

# Courage personified!

UTTAM KUMAR, WHO FOUND HIS HAND IN HIS FEET, IS ONE OF THE VERY FEW ARTISTS IN THE STATE WHO CAN ACTUALLY PAINT WITH THE MIGHT OF HIS FOOT. HIS FABLES ARE POPULAR, AND HE DESERVES THE APPLAUD TOO. RAJAN KOUR FINDS OUT HOW HE PERSEVERED ALL OBSTACLES TO EMERGE VICTORIOUS, AND INSPIRATIONAL



Uttam Kumar giving final touches to his painting

When destiny denied the strength in Uttam's hands, he did not sit back to grouse or moan, rather he carved his destiny at his will which now lies in his 'foot's' hands. The huge mountains around Uttam Kumar's modest dwelling in Dudu Basantgarh did not act as impediments but as inspiration and their mightiness today is being captured so fascinatingly by the artist, thus humbling them to the core.

As a young lad going to his village school in Rasli Dandsaran, Uttam struggled to keep up with his class mates as he could not write. But adversity coaxes to envisage, to invent. As such the young lad not only discovered his latent potential to sketch things but became the tough master of his body, convincing it to obey it against all odds. He found his hands in his feet. He directed them not only to hold a pencil to write but also readied them for deft strokes of his brush, creating images with finesse. With desired agility his left foot gently stirs the brush on the canvas, translating thoughts into images, blending colours and giving realistic expressions to his impressions.

The divine love of Radha Krishna in the Geet Govinda series in traditional Kangra art is portrayed with precision by the young artist. The nuances, the fine intricacies of the art form with stone colours on hand made paper have been very well depicted in his Geet Govinda paintings. "My well wishers and friends have helped me learn the art, by teaching me and also presenting me some valuable books on the subject," expresses Uttam, the artist with a vision. "The holy shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi in Trikuta Hills has always inspired me, so I decided to create 'Nav-Durga' series after getting a nod from the Shrine Board authorities a couple of years back," revealed Uttam who has already created 65 works which are unique and beautiful. "I was to create 300

works for the series but did not get the desired response," avers Uttam who discloses that he has done extensive research on the subject in order to create good work. The versatile artist who started serious painting after passing out from school in 1990, has more than 700 works to his credit. He was chosen for the state award in 2008 by the former Chief minister of J&K Ghulam Nabi Azad. "Azad Sahib was quite impressed by my works, expresses Uttam, who will be presented with the award in July this year.

The artist who initially concentrated on traditional Kangra art is now focusing on realistic art form too and seems equally deft at it. His oil on canvas painting of playful puppies and a dark stallion is quite a treat to the eyes. The work beautifully portrays the nature in perfect harmony; the imposing attitude of the stallion and the bouncy pups with a peacefully flowing brook and hillocks in the rear, each one in idyllic synchronization.

Uttam Kumar knows exactly the colours which should fill his life and his works. He plans to have a series on the cultural aspects of his state. "Our state is rich repository of culture and traditions and it is my desire to bring it alive on canvas, expresses Uttam, the man with a firm mind. He says, "My two kids eight year old Isha and 4 year old Aditya love painting and they always come home with awards." "My wife is my strength and helps me in my work," he adds.

He has organised quite a few exhibitions but his dream to portray his works to the public at the Jehangir art gallery in Mumbai is alive in his eyes. "Once I am able to produce works on the culture of my state, I plan to hold an exhibition at Jehangir Art gallery," expresses Uttam, who feels support from the government and the administration is the most important prerequisite for an artist with meager resources to bloom.

A physically challenged painter Uttam Kumar holds brush in his foot to make a painting at Uchampur. Uttam has painted more than 700 paintings with his foot.



YEH HAI JAMMI