

Painting It His Way

By Poonam Goel

Manav Gupta may have shifted loyalties from native Kolkata to Delhi, for this is 'the happening city as far as art is concerned,' but for the 32-year-old 'self-taught' watercolourist, Calcutta is where his heart lies. Delhi, however, seems to have taken to Manav, who's the first young painter to have his work displayed in the office of the Joint Secretary (Culture) S. Satyamurthy. It is the Human Resource Development Ministry's attempt to showcase the country's emerging art talent.

"My first big exposure to the world of art happened when Calcutta's Birla Academy of Art gave me an opportunity to hold my first solo exhibition of watercolours in 1996," recalls the Presidency College Physiology (Honours) graduate. "It was a bold experiment, the first of its sort, because the Academy's open-air studio was before this known only for its kala melas and group shows."

What he didn't learn at art school, he made up by absorbing the beauty of the lush green campus of Calcutta's National Library, where his father was the Deputy Director.

"I feel lucky I lived in virtually an island in Calcutta with greenery all around me," Manav says. "If nature inspired me in my artistic endeavours, the openness of my parents to new ideas helped me too." And that's why he had no problems switching over to a profession he never trained for.

Not that there weren't any obstacles.

"Like any other struggler in the field, I, too, have fought my way till here. There was no family wealth or guru to fall back upon. So many times I have had to personally seek out corporate houses to sponsor a show," says Manav.

And when he does get a show, his works — which cover a wide range of moods and themes, from nature to mysticism to music — do all the talking. His latest show, held at the Taj Palace in May, was a near total sell-out, with 60-70 per cent of his works going during the show itself.

These days Manav is busy working on a book — his first — which will be a collector's delight. A companion volume to the recently concluded Taj Palace show, the book is set to be released soon. He's also working on a poetry anthology, the proceeds from which he plans to donate to charity.

An exhibitionist at heart, Manav is not one to rest on his laurels. Currently, he's busy with his next show which is to be presented by Citibank, possibly in the next two months. And after that? "I'd like to have a show abroad," he says simply. For a painter who has taken Delhi by storm in the space of just one exhibition, it's only a matter of time.