

The Nation's Conscience

Abdur Rahim Nagori (b. 1938)

By Marjorie Husain

Professor A.R. Nagori established the Fine Arts Department of the Sindh University in 1970 and for many years remained there to head the Department.

Nagori is a scholastic man, well-versed in Eastern history and philosophy. A veteran of art exhibitions, his work resonates with symbols that refer to ancient myths and legends. These he introduces to articulate protest against the injustice and cruelty of man to his fellow beings, tempered with a mood of sardonic observation. Nagori's art is directed towards raising serious socio-political issues, while retaining pictorial and aesthetic value.

The first and most radical socio-political artist in Pakistan, Nagori took a Masters in Fine Art from the Punjab University Fine Arts Department in 1965. There he trained as a muralist, but from the 1980s, for economic reasons, he painted on small scaled canvases, expressing in colours of brilliant vibrancy personal outrage at society and the world around him.

Though never intended to please or to decorate walls, the beauty of sensual textures and adept simplification of form were as inherent a

factor in Nagori's work as were his uncompromising statements rich with meaning. His exhibitions at the Indus Gallery in the 1980s made art history.

In 1986, Nagori 'shook the conscience of the nation' with his portrayal of the hardships suffered by the country's rural population. In 1988, he evolved new symbols of the alphabet based on shocking events; guns, heroin, crime and dacoities.

In Nagori's work, the viewer finds laughter and tears; his biting wit was irresistible as was the sincerity of his feelings for the people without recourse. In a mellow mood he painted idyllic memories of his children in their early years, and spoke of his student life in Lahore.

Trained by mentors who had no interest in commercial aspects of art, he maintains lasting respect for Anna Molka Ahmed, Khalid Iqbal and Shakir Ali. Recalling an early exhibition in Lahore, when someone commiserated on the lack of sales, he related: "It was extremely successful, Moyene Najmi bought a painting".

The writer is one of Pakistan's leading art critics.

