

## THE ARTS



Three of the 25 major paintings of Satish Gujral's recurring dream-like poetic and musical figures, at Gallery ArtsIndia in New York. Gujral's first solo show, in association with Art Today from New Delhi, is scheduled to run through July 14. (Photo: Jyotirmoy Datta)

## Many-faceted artist Satish Gujral's first solo show in N.Y.

By JYOTIRMOY DATTA

NEW YORK — Considering their consequences, even the greatest of human tragedies may seem to have saving graces. The end of World War I caused attorney Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi to return to India, hailed as 'the Mahatma' by poet Rabindranath Tagore.

To most Indians, the partition has nothing positive in it. But it was what gave poet Jibanananda Das to West Bengal, and the Gujral brothers to India.

Satish Gujral, who is having his first solo show in New York at Gallery ArtsIndia on Fifth Avenue, almost next

door to *News India-Times*, was born in a village that shares its name with the river that invaders from the northwest have found troublesome — Jhelum — in the year 1925.

There have been movies made and novels written about the blood-soaked railway carriages in trains from and to Pakistan in August, 1947. But no one has written about the memory-filled minds of millions of refugees crossing the borders.

In Gujral's paintings, we see how the horror has been transformed into angelic images of shepherdesses and musicians, men with the faces of innocent children, with the girth of floating balloons and birds carrying strings of pearls to tabla players.

Unlike most modern artists, Gujral denies his art any autonomy; they do not exist independent of his journey through life as a feeling, dreaming human being triumphing over his sufferings.

Brother of India's pacifist former prime min-

ister Inder K. Gujral, Satish belongs to a unique family, headed by a patriarch who had represented Rawalpindi in the legislative council of undivided India.

He lost his hearing after an illness at the age of nine. For more than 50 years, he lived in a world of silence. "My father refused to cast me away as a lost case," the artist told *News India-Times* in an interview at the New York gallery, overlooking Madison Square Park on the eve of the opening of his exhibition.

"In those times, there was no help for a deaf child. But my dad built around me a world of books.

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page, so sometimes I made up the pronunciation in my own fashion. For example, I used to say 'sham-pagh-nay' whenever I came across the word 'champagne.' I was taught how to say 'trouble' by a friend who had patience enough perhaps to make even tables and chairs to speak."

Satish was, however, no chair or table, but one of the most sensitive Indians in recent history. Regardless of his impairment, he studied art, first at Mayo School in Lahore and then at J.J. School in Mumbai.

In 1947, we find the incredibly well-read but deaf artist in New Delhi, catching the attention of one of India's greatest modern interpreters to the West, the Mexican poet Octavio Paz.

When India achieved independence, one of

the first non-European countries to open an Embassy in India was Mexico, though India did not return the attention, choosing to include that vast Latin country in the diplomatic see of the Embassy in Washington, D.C.

Mexico named one of its former presidents, Cortes Gil, ambassador to India. Since Gil did not know English, Paz came to Delhi to help him out.

Paz himself was to become ambassador to India in the 1960s, when he made numerous friends in Delhi's vast artistic and literary community.

But even on his first tour out, he had spotted in Satish an artist of promise.

The artist won a Mexican government scholarship in 1952, and during the following four years, he immersed himself in the great Mexican populist art tradition. He actually worked side by side with Diego Rivera and Siqueiros. He came to regard Clemente Orozco as his guru and took part in the painting of many large murals in public buildings.

Satish has crossed many borders, from sound to silence, from Pakistan to India and from the Anglo-Saxon cultural sphere to the Hispanic. One such border-crossing led to his discovery of Kiron, his wife, on his return to Delhi in 1957.

"There have been three pillars in my life, my father, my brother and my wife," the artist told *News India-Times*, watching Kiron Gujral advise ArtsIndia owner Prajit Datta (who in his other incarnation is a professor of economics at Columbia Uni.) as he attended to the hanging of his pictures at the long gallery, with its two

unique skylights, or lanterns, on the roof.

Gujral's comments about famous painter M.F. Husain have sparked controversy, but the fact remains that both painters are great artists of life, unwilling to be bound to their easels.

If Husain has been drawn to filmmaking, Gujral is a successful architect. His design for the Belgian Embassy has been criticized for its indulgence with lavish arches and domes, but it captures the very spirit of Mughal Delhi. Gujral is also the author of a revealing and inspiring autobiography.

Looking at his paintings, one is reminded, although there is no similarity in their styles of the paintings, of Paul Klee and Marc Chagall. Here too, fiddlers float over roofs.

Sheep lie against the moon in the embrace of a woman with the face of one not born yet. Like the dancing Natarajas of the Chola period, Satish balances wild imagination with the strict discipline of skill in his art.

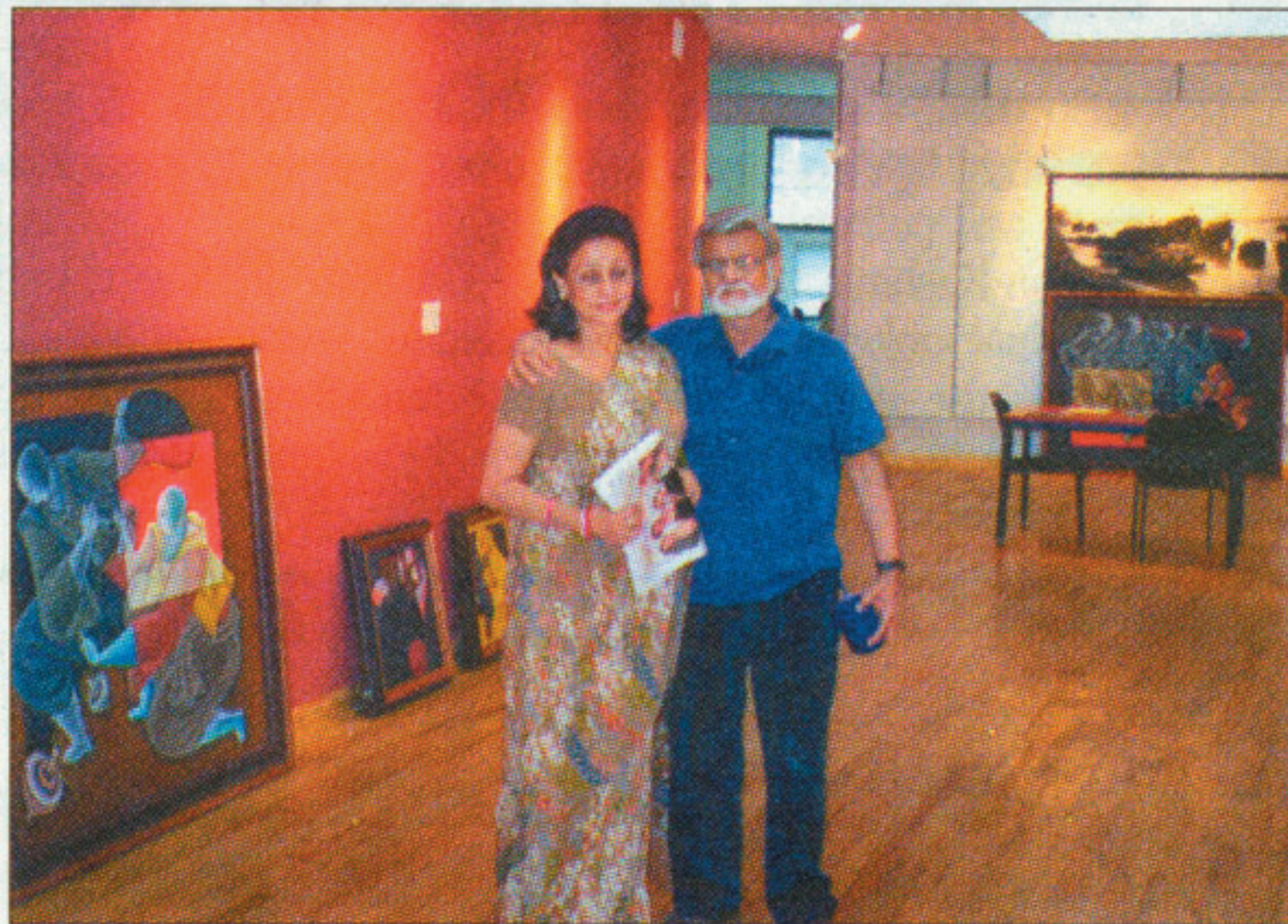
It should be put on record that Gujral recovered his hearing at the age of 65, following a cochlea transplant. Asked if he enjoyed his new ability of hearing, he shrugged, in a far-off, whimsical sort of way.

"I had gotten used to the silence," the artist said, noncommittally. When I asked about his limp while walking, Kiron said he had had a bad fall, breaking his leg bones, 15 years ago. The bones had been replaced with steel rods.

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**GUJRAL'S SOLO SHOW:** Artist Satish Gujral, right, with his wife, Kiron, at Gallery ArtsIndia, where the first New York solo show of the renowned artist's works opened on June 21. The gallery, on Fifth Avenue and overlooking Madison Square, is a 3,200-square foot space in the heart of Manhattan's Flatiron District. (Photo: Jyotirmoy Datta)