

We haven't forgiven him, say Husain's critics

Despite M.F. Husain's painting 'Battle of Ganga and Jamuna: Mahabharata' fetching a whopping \$1.6 million at the Christies' auction in New York and setting a world record, his detractors here refuse to forgive him for his earlier work that they consider anti-Hindu.

'Husain might have sold his painting on the Mahabharata on a global platform at an enormous price, but that doesn't change our stand. He has portrayed our gods in a derogatory manner, therefore when he is selling his painting abroad, it is a wrong portrayal of our beliefs and culture,' Rajendra Singh Pankaj, national secretary of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), told IANS.

At Christie's South Asian Modern and Contemporary Art sale in New York Thursday, Husain's painting fetched a whopping \$1.6 million to an anonymous bidder.

Ashok Bansal, the VHP spokesperson, said it hardly mattered how much money the painting fetched.

'It doesn't matter how much money the painting raised. It is like selling our culture. It will never receive social acceptance here,' Bansal told IANS.

Rakesh Misra, a Bajrang Dal supporter, added: 'Husain had sold our culture in the name of art. Just because the painting has sought such a price doesn't mean that it has been accepted globally.'

Husain's art works have often courted controversy. In December, Shiv Sena members tried to disrupt an exhibition of his paintings at the India International Centre here, saying they were disrespectful of Hindu gods.

Estimated at \$600,000-800,000, his painting 'Battle of Ganga and Jamuna' depicts a scene of the ancient Hindu epic 'Mahabharata', detailing the cosmic civil war between forces of right and wrong.

This monumental work of Husain's, a large diptych, was made in the apex of his career and is a part of a series of 27 paintings he began for the 11th Sao Paulo Biennial.

For art enthusiasts, the record sale of this painting was great news.

'Despite all the mindless protests, this just shows how much is Husain's art appreciated and sought after, not only here but the world over. This is a victory of art, Indian art,' said Sohini Raman, an artist based here.

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