

Stunning Pen And Ink Drawings Depict Life In A Small Village In India

Nakul Mondal discusses life and art in the town of Gangpur.

By Priscilla Frank

All images by Nakul Mondal

There are places in the world many of us will never have a chance to visit. Photographs, often, present an alternative mode of traveling, showing visions of people, places and things around the globe. While a camera can capture life exactly as it is seen, other modes of art-making excel at depicting life how it is felt.



For example, for West Bengali artist Nakul Mondal, pen and ink are best suited to capture daily life in the small village of Gangpur. For Mondal, the town is often silent save for the sounds of trains moving throughout the village, and the smooth flow of ink echoed that momentum. "I want to give my work a tempo and a meaning, just like train tracks which are straight but have their own rhythm," the artist explained in an interview with The Huffington Post.



Mondal, who primarily works in watercolor, completed his MFA in painting from Kala Bhavana in India. But for his most recent series, titled "Gangpur," the artist opted for black and white to depict a radically simple way of life, and all the joys and pains that accompany it. I reached out to the artist to learn more about the series. His answers are translated from Bengali by Nilanjana Kar.

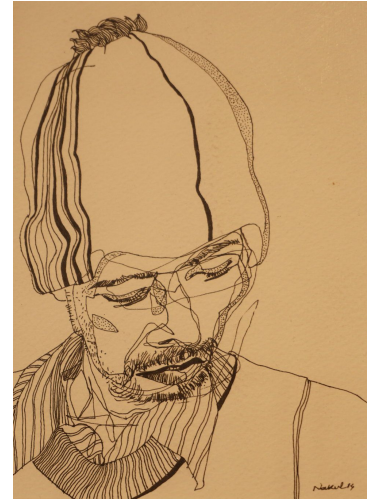
How would you describe the village of Gangpur to someone who has never been there before?

Before talking about Gangpur to one who has not visited the place, I should start with an introduction. I am Indian, from the state of West Bengal, capital Kolkata. Gangpur is a small village near to Burdwan, which is located between Kolkata (by the river Ganges) and Delhi. The Burdwan rail junction is seven kilometers from this village, and many people travel via this station. We have a station bazar surrounding this area. I live beside this station bazar. Around 25 years ago this area was farmland. Today it is very civilized. I am developing my art around this place. I am inspired by the nature and people of this place.

What constitutes a typical day there for you?

People living in this village do things like farming, day labor, driving and government office work. The people around the station are mostly hawkers. All day there are noise from the trains and people moving around. People are just running around from one place to another. After sunset, almost everyone in the area gathers around tea stalls to play poker and gossip. Some people are matching numbers to find out if they won the lottery.

Around 9 p.m. the streets are silent but trains from Burdwan to Howrah (a station in Kolkata) and Howrah to Burdwan keep moving on their own pace. We can hear announcements about the trains from the station master's cabin like "Burdwan Local is coming on platform number 2" or "Howrah Local is coming on Platform number 3." My days begin with these announcements, and my whole day goes by, getting inspiration from this practical life, observation and imaginations, which are reflected in my work.



What imprint has political and natural unrest left on the village?



In today's world, people are worn out by politics and day-to-day life. Sometimes farmers do not get paid enough for their work or they suffer from climate conditions. Due to political influence, some people are becoming rich while others are committing suicide. There is lot of fighting because of political unrest. People have lost hope and are clueless of what to do. They are trying to survive. This is not just in Gangpur; there is a social instability around all the villages in west Bengal. This is the scenario of all workers and laborers and unemployed youth.

Why pen and ink for this series? How does the medium interact with the subject matter?

The main reason to use pen and ink was to make the work easier and lighter for me. I started to use them as a medium because it's convenient and I wanted this to be a work of routine, that I could add every small detail of my observations, something like writing a diary.

This medium is also related to the circumstances of the subject matter. In this series you can see plenty of human figures and nature. I tried to capture innocence and basic expressions of human emotion. I have observed nature with different perspectives, and tried to extract the simplicity out of them. I wanted to capture the unseen part from the rhythm of climatic conditions and the nature of man into my work.

What was a major challenge in creating this series?

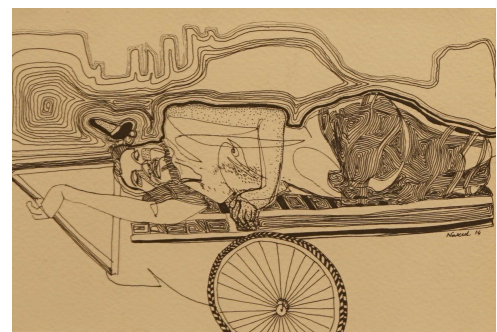
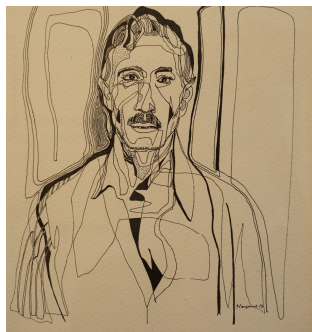
The main challenge of this work is the simplicity. To portray with lines, the beauty of nature and the poetic beauty of the human being, and to do it artistically. Maintaining the rhythm from start to finish was a challenge.

Is there an art world in Gangpur or an appreciation of art? How do you think the people of the village will respond to the images?

You can say that there is no art world in Gangpur, and no practice of art. For that reason it is a challenging task for me. While I made this particular series, I ran around Gangpur station, Burdwan, crowded market places and so on. During this period, people came to know about me and my artwork was recognized, and it became quite joyful for many. This led me to make more portraits. While this joy is nice, I am of course trying to capture sorrow and the pain of these people. I have tried to create something *truthful* with these simple works, and it was nice for me that they became dear in the hearts of the people in and around Gangpur.

What do you hope to communicate through the series?

People are main subject of this series – their emotions, their feelings, their silence, their helplessness and their busy lives. The series is a snapshot of my place at this time: the river bank, the empty boat on the shore, the kids playing in the village, people resting, tired from walking. Sometimes I did paint people far away from my village – today's life in India, the infighting, political instability, natural calamities. I tried to capture mostly the social life of Gangpur but also to tell a story which is connected to, and greater than Gangpur.



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