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Ways of Perceiving

CURATION ESSAY



Figure One

“So there is no rules in terms of how we put an exhibition together. Sometimes the artist already has a strong idea of what they want to do but it is always in response to a space” said Eva Langret a head of exhibition at the Tiwani Contemporary Gallery (*Catriona G, 2016*).

I plan to curate my exhibition entitled ‘Women of Raj’ in a historical architecture of

Bangladesh called 'Gorashal zamidar bari'. It is a 247 years old classical colonial home built in 1175s located in Ghorashal, Palash, Narsingdi, Bangladesh (*Abu H,2018*). I chose this place in order to draw attention of peoples in Bangladesh toward this historical beauty. I believe that it will motivate the audience to learn and admire their own historical architectures. A writer and journalist Samuel mentioned, "Old colonial is at its present the only proper style for a country house"(*Samual A D, 1894,p.2*). I believe they are passages of time, one that holds many stories, secrets and its own cultural authenticity.

This historical building will create an instant connection with audience. Connection between theme of the exhibition with the place where the art pieces will be exhibited is important. Curator William C Seitz said "the gallery itself became the framing mechanism" (*Obrist,2014,p.29*), therefore selecting historical home will support my subject of the exhibition. The place itself and the photographs I have selected both are part of Bangladesh history which I would like to present to the new generation who are drifting away from their own root and culture. Architect Tadao Ando said "I believe that the way people live can be directed a little by architecture"(*Ngan,2019*).

Each photograph will be in wooden frame with a black background. There will be three rectangle and two square frames and the thickness of the frames will be 2". The square frames will be 1' all around and rectangular frames will be 1'x2' in size. The frames will be placed in the long veranda of the house which is about 20 meter with a extended circular space which made it specious and comfortable for people to move around. The exhibition will be attended by about 200 students and young artist. Each frames will be put in between the doors and windows and the gap between doors and windows. All rectangle frames will be placed vertically. Gap between doors and windows is about 4' which is enough space to place the frames in between. The entire building is painted in white which will help the photographs stand out to the audience. Idea of using a white space was from a film about photography of Jeff Walls solo exhibition in 2012 where he used white space to showcase his photographs (*Jeff W, 2012*).

I have selected 5 photographs of woman in 18th and 19thcentuary and through these photographs my goal is to show the incredible and bold women during British Indian Empire mostly known as British Raj. Photographer P Sainath's exhibition video about women of India in the days of British ruling encouraged me to present these photographs. "Women have and always been strong and responsible since centuries but unnoticed and unappreciated by everyone" (*P. Sainath, 2019*).



Figure Two

First picture will be in a rectangular frame. It is a portrait of an young princess Tarabai of Badora, Gujarat in 1880s. Though she is young her body language and attire represents her high status in the society. Accessories were not only used for fashion or to look beautiful around 18th and early 19th century . The purpose of wearing heavy jewellery was much bigger at that time. They were symbol of status, value, honour or ethnicity of an individual (Sauder,2012).



Figure Three

This photo of an Indian lady of 1880s. I chose this picture because of her beautiful hair decoration and how she dressed herself with a simple piece of clothing but did not compromise her hair decoration. Her posture and slight smile on her face shows her confidence by being so simple yet beautiful. This picture can be inspiring to women of 21st century and help them see beauty in a more authentic way. As many women now suffer from body shaming and lack of confidence and the meaning of beauty is now labelled in some specific category and to match that level young women are risking their mental and physical health (Cameron R, 2013).

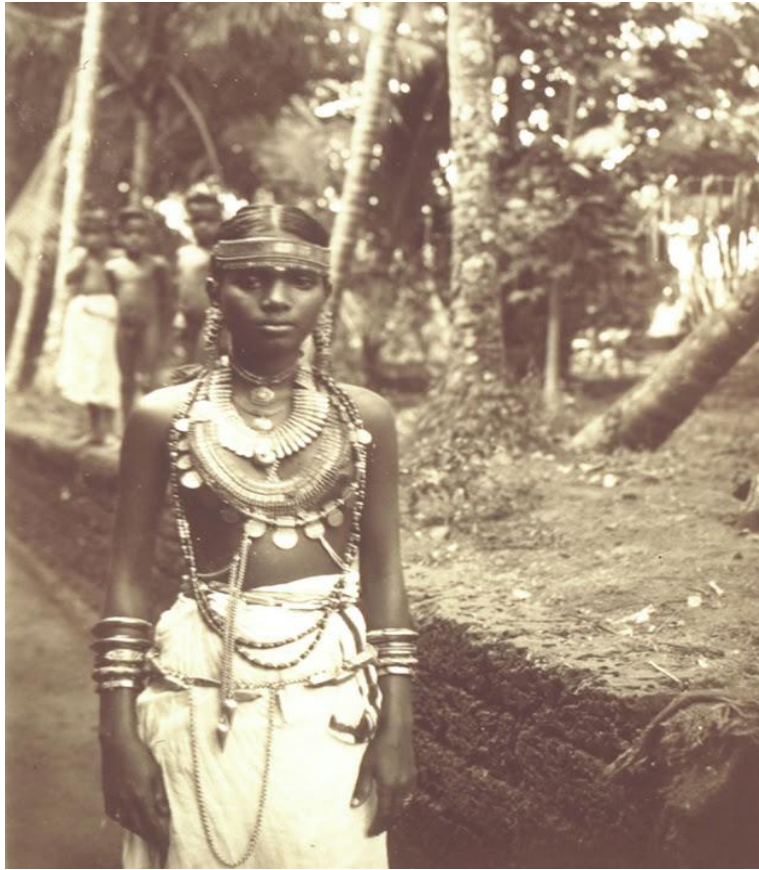


Figure Four

This is a photo of a tribal Malabar Nair women in 1914. The girl in the picture is wearing beautiful necklaces with only one piece of cloth to cover her lower part of the body leaving her breast uncovered. Behind this portrait of a beautiful bold women is the story of cruelty and violation caused by higher cast people and Hindu Brahmins of India in 19th century. Described by artist Sheikh Zainuddin "only a single loin cloth is girdled round the waist leaving the upper part exposed. In this respect males and females, rajas and nobles, rich and poor are equal." "None of the Hindu ladies except Brahmins thought that the breast was to cover, the caste law prohibits a Nair lady to cover her breast. There are instances of cruelties inflicted upon the ladies for violating these laws. An Ezhava lady who happened to travel abroad and returned well dressed was summoned by the Queen of Attingal and her breast was cut off for covering them" (*blog,2009*).

While women of so called high cast family were bound to remain inside the house and away from man's world (*Ian J, 1997, P.131*). According to an author Manisha Roy, In 19th century while women were exposed to western culture and Indian education system they were not encouraged to have an independent life based on profession (*Manisha R, 1975, p.10*).



Figure Five

When most educated women stayed home and did not even thought of breaking the social boundaries women of lower cast simply did not care and made their bold choices to provide for themselves or their family. In this picture these three girls are dancing for human pleasure. They were called 'Nautch girls' who danced and did prostitution to raise money. they were known for their skill and style which mesmerized man instantly (*Alex C, 2013*).

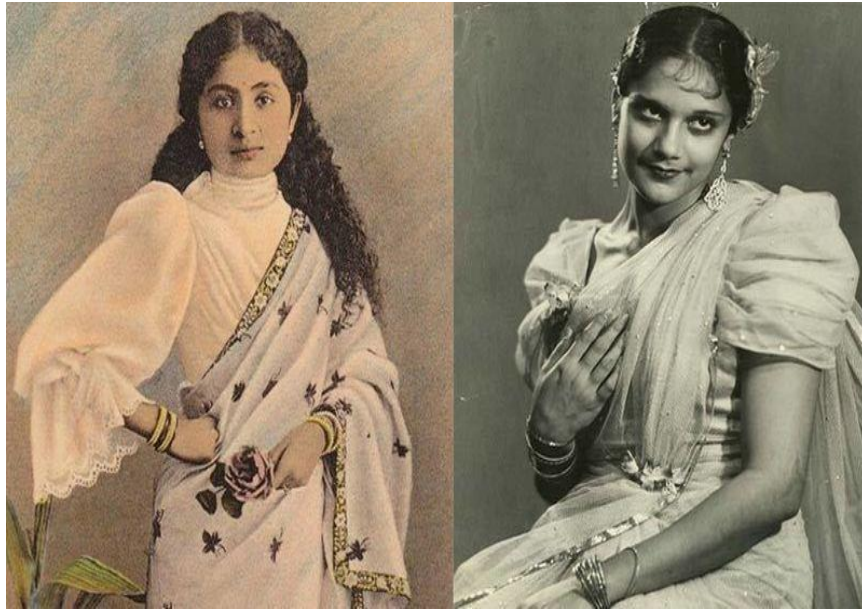


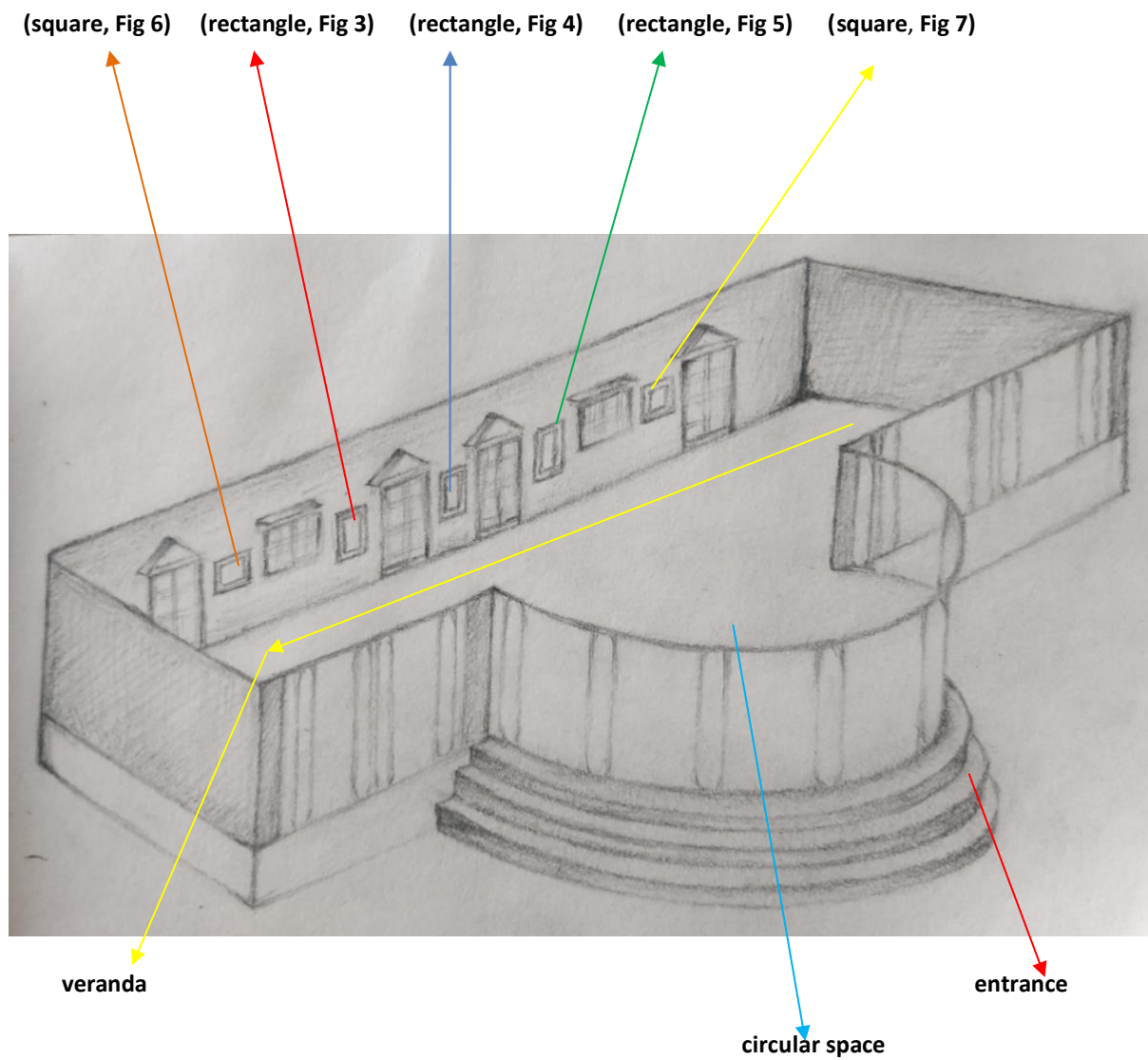
Figure Six

The last photograph will be of two women from Maharashtra community known as Pathre Prabhu women. They are great example of women who were thinking creatively and had the abilities to go against the culture and traditional rules even though independence for women was not established then. During British Raj when the word style or trend did not even exist in the dictionary of women of Indian community these women were making some bold choices by combining western and Indian style and creating something new. according to a blog by Payal Mohta the Pathre Prabhus held special status acquired under colonial rulers because of their intellectual abilities and great literacy rate. They invented the style of puffed blouse, wearing heels with sari which is emerging in fashion industry globally nowadays (*Payal M, 2017*).

This exhibition will be a contribution to represent the history of women of Bangladesh history .It is to target the heart of the youth of my nation who are forgetting to respect their own tradition, culture and have no interest to know about their own history. The lack

of publicity of these vintage photographs and historical places are the reason for them being forgotten.

Exhibition layout



Figures

Fig One: Ghorashal building

<https://www.bing.com/images/search?q=ghorashal++monu+mia+jomidar+bari&q=n&form=QBIR&>

Fig Two : <https://www.oldindianphotos.in/search/label/Royals> [glare free Ilford B & W print, solid wood passe partout frame]

Fig Three: <https://www.19cphoto.com/product-category/albumen-photographs/india/page/26/> glare free Ilford B & W print, solid wood passe partout frame]

Fig Four : <https://www.oldindianphotos.in/search/label/Women> glare free Ilford B & W print, solid wood passe partout frame]

Figure Five : <https://www.oldindianphotos.in/2010/12/three-nautch-girls-in-costume-dancing.html#links> [glare free Ilford B & W print, solid wood passe partout frame]

Fig Six : <https://homegrown.co.in/article/802015/the-maharashtrian-women-who-became-fashion-icons-during-the-british-raj>

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