

## A Contemporary Move towards Study of Light and Colours An Analysis of Munawar Mohiud Din's Landscape Paintings

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### Abstract

*Painting is related to the psychology of the period in which it is produced. It reveals and expresses the relationship of a society to the world. Impressionism belonged to the time when mission of the painting was to reassure the beholder and banish the tension of reality. Impressionism in post modern era is less directly significant. Fewer artists assure to the philosophy of intellect or self expression commonly known as Impressionistic concern, for nature. Munawar Mohiud Din's eminence as impressionist attracts a number of artists working with oil paints. His masterly skill reveals delight in painting while squinting through an imaginary view finder allowing composition to take a clear form. In his paintings serenity and truthfulness of 'impressions' such as trees, flowers, vegetations, long paths, make all of his works notably phenomenon. Painterly strokes in his paintings look abstract but the application of right colour and value relationship bring surprising reality to the composition. All paintings possess layers of colours that are effective, delicate and thin when multi layers are added. Many of his works offer perceptibly higher key with bright colours and lightness of touch which distinguishes him as an astonishing impressionist without question. His peculiar move towards colour theory, momentary capture and inspirational strokes proves and identify him as an outstanding impressionist without question.*

**Keywords:** Impressionism, Contemporary approach, light, Perception, Landscapes.

### Introduction

Impressionism, an art movement that was initiated in 19<sup>th</sup> century can be measured as the first particularly modern movement in painting. This movement began in Paris in the 1860s and its sway spread right through Europe and United States. Artists who were the instigators of this movement rejected all exhibitions endorsed officially by government as well as juries of academic art institutions. Edouard Manet, Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Camille Pissaro, Edgar Degas, Alfred Sisley, and Berthe Morisot contributed in this movement.

The Impressionists rejected the imposed canons of public taste, the comparatively rigid expectation of academic values. Extreme opposition was between the sketch and traditional notion of the major public painting.<sup>[1]</sup> Impressionists also incorporated scientific research to achieve more accurate representation of tonal-value of colours with the change of light. Driving force for the impressionists was to capture momentary scenes that could develop sensory experience made on the eye in ephemeral instant. Developed characteristics of impressionistic paintings were relatively small yet

visible brush strokes and the focus was real depiction of light and its changing quality over perfection of form. From everyday life subjects were observed and analyzed and rendered with insertion of movement as an essential element of human perception while observing unusual angles with sensory experience. For the reason artist followed a turning way from fine line and details to capturing mere impression with choppy brush strokes. To attain momentary captures followed by transition of light artists moved out from studio to outdoor.

Impressionism has changed enormously since 20<sup>th</sup> century. A range of historical perspectives have opened out many new ways of viewing art of Impressionists. Focus of analyzing such art can be its style, technique, imagery and subject matter and most of all institutional and commercial contexts along with critical response of public and socio political and ideological value with which that art is expressed. All of these are fundamentals to a historical understanding of Impressionism.

My analysis of Munawar's works starts with a number of basic codes of belief. It is important to develop an understanding in which his art has generated meanings; initially focus is questions about technique he applied. What he is doing to obtain, the qualities of purity, simplicity, suppleness and freedom of spontaneity and bringing freshness in native landscapes. It is observed that

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while depicting themes with a range of brush strokes, starting from thin to thick and broad choppy, husky all remain visible in their individual identity due to varied tones hence visual change to slight stylization than fragmented. To render details he avails masses of vegetation and gives a feeling of space and volume. This is like creating solidity the way he tried to capture the variation of nature which somehow looks immutable. Trees, vegetations, sky all belong to same nature and set a balance of opposing forces. In this way a contemporary Impressionist's art offers more challenge to accept all these values. Munawar's many of the landscapes since he is observing sensation of light, are unequivocally composed to find their meaning when similar themes are painted in diverse ways. His paintings are a treat to the cultural values and they seem a breath of fresh air. What he is painting is an insurmountable barrier that separates him from other contemporary artists.

### **A Contemporary Move towards Study of Light and Colours**

As for present-day art, we can say that Impressionism is less directly significant in the sense that there are few artists today who would assure to the philosophy of intellect or self expression or an impressionistic concern for nature. Though, philosophy of intellect, the transcendent, and self-expression has come under critical analysis by artists of an intellectual character mainly post modern or conceptual artists. Such notions still function as nucleus concepts enlightening the dialogue of the art market, without which there would be no art in the perspective of modern and postmodern industrial society. Philosophy of self-expression, freedom of expression, theory of colour and light, brilliance and the transcendent all developed in the perspective of impressionism. Impressionism led many other art movements in 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Since primordial times artists have been making efforts to capture their surrounding and express their thoughts, fantasies and ideas. These attempts were made to express, document, interpret events, share vision or question existing phenomenon that could help visualize their notions. Realism was a reaction to Romanticism and Realists drew out strong communicative response after observation of their surrounding whereas Impressionists' work was distinguished by ruthless departures from the up to standard model.

To a modern eye impressionistic paintings are among the most instantly pleasurable of all works of art. The impressionists are without question the most popular painters that have ever lived.<sup>[2]</sup> Claude Monet's painting entitled 'An Impression' gave its name to the movement of which he was leader.<sup>[3]</sup> Gauguin was of view that impressionists studied colour solely in term of decorative effect but without free will for they kept the restraints of representation. They looked for what is near the eye not at the mysteries of heart.<sup>[4]</sup>

Scientific inventions in 19<sup>th</sup> century changed the art scene and artists gave way to experimentation with new ideas and applications. Availability of paints in tubes made it possible for artist to come out of studio and work in outdoors. Eugene Boudin stated "three strokes of the brush after nature are worth more than two days labouring at the easel". Boudin's statement further give emphasis to the artist's longing to inquire about truth in nature itself, rather working in studio.<sup>[5]</sup>

Munawar Mohiud Din's standing as a painter attracts score of artists working in the medium of oil paints, and his eccentric move towards colour theory is legendary. He painted nature under glaring sun, using brushes with an inspirational movement of his hand. The painting tool forcefully applies large dollops of oil paint, making it impossible to render the image in blur appearance first, developing preliminary ground over the canvas. Later by using large simple masses of colour he captures the effect of objects in a very subtle manner that captures the effect of sunlight. One enjoys such enthusiasm in the movement of brushes developing choppy and sometimes very delicate, thin yet, visible brush strokes that magically capture the colour tones of objects and form a visual rich with life.

The impressionists endeavoured to establish into painting self-governing manifestation, free of intellectual or psychological ties. Their determination to present themselves to physiological vision was for them an exploration for an inflexible realism, which incongruously was to lead beyond realistic painting. Impressionists negated corporeal partition of elements. Modern psychology has proved this in fact man is prepared what he is going to see. Munawar organizes what he already knows and almost what he is seeking. His observation is as crowded with all sensory experiences that an impressionist needs to portray a subject from his environment.

Pissarro urged young painters not to define too closely the outlines of the things since perceive drawing 'destroy all the sensation'.<sup>[6]</sup> In classifying to see and paint impression Munawar asserts that 'one must comprehend when one first sights something, we all see big patterns of lights and darks before we observe details. For instance, when we are familiar with someone and he comes walking toward us from a distance, first of all we get acquainted with the shape of his or her body and face before we perceive his or her other details. As the person comes closer, some details gradually become more understandable, and we may look into the details of other features such as his and her colour of eyes and hair. Finally we examine how the colours are affective in combination to cool and warm one wears. And this is what we call the science of seeing. Here one needs to keep things simple to understand the phenomena of seeing by following simple shapes, values and temperature.

The impressionists placed great emphasis on bright, primary colours, applying them directly to the canvas rather mixing them on palette. Most characteristically they used dashes of paints without any effort to hide the strokes.<sup>[7]</sup> Light is the screen through which everything is seen, and details breakup under its impact. But light is always varying in intensity and an object varies its appearance under such fluctuation.<sup>[8]</sup> Beautiful momentary capture of sun light in *Afternoon Light in the Garden* presents overall visual effects as a substitute of details, by using short, choppy brush strokes of various warm and cool colour to accomplish an effect of forceful colour vibration. (Plate.1) The attraction of impressionism and its limitations are one and the same. It is view of the world as what we see, not what we think or feel which addresses to surface view which is immediate and beguiling where solid shapes dissolve and shower in colour to reform an image.<sup>[9]</sup>

For any artist the most important phenomenon of how to see, affects several disciplines such as drawing crowds of vegetations, creating value associations, expressing light and shade, and adding colour and sophistication. It is not simple rather a complicated process and need effort to train eye to get to the stage of seeing the inestimable amount of colour changes within form, that is why the scale of study also matters a lot.



**Plate.1** Afternoon Light in the Garden

Munawar’s work is a determined example of Impressionism at its purest. He feels delighted in depicting scenes from alluring nature, included landscapes, seascapes or still life with flowers set in natural observable environment. He fully incorporates natural reflecting light into his compositions and applies his passion for tonal relationship in visual experience. With very diminutive detail in *Birds of Paradise* Munawar sets up a scene portrayed through dissimilarity of colours, profundity, and temperature choices. After instituting these elements he paints more colours within the masses that give a painting more distinct look. It is all about adding additional strokes of colour into the first layers of colours and the painting comes into sight as a finished piece. (Plate.2) Forms in this painting are typically emphasized. Vibrant brilliant flowers set in leaves are depicted in sharp contrast and a range of tonal variation. Splash or rays of light right in the centre as falling from

above on leaves and flowers looks dramatic and making this painting a summary of Impressionism.



**Plate.2** Birds of Paradise

According to Degas, “One sees as one wants to see, and this falsity makes art.”<sup>[10]</sup> Impressionism is one of the chief characteristics of Munawar’s works. His work posses layers of colours that are effective, delicate and thin when multi layers are added. The brushstrokes in *Shades of Soul* overlap the very subtle colours. Viewers can without difficulty see the layers of yellows, pinks, and blues in the sun-drenched areas, while the shadows are made up of blues, violets, and gold. And the image portrays serenity and tranquillity of nature. Colours of the sky also depict a specific mood of time and light which is very sublime and subdued. (Plate.3) Path of rural nature in its pastoral mood depicted in pastel shades is another remarkable work.



**Plate.3** Shades of Soul

Effect of dull light is rendered with infinite diversity of tones. Atmospheric mood of the composition is portrayed with subtle potential of colours that makes it a true representation of melodious nature. Use of bolder and freer brush strokes follows Impressionistic style though his individualistic method is exemplified in this painting. Painting impressively shows as Munawar was absorbed in serenity of nature as evocative use of subdued colour tones to depict specific mood of light and atmospheric effect has taken precedence over representation of subject.

Principle of contrast applied in *Birds of Paradise* is far harsher than one applied in *Shades of Soil*. In foreground of *Shades of Soil* grass and bushes are rendered with rapid dashes of paint while tree with soft foliage are set off against the harsher strokes of grass and path while gloomy light representing a day in early autumn.

Impressionism is the most significant movement that ensued in European art since Renaissance, the visual approach of which it replaced. For a theoretical move toward ideas about the character of what we see, it alternated a perceptual one, based on authentic visual experience.<sup>[11]</sup> Impressionists represent familiar human pleasures family life, outings, and walks in the country river trips. The impressionist manner seems so natural, so truthful which posses a truthful matter of seeing. It is a revolutionary idea that painting is above all the matter of seeing.<sup>[12]</sup> The colour pulsation in Munawar's landscapes is created when one colour communicatively is painted over the other helps calm the significant colours that were painted first. Flowers in form of splashes of red spots in masses of greenery, is the way he sees them for his painting, and this truthfulness makes *Red Flower Tree* not less than a melody of brushwork. (Plate.4) Bright orange flowers against green background derived from the fact that they are complementary colours but equally instinctive according to the study of colour laws. This combination is not less than a powerful psychological separation that is required to depict such subject with its purity as it exists in nature.

Baudelaire has said, "The true painter will know how to extract the epic side of real life and understand how great and poetic we are in our ties and varnished boots".<sup>[13]</sup> The Impressionists behave the same way as they do with the countryside. They reject the illusion of line and seek only to capture the vibrancy.<sup>[14]</sup> With *Red Flower Tree* Munawar discovered new spectacle of site and its time like the poetry of modern time and appearance of visual seems a translation of pure interpretation. Rich colours are incorporated in his energetic paintings with integrating broken brush approach compromising decisive lines. For the swift impression of colours he used dissimilar but strong colours such as verity of green, bright red and white with delicate effect. The same boldness is manifested in the bold strokes to add details in the scene. His impressionistic approach to the painting style and selection of colours illustrates variety and unity in a range of subjects. Focus to lighting conditions and technique help him resolve compositional ideas for other larger studio paintings for which he makes preliminary sketches on location.

Palette of Munawar contains warm and cool pigments of every colour yellows include cadmium yellow, cadmium yellow light which is a primary yellow and lemon yellow. For the range of orange we find cadmium yellow light and dark, or cadmium orange. The reds include cadmium scarlet, cadmium red, and crimson. His palette of violets and blues consist of ultramarine and

cobalt blue, cerulean blue, and magenta. The greens include light or viridian green and the earth tones are violet or burnt sienna and yellow ochre. His *Red Flower Tree* is an example where he seems a champion of sensible and subjective mixing of cool and warm palette.



**Plate.4** Red Flower Tree

Thoughtfulness of the painting practice helps artists increase a greater understanding to colour sensitivity, and it give confidence to artist to use paint in a more dynamic and exhilarating way. The first prerequisite is to paint directly from the palette, using colour as pure as possible without adding white or any other colour tone. In his paintings we clearly see overlaying of main masses, and divisions of light and shade. His paintings resist mixing colours in first notes, except with white to lighten the value. This maintains the starting layers rich and highly saturated and helps avoid painting turning into muddy or dull colours. Applications of colours in layers for light and dark planes or masses are established correctly.

For impressionist, what matters is 'impression' not subject. Hard outlines, précised details, high finish all to be avoided still image seems so realist when seen.<sup>[15]</sup> Painterly strokes in Munawar's works look abstract but the application of right colour and value relationship bring surprising reality to the composition as we can see in one of his painting *Kachchay Rāstay*<sup>[16]</sup>. A serene mood has been generated by applying sensitive strokes of cool colours overlapping medium dark warm colours with a great skill. (Plate.5)

In his entire landscape paintings one can get pleasure from cultivation of his individual and personal sensation of nature. There is a dichotomy in his ambition to render notion of truth to nature or realism on one side and an assertion on the essential subjectivity of his vision on the other. Crisp strokes of oil colours on canvas reveal effect of sensation on his human soul and his canvas become a potent metaphor of viewing and particular notion of artistic creativity. His rapid informal notation of sketch signifies originality and uniqueness of his personal vision. The general outline of the scene follow the convention

established by Munawar in this painting that is an evidence of his personal attitude to this constant presence in the rural scene. The viewer's relationship with the visual representation is determined by organization of picture and it creates an impact of physical location for viewer. Extreme variety of mark-making in this painting complements the type of site that he chose. With *Kachchay Rāstay* Munawar discovers new manifestation of his surrounding in modern time. What he is painting is an insurmountable barrier that separates him from other contemporary artists.



**Plate.5** *Kachchay Rāstay*

It is in the relationship between sketches and the finished painting that our understanding of Impressionist art must be based.<sup>[17]</sup> The most notable feature of landscapes Munawar painted is the serenity and truthfulness while making an 'impression' trees, flowers, vegetations, long paths, he tried to represent his instinctive endeavour which possesses realistic subject and impressionistic approach. Momentary light falling on or in the subject not only displays assortment of vibrancy but also provides the moment that can be read as sun set or dusk. His two paintings sketchy in rendering titled 'Water lily' are fine examples of applying various kinds of strokes, dramatic and correct, both in colour and the decision of size. Treatment of the surface and movement of water is remarkable and rendered exquisitely. A rich combination of small and large brush strokes is going well in harmony and making the subject powerful in colour, style and captured moments. (Plate.6, 7)

Following Monet in his fascination of capturing water lilies in varying light and affecting single scene Munawar turned to this subject at numerous occasions. Art works of Munawar propose colours that best represent the major areas of composition or the areas of very subdued sun light and shade. Normally using the warmest tones for the sun planes and cool colours for shade areas makes these compositions vibrant and colourful. Critically speaking, these paintings of water lilies seem intimately analogous to the 'water lilies' by Claude Monet. Like Monet he did not bypass the supremacy of colour and

followed ideals while depicting un-idealized nature of landscape. However, with his ardent observation and skills, Munawar has occupied viewers with his remarkable palette and inviting compositions. A melodious mood of weather in these paintings entailed a careful decision of applying the level and tones of various warm and cool colours which has been dealt very sensibly and skilfully.



**Plate.6** Water Lilies.



**Plate.7** Water Lilies

If we observe tonality in the works of Munawar we will acknowledge him most excellent among his contemporary impressionists. Powerful play of light and shadows is an unavoidable aspect of his paintings. Act of placing pure pigments first for initiation of composition is relatively bold. Excessively applied pure colour in his paintings is sometimes overpowering because the eye needs a place to rest, but this is merely artist's own choice. More exaggerated colours look truer so no matter how intense they appear; in the end these colours altogether communicate the truth of such exaggeration. His painting *Amaltās*<sup>[18]</sup> is quite subjective showing full bloom of bright yellow flowers in hot summer. (Plate.8) Subject is painted with clarity and brilliance along with a strong sense of aesthetic honesty which is considerably compelling. A consistent tonal mastery conveys a sense of almost palpable atmosphere in his landscapes. His paintings are remarkable for the delicacy of his perception and dynamism in depiction. Frequently he manifests a certain dullness of composition as evidence

for instance *Kachchay Rāstay* which has a very dull and misty mood compared to his painting *Amaltās*. Blazing yellow of *Amaltās* flowers offers a range of yellow tones by using more warm colours such as browns and vermilions. In contrast cool greens are creating a balance that is much soothing for eyes.



**Plate.8** Amaltās

Selecting a process of developing imagery in a composition is artist's own choice. All the paintings start with simple masses with a forceful application of colour theory. Very initial filling of areas that are divided into large and small sections with warm and cool colours create very strong decisions of composition. Amazing factor of such practice is that very little application of paint gives the composition feeling of completeness. Sometimes additional layers are not required and very first application seems enough to bring a painting into perfection. First layers of paints develop effects of lights and darks into a composition though the details and textures added further that bring individuality and distinction in a painting. In his impressionistic approach of painting linear details are not added relatively variety of colour tones within masses creates a greater impact of composition.

Such gradations are actually the features of the subject that cause attraction in image. This variation may cause main focal point or the reason to appreciation. To preserve integrity of first layers is important so a cautious attempt while adding other layers in the subject is of prime importance. This practice makes it possible to add colours stroke by stroke and layer by layer and this develops infinite variety of colours in nature. Impressionism is not a technique to paint but an approach to see. It is the expression of translating subject through paints. Endless beauty of nature nurtures through the true Impressionist spirit and this characteristic is dominant in every painterly application of his works.

Either Munawar Mohiud Din is painting still life, plants or landscapes; he is enjoying the momentary and ephemeral effect of sunlight. His colours are not merged

or blended smoothly rather free brushwork facilitating the visual magically to achieve an emphasis on accurate depiction of subject in a continuously changing phenomenon of light. This is what makes him a remarkable artist who is assuring the philosophy of intellect, self expression or an impressionistic concern for nature.

## Conclusion

Munawar Mohiud Din is essentially a figure painter, fascinated by still life, landscapes and vegetations. For Munawar there is a delight in choosing to work in the crowd as for him crowd produces a new language. In the daily metamorphosis of outward things he felt a demand of an equal speed of execution. For this he came up with a style which is flexible and instantaneous and came along simplistic manner and expression of depiction. Like Impressionists he produced decomposition of light in given areas and planes with cool colours established by masters of Impressionism. He in many of his paintings rejected illusion of line and captured vibrancy and tended towards slight abstraction.

Munawar's masterly skill reveals delight in painting while squinting through an imaginary view finder allowing composition to take a clear form. In his landscape paintings serenity and truthfulness of 'impressions' such as trees, flowers, vegetations, long paths, make all of his works notably phenomenon. In each of his landscapes shapes are governed by varied directions linked by dominant tints and he succeeded in producing realistic translation of landscapes, on the contrary, he intended abstraction. His painterly strokes look abstract but the application of right colour and value relationship bring surprising reality to the composition. His work possesses layers of colours that are effective, delicate and thin when multi layers are added. Many of his works offer perceptibly higher key with bright colours and lightness of touch which distinguishes him as an astonishing impressionist without question.

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- [14] *Ibid.*, 43.
- [15] Denis Thomas, *The Age of Impressionists* (United kingdom: St Michael, 1988), 13.
- [16] *Kachchay Rāstay*, means Trails: An unpaved path or track.
- [17] John House, *Impressionism: Paint and Politics* (Singapore: Yale University, 2004), 68.
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