

Sachin Gokhale

Phoenix Rising



SOULFUL ART:
Shukla Chowdhury

Shukla Chowdhury gives free rein to the Phoenix, her alter-ego, as she explores life and afterlife on canvas, finds Shreyashi Srivastava

There were no staid greys or whites. They were angry reds, fighting greens, dying-to-break free blues. They did not want to be contained by lines; only to flow into each other, around each other. Shukla Chowdhury's celebration of life entitled 'Glorious Days of the Phoenix' seemed to have caught the pulse of these colours.

Trying hard to explain her art, often looking to her daughter to help her translate her thoughts from Bengali to English, Shukla looks every bit the artist. Wearing a stark black *saree*, she stands out amidst all that vibrancy. Elaborating on the generous use of colours, she says, "I love bright hues and work with primary colours. I don't like mixing their energies. They have purity, an intensity about them."

The exhibition has abstract expressionist paintings, a genre that the artist identifies with now. Derived from surrealism that focuses on spontaneous and automatic painting, abstract expressionism is about free-flowing, non-figurative art. Shukla avers, "I started with conservative lines and symmetry in art school, then gradually moved onto impressionistic art and now feel most comfortable in this genre as this reflects the unrestrained bird in me. I don't want to be bound and my paintings depict my evolution as a person."

An alumni of Shantiniketan, the artist instantly quips "Rabindranath Tagore" when

asked about her inspiration. She points out that her paintings talk about his poems. Discussing the philosophy behind her work and the constant in all her exhibitions — the mythical bird Phoenix — she states, "My work is a celebration

of life and eternity. Like the Phoenix that seems to rise from the ashes, I have risen time and again from my own burdens."

The lady, whose dreams of being an artist were thwarted by her marriage and the consequent respon-

sibilities, has today managed to circumvent around her problems and achieve her eloquent dreams. "It was very difficult for girls to take up art back then. Fortunately, my parents encouraged me and I owe everything to them," she

smiles.

So who is Shukla Chowdhury, the artist? "I am the soul, I have been created by God; I am colour, simplicity; I am the Phoenix; I want to go beyond the sky..." she signs off.