

**JOURNAL
OF
THE ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BANGLADESH
(HUMANITIES)**

Vol. 70

No. 2

December 2025

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Correspondence : All correspondence may be addressed to: Editor, Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh (Humanities), 5 Old Secretariat Road, Nimtali, Ramna, Dhaka 1000, Bangladesh.

Telephone : (880+2) 2226640753

E-mail : asbpublication@gmail.com

Website : www.asiaticsociety.org.bd

Published by The Asiatic Society of Bangladesh

Price Tk. 200.00 (Two hundred taka)

ISSN 1015–6836 (Print)

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CONTENTS

- The Tapestry of Masculinities: A Critical Analysis of Heterogeneous Masculinities in Begum Rokeya's *Padmarag***
Atia Sanjida Sushoma 143
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3329/jasbh.v70i2.87525>
- Investigating the Gap Between Viewers' Perception and Artists' Motifs of the Graffiti Art in Bangladesh: An Inquiry**
Shorna Akter and Md. Minhajul Abedin 155
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3329/jasbh.v70i2.87526>
- Reconstructing Domestic Architecture in Ancient Pundranagar : An Ethno-Archaeological Hypothesis Based on Pāla Period Evidence**
Sajid Bin Doza 171
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3329/jasbh.v70i2.87528>
- Wanderers, Warriors and Threshold: Situating Ascetic Militarism in Eighteenth Century South Asia**
Sutapa Bhattacharya 193
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3329/jasbh.v70i2.87529>
- Understanding Women's Subordination and Patriarchal Practices in the Context of *Kālidāsa's Śakuntalā*: An Analysis**
S. M. Latiful Khabir 215
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3329/jasbh.v70i2.87530>
- An Unpublished Late Mughal Mosque Inscription: Exploring the Local History of Greater Cumilla**
Mohammad Mahmudul Hasan Khan and Nazmul Alam Ridoy 229
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3329/jasbh.v70i2.87532>
- The Lamp of Reform: Florence Nightingale's Health Interventions in Colonial India**
Sharmin Jahan Chowdhury 251
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3329/jasbh.v70i2.87533>

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The Tapestry of Masculinities: A Critical Analysis of Heterogeneous Masculinities in Begum Rokeya's *Padmarag*

Atia Sanjida Sushoma*

Abstract

This paper illustrates a convoluted exploration of the portrayal of hegemonic masculinity in Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Padmarag*. Through the depiction of diverse male characters in *Padmarag*, Rokeya deconstructs the perception of universal male privilege in patriarchal society and challenges the monolithic and unidimensional representation of masculinity. Through deploying Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity and an intersectional lens, this paper scrutinizes how socio-cultural, financial, and colonial aspects frame and situate men within patriarchy. The paper illuminates that through *Padmarag*, Rokeya unveiled the fluid nature of masculinities. It also extensively portrayed how Rokeya challenged the colonial paradigm that situates Western men as sophisticated and reveals the moral and social fraudulence immanent in colonial masculinities in *Padmarag*. This paper endeavors to enhance the academic discourse by highlighting new discernments about *Padmarag*, which focuses on the fluid, multifaceted, and heterogeneous nature of masculinity in colonial Bengal.

Key words: Hegemonic masculinity in *Padmarag*, patriarchy, intersectionality, colonialism.

1.1 Introduction

Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain is acknowledged as the pioneering advocate for women's liberation in Bengal. The motivation of her literary work aims to address the history of the suppression, oppression, and domination of women in Bengal by men.¹ She aimed to expand female education among Bengali Muslims, and her literary works advocated Muslim women's education and empowerment in colonial Bengal.² *Padmarag* is one of the distinguished feminist texts, which focusing on the diversified socio-cultural realities faced by women in colonial Bengal.³ The story of

* Lecturer, Department of Women and Gender Studies, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh.

¹ T. Alam, *Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain: Trends of Thoughts and Social Works* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1992), p. 45.

² R. Mahmud, "Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain: Tireless Fighter of Female Education and Their Independence—A Textual Analysis", *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, Vol. 4, No. 9, 2016, pp. 40–48.

³ Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, *Padmarag*, in *Rokeya Rochonaboli* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1924)

Padmarag revolves around a group of women in *Tarini Bhavan*, where they share their untold stories, experiences of patriarchal and domestic abuse with each other.⁴ However, she also portrayed diversified forms of masculinities in the novel, which usually remain concealed and obscured. *Padmarag* not only illustrates the multifaceted oppressions faced by women but also highlights the multiple manifestations of male characters in its narrative to depict the intricate dynamics of gender relations. The novel highlighted how Bengali masculinities were heavily influenced by the colonial discourse, which represented Bengali men as effeminate and weak. To validate the colonizing endeavor, colonial officers propagated that Bengali men were not adequately masculine and too effeminate to fit into the standards of colonial hegemonic masculinity.⁵ Through the portrayal of characters such as Rafia's husband, Abdul Gofur Mia, and several other male characters, Rokeya illustrated the influence of colonial standards on reshaping local masculinities. Rokeya also showed how Bengali men internalized some of the colonial standards, and embarked on careers that involved a degree of Western education and training. This is what led them to travel to the UK to study for the Bar, or careers in government civil services and so on, but as far as women were concerned, they wanted to keep women away from internalizing western culture. Thus, women's education was confined to learn a smattering of English, aimed at creating suitable wives for the emerging professional men. At the same time, they expected women to be submissive and dutiful wives. On this ground, Partha Chatterjee (1989) argued that during the latter part of the colonial period, women's education was concerned to safeguard traditional values in the spirit of nationalism, and women were to refrain from internalizing Western culture. This selective approach to modernization of women's questions embodied the dynamics of a new patriarchy.⁶ Besides this, through the portrayal of a white man's abusive behaviour in *Padmarag*, Rokeya deconstructs the established notion about the colonizer as a symbol of modernization, civilization, and instead discloses their active role in consolidating established patriarchal norms. As evident from various studies that

⁴ Md. M. Hasan, "Intimate Revelations: Conversations among 'Evil' Women in Rokeya's *Padmarag*", *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol. 57, No. 1, 2022, pp. 83–101.

⁵ Sahelee Parveen Dipa, "Subversion of Colonial Masculinity and Manifestation of Gendered Nationalism in *Letters of 1971 (Ekattorer Chithi)*", *Crossings*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2022, pp. 27–41.

⁶ Partha Chatterjee, "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India", *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 1989, pp. 622–33. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/645113>.

despite the discourse that claimed Europeans to be the epitome of civilization, European women's rights had to be fought for, and their voting rights were denied for many years.⁷ Moreover, brutal practices such as witch-burning had been practiced for a long time.⁸ Though *Padmarag* is more often read as an example of Rokeya's feminist vision and a portrayal of women's empowerment, the depictions of various male characters have not received similar inspection. These characters play a significant role in shaping the novel's interpretations of gender relations. Through presenting a spectrum of male characters who, instead of conforming strictly to ideals of hegemonic masculinity, exhibit diverse behaviors, including allies or oppressors, Rokeya portrayed the construction of varied forms of masculinities in the socio-cultural context of colonial Bengal.

The representation of male characters in Rokeya's *Padmarag* illustrates how men's identity and behavior are shaped by patriarchal norms, which signifies that masculinity is not uniform and homogenous; rather, it is fluid and dynamic and influenced by socio-cultural factors. The parallel existence of progressive and oppressive male characters in *Padmarag* demonstrates that masculinity is not monolithic. This article aims to shed light on how Rokeya not only challenges patriarchal authority but also visualizes diverse forms of masculinities that harmonize with feminist values.

1.2 The Selective Male Characters of *Padmarag*

Latif Almas- Latif Almas is the key male character of *Padmarag*. He is the husband of Siddika, the novel's lead female character. Latif's family was raised by his uncle Zamindar Haji Habib Alam, who exercises patriarchal control over him. Though he was generous to look after Latif's family, his greed and tactics influenced the tracks of Latif's life. When Latif reached the age to get married, his mother arranged his marriage with his sister Rasheda's sister-in-law Siddika. Their *Akdh* programme was completed, and it was decided that after three years, they will officially receive the bride. Latif went to England to study law to become a barrister, which was a popular profession for men in colonial Bengal. After becoming a barrister, Latif's uncle Haji Habib Alam became extremely greedy and exercised his patriarchal control over his niece's personal life. He decided to utilize Latif's degree in law as a functional asset to get favorable marriage proposals. Haji wrote a letter to Latif's brother-in-law,

⁷ Shakhawat Liton, "The Long Struggle of Women to Achieve Voting Rights", *The Daily Star*, 2017.

⁸ "Early Modern Witch-Hunts 'Left Britain with Collective Wound'", *The Guardian*, 2022.

Soleman that he had to transfer all the property to Latif, and if he refuses, he will settle Latif's marriage somewhere else. Soleman replied that he can do whatever he wants, but he will do no such thing. Initially, Latif did not agree to marry somewhere else because he thought it would be an injustice for Siddika, though he had not seen her for these years. But Latif was continuously pressured by his family to marry another wealthy widow, and he was being criticized for not following Haji's order. Latif ultimately marries the widow named Saleha, with whom he shares a son named Hamid. But it was an unhappy marriage.

Rafia's Husband- It is one of the male characters of *Padmarag* whose actions exemplify the patriarchal and masculine norms prevalent in Colonial Bengal. He went to England to pursue his degree in Law, leaving his wife, Rafia, and two daughters behind in the country. Earlier, he used to send letters to Rafia regularly, but gradually it became a rare occurrence. Despite his negligence, Rafia used to wait for his letters and even learnt English, hoping for his love and commitment. A full decade passes by, and Rafia's prediction for his return remains unchanged. Finally, after ten years, she receives a letter from him. To her astonishment, she came to know that it was a divorce notice in conjunction with the shocking revelation that her husband had married a *Mem Saheb* (British Woman). Rafia went through an emotional breakdown, which led to madness for a period of time. The action of Rafia's husband demonstrates the ubiquitous patriarchal culture where men's decisions are given precedence and women are expected to remain submissive.

Abdul Gofur Mia- He is a lawyer, but is an irresponsible and morally corrupt man. His elder brother attempted to reform him but failed. To bring stability to Gofur's life, his elder brother decided to make arrangements for his marriage. Though Gofur initially rejected but he ultimately agrees under the condition that the bride should be beautiful. Unaware of Gofur's involvement with a woman named Bela, who had a crucial influence over him, Bela accompanied Gofur on the day of his wedding to Sokina. During the occasion, she whispered to Gofur that the bride was not beautiful, and without verifying it, Gofur believed her, abandoned Sokina, and the very next day, he fled with Sokina's bridal ornaments. Later, Bela passed away, and he remarried a widow. Concurrently, Sokina's brothers pressure him for the payment of *Denmohor* (dower money). Gofur decides to take her back. At this point, Sokina was very ill, and Gofur took proper care of her. However, after her recovery, Sokina refuses to go with him since he never respected her and obviously believed Bela's narratives about her. Gofur's conditions of getting married, his ability to abandon his

wife Sokina and then easily remarrying, and his attempt to reclaim her for his own needs illustrate the privileges that patriarchy provided to men.

Usha's Husband- Usha's husband is represented as a cowardly and irresponsible male character who abandons his wife during danger. When their home was attacked by bandits, Usha's husband fled, leaving Usha to face the bandits alone. However, the bandits did not cause any physical harm to Usha; they only took the family's wealth, kept her captive for a period, and returned her home. After returning home, Usha received the utmost humiliation from her mother-in-law and other women of the family. They questioned her character and purity and shamed her for being under the custody of bandits. In the meantime, her husband remains entirely absent from the whole scenario. Despite his failure to protect his wife, which is considered to be one of the traditional masculine roles, he faces no consequences; rather, Usha is being shamed.

Mr. Joseph- He is Helen's husband, who is marked by troublesome illustrations of masculinity, which include abusing his wife, negligence, getting drunk, and emotional exploitation. After three years of knowing each other, Helen married him. The first year of marital life went well. However, from the second year, he gradually changed into a violent man, frequently got drunk, and physically abused Helen. Despite his toxic behavior, Helen hoped for his potential change and remained committed to him. Later, she got news that Joseph got involved in a murder case in Kanpur, and because of having mental instability, he was sent to England. Helen also followed him to England by selling all her assets. She was again in an emotional shock that Joseph got involved with another woman named Riva and was accused of another murder case. He was kept captive in a criminal lunatic asylum. However, despite this toxicity, Helen could not obtain a divorce from him due to legal loopholes, and the newspapers published news about their situation under titles like 'Tied for Life to Lunatic'. Through the portrayal of a white man in *Padmarag*, Rokeya illustrated that, though the colonizer white people of England claimed themselves to be civilized and progressive, the patriarchal treatment of women is universal, which surpasses national and cultural boundaries.

2. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This study positions *Padmarag* within the analytical framework that intertwines the postcolonial school of thought, feminist literary criticism, and hegemonic masculinity to investigate the non-uniform constructions of masculinity. Reconfiguring the readings that are more likely to promote female subjectivity, this study explores how

Begum Rokeya formulated and situated masculinity within the broader socio-cultural and colonial hegemonies of Bengal.

The theory of hegemonic masculinity of Connell is embodied as the key theoretical framework and interpretive lens for this study to identify the shifting power dynamics among male characters in *Padmarag*. Connell defined hegemonic masculinity as how a certain group of men gains power and wealth and how these forms of dominance and social relations are legitimized through it.⁹ Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity offers a vital framework in this study for analyzing how Begum Rokeya deconstructs the privileges and vulnerabilities woven within male identities. Through the adoption of this theory, this paper investigates how Rokeya confronts hegemonic masculinity and brings forward alternative masculinities that diverged from traditional patriarchal and gendered norms in Colonial Bengal. This conceptual framework facilitates a comprehensive understanding of how Rokeya not only defied traditional androcentrism but also suggested alternatives and introduced reformed and progressive masculinities that adhere to the feminist ideals. Corresponding to this, the intersectional lens employed by Crenshaw positions these masculinities within intersecting systems of class, colonial culture, and education, which highlights the heterogeneous experiences of men in Rokeya's world. Intersectionality, as conceptualized by Crenshaw, highlights the fact that multiple social identities- sociocultural background, age, etc. intersect to shape an individual's experiences and opportunities within patriarchal systems.¹⁰ This study follows a textual analytical approach, emphasizing the male characters of *Padmarag* not as distinct figures but as intertwined threads in an intricate tapestry of gender relations. Textual analysis is one of the methods that is employed to interpret language, symbols, or images presented in texts to examine the communication patterns of people.¹¹ Among various male characters of *Padmarag*, this paper solely examines selected male characters- Latif Almas, Rafia's husband, Usha's husband, Abdul Gofur Mia, and Mr. Joseph to emphasize manifold responses to patriarchal authority,

⁹ Robert W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt. "Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept", *Gender & society*, Vol. 19, No. 6, 2005, pp. 829-859; Demetrakis Z. Demetriou, "Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity: A critique", *Theory and society*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 2001, pp. 337-361.

¹⁰ Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics", In: *Feminist legal theories*, 2013, pp. 23-51, Routledge.

¹¹ J. Hawkins, "Textual Analysis", In: *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*, Vol. 4, ed. (SAGE Publications, Inc., 2017), pp. 1754-56

colonial modernity, and reformist ideals. Various scholarly books, research papers on *Padmarag*, and arguments about South Asian masculinity were reviewed to procure an extensive insight into the portrayals of male characters within the broader socio-cultural context of Rokeya's time. This framework thus enables a dialogic reading where masculinities are understood relationally, how one mode of masculinity defines itself against or alongside others, and how these negotiations reimagine gender justice in Rokeya's feminist vision. The study prioritized limited key male characters, which the researcher deliberately overlooked, solely emphasizing the portrayal of masculinity of certain male characters of *Padmarag*. Since there are lack of literature on the portrayal of masculinity in *Padmarag*, this paper endeavors to catalyze new pathways for further research on the representation of masculinity and its intersection with socio-cultural and historical context, colonialism in *Padmarag*.

3. Masculinities in *Padmarag*

3.1 Latif Almas- The Victim of Patriarchal Domination

Through the portrayal of the character Latif Almas, Rokeya unveiled that even men can be victims of patriarchal domination, which often remains unexplored. Despite being a man, he is under the control of his uncle Haji Habib Alam, manifesting that patriarchy does not privilege all men; rather, there are absence of arguments about how patriarchy burdens men. In the novel, though Latif does not wish to remarry, he ultimately remarries a wealthy widow due to family pressure, which eventually leads to an unhappy marriage. This demonstrates the financial dimension of hegemonic masculinity, where financial resilience takes primacy over the emotional aspect. It is evident from a study that demonstrated how men become victims of forced marriages due to the existing patriarchal structure.¹² On this ground, by analyzing two modern American stories *Seize the Day* (1956) and *Death of a Salesman* (1949), a study presented how men become the prey of patriarchy along with women.¹³ However, application of an intersectional lens signifies that the intersection of variables such as age and socio-cultural identity of Latif made up more vulnerable in the patriarchal system. The head of Latif's family was his uncle Haji Habib Alam, and the socio-cultural norms expect Latif to adhere to the instructions of his uncle, as he is the head

¹² M. M. Idriss, "Abused by the Patriarchy: Male Victims, Masculinity, 'Honor'-Based Abuse and Forced Marriages," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, Vol. 37, No. 13-14, 2021, pp. NP11905-NP11932

¹³ Rifat Binte Joynal, "Men Are Also Victims at the Hand of Patriarchy: A Study of Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day* and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*", *Advances in Literary Study*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 2023, pp. 296-305.

of the family. One of the most significant insights of this character is the duality of visibility and invisibility of Latif's burden under patriarchy. Patriarchal society's partial nature is reflected in celebrating men's roles as providers and protectors and condemning the concurrent burdens and sacrifices. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity proposes that this invisibility is a deliberate component in upholding patriarchal systems, as recognizing men's challenges and burdens would challenge the existence of the patriarchal system and male privilege. The representation of Latif's character by Rokeya confronts the notion that all men are privileged by patriarchy and reflects that patriarchy as a structure does not affect all men in a uniform way, rather it creates a heterogeneous burden for them.

3.2 Rafia's Husband: An Epitome of Dominant Masculinity

Rafia's husband epitomizes a form of dominant masculinity that is certified and validated by the patriarchal system. As a barrister educated in England, he represents a form of dominant masculinity where individual and professional success take ascendancy over familial responsibilities. His negligence towards his wife Rafia and their children accentuates that patriarchal norms certify men to emphasize their careers while expect women to be submissive and prioritize familial responsibilities. His actions of sending a divorce notice to his wife, Rafia, after a decade of negligence and marrying a *Mem Saheb* (British woman), illustrate his alignment with status elevation, reinforcing the dominant form of masculinity. By portraying this character, Rokeya highlighted how the dominant form of masculinity enables men to emphasize professional ambition and grants the privilege to evade familial responsibilities and legitimizes it without any consequence.

3.3 Abdul Gofur Mia: The Morally Corrupted and Misanthropist Patriarch

The masculinity of Sokina's husband, Abdul Gofur Mia inextricably embedded with moral corruption and misanthropist, and opportunistic behavior. Being a barrister, his professional status gave him more social privilege in colonial Bengal. His persistence in marrying only if the bride is beautiful accentuates the objectification of women, consolidating patriarchal norms about marriage that emphasize beauty over agency. Through his actions, Rokeya illustrated how hegemonic masculinity is more about maintaining social and professional status and less about morality. On his wedding day, his trust in Bela's claim of Sokina not being beautiful highlights how men often devalue women based on the narratives constructed by others. Additionally, his actions, such as abandoning Sokina the very next day of the wedding, fleeing with her bridal ornaments, and remarrying again, illustrate how hegemonic masculinity

grants men the privilege to deflect familial responsibility. However, his return to Sokina was not driven by his regret and remorse, but rather by the rising concerns regarding dower money, which reflects his opportunistic behavior. It aligns with the masculine norms, which signifies that men can claim their control over women anytime when it complies with self-interest. Besides this, by viewing Gofur's actions through an intersectional lens, it becomes obvious that his masculinity is also shaped by class and professional status. His professional status provides him with more privileges in society and validates his moral corruption. Rokeya's illustration of the character Gofur discloses the opportunistic aspect of masculinity, which grants men the privilege to do anything that aligns with their self-interest.

3.4 Usha's Husband: The Failure to Fit in Hegemonic Masculinity

Rokeya portrayed a failed masculinity through the representation of the character Usha's husband. The hegemonic masculinity expects men to play the role of the protector of women and family, which contradicts the decision of Usha's husband when he fled away in fear of the bandits that attacked their home. However, despite his failure, it is only Usha who faces societal stigma and humiliation for being kidnapped by the bandits, which highlights the victim-blaming culture imposed by patriarchy. Concurrently, her husband's absence from the whole scenario reflects not only his cowardly nature but also illustrates how patriarchy protects men from accountability and obscures their deficiencies.

3.5 Mr. Joseph: Breaking the Stereotypes of Civilized Colonial Men

Through the portrayal of the character Helen's husband, Mr. Joseph, Rokeya disassembled the narratives about colonizers as inherently civilized and just. He encapsulates the violent form of masculinity, i.e., being an alcoholic, violent, and exploiting his wife both verbally and physically. By depicting this character, Rokeya deconstructed the colonial claim of cultural and moral dominance, elucidating that the European men could be violent, uncivilized, and oppressive. Joseph's engagement in crime in Kanpur and sending him to England, his further engagement in a murder case, and institutionalizing him in an asylum portray the loopholes of the colonial legal system that often exempt European men. His case alters the colonized hierarchy established by the colonizers, which positioned British men as civilized, enlightened, and protagonists to gender equality and Bengali men as uncivilized and antagonists to women's liberation. Besides this, due to judicial constraints, Helen's incapacity to dissolve the marriage with him unveils the universal structural barriers that kept women engaged in abusive marriages. This reveals Rokeya's

comprehensive critique of colonial legal systems, which uphold gendered oppression despite their claims of justice and progress. Additionally, the media representation of Helen's case as *'Tied for Life to a Lunatic'* signifies the tendency of society to disparage women's suffering. Thus, by illustrating the colonial legal system's failure to liberate women from abusive husbands, Rokeya challenged both native and colonial cultures, which share concurrence in sustaining male privilege.

4. Intersectional Analysis of Hegemonic Masculinity in Colonial Bengal through the Lens of *Padmarag*

The portrayal of male characters of *Padmarag* also signifies the major components that men needed to adhere to fit into the hegemonic masculinity of colonial Bengal. One of such significant markers of hegemonic masculinity during colonial times was the barrister identity, which embodies elite status, symbolizes Western education, and validation from the Western world. Men who endeavored legal education in England were augmented both within colonial and native structure, which certifies them to exercise dominance both over women and native men. However, through *Padmarag*, Rokeya revealed that though barristers were often portrayed as the agents of progress and modernity, their medium of progression did not ensure gender justice; rather, it legitimized the actions of exploiting, abandoning, and controlling women masquerading as modernity and progress. Nonetheless, the nature of masculinity was not homogeneous among all men. The application of an intersectional lens reveals how factors such as class, age, financial dependence, and individual temperament shaped men's responses to hegemonic expectations in *Padmarag*. Latif Almas, regardless of his privileged position as a barrister, experienced patriarchal dominance in contrast to other male characters due to his age, personal inclination, and financial maintenance of his family by his uncle, Haji Habib Alam. Contrary to the barristers who exercised power over their wives in *Padmarag*, Latif was forced into marriages that aligned with his family's interests rather than personal choice. Latif's uncle Haji Habib Alam, was greedy and used Latif's professional privilege as a medium to get a marriage proposal for him, which would bring financial support. Latif had no choice but to follow his instructions since his uncle financially maintained his whole family from his early childhood. In contrast, Abdul Gofur Mia exerts his masculinity through exploitation. As opposed to Latif's uncle, Gofur's elder brother always tried to guide him to the right path, but Gofur, being adamant, always denied it. Gofur's actions, such as commodifying women based on beauty, discarding his wife Sokina based on Bela's narratives, remarrying, and later returning to Sokina for financial benefits, signify his narcissism. His actions and treatment of women completely

differed from Latif's. Similarly, Rafia's husband, another barrister who abandons his wife, Rafia, and their children, embodies a masculinity that affirms the privileges provided by the colonial legal structures. He used his Western education to sever ties with his native culture and solidified his status through his marriage with an English woman. His detachment from Rafia and the family signifies that hegemonic masculinity not only embodies domination but also applies a strategic approach to sustain within colonial power structures. In contrast, the portrayal of the character Usha's husband, who fled away during danger, underscores a failed masculinity that negates the construction of ideal men as protectors. This portrayal by Rokeya revealed that, amidst the patriarchal system, not all men epitomize hegemonic standards successfully. Besides this, through *Padmarag*, Rokeya also challenged the colonial discourse that presented the Western notion of modernity as liberating for women. Through the portrayal of the abusive English character Mr. Joseph, the novel highlighted how both traditional and Western masculinities functioned within the same patriarchal schema. Men across different racial, social, and educational backgrounds exerted power over women, whether through violence, negligence, abandonment, or arranged marriages.

5. Concluding Remarks

Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Padmarag* exhibits an intricate tapestry of masculinities through the portrayal of various male characters, each shaped by the varied intersections of class, familial expectations, financial dependence, and colonial influence. Through the application of Connell's theory of masculinity and an intersectional lens, this paper illustrates that masculinity was never a unilateral and monolithic construct, but it is fluid and transitional, which is intricately showcased by Rokeya in *Padmarag*. *Padmarag* is frequently analyzed for its rich contribution in portraying various radical issues, including *Tarini Bhavan*, introducing outcome-based education curriculum, and stories of women of various backgrounds. But the way Rokeya portrayed diverse forms of masculinities in this novel is rarely present in any study. In this novel, Rokeya not only portrayed the diversified oppressions faced by women but also how masculinity operates in a patriarchal system. By bringing these discussions into focus, *Padmarag* not only endorses women's liberation but also sheds light on how masculinity is shaped and embodied in colonial Bengal.

Investigating the Gap Between Viewers' Perception and Artists' Motifs of the Graffiti Art in Bangladesh: An Inquiry

Shorna Akter* and Md. Minhajul Abedin**

Abstract

Following the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement (ADSM) in Bangladesh, graffiti art has suddenly begun to overflow all the walls of the country's main cities, like a gigantic stream. This city-based art form is widely recognised for its multifaceted functions, ranging from protest against any injustice to celebrating national and international achievements. In short, apart from its artistic value, this art can also play an educational role, uphold tradition, and make historical sense through its distinctive potential. Therefore, forming a correct perception by readers is crucial; otherwise, people in general may be misled by the discourse displayed in public graffiti. Focusing on this issue, the present study aims to identify the gap between viewers' perceptions and artists' motifs regarding the ideology-contained discourses of street art in Bangladesh in 2024, through an embodied inquiry within a mixed-method research framework. Following purposive sampling, participants (graffiti artists and viewers) were selected for the Focus Group Discussion (FGD). In addition, graffiti has been collected from the Dhaka University area and the Science Lab intersection at the researchers' convenience for content analysis. The findings support viewers' appropriate awareness regarding the motifs of the street art discourse.

Key words: Art, Embodied Inquiry, Graffiti, Motifs, Perceptions.

Introduction

Graffiti art has long been a beloved and lasting subject matter for artists worldwide. It has been practiced and displayed for different purposes, such as protesting, building awareness, and representing cultural, social, and even historical phenomena. In this respect, Bangladesh, which repeatedly experiences vulnerability of democracy, is no exception. The walls of urban Bangladesh are used to convey messages through graffiti. Many walls of the country's major cities became canvases for the graffiti artists who made them vibrant and alive during and after the Anti-

* Associate Professor of English, Dhaka City College, Bangladesh,
E-mail: shorna.akter@gmail.com

** Associate Professor of English, Stamford University Bangladesh, Dhaka,
E-mail: minhaj.abedin@gmail.com

Discrimination Student Movement (ADSM). This movement had been initiated as the Quota Reform Movement 2024, and following the development of the protest, it took a dynamic turn.¹ They are displayed in various formats, including pictures, text, signs, and calligraphy. Seemingly, the discourses of graffiti or street art are simple in structure and plain in meaning; therefore, casting an uncritical glance at them, locals may initially take them lightly or enjoy them as a kind of sightseeing experience. However, the truth is that it encourages social interactions and develops creative insights, and this art-based communication can be of great use for community development.² This urban art form can even portray a social movement, critique society, and tackle controversial political issues.³ As this art conveys vital information and plays important functions of various types, it is imperative to scrutinize whether all street art motifs align with the community's understanding in general. Inspired by the overwhelming display of this art, the present researchers intend to analyze different themes of textual graffiti in the context of urban Bangladesh and examine whether the public perception of the graffiti art is congruent with the actual motif of the art.

Function of Street Art and Related Studies

Wanjiku has come up with an easier definition for street art in the following words: “Street art speaks to the people and for the people. It is the property of the simple passerby; it belongs to everyone, not to galleries.”⁴ Street art, also known as graffiti, has a connection with the time of ancient cave paintings.⁵ This art form can transfer its messages to future generations.⁶ Graffiti features an expressionistic technique while representing the cultural development of a country, focusing on its lifestyle in a

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1. “Quota Movement Timeline: Unfolding Events”, *Prothom Alo English*, 2 August 2024, available at: <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/5jvl0xye5l>
 2. C. Bhatt, “Graffiti and Street Art Around the World,” *ARTSHELP* (blog), June 15, 2021, available at: <https://www.artshelp.com/graffiti-and-street-art-around-the-world/>; H. Shamali *et al.*, “Influence of Graffiti on People’s Perceptions of Urban Spaces”, *ISVS e-journal*, Vol. 10, No. 7, 2023
 3. J. N. Wanjiku, “The Evolution of Street ART: From Graffiti to Social Commentary. *Research Output Journal of Arts and Management*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2024, pp. 17-19. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/382878607_The_Evolution_of_Street_ART_From_Graffiti_to_Social_Commentary
 4. *Ibid*, p. 18
 5. G. D. Curry and S. H. Decker, “Graffiti Art,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, last modified March 25, 2025, available at: <https://www.britannica.com/art/graffiti-art>
 6. *Ibid*.

specific social context.⁷ Regarding the types and functions of graffiti, Feitosa-Santana et al. mention that street art or graffiti may be exhibited either as a picture or as word pictures on walls, a practice with an archaic legacy. This art has the potential to protest for legitimate, sociological, political, and aesthetic causes.⁸

About graffiti's antiquity, Manco says, "Graffiti art, as an idea, has always existed alongside other artistic endeavours."⁹ However, it is often considered an illegal art form.¹⁰ From a 'legal perspective,' Valjakka also views graffiti as unlawful, and characterised by destruction and contingent upon legal consequences.¹¹ On the other hand, Howze supports it as a means of placing demands or raising one's voice against the illegal practices of society.¹² Likewise, Wanjiku adds that it can also function as a means to protest and safeguard people's rights.¹³

Individuals' opinions, reactions, historical recollections, and anticipated goals - all play roles in presenting a holistic appreciation of any art.¹⁴ Street art can make a connection between individuality, values, setting, and context.¹⁵ Wanjiku opines, "The street is not only the artist's canvas but also a common space everyone can identify with and share. As the observer and the observed, the passer-by is no longer indifferent and passive but active, interested, searching, and critical."¹⁶

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7. R. Sampui, "Graffiti Art: A Modern Approach to Address Social Concern," *Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 9, No. 7, 2021, pp. 42–52, available at: <https://www.questjournals.org/jrhss/papers/vol9-issue7/Ser-7/D09074252.pdf>
 8. C. Feitosa-Santana et al., "Art through the Colors of Graffiti: From the Perspective of the Chromatic Structure," *Sensors*, Vol. 20, No. 4, 2020, pp. 1–12, available at: <https://www.mdpi.com/1424-8220/20/9/2531>
 9. T. Manco, *Stencil Graffiti* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2002), p. 9.
 10. Ibid.
 11. M. Valjakka, "Graffiti in China – Chinese Graffiti?," *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1, January 2011, pp. 61–91, available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282604174_Graffiti_in_China_-_Chinese_Graffiti
 12. R. Howze, *Stencil Nation* (San Francisco: Manic D Press, 2008)
 13. J. N. Wanjiku, *Op. cit.*, 2024
 14. S. Gallagher and D. Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind*, 2nd ed. (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2012); P. Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Senses and Place* (Eastbourne: Routledge, 1994).
 15. University of California Santa Cruz, "The Writing on the Wall: Exploring the Cultural Value of Graffiti and Street Art," *UCSC News*, September 14, 2021, available at: <https://news.ucsc.edu/2021/09/graffiti-street-art/>
 16. J. N. Wanjiku, *Op. cit.*, 2024. p. 18

Furthermore, graffiti has great ornamental and educational value.¹⁷ In other words, it adorns and educates the urban community. University of California Santa Cruz depicts graffiti as a countenance of individuality and a vent for imagination and inspiration, which can be used for maintaining social connection and telling the story of accomplishment.¹⁸ On the other hand, several studies have found that graffiti art gives the vibe of the past, which can make historical sense. In this regard, Wanjiku believes that street art can convey present and past social, cultural, and political messages.¹⁹ He clarifies that graffiti artists confront and raise questions against social and cultural bad practices using their artistic language, which can be used to convey social, historical, cultural, and political messages.²⁰

Thus, street art experts proclaim that graffiti artists' discursive thoughts and ideas convey different functions and social commitments. Social awareness-raising street art can pave the way for future planning of nations. In short, graffiti art can convey messages that target social reform, historical realities, contemporary politics, and pressing issues that deserve attention.

Again, Wanjiku examines the street art of Banksy and Shepard Fairey and claims that as a visual weapon, it can raise questions about political and social discourse to make people conscious regarding the malpractices of the power structure.²¹ Romanian urban locals' perception of street art connects this art form with an occasional historical moment, which can positively influence urban communities.²² This art can also be incorporated into the secondary curriculum to teach young learners about social issues.²³ Discovering this art as a canvas for public reproach through numerous technical forms for demonstrations, Sampui emphasizes the appeal of this art in the Indian context.²⁴ Chang glorifies this art in Singapore as an emerging ingredient of

17. L. M. Hughes, "Street Art and Tree Art and Graffiti: Developing an Understanding", Master's thesis, Georgia State University, 2009, available at: <https://doi.org/10.57709/1062182>

18. University of California Santa Cruz, *Op. cit.*, 2021

19. J. N. Wanjiku, *Op. cit.*, 2024

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

22. A. Cercleux, "Graffiti and Street Art between Ephemerality and Making Visible the Culture and Heritage in Cities: Insight at International Level and in Bucharest," *Societies*, Vol. 12, No. 5, 2022, available at: <https://www.mdpi.com/2075-4698/12/5/129>

23. L. M. Hughes, *Op. cit.*, 2009

24. R. Sampui, *Op. cit.*, 2021

the art and culture and scrutinizes the artists' reactions to the government's response to this art.²⁵ However, Fransberg, et al. suggest that readers' and researchers' perceptions should be equally considered in graffiti and street art research (GSAR) to comprehend this art better.²⁶ Therefore, they recommend following an embodied approach to identify the conflict in understanding the art. Both Fransberg, et al., and Hughes find viewers' conflicts in recognizing the meaning conveyed by street art.^{27,28}

True, GSAR is a popular research field worldwide. Perhaps it is in its infancy in Bangladesh, though this art has been popularly known for a long time. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, no research has yet been conducted on Bangladeshi graffiti art from the perspectives of viewers' perception and artists' motifs. Observing the street art on urban walls, the researchers of the present study take the initiative to address this increasingly popular art form to determine whether the public's perception of this art aligns with the underlying themes of the concerned graffiti art. In other words, the purpose of the study is to investigate the objective of graffiti and determine whether there is a gap between the motifs of street art and community perception through an embodied inquiry in Bangladesh.

Embodied Inquiry as the Data Collection Plan

Following the embodied approach, a researcher can typically focus on the entire research field to form a proper understanding.²⁹ Embodied Inquiry collects data from participants' self-experiences. "[E]mbodied methodologies provide multisensory research results where the experienced moments, the participant's and researcher's senses, cognition, and mobility in urban spaces are connected".³⁰

Regarding graffiti art, Fransberg, et al. argue, "Graffiti and street art practices may be understood as embodied experiences where both scholars and research participants are part of the embodied process, accumulating field-relevant knowledge".³¹ Hannerz emphasized GSAR, which measures how artists' actions, individualities, values,

25. T. C. Chang, "Wall Dressed Up: Graffiti and Street Art in Singapore", *City, Culture and Society*, Vol. 20, 2020, p. 100329

26. M. Fransberg *et al.*, *Op. cit.*, 2021

27. *Ibid.*

28. L. M. Hughes, *Op. cit.*, 2009

29. B. Spatz, "Embodied Research: A Methodology," *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2017, pp. 1–31, available at: <http://liminalities.net/13-2/embodied.pdf>

30. M. Fransberg *et al.*, *Op. cit.*, 2021, p.1

31. *Ibid.*, 2021, p. 3

judgments, and feelings are contained in creative art.³² Hansen and Flynn opine that the perception of any street art depends on the interconnection of communication between the art form, the artist, and the interpreters.³³ They also emphasise the setting in which the street art is displayed. Gallagher and Zahavi argue that people's inferential power, affective factors, and historical sense influence their involvement in making sense of a phenomenon.³⁴ For forming a concept about graffiti, Shamali, et al. say that the perspective of the critique and the background should be given importance since interpretation in this respect very often proves to be subjective.³⁵ The mental development stimulates how viewers form insight and make connotations to wall art, which is often based on individuals' experiences, cultural circumstances, and communal values.³⁶ Therefore, all individuals who create, shape, and appreciate graffiti art are essential sources of information for understanding the distance between the art's inner meaning or message and the viewer's perception. In this regard, the next crucial consideration should be the settings. The location of graffiti or street art is vital, as its interpretation depends on it.³⁷ The rationale for site selection of the present study is provided later in due course.

The present study employs embodied inquiry to collect data, ensuring the reliability of the findings in an inclusive manner. The graffiti artists and the viewers have been considered the data source in finding the incongruity between the arts' motifs and viewers' perceptions. The researchers visited the previously chosen settings of graffiti art several times to observe the places and the artistic representations of the discursive cognition on the wall.

Methodology

The present study is primarily a mixed-methods research project, with an embedded qualitative design. However, in a limited sphere, the quantitative strategy was instrumental in strengthening the qualitative data. Nonetheless, no separate

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32. E. Hannerz, "Bodies, Doings, and Gendered Ideals in Swedish Graffiti," *Sociologisk Forskning*, Vol. 54, No. 4, 2017, pp. 373–376
 33. S. Hansen and D. Flynn, "Longitudinal Photo-Documentation: Recording Living Walls", *Street Art & Urban Creativity Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2015, pp. 26–31
 34. S. Gallagher and D. Zahavi, *op. cit.*, 2012
 35. H. Shamali *et al.*, *op. cit.*, 2023
 36. L. Shaw and M. Noa, "Using Street Art to Engage Teens in Social Emotional Learning," *Social Work Today*, Vol. 21, 2021, pp. 1–26, available at: <https://www.socialworktoday.com/archive/Winter21p26.shtml>
 37. H. Shamali *et al.*, *op. cit.*, 2023; E. K. Tokuda *et al.*, "Quantifying the Presence of Graffiti in Urban Environments: The IEEE Big Data and Smart Computing", *arXiv*, 2019, available at: <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.1904.04336>

quantitative analysis report is presented in the findings. Here, the quantification of graffiti in terms of frequency of display is used as a preliminary organisational tool to ensure representativeness. Raw data were collected from two specific points in Dhaka city. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) sessions were used as data collection tools.

Selection of the Sites

The city walls serve as a canvas for street art, and in that sense, the location or setting can be any urban point. For the researchers' convenience, the areas of the University of Dhaka and the Science Lab intersection were chosen as the location of this study. To understand them appropriately, addressing the street art on all the walls of urban Bangladesh may be a massive initiative, as different metropolitan cities in the country are flooded with this art form. Hence, to maintain control over the investigation, the present researchers have narrowed down the data source to select only graffiti words.

Selection of Participants

At the researchers' convenience, 40 participants (viewers) from both the selected sites were chosen on purpose to conduct four FGD sessions, and it was ensured that all participants were students. Among these participants, 20 were from the higher secondary level, and the rest were from the tertiary level. Also, a team of 10 graffiti artists participated in a separate FGD session to share the ideology behind the discourses on sorted graffiti.

Data Collection, Categorisation and Analysis

Initially, through photo shoots and video shoots, a total of 350 discourses of street art were collected, transcribed, and translated from Bangla to English (five of the 350 graffiti discourses were found in English). A total of 44 street art pieces were selected for analysis based on their repetitive display.

A qualitative approach was then employed during data collection and analysis. Viewers' awareness and graffiti artists' ideology regarding the art type in question were collected separately through FGD sessions. At first, the participant artists were shown graffiti discourse and asked to share the art motifs. The participant students were then instructed to share their perceptions regarding street art. The participants' reactions were recorded, transcribed, and coded. After that, these two sets of codes, which expressed themes, were analysed to identify gaps in spectators' understanding

and the keynotes of the selected art, as collected from the artists. To illustrate, themes related to the art were identified through content analysis of the data gathered from participants. The discourses of the graffiti were then classified into their respective theme types. Then, findings collected from both groups were compared to investigate whether any conflict existed between the intention and the perception of graffiti art.

Findings and Discussion

Findings:

Broadly, alignment is found in the perceptions of viewers and the motifs of artists regarding graffiti art. The participants identified the following categorical areas based on their observations and intentions regarding the graffiti: political discourse, social reform-related discourse, historical discourse, and discourse related to some global and local issues on humanitarian grounds. These primary areas are utilised to demonstrate protest, compare the distant past and the immediate past to make historical sense, portray the July-August 2024 movement, and some global and local phenomena expressing ideas related to protest, wish, unity, and humanity. So, the greater thematic areas at which both the artists and the participants have consensus are political, reformative, historical, and global and humanitarian discourse of graffiti.

Table 1. Political Discourse.

Sl.	Content	Graffiti artists' feedback	Students' feedback
1	স্বাধীন-৩৬ জুলাই ২০২৪ (Independent- 36 July 2024/ Free- 36 July 2024)	July-August movement	Same
2	People Power	Power of the common people	Same
3	কথা ক? Speak up!	Awareness building	Same
4	বিকল্পকে? তুমি, আমি, আমরা (Who is the alternative? You, I, we.)	July-August movement	Same
5	গণজোয়ার (Mass uprising/ Mass Upsurge)	July-August movement	Same
6	আমার ভাইয়ের রক্ত বৃথা যেতে দিবনা (Won't let my brother's blood go in vain)	Political-protest	Same
7	স্বৈরাচারী শাসক আর না (No more autocrats)	Political-protest	Same
8	বুলেটের রাজনীতি চলবে না (Politics of bullet won't do)	Political-protest	Same

9	পাহাড়ের মুক্তি কবে? (When will the mountain be free?)	Political-protest	Same
10	গর্জে উঠেছিলাম বলেই বিজয় এসেছিল (Victory came because we roared)	July-August movement	Same
11	GEN Z	Celebration for Generation Z	Same
12	New BD Unlocked by GEN Z	Rebirth of Bangladesh by GEN-Z (July-August movement)	Same
13	ভয় পেলে তুমি শেষ /রুখে দাঁড়ালে বাংলাদেশ (If you fear, you are finished/If you fight back, you're Bangladesh)	July-August movement	Same

Among the political graffiti categories, the following issues are found: the July-August movement, awareness building, the power of the common people, the celebration of Generation Z, the rebirth of Bangladesh by Gen Z, and political protest. The July-August movement covers the central portion of the political discourse in the graffiti in which the protesters justify their movement, presenting themselves as alternatives to the government, celebrating the power of common people and Generation Z, making people aware of injustice and oppression, declaring 36 July (5 August) as the day to celebrate freedom whereas, promise for securing justice for the victims, voice raise against the brutal repression of the authority to control political activities, freedom for the minority group and encouraging the common people for protest with patriotic zeal are the different other expression under political discourse category.

Recognising the ideologies expressed in graffiti by students is ideally in line with the art motifs shared by graffiti artists.

Table 2. Social Reformation-Related Discourse.

Sl.	Content	Graffiti artists' feedback	Students' feedback
1	দেশকে ভালোবেসে আগলে রেখো (Love the country and protect it)	Devotion to the loving motherland	Same
2	দেশটা আমার / দেশকে ভালোবেসে আগলে রাখার/ দায়িত্বও আমার (The country is mine / It is my responsibility to love and protect it.)	Responsibility towards the country	Same

3	এখনও অনেক পথ হাঁটা বাকী (There's still a long way to go.)	Promise for future action	Same
4	স্বাধীনতা এনেছি সংস্কারও আনবো (We have brought freedom, We will bring reform, too)	Celebrating past achievements and promising reformation	Same
5	স্বাধীন হয়েছি এবার সভ্য হই (We have gained freedom; now let's be civilized)	Awareness of being free, self-realization, and determination for positive changes	Same
6	সব দায়িত্ব রাষ্ট্রের না কিছু আপনার, কিছু আমার (Not all responsibilities are of the state. Some are yours, and some are mine.)	Responsibility towards the country	Same
7	স্বাধীন হতেও জানি স্বাধীনতা রক্ষা করতেও জানি (I know how to be free, I know how to protect freedom.)	Responsibility towards the country	Same
8	গাছ লাগান পরিবেশ বাঁচান (Plant trees, save the environment)	Responsibility for environment	Same
9	দুর্নীতি মুক্ত বাংলাদেশ গড়তে যাব (We will work to build a corruption-free Bangladesh.)	A promise for a corruption-free society	Same
10	এখন সময় দেশ গড়ার (Now is the time to build the nation)	Need for reformation	Same
11	দেশ সংস্কার চলছে (The nation is being reformed)	Ongoing reformation	Same
12	আমার সোনার বাংলায় সাম্প্রদায়িকতার ঠাই নাই (In my golden Bengal, there is no place for communalism)	Protest against Communalism	Same
13	পাহাড় কেটে দালান না (No cutting of mountains for buildings)	Voicing for the protection of the environment	Same

In the category of social reformation, devotion to the motherland, responsibilities for the homeland, awareness about freedom, promises for future action, promises for reformation, self-realisation, commitment to the environment, ensuring a corruption-free society, need for reformation, ongoing reformation activities, protest against communalism and voice for the protection of the environment are observed. Social awareness-building messages are evident in this discourse, where the cutting of trees and the establishment in hilly regions are suggested to be harming nature. Throughout the discourse on graffiti art, promises, hopes, determination for positive changes in the future, self-realisation, and plans for a better, reformed Bangladesh are evident.

The viewers' response to the underlying messages in the street art aligns with that of the street artists.

Table 3. Historical Discourse.

Sl.	Content	Graffiti artists' feedback	Students' feedback
1	FREEDOM	Achievement of distant past and immediate past (1971 and July-August 2024)	Same
2	৫২ থেকে ২৪ ইতিহাস এভাবেই ফিরে আসে (From '52 to '24, history returns like this)	Recurrence of History (1971 movement and July-August 2024 movement)	Same
3	৭১ দেখিনি/২৪ দেখেছি (I did not see '71, But have seen '24)	Recurrence of History (1971 movement and July-August 2024 movement)	Same
4	৫২ এ ২৪ এ তফাৎ কইরে ? (Where lies the difference in 52 or in 24?)	Similarity in distant and immediate past history (1971 movement and July-August 2024 movement)	Same
5	1971 → 2024s	Repetition of history (1971 movement and July-August 2024 movement)	Same
6.	৬ দফা → ৭১'এর বিজয় ৯ দফা → ২৪এর নব বিজয় (6-point movement → victory of '71 9-point movement → new victory of 24)	Reappearance of history with new demands (1971 movement and July-August 2024 movement)	Same

In the historical discourse category, there are slogan-like expressions, such as the historical achievements of freedom in 1971 and 2024, the recurrence of history, the similarity between distant and immediate past events, and the repetition of history with new demands. Overall, the discourse in this section repeatedly presents a comprehensive comparison between the past state of affairs and the recurrence of past incidents in the present. The July-August 2024 movement covers all the discourses of graffiti art in this section. To sum up, the recent movement is represented through the lens of 1971's history. Historical achievements, including the victory over Pakistan, the struggles of the then-East Pakistanis, and the celebration of freedom achieved in 1971, are revisited in the portrayal of a recurrence of historical events in 2024.

No conflict has been detected between the viewers' perceptions and the ideology manifested by the artists in this section's discourse.



Figure: Four Graffiti Artworks Collected from the Dhaka University area.

In the global and local taxonomies, humanitarian topics, prayer for the oppressed in the world, moral lessons, celebration for a new generation and united position of the nation irrespective of religious boundary, the unity of Bangladeshis as a secular

nation, unity as a collective force and protest against the malpractice in the society and mischievous deeds' eventual punishment are expressed in the street art. Best wishes for the Palestinians, voices for the liberty of Palestinians, demands for justice for the minority, an enunciation of hopes for Bangladesh, a culturally united position, and appeals for changing fate through hard work only, without flattery, are observed in this part of the graffiti art.

Interestingly, even in this section, the alignment between the viewers' awareness and the artists' motifs is exact.

Table 4. Global and Humanitarian Issues, including Wishes.

Sl	Content	Graffiti artists' feedback	Students' feedback
1	হে আরশের মালিক বাংলাদেশের মত এমন একটা বিজয়ের দিন তুমি ফিলিস্তিনকেও দান কর, আমিন! (O Lord of the Throne, grant Palestine a victory day like that of Bangladesh. Ameen!)	Wish for Palestinians	Same
2.	FREE PALESTINE	Voice for Palestinians	Same
3	বাংলার হিন্দু/ বাংলার খ্রীস্টান/ বাংলার মুসলমান (The Hindus of Bengal / The Christians of Bengal / The Muslims of Bengal)	Unity as a secular nation	Same
4	ধর্ম ও মতবাদ যার যার /রাষ্ট্র সবার (Religion and beliefs are personal, the state belongs to all.)	Unity as a secular nation	Same
5	একজন VIP এর জন্য পৃথিবী থেমে থাকতে পারেনা (The world cannot stop for a VIP)	Protest against bad social practice	Same
6	ধর্ষণের শাস্তি একটাই/মৃত্যু ছাড়া গতি নাই (Only one punishment for rape/ No alternative to death)	Demand for justice	Same
7	Justice for Kalpana Chakma	Demand for justice	Same

8	বাংলাদেশ চিরজীবী হোক (May Bangladesh live forever)	for the minority Wish for long-lived Bangladesh	Same
9	সবার বাংলাদেশ (Bangladesh for all)	Unity as Bangladeshi	Same
10	আমরা সবাই বাঙ্গালি (We are all Bengalis)	Unity for cultural identity	Same
11	অদম্য এই প্রজন্ম ২০২৪ (This Indomitable generation of 2024)	Celebration for the youth	Same
12	খেটে বড় হও চেটে নয় (Grow through hard work, not by flattery)	Moral lesson	Same

Discussion

Each graffiti has its own story to tell. The participants provide a vivid word picture of every narrative, along with its underlying message. Without pictures or illustrations, graffiti texts evoke and portray historical, cultural, social, political, and religious passions in viewers' minds. The present study's findings reflect the assumption of Shamali *et al.* (2023), who go on to say, "Graffiti can bear social, political, and cultural messages, providing a visual narrative of the community's values, concerns and aspirations."³⁸ From the findings, it becomes clear that they can create both local, national, and global sense, and, wisely enough, the viewers perceive the discourses of street art.

People experience communication through graffiti art, and they form specific perceptions by encountering it in relation to political, historical, cultural, and ethical realities. It creates both political sense and social awareness. Love, devotion, responsibilities to the motherland, planning for societal reform, environmental sustainability, the value of unity, hope for a corruption-free and bias-free nation, and self-criticism are wisely grasped by the viewers of graffiti. The viewers sagaciously sense the issues of the July-August Movement, the vigour of Generation Z, the need to raise their voices against the ruling authority, and injustice towards innocent people. The absence of conflict in the viewers' perception and the artists' ideology refers to alignment between them.

Although simple in appearance, the impregnated form of wall art has a nationally and globally practical impact, conveying specific ideologies intentionally. The discourse

38. H. Shamali *et al.*, *op. cit.*, 2023, p. 71

of the selected graffiti has the potential to glorify, magnify, and critique city life, conveying messages that favour humanitarian issues and wishes. Wishes and prayers are offered to people beyond Bangladesh's borders, and the unbiased religious attitude of the Bengalis inspires a sense of magnanimity in the minds of the participants. Demand for justice for the minority group implies the protesting attitude of the social body, and appreciation for hard labour without admiring people for personal gain suggests the ultimate development of the body and mind of the people in the society. The viewers of the graffiti aptly distinguish all these realities.

Different research works demonstrate that street art is likely to connect with the past to convey messages to the future generation. This function is effectively and practically fulfilled by the discourses of the concerned graffiti, which reflect the distant past while maintaining a historical interlink with the immediate past, especially signifying either the repetition of the historical phenomenon or the achievement of freedom. The viewers evidently comprehend the historical issue as no differences are detected between the shared experiences of both the artists and the viewers regarding the concerned theme-type of discourses.

True, street art is an adornment for the city walls, and this simple insight often ignores a concerned society's deeply rooted thoughts and social messages. Shamali *et al.*, Fransberg, *et al.*, and Hughes opine that the motif of graffiti may not always resonate with the viewers' understanding.³⁹ However, the present study's findings offer that the viewers' perceptions regarding street art are congruent with the motifs of the concerned art forms. Therefore, it can be stated that the results of the present study demonstrate a deviation from and no repetition of the findings when compared with the discoveries of previously conducted research on graffiti in various countries.

Conclusion

Street art is prominent in the urban setting of Bangladesh, where it is extensively displayed, and young people are not only familiar with it but also can grasp its meaning appropriately. The viewers' understanding of the story of achievement, the celebration of people's power, and the indomitable attitude of the new generation, as well as fellow feelings, unity, humanitarian appeal, and a sense of global and local

39 Ibid; M. Fransberg *et al.*, *Op. cit.*, 2021; L. M. Hughes, *Op. cit.*, 2009

responsibilities among Bangladeshis, are perfectly in line with the motifs of the street art. Therefore, it can be argued that in the context of the present research, there is no graffiti art in Bangladesh, the discourse of which is complex for viewers to understand. In accordance with the motifs and perceptions of both artists and readers, graffiti art has the potential to bridge the past and the present, fostering historical, political, cultural, and social awareness. It can convey messages for future generations, appealing to artists, art critics, and viewers to address the various problems a country may face.