearts of the viewer in ways like never before. As the panoramic work in the show states: We are mosaics, made up of bits and pieces of life's offerings.

**Asif Kamal**

Director





# *Ae Mohabbat*

## Traversing Historical Romances

Fusing a story with pictorial elements, Pradiptaa Chakroborty rediscovers, and re-contextualises historical romances in a unique genre of modernist moorings in painting by bringing it forward with his own personal idioms.

*Ae Mohabbat* unravels 6 works as the exemplification of an experimental approach to the genre of story telling. Encompassing painting, Pradiptaa creates resonant yet romantic articulations of the Indian miniaturist tradition by inserting new dialogues that are romantic but more realistic in nature. The stories of romance across regions and boundaries cast and creed form a rich archive of imagery. Not young, not beautiful but strong and full of character and vigour, perhaps older in age these characters bring us close to human reality framed in a format of gorgeous gravitas.

His visual vocabulary engages a multiplicity of themes including translation as narrative, the exploration of deviation as a means to cultivate new associations, and issues concerning social customs, scale and time. Narrative is a central aspect of Pradiptaa's practice. It is not only crucial to the traditional format of miniature painting, but it also appears in his engagement with the art of telling short stories in one frame. Pradiptaa harnesses the spirit of the heroines he picks, they have ruled hearts and minds for centuries. This show seeks to salute the spirit of medieval maidens who cut across societal pressures to create their own stories even as it personifies the beauty of folk traditions in story telling.

Two legendary love stories from Punjab, one story from Bengal, one Welsh story, Mehboob Khan's legendary *Mother India*, and one panoramic canvas to muse upon, Pradiptaa dips his brush into the past and picks out love stories to reflect upon.





*Melancholy Kiss of Heer Ranjha* • Acrylic on Canvas • 78 x 78 inch • 2021

## Imperative of Imagination

255 years after it was penned by Waris Shah, Pradipta brings to canvas poet Shah's *Heer Ranjha* with a work that is resplendent with characters in a choreography that includes a lion as well as a chandelier in a room in the palace of Ranjha's dwelling.

*Melancholy Kiss of Heer Ranjha* is replete with both imagination and intuition. The legend of Heer-Ranjha is believed to have played out in real life on the banks of the river Chenab, way back in the second half of the 15th century. This was the site that many poets chose to tell the tale of the lovers.

Pakistani scholar Muhammad Sheeraz described it beautifully when he said : "For centuries, the Chenab River has been flowing through the soils of the Punjab, the land of five rivers, and its fast and furious waves have told tales of love and romance. *Heer-Ranjha* is one of the tales told in unison by the waters of the Chenab."

But Pradipta gives us an interior scene; he captures the melancholy kiss as a moment of deep despair, suggesting the inane sadness but creates a corollary of conversations when he brings in hybrid characters like the hoofed human sitting (deer-symbol of freedom in Buddhism) at the feet, and a lion (symbol of pride) at the centre. While Pradipta uses the 'melancholy kiss' as the title this work does not have any element of erotica, instead it is filled with many characters full of a suffusion of references and ideas and imagery. He brings to mind the story as well as two Sufi poets who trailed the stories through their pens.

It is refreshing to assess the medieval heroine who dared to transcend social bounds for her lover Ranjha, whose first name was Dheedo. The prominent Sufi poet of the 18th century, Bulleh Shah, described the intensity of her passion, in first person, as Sufi poets are known to do when speaking of love:

*Ranjha Ranjha kardi hun main aape Ranjha hoyi  
Sakhiyo ni mainu Dheedo Ranjha, Heer na akho koyi*

(Chanting the name of Ranjha I myself am Ranjha now  
My friends call me Dheedo Ranjha not Heer anymore)

Pradipta also recalls the rendition by Sufi poet Waris Shah, completed in 1766, that captured the imagination of the Punjabis. Shah's *Qissa* is an all-time classic and a best seller. We also bring to mind Chandigarh-based historian Ishwar Gaur, who sources his writing of Punjab's history from folklore, Sufi poetry and Gurbani who said:

"It is a complete socio-cultural text of the turbulent 18th Century Punjab and truly secular in nature and it is time we acknowledged its value and not treated it as mere erotica."





*Mirza-Sahiba's Immortal Love Story to create the new world* • Acrylic on Canvas • 78 x 78 inch • 2021

## Mirza Sahiba

The second story is also set in Punjab before Partition. *Mirza Sahiba* is more about the inherent instinct to imagine the future and act in the present—a tragedy that leaves us heartbroken in this folk tale.

Pradiptaa creates a masterpiece as he shows us the journey's end when Mirza helps Sahiba off the horse. There is something quintessentially sub-continental about the tragic romance of *Mirza Sahiba*.

*Mirza* comes from the North-West frontier, but we can't call it just Indian anymore when we look at history before Partition and thereafter. There are so many Indias — *Mirza* is Afghanistan-India, Baluchistan-India, Peshawar-India. While divided now, the beauty is in this shared culture that exists through more than a million stories and customs.

Pradiptaa creates many avenues for multiple reflections. We must recall the famed French documentary *Latcho Drom* and know history for its many journeys. We can remember how the Romani people, the gypsies from Rajasthan travelled all the way to Europe through Afghanistan, Turkey, East France, and Romania thousands of years ago. This painting by Pradiptaa talks to us about the nature of storytellers, and the way stories travel.

There is a storyteller, there's the story and there's an echo of the story in today's world. This image suggests that art is an instinct to imagine the past and bring it forward to the present. Pradiptaa uses his own imagination as instinct, as something that even in times of great divisiveness, binds us all.

In this image that hosts the story of two lovers who had a tragic end, is the idea of the postcolonial, as well as the rhetoric of imagination that seems both buoyant, as well as full of visual possibilities, specifically as a foil to the notion of the migration and exile. The angels with bows and arrows, one angel kneeling down with flowers, the scene is a reflection of relationships that can grow and soar in an empowering space that is free from constraints. And if we think in terms of inter-connectivity, the beauty of the story is what ties all of us together. The bows and arrows an elegiac reminder of the arrows that were broken by Sahiba which finally led to the tragic end of both lovers. Melancholia and myth transcend many barriers of faith and following. The idea of multiplicity again an intrinsic symbol of rituals across the universe.





*Parineeta* • Acrylic on Canvas • 48 x 48 inch • 2020

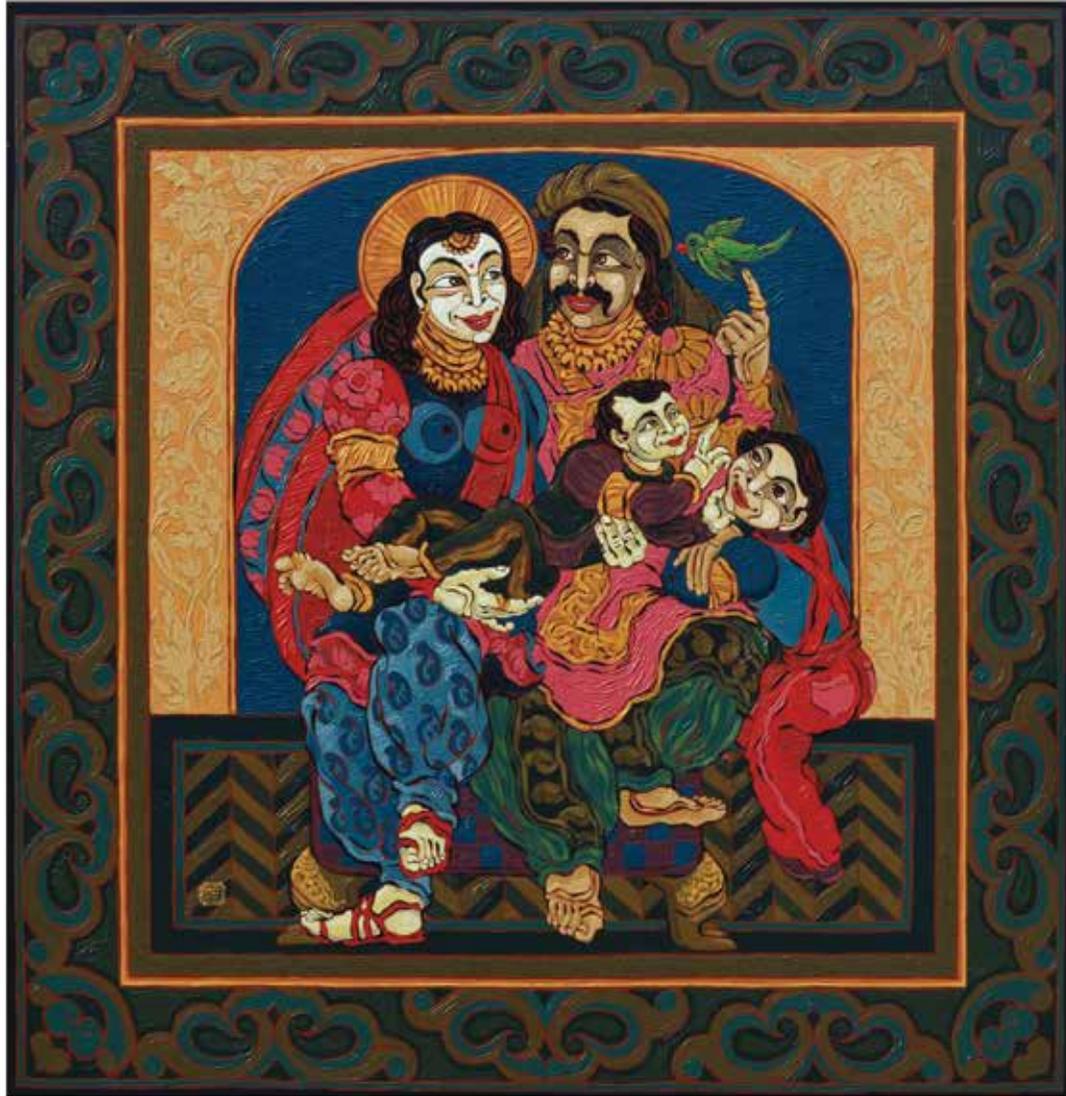
## Parineeta

Pradiptaa's *Parineeta* is a sterling work. He recreates a scene from the 1914 Bangali Language Novel written by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay and gives us the couple who are accompanied by a hybrid being the hooved golden deer Maricha, the character in the Ramayana. Embellished with bells on its four legs it is part of the conversation, gazing in absolute agreement at the hero and heroine.

If *Parineeta* was a novel of social protest which explored issues of that time period related to class and religion, Pradiptaa introduces a playful element, as he creates a scene reflective of a repertoire of intonations. Treatment is what revels in this image, which accounts for the variety of coloration one encounters in the strokes and rich tints of gradations. " *Parineeta* is a complete woman she gives of herself for her home and family. I was trying to create that image of wholeness," says Pradiptaa.

Pradiptaa gives us a dramatic narrative, in the two characters he creates. Their expression itself has exceptional communicative power, and so we see a dramatic narrative open to individual interpretation but often understood to imply the beauty and passion that can exist between two people who share a deep bond of romance. Adding to its visual appeal, the golden deer becomes a part of the pictorial idiom, as we glimpse the adoption of elements of spatial illusionism that make this scene at once both dreamy and realistic, familiar and unfamiliar.





*Mother India* • Acrylic on Canvas • 48 x 48 inch • 2020

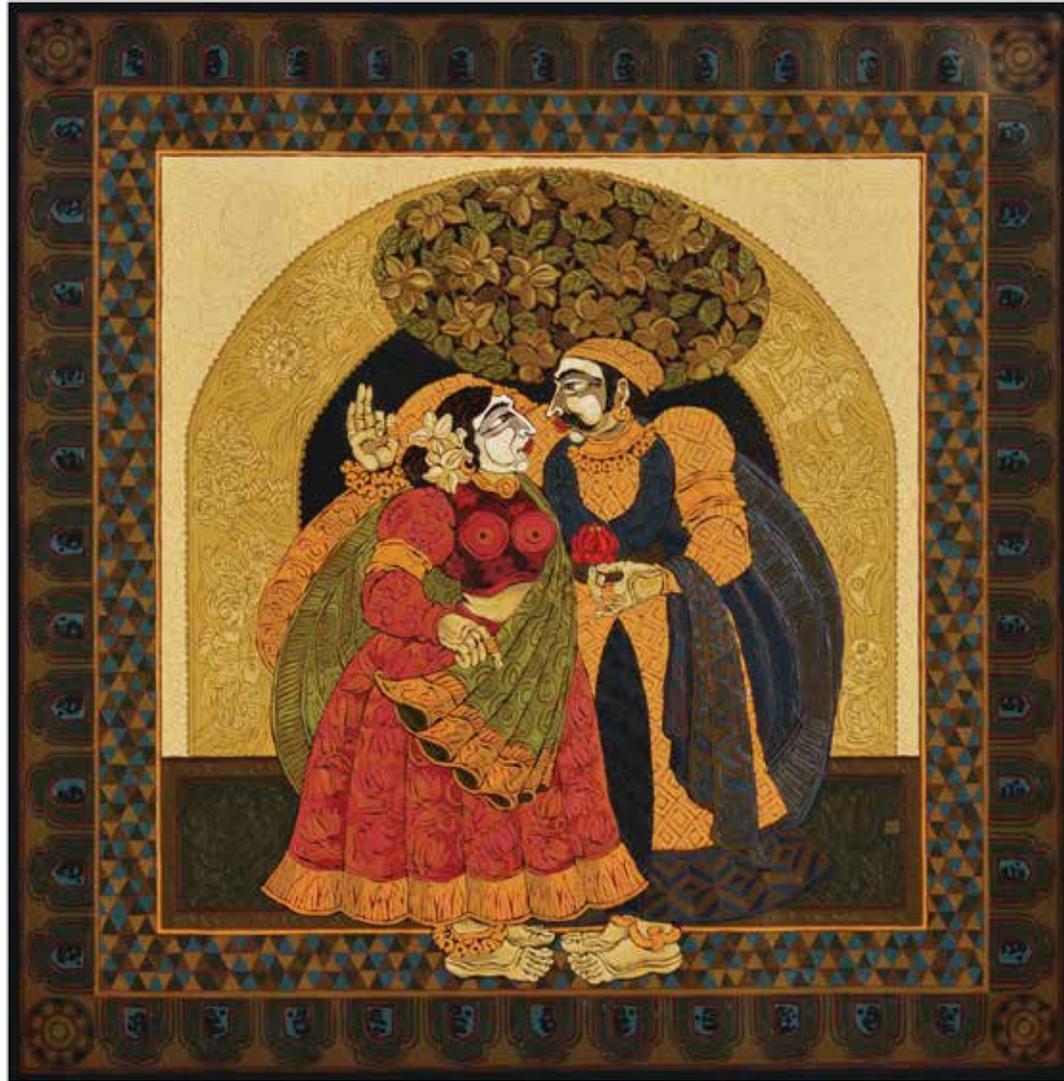
## Mother India

Remember how Mehboob Khan took Nargis and made her into Bharat Mata ? “*Mother India*” continues to be a benchmark for serious Hindi filmmakers to this day. Relating the story of a dogged woman faced with adversity on all fronts, including poverty and possible widowhood, the film was able to blend the colours of patriotism with romance, good old valour with the problems of development in an emerging nation.

Pradiptaa creates *Mother India* with a straightforward composition—the couple and two children seated in a formal setting. While the boy and girl snuggle into their father’s lap it is the little parrot that holds our attention. In this work Pradiptaa articulates the capacity to express the inexpressible. The parrot stems from both childhood familiarity and artistic exploration—the parrot belongs to myth and memory. The motif of the parrot features prominently in miniature painting, and can be read as a metaphor for the emotional trust necessary in seeking artistic truth. In many ways this work is about distinctive imagery, how by altering subjects and changing the context of the setting can show us how far they can go in time, how new associations can be conjured up using the past as history.

Pradiptaa raises a toast to poet and lyricist Shakeel Badayuni’s lyrics. “*Dukh bhare din beete re bhaiya*” reflects the aspirations of a nation that had just attained Independence. Then his “*Duniya mein hum aaye hain*” talks of the odds confronting the individual as well as the nation. Pradiptaa blends the individual with the universal, thereby enhancing the work’s appeal without compromising its sensitivity.





*The Forgotten Princess* • Acrylic on Canvas • 48 x 48 inch • 2021

## The Forgotten Princess

Great loves, like great works of art, live at the crossing point of the improbable and the inevitable. *The Forgotten Princess* looks at a Welsh story of King Edward of England who looks to secure his annexation of Wales and resolves to put the heir to Gwynedd's throne, the orphaned infant Princess, Gwennllian, out of mind, secure and forgotten in a Lincolnshire Priory.

The lady Rowena, ever loyal, undergoes many an ordeal to find, comfort and protect the miserable child, whose real identity has been cruelly kept from her. Eighteen years later when the King conceives a plan to settle any question of Welsh succession and news of the Princess leaks to those who would free her, Rowena finds herself faced with the most agonising of choices.

The authority of the story and its relationship with image is further developed in this meticulously crafted pictorial canvas of two people. Pradipta sets them in an Indian context perhaps in the interior of a palace.

Fusing a fragment of the moment with formal pictorial imagery, this image captivates and with deeper study becomes as multifaceted in meaning and interpretation as the story of the princess who is sent to a castle of an evil King. The power of this work lies in its simple exactness and over arching ambiguity in the questions that it raises about relationships and the many situations faced by young women married off in alliances to suit families anywhere across the world.





*We are mosaics* • Acrylic on Canvas • 48 x 96 inch • 2020

*We are mosaics, pieces of light, love, history, stars,..  
glued together with magic and music and words.*

*~ Anita Krizzan ~*

## We are Mosaics

This panoramic canvas includes a choreography of characters, they belong to different worlds and create their own coda in the tunes of life. Pradiptaa's felicity with the composition of the human figure and the inclusion of botanical details and elements from nature all go back to his days in Malda, West Bengal where he was born as well as the beauty of environs at Kala Bhavan Shantiniketan.

"I'm always dreaming, says he. "In my dreams I create my canvasses, so the people float in and out through many stories. I research before I create, it is my reading that gives me ideas, it may be a song that I remember from childhood maybe adulthood but in my dreams history and memory converge just as the dream gets translated onto my canvasses.

The humans on my canvas share many attributes -the women are not so feminine they seem more manly, they belong to any imagery of olden day stories. My imagery in childhood was deeply imprinted by memories of Ram Lila plays performed on the streets. I watched how the actors played their roles despite despair and poverty and struggles of livelihood. The female roles were enacted by men or young boys, not by women. This is why my characters while belonging to romantic stories look like characters who have lived through long periods of pain and pathos. If you see the legs and hands of my male/female and figures you will notice they are similar in every way."

Pradiptaa says this canvas is a chronicle of humanism and quotes the Upanishads. "Every Human form represents a chariot, and consciousness is the charioteer, intuition its harness, five senses are five horses. The one, who could conquer this wandering consciousness, becomes the recipient of pleasures and pains."

This canvas is a congregation of many humans, as well as the hybrid human; we could also think of everyday idioms including rituals that explore cultural and geographic traditions. Many hues, patterns and incidents appear, identifying Pradiptaa's attention to small detail, strong colour palettes, and understanding of architectural elements juxtaposed within the intimacies of domestic culture. The use of perspective is increasingly noticeable, exhibiting a linear movement of composition.

Common concerns of economics, imperialism, colonialism, and identity are also apparent. Pradiptaa explores the relationship between the present and the past, including the richness of multicultural identities. Integrated with both personal and social histories, his work invites multiple meanings, operating in a state of constant flux and transition. We see myriad potential pictorial idioms.



## Discipline and Devotion

Pradiptaa can be lush with his spontaneity and can also be rigorously precise as these 6 works demonstrate. In each work, he toys with multi coloured, opaque forms of male and female figures and the avatars of both angels and mythic symbols, all within a complicatedly patterned mosaic. The women and men while very much part of the romance are exaggerated, sometimes contorted, sometimes even deformed, their hands and feet revealing strength of dynamism rather than ivory satin smooth softness and petite looks as in illustrations across ages.

Pradiptaa's style of painting, requires equal measures of discipline, gesture and expression in order to execute careful layerings of colour, contour and detail. Compositionally, like miniature paintings these works too convey an extensive display of colourful imagery including, human forms, animals, patterns, and connecting lattice designed painted frames. Miniature paintings often engage in contextual complexities Pradiptaa does the same but creates a mosaic in mythic analogies.

Throughout the extraordinary realities, of the romances, he demonstrates a marvellous facility for pulling the tradition of miniature paintings into other cultural contexts.

His forms and figures exhibit a quality of continual translating as imagery is layered, providing a complexity with endless shifts in perception. His complex compositions dismantle hierarchical assumptions and subvert the notion of fixed identity of figures and forms. He also brings home the truth of the depth of relationships; to an ever-changing world where opposing societies interact as in *Sahiba Mirza*.





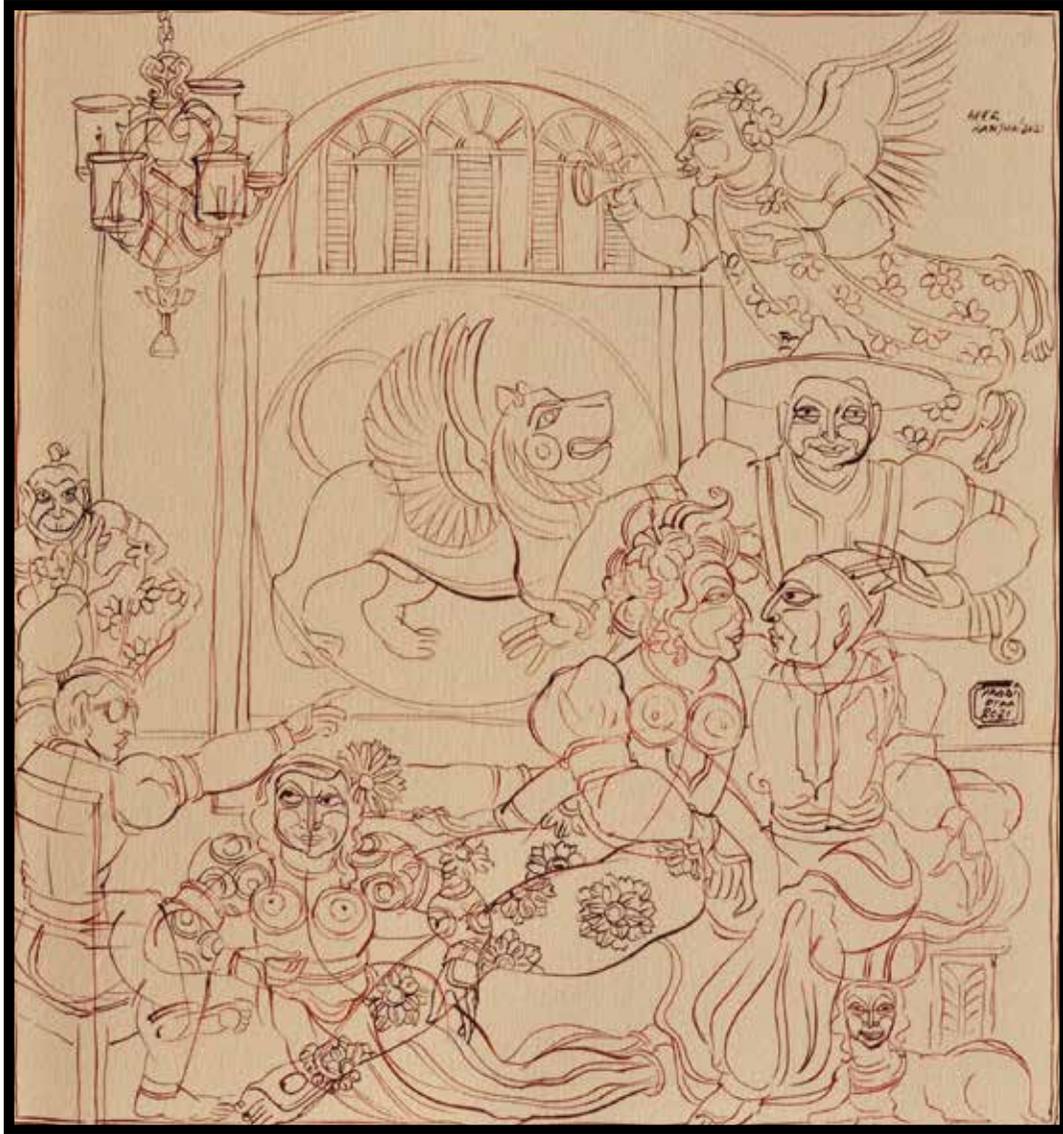
## Painting as a Vehicle

For Pradiptaa painting is a vehicle for story telling; his repertoire of images is culled from contemporary culture, personal experience, fantasy, mythology, and the popular imaginary of films everything comes together. His drawing practice challenges the conventions of creating human figures. Working with such idioms has allowed the artist to experiment with the technical aspects of drawing on paper as well as the life of drawn forms beyond the surface of the page.

This show demonstrates that we can indeed play with our inherited traditional ways of looking when we find an artist who can transform them elegantly and powerfully with the cultivated facility of his hands and his aesthetics. *Ae Mohabbat* then is about yesterday, today and tomorrow. It extols the need for love stories in a world torn by terrorism and the toll of the fragmentation of nations that has forgotten simple, human pleasures.

UMA NAIR  
Curator & Critic

# DRAWINGS



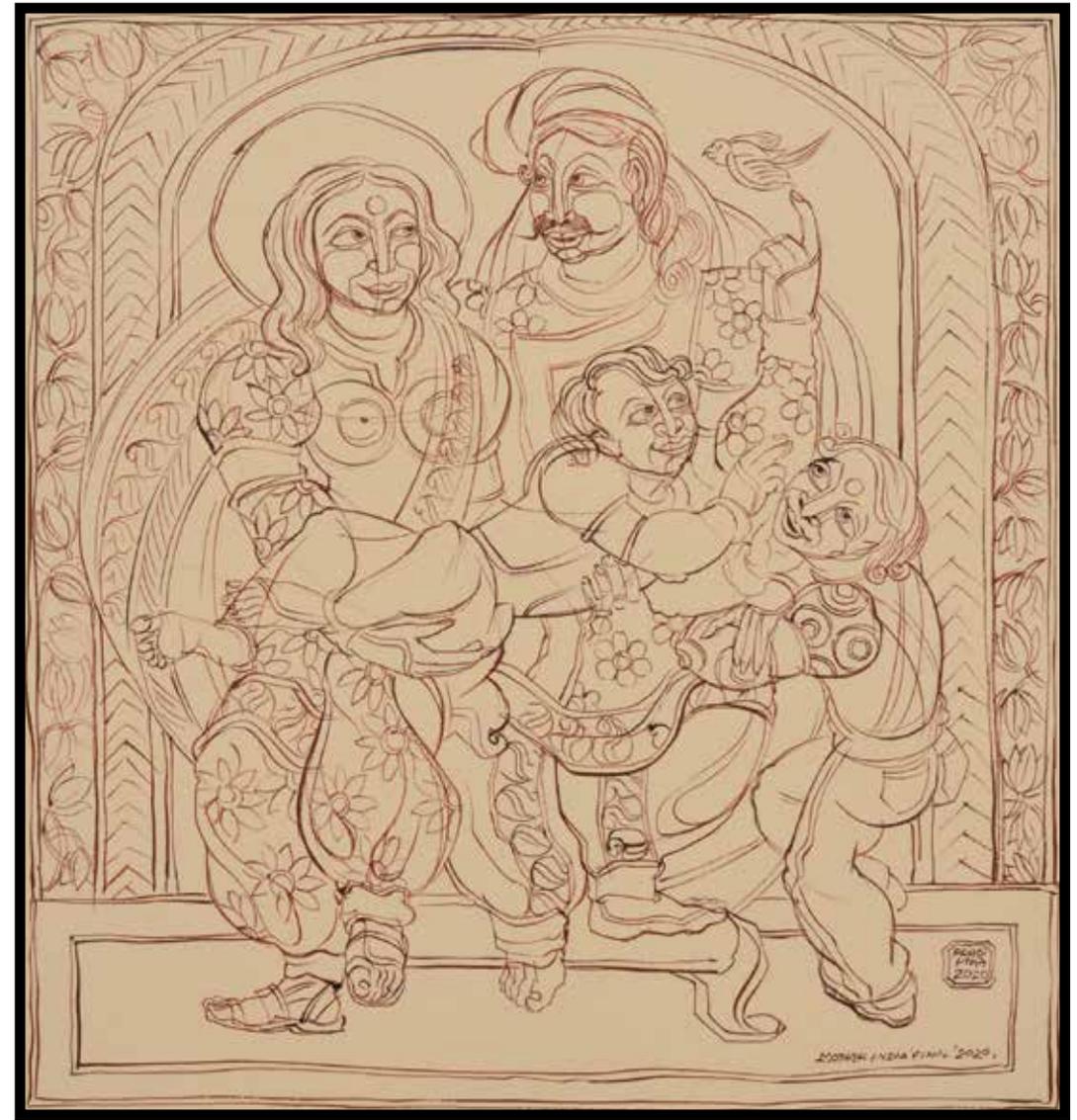
*Melancholy of Heer Ranjha* • Ink on Handmade paper • 23.5 x 25 cms • 2021



*Mirza-Sahiba's Immortal Love Story to create the new world* • Ink on Handmade paper • 23.5 x 25 cms • 2021



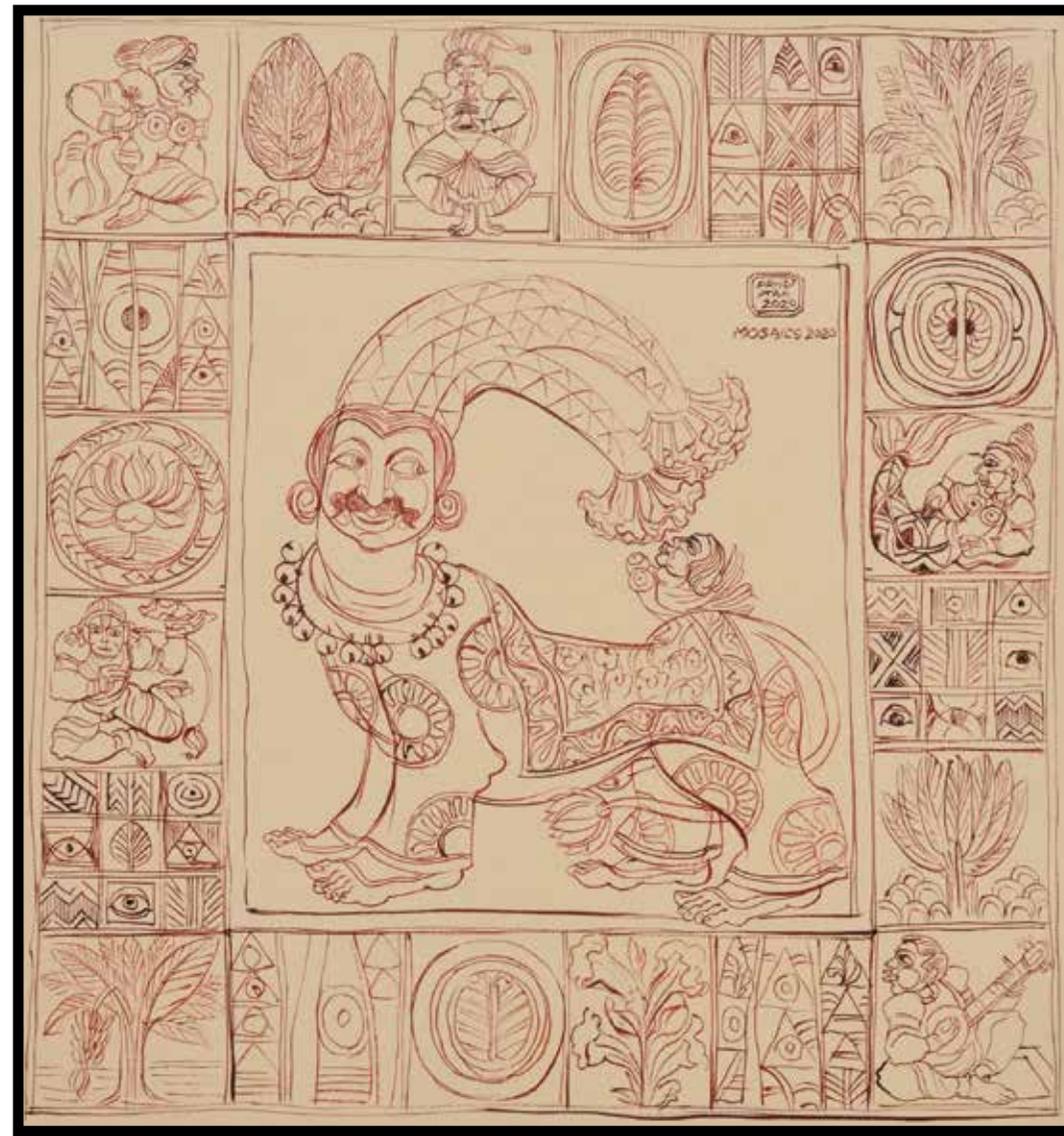
*Perennial Parineeta* • Ink on Handmade paper • 23.5 x 25 cms • 2020



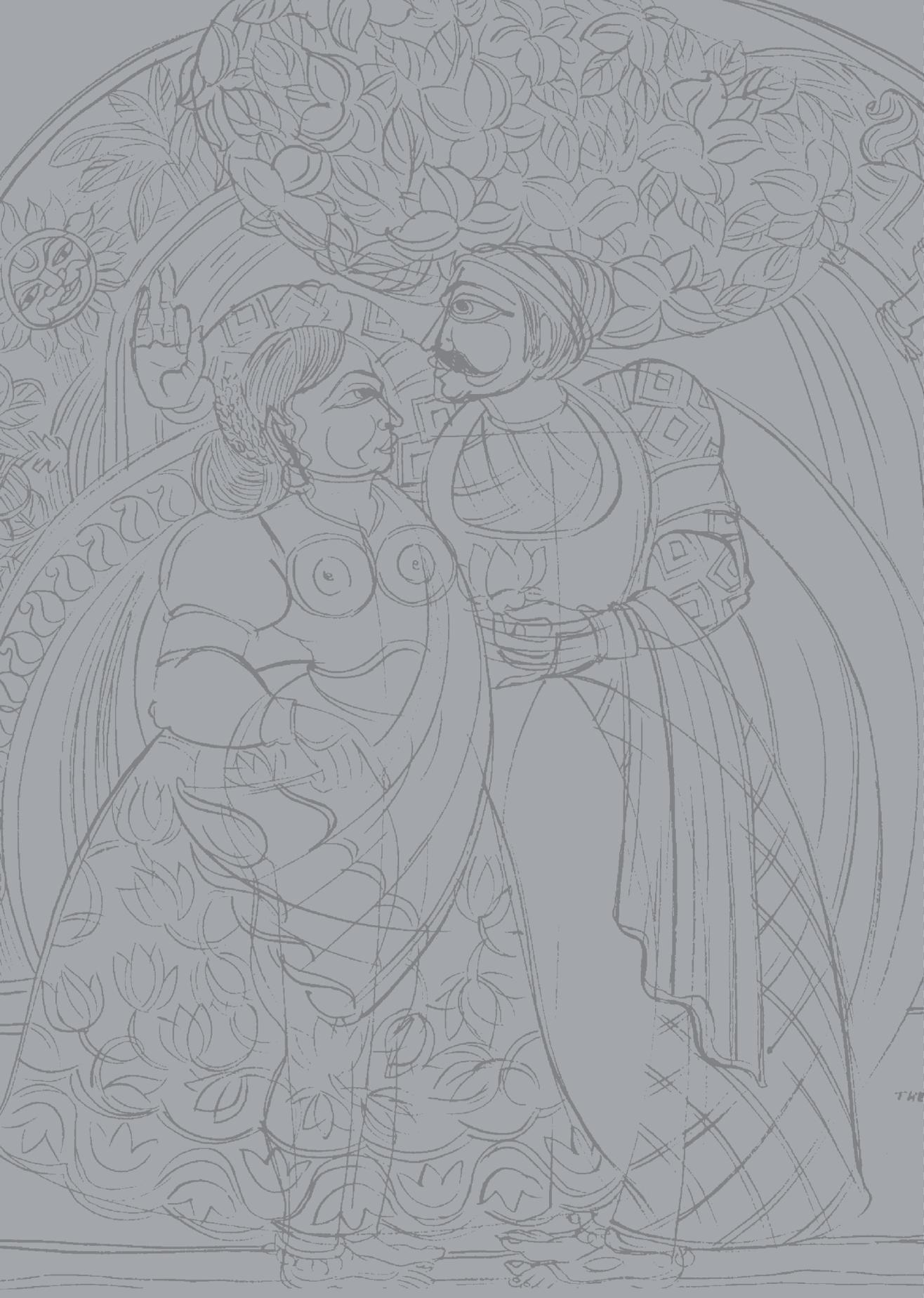
*Mother India* • Ink on Handmade paper • 23.5 x 25 cms • 2020



*The Forgotten Princess* • Ink on Handmade paper • 23.5 x 25 cms • 2021



*We are mosaics* • Ink on Handmade paper • 23.5 x 25 cms • 2020



These 6 drawings in the show are preparatory drawings for the six canvases Pradiptaa created. These drawings engage in the narrative of the stories he translates later onto canvases. In many ways Pradiptaa explores the radical transformation of the medium of drawing presenting a flashback perhaps of the twentieth century, a period when numerous artists subjected the traditional concepts of drawing to a critical examination and expanded the medium's definition in relation to gesture and form.

In a revolutionary departure from the institutional definition of drawing, he uses his reliance on paper as the fundamental support material, to create these drawings that push the lines across the plane into real space, thus affirming the relation between the object of art and the environment created. His lines flow like fluid realities to create drawings that are at once compelling and charismatic.



### Pradiptaa Chakraborty

Born in the Malda Town, of West Bengal in 1979, Pradipta Chakraborty is an Alumnus in Graphics from the prestigious Kala Bhavana, Vishva Bharati University, Shantiniketan. He also holds a five-year diploma degree in painting from Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata, West Bengal.

He has been a National scholarship holder as well as a Merit Scholarship holder from Kala Bhavana Vishva Bharati University, Shantiniketan for many years of study.

He has been exhibiting in exhibitions ever since 2002. His solo exhibitions have taken him to different parts of India and his group participation has made him a global name in the art circles.

His works belong to prestigious collections all over India as well as the world. His inspiration comes from literature, poetry as well as the performing arts especially the street theatre of West Bengal which goes back many generations. He lives and works in Haryana.

His teachers who have influenced him deeply have been the famed mentor KG Subramanyan and the figurative master Jogen Chowdhury.



### Uma Nair

Uma Nair has been writing as an art critic for the past 31 years. She has been art critic for Economic Times, Times of India, Hindustan Times, Asian Age, Architectural Digest India and The Hindu.

She has authored 25 years of Paresh Maity (2005) and Reverie with Raza (Mapin-2016) other than writing more than 100 catalogues.

Amongst most historical catalogues are her catalogues of Gopal Ghosh (2015) for Kumar Gallery Retrospective and Jamini Roy for Dhoomimal Ravi Kumar Collection.

Her most important curatorial exercises have been National Exhibitions for Lalit Kala Akademi-Moderns, Earth Songs, Bapu at 150.

Her most important solo exhibition has been Jyoti Bhatt's -original intaglios and serigraphs in the exhibition Manushya aur Prakriti for Bihar Museum Patna, other than being Curator for Kolkata International Photo Festival 2019.





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