

Research in Context (ADAD5003)

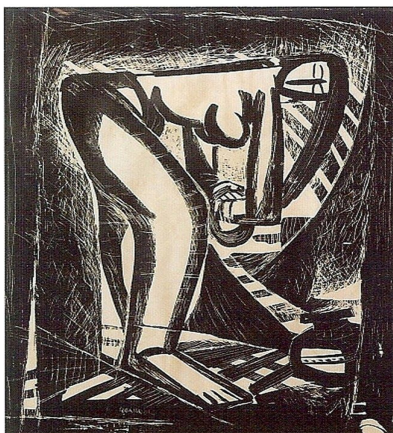
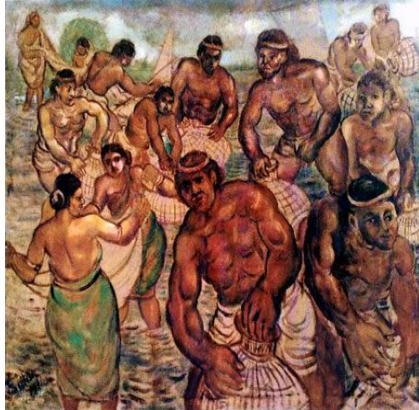
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Question 5: Choose a theme, movement or selection of artist designers that relates to your practice or interests, and construct a 2,500 word essay. Critically assess primary themes, key writers, and relevant practitioners.

Creative thinking inspires ideas, ideas inspire change (Barbara J). Art has meaning and has the power to change, I've got to understand that when my history teacher was Reading a chapter about the pioneer artist Zainul Abedin (1914-1976).

Abedin moved from Calcutta, a city of India to then Dacca, East Pakistan in 1948. It is currently known as Dhaka, the city of Bangladesh. He was devoted to the development of modern art in East Pakistan . With the leadership of Zainul Abedin, other artists called Anwarul Huq, Safiuddin Ahmed and Habibur Rahman started the first Government Institute of Art in the capital of Bangladesh (Hashem K,p.18,1998). Many of the teachers went abroad for training and came back with new ideas.



Figure 1: *Famine sketches ,1943*

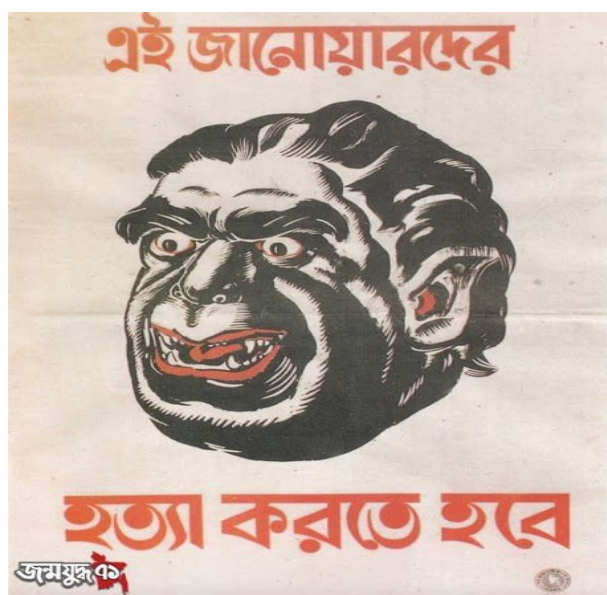
His famine sketches 1943-1944 which presented the horrific condition and struggle of starvation after the great famine in Bengal during its British Colonial period.

The artists started mixing folk art with western styles such as cubism and opened the door to new ideas. They started with 18 students, many of which are famous painters and kept contributing toward the art community in their own ways. Artists like Quamrul Hassan (1921-1988) who was an art student of Calcutta moved to Dhaka in 1948 to join the faculty which was led by Abedin to form an art institute there. After the independence from British ruling in 1947 followed by the partition of India and

Pakistan the excitement and desperation for new identity these pioneer artists has given the field of creativity new meaning so that it is not neglected and unappreciated.

In Bangladesh art was looked at as a decoration or something that pleased audiences eyes until art pieces like 'The Famine' sketches of posters like 'Annihilate These Demons' series were created. To create famine sketches Zainul made his own ink by crushing ordinary charcoal and sketching on ordinary packing paper. His goal was to document the suffering, struggle of people who were dying by the roadside by starvation. His famine series exposed the negligence of British ruling while the great famine caused salvation across the bengal province. His work was published in a book called 'Darkening Days' by Ela Sen 1944 along with short stories which was banned by British authorities,(Sushil G,2012). Few of the original drawings of abedin are still available in the British museum, (Andrew W,2016).

Two most powerful pieces which also became a part of Bangladesh political history were drawn by Quamrul Hassan(1921-1988). An artist who's known for being patriotic, bold and fearless. His work ' Annihilate These Demons' is a monstrous face of the president of Pakistan Yahya Khan who ordered a genocide in Bangladesh in late night of 25th March,1971 while everyone's asleep (Sumit G,p.60,2001).



1



2

Figure 2:“Annihilate these demons,1971”

In May 1971 the poster was published in Calcutta but the influence of the poster was so powerful that in the same month millions of copies were printed and distributed among the public for free. At first it was only published in Bangla then printed in English targeting international attention . The poster was used as posters for a non-cooperation movement in March 1971 to motivate freedom fighters of Bangladesh to fight back against the pakistani government even though they weren't trained (Newage.bd,2016).

Hassans other powerful work was when he made a mockery of the ruling dictator Hossain Mohammed Ershad in 1988. It was titled with a Bangla quote which means “Our land is now in the hand of the champion of shamelessness”, (Sultana D,2016). The sketch triggered the mass anti- Ershad movement in 1990. It was a quick sketch which he drew at a poetry event in 1988. Few minutes after completing the drawing he passed away (The Daily Star,2019).



Figure :3 ‘Desh Aaj Bissho Behayar Khoppore, 1988’

The pioneers never stopped gathering progressive young groups of people and teaching them how to use art as an expression for their social and cultural views. Recent independence and immense popularity of artist movements with simplest forms of creativity like illustration, drama or songs started to gain momentum and spread social awareness amongst the people of Bangladesh.

Works of Bangladeshi artists revolve around the country and the people. Work of pioneer artists as well as the work of new promising artists work are mainly based on realism then abstract. It has been a way for them to showcase issues where they live and aspects of their life. As a practising artist I tend to create work which is connected to my roots and artists like Kanak Chapa Chakma, Zainul Abedin, Quamrul Hassan have been huge inspiration.

Kanak chanpa chakma,1963 is among the ethnic minorities of Bangladesh and her work also focused on the life of women of ethnic minorities. Bold colour, combining realism and abstract together her work focuses upon the women's contribution in families compared to men.



Figure 4: *Music* ,2010

A newspaper published an article where Kanak talks about what inspires her. She said “ vivid colours of indigenous attire, the hills, forests ‘jhum’ cultivation, pristine blue waterfalls, dance and music; in other words anything that defines life in the hilly areas of Bangladesh” is what inspired her, (The Daily Star,2013).



Figure 5: *Chakma Girl*,2006

My favourite pieces of work by Kanak are ‘Music’ And ‘Chakma Girl’. Only a few shades of colour and the texture of acrylic paint never fails to mesmerise me. Her work is a perfect representation and combination of female strength and beauty. The ongoing covid 19 pandemic has shook every individual and almost feels like the pace of living has slowed down. To help people stay motivated and create social awareness across Bangladesh, which is currently economically struggling to face the pandemic, eminent artists came together and organised the country's first virtual event. Five of the country's most renowned artists were painting in their own studio space while being live on facebook from 11:30 am till 4:30 pm. Bishwajit Goswami, Anisuzzaman Anis, Biren Shome, Mohammad Eunus and Kanak Chanpa Chakma created two paintings each. Cosmo Gallery in Dhaka, Bangladesh came up with the idea to initiate a virtual art movement because of the pandemic. Assistant professor of the faculty of arts and visual artist Bishwajit Goswami explained it as ‘Brightening the spirit with art’(UNB News,2020).

The theme is an exceptional initiative taken by the artists to raise funds by selling the paintings to help people who were affected by the pandemic. Many societies in my country believe that painting or artwork of any sort is a visual entertainment when by using art as a source of expression artists have saved tradition and cultures in so many occasions.

The first abstract painter of Bangladesh Mohammed Eunus born in 1954 thinks of drawing as an appearance of thoughts and mirror of his mind frame, (Blog,2016). Geometrical shapes are something I have been trying to use in my art practise and find Eunuses approach of using shapes is interesting.



Figure 6: *The Abstract Affair, 2017*

Artist Eunuse uses structures, forms, doodles, shapes and manipulates them to create various expressions in his abstract paintings.. His style and way of implementing geometrical shapes helped me get ideas about how to use the shapes without drawing any harsh lines and sort of present them in a form which has the essence but not the actual form.

Platoon commander for the Bangladesh liberation war in 1971, Shahabuddin Ahmed 1950 started studying art to become an artist. His painting reflects his experience during the war. He is known for his bold expressive painting where he creates human figures as fearless and muscuing free from their skin, flesh and blood.

Although Bangladesh is an independent country I have personally never felt free from social stigma which was combined with Islam and used the religion as a tool for creating pointless issues. As an artist being bold and still holding back because of the hesitation or fear of what the outcome will be of the expression is scary even today.

As artist Shahabuddin stated “The idea of Bangladesh was successful after the Liberation War and again was not successful (blog, 2017).” His series ‘Desire’ where he painted human figures as free spirits and made them look powerful and strong. The bare human bodies in the paintings almost represent the fiercer soul and desperation which is hidden under the skin of Bangladeshi youth and fighting to break free.



Figure 7: *Desire II, 2009*

Religion has been used as a weapon over and over again in many ways. Bangladesh is known for its mixed culture and religion where every religion celebrates and respects each other's faith and values. Various times political groups have tried to destroy freedom and peace for the name of religion. Artists have been attacked and been called atheists just because their work didn't follow the religious

rules. In fact some activists and bloggers lost their life for being outspoken (Jayanta S,2020) .

In 2016 Bangladeshi sculptor Mrinal Haque (1958-2020) faced serious clashes for creating a statue called 'Lady justice'. The Government asked him to create a statue which will be placed in front of the supreme court as a symbol of justice.

Political groupe who clames to be islamic began to protest for removal fo the statue because worshipping idol is forbidden in islam. After ordering the statue's removal by the government art students and activists got together demanding reinstallation for the statue.



Figure 8: *Lady Justice,2016*

Artists all over the country got together for the mass protest. Activist Imran Sarkar said “ it is a betrayal of the people. The depressing thing is that the government is using it as a political tool” (aljazeera,2017). Bangladeshi artists have been fighting the freedom of expression together since decades.

Nowadays female artists whose work is mostly about women are labeled as feminist. In my own practice I tend to focus on women's life in my own culture and society simply because some incidence triggers my feelings or I'm fascinated by something. In my recent artist research I learned about an artist called Nazlee Laila Mansur, 1952. I Can relate to the way she looks at a woman's journey as strong and fearless

instead of how generally it all about how oppressed a woman is. As she said in an interview “Women, their reality and psyche have been the themes for my works time and again in the local context. But my approach to women is not that of a feminist’s, though I like to tell women’s story which is mine too (Newagebd,2020)”.

Female artists have played a vital role in Bangladesh cultural movement. Their workes aare concentrated on harassment, intolerance, discrimination, fundamentalism and womens contribution to the society. In my country every other

day women are getting raped, girls are getting threatened and harassed on the street. Female artists like Nazlee, Fareha Zeba, Maksuda Iqbal Nipa, Habiba Akther Papia and many more artists have been trying to create social awareness through art movements.



Figure 9 :
Bandaged Bondage, Present, 2002



Figure 10:
Bandage Bondage, Child, 2002

Nazlee mentioned in an interview "Art can play a vital role in generating social awareness, but to make the people truly aware everyone has to play a part. In our country, women have been subjected to exploitation for decades, and for various reasons. Until women and girls are liberated from discrimination and injustice, all our work goes in vain. We should work with renewed determination for a future of equal

rights, equal opportunities and progress for all (Takir H,2011)." women are becoming more vocal about their opinions because our female artists of various roles were successful to be vocal about the social and traditional and been motivating the young people to express themselves and break barriers.

Farida Zaman, 1953 and illustration and artist is a great example for Banglali girls who want to focus on career rather than be bounded by traditional norms. I believe today's youth need to see artists like Farida, Fareha Zeba, Kanak Chanpa Chakma and their contribution so that they don't surrender their dreams or interests and be recognised. Art has been frowned upon by many traditional minds even today because it's difficult to earn in this field. People like Farida proved that if you stay positive and work hard it is possible to overcome obstacles that come across. She stated, "Life gave me a fair share of hardships, but I continued to paint no matter what; painting was my source of livelihood, my favourite pastime and my only sliver of salvation"(Nafisa F,2018). Women in the field of art began centuries ago. They always had to fight obstacles to make a place for themselves.

An unforgettable sculptor of Bangladesh Novera Ahmed (1939-2015) an



Figure 11 :*Novera Ahmed, Seated Woman 1958*

unforgettable icon who revolutionised the field of arts and crafts. Her work and thinking process were always ahead of its time and unique. Pioneer artist Abedin

stated “What Novera is doing now will take us a long time to understand, she is that kind of artist, (Farhat A,2020).”

She was the first sculptor of East Pakistan in 1957 which after the liberation war in 1971 became Bangladesh. Her work was not appreciated back in the days it was considered fictional and far from reality. She collaborated with another artist Hamidur Rahman to design the most important and respected symbol ‘ Shahid Minar’ which was built to show respect toward martyrs who lost their life in the liberation war. Novera was labelled as an arrogant artist because of her bold personality and unapologetic expression. The social barriers couldn't stop Novera from doing what she's passionate about. Novera once mentioned “We must let the people grow up with work of art playing a direct positive part in their everyday lives. We must return to the concept of city planning which has inspired the growth of great cities of the world, giving it a new interpretation. We must ignite among our people the spark of curiosity, about the inner visions, meanings and truths of life, which can come only by bringing art within the horizon of our city life (Farhat A,2020).”

Artists of Bangladesh have broken the typical thinking of society where artists were taken as somebody who only makes colourful canvases for decoration. Creative people have played important roles in social or political situations whether it was through performative art, joining protest becoming an activists or organising an movement to bring changes to the society and break through traditional thinking and gave new generation hope to dream and consider art as a career and not just a hobby. Recently Bangladeshi people have started to take art seriously and the youth have been inspired to take the chance with what they love. Kanak Chanpa Chakma, Zainul Abedin, two of these artists have inspired me to take art as my career. Art can be verbal and visual and it is understood by everybody.

Source of Image

Figure 1: *Famine Sketch* , 1943

<https://www.dhakatribune.com/magazine/arts-letters/2019/04/04/new-soil-study-confirms-1943-bengal-famine-was-caused-by-winston-churchill-s-policies-not-drought>

Figure 2: *Annihilate These Demons*, 1971 (1,2)

https://www.google.com/search?q=annihilate+these+demons&sa=X&rlz=1C1CHBF_

Figure 3: *Desh Aaj Bissho Behayar Khoppore*, 1988

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/825706912906960935/>

Figure 4: *Music*, 2010 <https://www.artisttrekker.com/kanak-chanpa-chakma>

Figure 5: *Chakma Girl*, 2006

http://www.artnet.com/artists/kanak-chanpa-chakma/chakma-girl-0zUVjnrez5NMhkR_Hf_GrQ2

Figure 6: *The Abstract Affair*, 2017

<https://www.thedailystar.net/arts-entertainment/exhibition/poet-abstraction-1377544>

Figure 7: *Desire II*, 2009 http://www.gangesart.com/artist_details.php?id=208

Figure 8: *Lady Justice*, 2016

<https://dailyasianage.com/news/65323/the-mistreating-of-lady-justice>

Figure 9: *Bandage Bondage, Present*, 2002

<http://nazleelaila.blogspot.com/2017/11/acrylic-on-canvas-oil-on-canvas-and.html>

Figure 10: *Bandage Bondage, Child*, 2002

<http://nazleelaila.blogspot.com/2017/11/acrylic-on-canvas-oil-on-canvas-and.html>

Figure 11: *Seated Women*, 1958

<http://nazleelaila.blogspot.com/2017/11/acrylic-on-canvas-oil-on-canvas-and.html>

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