

FRIDAY REVIEW

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Rising from the ashes

From an early age, Shukla Chowdhury was introduced to the world of creative arts, music and dance through the family setting. To explore the creative arts further, she joined the bachelor's course in Fine Art at Santiniketan. But, even before she turned 20 and complete her degree, she was married off.

She wasn't ready for it. "It was a mental shock for me. I couldn't believe that I wasn't going to pursue creative arts but manage home at that age. I sank into depression and became a quieter person. For almost 20 years, I turned myself into a machine, taking care of in-laws, husband and three daughters uncomplainingly," she recalls.

And then, she gradually started coming to terms with life's practical realities. She found out a remedy for her trauma too. "Out of 24 hours, I would give 20 hours to home and four hours to myself at night." She stopped

CANVAS Shukla Chowdhury brings alive her own experiences.

RANA SIDDIQUI ZAMAN

sleeping and instead utilised that time for meditation, music, poetry, dance, and painting.

A reunion with creativity and meditation soon started filling the void in her. Then at middle age, she finally did her graduation in Fine Arts from Pune. The technical expertise and "self realisation" as she calls her experience, started flowing in her canvases smoothly. And they resulted in "Phoenix sings a song", a spectacular blend of bright hues in acrylic. Now, its creator's joy knows no bound. This col-

lection of work finds a place of pride at Open Palm Court Gallery, India Habitat Centre. The works almost spell magic with their brightness. They fuse into each other peacefully. At places they seem like an inferno, emitting light and undistinguishable mix of colours and in some, the shadow of a bird in black seem hovering over them. Red, blue, green, crimson, gold, silver find harmonious existence and shades of grey is barely visible.

"I feel like the legendary bird Phoenix who tried to reach the sun but would turn into ashes and rise from it again. When I was stopped from completing my graduation from Santiniketan after my marriage, I promised to myself and I wouldn't let my creativity go waste." Seeing her commitment, the family gradually came around. "They started supporting me wholeheartedly. What I gave them through my love and care in 32 years came back to me. And that's the posi-



COLOURS OF EXPERIENCE Shukla Chowdhury's work.

tivity my colours reflect. I use pure colours and don't mix them. I put them directly on the canvas while making a sketch inside the mind," Shukla says.

Now close to 60, Shukla has been transforming her feelings on canvas for almost 10 years. This is her first show in Delhi and is on view till May 24.