

# Probe into artist's 'suicide' in Japan

FROM SUCHANDANA GUPTA

**Bhopal, July 7:** A leading tribal artist, who was desperate to return home and had written to his wife that his employers had rejected his appeals to come back, has allegedly committed suicide in Japan.

The Madhya Pradesh government has ordered a CID inquiry into the death of Jagan Singh Shyam, who was awarded the Shikhar Samman, the highest state honour for artistic excellence, about a decade ago when he was 30.

Shyam left for Japan three months ago to work in a museum. This was his third visit to the country. The artist's visa expired on June 20 and he wanted to return to his wife and three children in Bhopal.

But his employers persuaded Shyam to extend his visa by three months so that he could complete his paintings, earliest by July 27.

Shyam's letters to his wife Nankusiya Devi suggest that he was under pressure. Shyam was unhappy working for Rs 20,000 a month. On July 3, he allegedly hung himself from the ceiling of his kitchen in Nigata, near Tokamachi town. The letters are now with the CID team, which will soon leave for Japan. Nankusiya

has blamed an artist from Bihar who worked in the same museum for Shyam's death.

Shyam was working as an artist-in-residence in Mithila Museum near Tokamachi since April 13. The museum is acclaimed for promoting the Madhubani style of art. Lately, it had started promoting other Indian arts.

Though a deal was worked out and Shyam's departure was fixed for January this year, the artist was unwilling to go. After persuasion, he left in April.

"My husband wanted to return. He called me once and asked if I could send some false emergency telegrams so that he could say his wife and children are sick," Nankusiya said.

"But that Bihari artist served as a spy. He would listen to our conversation and go to the director of the museum to tattle. Whenever Shyam spoke to me, he was scared. He said there was someone eavesdropping. He last called me on Sunday," she said.

"He was depressed. He kept telling me the authorities got his visa extended and he would have to stay back for another month,



Shyam

maybe till August. He also said they were making him work hard but were not giving him good money."

Two days later, Shyam's wife was told her husband had committed suicide. The curator of the Mithila Museum, Miyoko Hasunuma, said: "After June 27, he (Shyam) stopped shaving and looked very depressed. We asked what was troubling him but he did not say anything."

## Memorial meet

A condolence meeting was held this morning under the aegis of Crafts Museum to mourn Shyam's death. Sanskriti chairman O.P. Jain, Jaya Jaitley, M.F. Husain, Manjit Bawa, NGMA director Rajeev Lochan, Vivan Sundaram and art critic Geeta Kapur, writers Nirmal Verma, Krishna B. Vaid, development commissioner of handicrafts Tinu Joshi and others paid homage to Shyam's memory. adds our special correspondent from Delhi. Artists Husain and Bawa and writer Verma spoke out against the exploitation of artists. Bawa said taking advantage of their innocence, folk and tribal artists are made to sign bonds.

THE TELEGRAPH

JUL 10 1991