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The Emergence and Development of Academic Fine Arts: Perspective Bangladesh

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A.

It is difficult to determine when and how the locality in India was formed but it can be anticipated easily that the history of this land is quite ancient. According to the *Mahabharata*, with the approval of Dirghotoma Muni Boloraj Sudeshna gave birth to five children, Anga, Banga, Kalinga, Pundra and Sunga. Among them, Banga came to Bengal. This is why it could be said that Bangla is not limited as a land only, rather she has an ancient and rich history.

The bank of Bengal was divided into various localities and the inhabitants of the localities were known by the respective names of those localities. But from a very ancient time the territory called Banga was formed as an individual nation, and sometimes a sovereign state, undoubtedly it was known not only to the Indian subcontinent but also to the outside world (Ajoy Ray 103).

Recent researches proved that primitive men used to live even in Bangladesh. No primitive art work has yet been found in this alluvial but primitive men's weapons are



discovered here. Our art has taken it's present state with the influences of Harappa Mohenjo-Daro and afterwards Hindu Buddhist Jain and Muslim religions. Actually to know the position of any creative work, the exploration of its history is required as history is needed to step forward. Most importantly, the history of whole India is actually that of our country (Bangladesh).

B.

Pal Puthichitro is Bengal's very own and very first art form. After the invasion of Muslim Sultans, the diminution of this art started but was not totally destroyed. With the foundation of the first institution for Fine arts in Kolkata, the art movement of India started its journey. As the institutional education was started, many conservative to elite families were courageous enough to be educated. The first professional artist who came of a Muslim Bengali family was Abdul Moin and he is one of the ancestors worth following for the Muslim artists. He was a student of a Madrasa in Kolkata, at that time the Madrasa students were propagating that drawing is Haram (forbidden) , he got admitted into the art school and secured his first position in the first class, later joined as the first Muslim teacher of the art school. But he died young and after that Zainul Abedin joined as a teacher in 1938. Who later led the art practice in Bangladesh (Faizul Azim 84). His allies were Shafiuddin Ahmad, Anwarul Haque, Said Ali Ahsan, Shafik Ul Amin, Sheikh Anwar and Habibur Rahman. The plant of art that these artists had planted in the then East Pakistan reflected the shadow of Kolkata art school. In this regard Abul Monsur says:

The limitations lie in the structure of our art education system. The nineteenth



century British colonial system is still running where the single sided perspective is made that can only create the image of visible reality. The base of relishing various art forms is not built (Bulbul Osman 11).

In the art movement of Bangladesh the contribution of this institution is enormous.

This institute has done a herculean task in order to spread Fine arts. The reason behind this is that the institution was founded in Dhaka, the capital of the then East Pakistan. A few personnel of the state were involved in this. The first Fine arts institution in this land of Bengal was founded in Khulna, “Maheshwarpasha School of Fine Art”. This institution was founded by Shree Shashivushan Paul (1878-1945) in 1904 at the yard of his own house in a humble set up. The intakes started in 1904 and a four year diploma course was offered and from 1917 annual exhibitions were arranged regularly. The viceroy of Bengal Lord Liton visited this school in 1922; afterwards the school was built beside the Khulna Jessor highway in 1929. The British government awarded the artist Shashivushan Paul the title of Raay Bahadur. He worked as the principal of the institution up to 1945. He achieved 40 international awards throughout his lifetime. He revealed himself as a professional artist in the Indian subcontinent (Mohammad Nazrul Islam Agrany 29-31). He dedicated himself just a hundred percent for the love of art. He did not create art pieces only but also tried to create artists and take part in art movements wholeheartedly. In this regard Nihaar Singha commented-

In the undivided Bengal or colonial India all the art institutions were mere business organizations. The aim of those institutions was to get financial benefits. This is why those institutions were founded in various commercial



cities. Opposite to this trend, without any British patronization and outside the city based art practice, the very first art movement that was triggered from a personal effort occurred at Maheshwarpasha, Khulna in the present Bangladesh. (Nihar Shingh 32)

The art arena of Bangladesh is having better time nowadays, celebrities are available, both private and government institutions are large in number. The buyers of paintings are also not rare. In the past artists had to depend on the foreigners. The circumstances changed these days. Customers are huge in number even at home. The trade of paintings is very much related to art practice. No kings and royal courts exist anymore to patronize the artists. So they have to patronize themselves. And this is why they need proper supply. After the partition it was a hurdled way to pass. The efforts that were required to establish an art institution is beyond imagination now. At that time Zainul Abedin came back to the country for the sake of his mother and motherland and started to chase his dream of establishing an art school. And the famous artist Aminul Islam is the founder student. He went to Kolkata to join art school but he heard from Zainul Abedin that an art institution would be established in East Pakistan and on the basis of Zainul's promise he came back and joined in the process of this establishment. The advantage on Aminul Islam's part was that he hailed from an elite family and had close relationship with the leaders and bureaucrats. Zainul Abedin could technically convince the authority about the need for an art institution using his fame and ability to mix with people. Aminul Islam informed:

Dhaka was a small town then. The lack of land and the uncertainty of getting the government's funding it was not possible to build the art school at that



time. But our attempt never stopped. In Pakistan most of the people did not accept painting and making idols as a good practice. In February 1948 at the dining room of Fazlul Haque hall, Dhaka University an exhibition of Zainul Abedin's work on famine was arranged for one afternoon for the first time in Dhaka (Aminul Islam).

That was the first art exhibition in Dhaka. After a few months there was another art exhibition where a poster exhibition was arranged on the occasion of the first anniversary of the establishment of Pakistan. The subject of the poster was a brief pictorial description of the creation of Pakistan from the victory of Muslims in the Indian subcontinent. Kamrul Hasan also helped Aminul Islam a lot along with Zainul Abedin. After the exhibition all the obstacle against the establishment of an Art school was gone. Aminul Islam commented about the exhibition, "The blind people of that time could easily see the glorious history in the pictures that were drawn in easy, simple yet strong composition" (Kamrul Hasan 32). Everybody understood the need for an art school after these two exhibitions.

But in a state established on the basis of religion with a conservative social attitude the foundation of an art college was not an easy task. But the then government permitted it by realizing the need for artists by the easy and vast endorsement of national alliance and state ideology despite the negative perception of Fine arts (Faizul Azim 116). The journey of fine art started in such a period when art practice was looked at from a communal point of view without the slightest recognition. The vastness and the spark of Fine arts were anticipated by some of the personnel of the then East Bengal government and this is why they did not want the establishment of an art institute right after the partition. An artist's mind does not approve



of corruption. Artists never take time to revolt against and criticize unfair means which had been evident in India. The continuity of it was the establishment of Bangladesh from Pakistan and even the present date from the post liberation Bangladesh. In all the movements the artists took part very actively. After the establishment of the art institute, a people's movement and the quick spreading of it in a Muslim country is a rare incident.

In the pride of victory in the liberation war of seventies, the history of our art was very active. At that time a number of artists entered into the art arena. So many realistic paintings were drawn instead of abstracts. A huge number of artists and art students started to have the opportunity to get trainings in various countries of the world. The scope for trainings in different western countries besides India, China and Japan added a variation in types and skills in our art. Very soon the fine art of Bangladesh was spread all over and the necessity of it was also felt. Outside Dhaka, in Chittagong and Rajshahi the art institutes were found with which Fine arts was spread immensely. After the independence Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy was founded which institutionally arranged exhibitions and competitions that opened the path for state patronization for Fine arts.

C.

As a result of Rashid Chowdhury's attempt in 1969 Fine arts was included as a subsidiary of Bangla department and after some time as a Master's program. In 1973 another art college was established in Chittagong which was also leaded by Rashid Chowdhury. In independent Bangladesh the first honors and Master's degrees were awarded in Chittagong University. Later (in 2012) the department of Fine arts and Chittagong Fine arts College together formed Chittagong Fine arts Institute. After the establishment of art school in 1948,



it was transferred to Segun Bagicha from National Medical School in mid 1952. It was transferred to its own building in 1956 and in 1963 it was named East Pakistan Fine Arts College. After the independence it was named Bangladesh Fine arts College. It was included as an institution of Dhaka University in 1983 and started offering honors degree from 1992. In 2009 a department of Fine arts was started individually at Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University, Trishal, Mymensingh. After that in 2013 Jahangirnagar University's and in 2014 Jagannath University's Fine arts departments started their journey. Before that Rajshahi Fine arts College was included in the University in 1994 and Khulna Fine arts Institution in 2009. Besides these a few government approved colleges also offer BFA degrees among which the followings are worth mentioning :- Narayanganj Art College, Narayanganj, Bogra Art College, Bogra, Rajshahi Art College Rajshahi, S. M. Sultan Art College, Jessore, Dhaka Art College, Rayerbajar Dhaka etc. Among the private Universities University of Development Alternative, Shanto-Mariam University, University of Liberal Arts offer bachelor and Master's degrees in Fine arts. In 2015 Sheikh Fajilatunnesa Mujib University started its journey along with the department of Fine arts. Of course the necessity of institutional education of Fine arts has been increased in Bangladesh and the development of it with the course of time actually is an evidence of this fact.

However, the art movement that started its journey with Zainul Abedin is still being continued to date. He could anticipate that in every smallest part of this land artists will be born and the consciousness of art will exist. At present, art is included in primary level education as a means of the psychological development of children and in medical treatment art therapy is used; both are surprising developments. The progress of Fine arts in Bangladesh



is playing a vital role in human development and national history. It has gained an international acclamation. And the gradual development of it has ensured the acclamation as well.



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