



Research article

Gender, Society, and Expression: An Analysis of the Subject Matter of Bangladeshi Visual Women Artists

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how societal influences shape the subject matter and artistic expression of Bangladeshi women artists, addressing the underexplored intersection of gender, identity, and sociocultural norms in the context of contemporary Bangladeshi art. Despite increasing participation of women in the arts, limited research exists on how societal expectations and gender roles affect their creative decisions and professional development. To bridge this gap, the study adopts a qualitative, phenomenological methodology, employing thematic analysis of in-depth interviews and artworks. The research explores how women artists internalize, resist, or reinterpret socio-cultural pressures through their work, revealing that art often serves as a psychological coping mechanism and a means of social commentary. Findings highlight that these artists navigate complex intersections of personal identity and societal expectation, using art both as self-expression and as a tool to challenge normative structures. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the sociocultural dynamics influencing women artists in Bangladesh.

Introduction

Art is frequently a reflection of the social, political, and cultural realities that influence an artist's lived experience; it is not only a means of aesthetic or personal expression. In a patriarchal system, artistic expression usually turns into a way for women artists in particular to negotiate their identities, express opposition, and speak for underrepresented voices (Pollock, 2003). The artistic practices of women visual artists in Bangladesh, a nation characterized by intricate intersections of tradition, religion, colonial history, and socioeconomic transition, exhibit unique topic matter patterns that need scholarly investigation.

Male opinions have historically been predominantly favored by the official and informal systems controlling the creation and consumption of art in South Asia (Lata Singh, May 23, 2024). Women's contributions to the visual arts have often been overlooked or understood from a male perspective, thereby limiting the scope of feminist art history in the region (Adebayo Abiodun ADELOYE, 2023). However, with the emergence of feminist organizations and the progressive inclusion of women in

formal art school from the mid-twentieth century, women artists in Bangladesh have emerged as critical voices, addressing subjects such as domesticity and identity in socio-cultural critique.

Problem Statement

Bangladeshi women visual artists are under-researched in scholarly literature, particularly in how their subject matter reflects gendered social experiences. Despite international recognition, their work is often interpreted in isolation from broader sociocultural narratives. This study aims to bridge the gap by exploring how gender and society shape the subject matter of contemporary Bangladeshi women visual artists, addressing the existing gap in literature.

Objectives of the research

- To identify and analyze the predominant subject matter in the works of Bangladeshi women visual artists.
- To examine the socio-cultural attributes that shape the artists' creative choices.

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- To explore the historical and institutional obstacles faced by women artists in Bangladesh and examine how these factors have influenced their visibility, recognition, and artistic expression.

Literature Review

Women's entry into mainstream art may seem unconventional due to their social preparedness for a different type of art. Men and women are not the same and face societal and family differences. This inequality manifests in their aesthetic consciousness and sense of life. Women's art, whether it's a work of art or an object of the world, reflects this different sense of life. Deeply rooted gendered beliefs and social norms shape the literary and creative conversation about women in the visual arts.

Linda Nochlin's 1971 essay, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' highlighted the historical invisibility and limited representation of women artists in the art world (Nochlin, 2018). Her theory serves as the foundation for comprehending how social restrictions have historically influenced women's artistic potential.

Cultural norms and freedom of artistic expression

If we look at history, we can see that women have played a significant role in the visual arts, as creators, innovators, patrons, collectors, and contributors. Traditional art history often excludes or masks women's participation, ignoring the social barriers they faced. The field frequently marginalizes women's contributions, either considering them non-existent or inferior compared to those of men, thus overlooking the societal impediments women encounter in their involvement within the art sphere.

In Bangladesh, women's roles in the home are still set by patriarchal rules, which affect their life situations and sense of beauty. These rules affect not only what topics female artists can talk about in public, but also how they think and form their beliefs. Scholars have pointed out how the pulls of class, faith, politics, and family roles shape women's identities. (Akter, 2018) These systems often marginalize women's voices or impose limits on artistic expression based on what is considered socially acceptable.

Gender norms as an influence on ideas

A recent sociological study highlights how restrictive gender norms hinder the leadership and agency of women in Bangladesh. (M.M. Enamul Aziz, 2024) While this study focuses on political leadership, the fundamental argument—those deep-rooted conventions limit women's autonomy—is also applicable in the creative arena. Likewise, normative expectations around caring and household responsibilities encourage women's confinement within private areas, limiting their ability to engage in public creative activities freely. (Faisal Islam, 2021)

Women Artists Negotiating Norms

Bangladeshi artists like Rokeya Sultana, Dilara Begum Jolly, and Atia Islam Anne demonstrate how socio-cultural constraints become embedded in visual expression. In the solo exhibition of 'An Ode to Joy' of Rokeya Sultana, she

said, 'Being a woman is not always easy; it is very easy to overlook us, and Women's accomplishments are not always recognized by society. Regardless of her hard work, rewards, or achievements, there were many times in her life when things were made uncomfortable for her just because of Rokeya Sultana's gender. Sultana's work explores female identity through series like Madonna, Bonobibi, and Relation, showing a dialogue with societal narratives about womanhood (Nahian, 2022). Dilara Begum Jolly uses satire and symbolic imagery to interrogate patriarchal structures and marginalized voices, such as garment workers and victims of religious violence. Anne uses surreal visual language in her Women and Society series to satirize the male myth and critique patriarchal oppression. These artists' narratives reveal how emotional introspection, resilience, and intellectual depth become intertwined in their creative ideologies, enabling them to resist and reinterpret oppressive norms. Feminist art history and visual culture studies argue that understanding women's art requires situating it within its socio-political context. Global feminist theory affirms that symbolic resistance often emerges from reworking traditional motifs, subverting normative aesthetics, and foregrounding personal narratives.

Methodology

The study follows a qualitative phenomenological research design to investigate the lived experiences of Bangladeshi female artists and how social norms, gender roles, and cultural values inform creative processes. The phenomenology is an appropriate approach because it is centred on the recording of the first-person views of the participants, corresponding with the research objective to gain insight into subjective artistic expressions informed by social settings.

With the integration of life history and biographical approach, there is an effort to document the longitudinal creative development and socio-cultural lives of the respondents. The strategy entails narratives and commentaries on their art, providing further understanding of how the respondents' contexts and identities shaped the creative decisions they made.

Sampling and Participants

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting professional women artists across diverse geographic and socio-economic backgrounds in Bangladesh. The selection criteria included:

- At least 5 years of active artistic experience,
- Record of exhibiting art locally or internationally,
- Willingness to share personal and professional life related to the art they do.

39 female artists were interviewed altogether. The size of this sample was sufficient to attain thematic saturation, enabling depth of insight within the boundaries of manageability for detailed analysis.

Data Collection

Three primary qualitative data collection techniques were used for the research:

- In-depth semi-structured interviews: Conducted face to face or via the internet, these explored individual relationships, social concerns, and attitudes to art by the artists.
- Artifact analysis: Selected artworks were analyzed for interview content, providing visual-textual correlation.
- Field notes and observations: Gathered while conducting interviews and studio visits to place artists' surroundings into context.

All interviews were recorded, transcribed word for word, and translated as needed.

Analytical Framework

Data analysis followed thematic analysis, using the constant comparative approach to compare similarities and differences between interviews and artworks, with emergent themes being refined. Interpretation occurred within the following theoretical frames:

- An understanding of feminist theory, to identify gendered relations and power structures of the art world and broader society.
- A socio-cultural perspective, exploring how cultural norms and collective histories shape artistic subject matter.

These interpretive lenses complement the phenomenological approach by deepening understanding of how lived experience and social positioning influence artistic expression.

Findings and Discussion

Society and Art

Art is a multidimensional representation of feelings, emotions, and the world that promotes peace and cooperation. It surpasses languages and countries, serving as a form of therapy, self-expression, and appreciation for life's beauty, while also chronicling history, embodying societal values, and commenting on political events. Art has the power to alter perceptions and catalyze change, as seen in movements like Dadaism, Surrealism, and Pop Art. (Uduak Peter, 2020) Art has a profound impact on society, bringing people together and expressing both the good and bad aspects of society. Art undergoes evolution as it interacts with its surroundings, thereby contributing substantially to the progressive advancement of humanity.

Throughout history, various art movements have shaped individuals' perspectives and established norms within the realm of artistic expression. Serving as a conduit for personal transformation, art possesses the capability to facilitate broader societal changes, whether beneficial or detrimental. It is imperative to discern genuine artistic expression from mere provocation. The expansive scope of art and its evolutionary trajectory have yielded seven fundamental reasons elucidating its enduring significance for humanity and society.

Art has been a powerful tool in bringing people together, even in the face of differing opinions. It serves as an expression and implication, allowing individuals to realize the goodness and follies of society. Art evolves

according to the context and plays a significant role in the progressive uplifting of society. Art movements have changed people's perceptions over time, and art can affect and enhance the self, acting as a mediator, bringing larger changes. Art influences society in various ways, such as visual knowledge, sculptures, traditional art, and digital art.

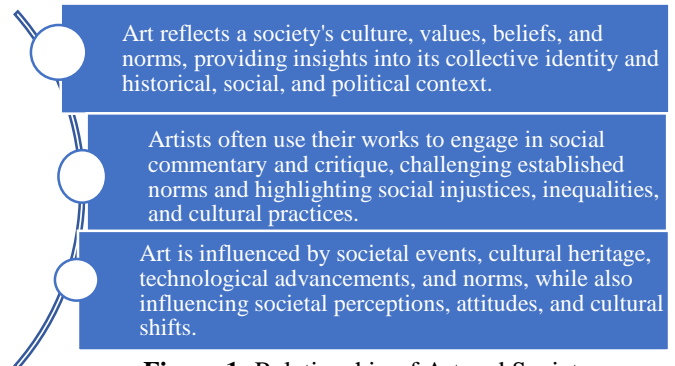


Figure 1: Relationship of Art and Society

Visual art enhances the inner self and questions differences, while sculptures depict choices and inner feelings. Traditional art, such as Madhubani, represents the culture, ethnicity, and ethics of various communities, which is crucial in today's society. (Anjan Sen, 2021) Art also creates awareness of social issues and engages audiences for social causes. Graphic and digital art, used for posters or advertisements, presents ideas for open interpretation. Despite being open-ended, art provides a wide range of thoughts and serves as a quintessential medium to bring about change slowly but with roots. The creative process has a profound impact on society by altering people's opinions, instilling values, and transferring experiences across time and geography. It acts as an archive for a society's collective memory, sustaining the sense of being in a particular area. Art can also be used as a method of communication, allowing people from other cultures to converse and inspire societal change. Artists are influenced by their society and are not detached from it. In Bangladesh, women artists face challenges and opportunities due to social changes. Their art explores issues like gender inequality, domestic violence, and empowerment. They use their creativity to challenge societal norms and advocate for social change. Their artwork serves as a powerful medium for expressing unique perspectives and shedding light on the experiences of women in their society.

Gender and Art

Gender has been a significant and evolving theme in the art world, influencing both the creation and interpretation of artistic works. Traditional representations of gender have historically been male-dominated, with female subjects often depicted through the male gaze. There has been a push for more diverse and authentic representations of gender identities in art. A study by Camilo J. Cela-Conde and his colleagues found that men and women rate the beauty of artistic and decorative stimuli differently.

The researchers found that during visual artistic appreciation, the parietal lobe was stimulated in both sexes. Still, the sides of the brain that displayed activity in the two sexes were not the same. In women, the activity was bilateral, while in men, it was primarily the right. Creating artwork is the same as visualizing. To make any artwork, women want to show their experiences and struggles of life through their creativity, while men appreciate contemporary issues more. Women express the complexities of life through their creativity by challenging cultural standards and campaigning for gender equality. Men, on the other hand, frequently explore contemporary topics in their artwork, presenting thought-provoking insights into the ever-changing world we exist in.

Women artists have faced challenges in gaining recognition and opportunities comparable to their male counterparts due to institutional biases, gender stereotypes, and limited access to education and exhibition spaces. The feminist art movement, which gained momentum in the late 20th century, sought to challenge and subvert traditional gender roles in art. In Bangladesh artists like Novera Ahmed, Farida Zaman, Fareha Zeba, Rokeya Sultana, Dilara Begum Jolly, and Tayeba Begum Lipi used their work to explore and critique societal expectations placed on women. Institutional changes have led to more inclusive exhibitions and collections, as museums and galleries recognize the importance of showcasing diverse voices. Contemporary artists use their work as activism and social commentary on gender issues through visual storytelling. The rise of digital and online spaces has provided new opportunities for artists to share their work, bypassing traditional gatekeepers, and allowing for a more democratic and inclusive representation of diverse gender perspectives.

Women Artists in Bangladesh

Throughout history, women's artistic contributions have often been marginalized and relegated to obscurity, overshadowed by the dominance of male artists within the field. Nonetheless, women have significantly influenced artistic movements by transcending biases favouring male supremacy, introducing distinctive viewpoints, and challenging entrenched societal gender constructs. (Selim, 2007) Continuously preserving the oldest artistic traditions of Bengal, women artists have emphasized themes such as nature, familial bonds, and vitality, which hold indispensable significance for the rural Bengali populace's sustenance. To comprehend women artists and their artworks, one must recognize that the guiding force behind Bengali folk art predominantly resides in the hands of women, whose adeptness permeates various facets of Bengal's cultural landscape.

Women who venture into the predominantly male-dominated realm of art defy societal conventions and expectations, showcasing their maternal strength amidst isolation. Despite encountering obstacles, women artists frequently navigate within aesthetic frameworks established by men. Diverging from male counterparts, women's artistic expressions are shaped by patriarchal

influences and distinct linguistic and expressive tendencies. Their art often revolves around themes of nature and family, reflecting an intimate understanding of natural energies critical to the livelihoods of rural Bengalis, while also endeavouring to maintain harmony and contentment within these vital energies. (Selim, 2007) Below are some of the women artists of Bangladesh with their artwork themes and subject matter-

Artist Name	Subject Matter	Themes of Artwork
Novera Ahmed (1939-2015)	National identity, liberation, and the strength of living beings.	Lives and struggles of rural and marginalized communities – particularly evident in the roughness of her style and choice of materials such as cement and found objects.
Rokeya Sultana (b. 1952)	Gender, societal expectations, identity, and freedom	Women's roles in society, gender inequality, silence, and empowerment.
Farida Zaman (b. 1953)	Nature, identity, and transformation	The female form, cultural heritage, beauty, and identity
Fareha Zeba (b. 1961)	Inner self, dreams, folklore	Complexities of womanhood, emotional journeys, reality, and dreams
Dilara Begum Jolly (b. 1960)	Women's strength, resilience, and empowerment	Challenging societal norms, personal and collective identity, and self-empowerment
Tayeba Begum Lipi (b. 1969)	Body, gender, societal norms	Gender, the body as a site of identity and societal control
Atia Islam Anne (b. 1962)	Feminine form, nature, emotional depth	Empowerment, cultural heritage, womanhood, self-reflection
Niloofer Chaman (b 1962)	Identity, self-image, culture	Women's emotional journeys, the conflict between tradition and modernity
Kanak Chanpa Chakma (born 1963)	Indigenous culture, women's identity	Cultural identity, indigenous heritage, female strength
Joya Shahrin Haque (b. 1975)	Women's experiences, social struggles	Feminism, identity, resistance, modern womanhood
Asmita Alam (b. 1978)	Social restrictions, emotional constraints	Female autonomy, relationships, societal limitations
Shatwana Shahrin (b. 1983)	Women's empowerment, self-assertion	Feminism, resilience, identity, resistance

Bangladeshi women artists are renowned for their unique artistic practices that explore identity, gender, cultural heritage, and social transformation. Their work often focuses on women's experiences, particularly in addressing societal norms, gender inequality, and cultural constraints. Artists like Novera Ahmed, Kanak Chanpa Chakma, and Rokeya Sultana focus on national identity, liberation, and women's resilience. Others, like Tayeba Begum Lipi, Atia Islam Anne, and Dilara Begum Jolly, examine the body and self-image as contested spaces shaped by culture, politics, and patriarchy. Artists like Farida Zaman, Fareha Zeba, and Niloofar Chaman merge personal journeys with collective memory. Their works form a robust visual discourse on womanhood in Bangladesh, challenging tradition and envisioning spaces for autonomy and change.

Social and Cultural Factors Influencing Women Artists

Socio-cultural factors significantly impact the experiences and opportunities available to women artists, both positively and negatively. These factors include historical context, gender bias, access to education and training, representation in art institutions, family and societal expectations, feminist movements, changing cultural norms, and global perspectives. Usually, women artists face barriers to entry into the art world due to societal norms restricting their access to education, training, and exhibition opportunities. Stereotypes such as the idea that women's art is inherently different from men's or that women lack the genius or skill of male artists persist. Over time, more educational opportunities have become available, but disparities in access to resources and mentorship can affect their artistic careers. Representation in art institutions has historically been underrepresented, affecting women's visibility and exposure. Balancing family responsibilities with artistic pursuits can be challenging, as societal expectations regarding caregiving and household duties may impact one's time and energy.

Feminist movements have played a crucial role in advocating for women's rights and equality in the arts, highlighting the importance of addressing gender disparities and pushing for greater recognition of women artists' contributions. Cultural norms and attitudes towards gender equality have gradually influenced the art world, with a growing recognition of the need for gender parity and inclusivity in exhibitions, collections, and art-related opportunities. Despite increased awareness and efforts to address gender disparities in the art world, challenges persist in achieving complete gender equality in the art industry.

Bangladesh has a rich history of traditional folk arts, such as Alpana and Nakshi kantha, which women within the household have primarily engaged. These traditions served as foundational art forms for women but were not recognized within formal artisan guilds or mainstream art institutions. (Islam, 2022) Under British rule, the rise of art institutions and exhibitions opened new spaces for women, particularly from upper- or middle-class families, to

pursue fine arts outside domestic roles. Pioneers like Novera Ahmed challenged patriarchal norms by embracing modern artistic forms and exhibiting publicly.

Post-independence, Bangladeshi women artists have grappled with decolonizing and asserting identity through art, challenging Eurocentric modes of representation. Artists like Tayeba Begum Lipi, Dilara Begum Jolly, and Nazia Andaleeb Preema explore intersections of nationalism, gender, and religion, reflecting global influences and local identity complexities. (Lê, 2015) Feminist art and patriarchal critique have emerged since the 1990s, with artists like Atia Islam Anne and Dilara Begum Jolly critiquing patriarchal structures, sexual objectification, and gender-based violence. (Karim, 2006)

Subject Matter of Women Artists in Artwork

Artists create art based on their mental state, influenced by their unconscious, subconscious, and conscious. The subconscious mind makes the urge to work, while the conscious mind completes the work in the outer world. The superego desires high recognition after the creation of art. These three parts control a person's psychology and play a role in creating human art. Freud's theory suggests that every human has two types of dreams: daydreams and nightmares. Artists fulfil these dreams in their fantasy world, creating art to visualize this fantasy world, paving the way for a path from fantasy to reality. (Freud, 1999)

The study reveals that women artists create their artworks through their subconscious and unconscious minds, incorporating their thoughts, personal experiences, and surroundings. This allows them to showcase various aspects of society. Art is an invention of the era, influenced by social, political, and religious circumstances. It has become a focal point for historians interested in postcolonial theories, as it represents the representation of its subjects and is a reflection of the societal context. Bangladeshi women artists are renowned for their unique artwork, which often explores psychological themes, personal experiences, societal issues, cultural narratives, and emotional landscapes. The analysis of subject matter in artworks by notable women artists in Bangladesh provides insights into their artistic expression.

Analysis of Bangladeshi Women Artists' artwork

➤ Tayeba Begum Lipi (b. 1969)

Tayeba Begum Lipi, a Bangladeshi artist, is known for her work exploring gender, femininity, womanhood, presence, absence, and mortality. She co-founded the Britto Arts Trust and was a commissioner for the first Bangladeshi Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, where her work was displayed alongside five other artists. (Tayeba Begum Lipi) Lippy's work is characterized by a strong emphasis on privacy and the mediums she uses to convey her experiences. Born into a large family with no privacy, her work often revolves around her handbags, which serve as a secret space for women. This concept of privacy was not present in her life until she started working with transgender individuals. Lippy's work is primarily sculptural, with a strong presence of film that brings in

concerns associated with the awareness of the body and gender identity. She believes that her work has been influenced by her attachment to her family and the objects that live with her in the same room. She began creating videos in 2004 and has evolved, incorporating elements of music, dance, and other forms of expression. Her work is characterized by a strong connection to her body and intimate aspects of her life, making it a unique and personal work. (In Conversation with Tayeba Begum Lipi | ASAP Art (Part I), 2021)

Lipi's multidisciplinary practice includes painting, prints, videos, and installations. Still, she is best known for her sculptural works that re-create everyday objects, including irons, bathtubs, strollers, handbags, and sewing machines, all made from safety pins or stainless-steel razor blades. Her work explores the commodification of art, addressing the paradox of subversive art created by women that speaks directly to issues of female identity, yet is ultimately absorbed into the patriarchal structure of the art world.



Figure 2: Tayeba Begum Lipi, *The Rack I Remember*, 2019, stainless steel and razor blades | Sundaram Tagore Gallery.



Figure 3: Tayeba Begum Lipi, *Mirror*, 2017, stainless steel, 48x24x16.7 inches | Sundaram Tagore Gallery

Lipi's razor blade sculptures are a poignant tribute to her childhood, where her family would give birth at home. Her brothers would be sent to the shop by the midwife to buy new razor blades, which she would use if she had to cut the baby out. One of her strongest memories is of the razor blades boiling on the stove, a sound she can still hear even when closed. The images depict the pain of growing older, a universal experience particularly profound for women as the manifestation of fading beauty becomes a reality.

The *Rack I Remember* is a memory-inspired sculpture made from razor blades, reflecting personal memories of

childhood and societal conditions surrounding women. The piece conveys violence, protection, vulnerability, and endurance, highlighting the tension between intimate and political aspects of female identity. It serves as a poignant testament to the complexities of female identity. Lipi's sculpture, *The Mirror*, features two female figures facing each other. She believes that she finds her reflection in others' thoughts, often reflecting her own experiences. Despite being diverse, she believes that we all face similar issues or stories that are usually unspoken. This sculpture is a reflection of her personal experiences and the importance of sharing them. (Nair, 2019)

The stainless-steel razor blade as a medium is layered with meaning, evoking violence, danger, craft, care, and armour. It becomes protective yet decorative, symbolizing how women navigate societal expectations and personal safety. Lipi's work critiques the commodification of female-centred art, highlighting how art that addresses women's bodies, identities, and struggles is often absorbed into the patriarchal art economy.

➤ **Dilara Begum Jolly (b. 1960)**

A renowned artist known for her multimedia artworks, often focusing on themes of strife, political turmoil, and gender identity, focusing on trauma and the female body. Initially trained as a painter, she has expanded her practice to include performance, video, and sound, renowned for her signature needling technique. Through symbolic elements and personal narratives, Jolly encourages introspection about one's roots and connections to a larger world. Her work also encourages viewers to empathize with the emotional journeys of individuals affected by socio-political changes.

Dilara Begum Jolly's art explores trauma, gender identity, and socio-political strife, focusing on the female body as a site of memory and wound. Her signature needling technique, pricking, stitching, and piercing fabric or photographs, serves as both a mark-making process and a symbolic gesture, reflecting the lived reality of many women who often endure both visible and invisible harm. Jolly employs everyday materials like petticoats, blouses, sanitary pads, and doll parts to recontextualize them into powerful visual statements about gendered violence. Her works often layer personal narrative with collective memory, connecting personal wounds to global injustice through symbolic anatomy.

Jolly's aesthetics include visceral aesthetics, symbol-heavy composition, and contrasts of visibility. Her installations envelop viewers, compelling them to inhabit the discomfort of the narratives. Her style can be seen as feminist activism, challenging voyeurism while making suffering undeniable. She preserves women's voices in contexts where they are systematically erased, using needlework as an act of rewriting narratives.



Figure 4: *In/visible*, Dilara Begum Jolly, Installation art, New Age

Dilara Begum Jolly's 'In/visible' depicts the female body as a reflection of male domination and violence, with visible or invisible wounds that can tell horrifying stories about the female body and the injuries it has suffered.

In/visible is a collection of three-dimensional sculptures and photographs, inspired by Jalaluddin Rumi's quote, "The wound is the place where the light enters you." The artworks are made of petticoats and blouses, stitched, folded, twisted, and joined to depict various body organs. A large piece with blouses stitched vertically takes the shape of the spine, while another wall holds a vulva-shaped artwork. The needle-pricked photos from the artist's clothing represent women's sufferings through tangible mediums, showcasing the artist's unique technique. The installation depicts the cruelty and displacement of Rohingya women, made of doll parts and sanitary napkins sent from Spain. The room with a dimmed bulb symbolizes the red-light districts of the country, while the bed and doll parts depict unborn lives and menstrual blood. The self-portraits symbolize 'self-bondage' and how patriarchal society deprives women of cultural and sexual expressions. (Molla, 2023)

➤ **Rokeya Sultana (b. 1952)**

Rokeya Sultana's thought-provoking artwork explores social and cultural issues. Her paintings, sculptures, and installations frequently reflect the difficulties experienced by women in Bangladesh. Sultana's artwork often shows psychological challenges, identity conflicts, and the inner battle between traditional roles and personal goals. It is critical to examine her works in connection with societal influences. Rokeya's artworks explore themes of gender, community, inclusivity, and struggle, often incorporating her memories and past experiences to create profound commentary.

Madonna, a popular American pop singer-songwriter, inspired artist Rokeya to create a series of paintings that depict everyday women navigating complex worlds and challenging patriarchal society. Her 1994 work *Madonna and the Passengers* depicts a mother and daughter in a bus, with fellow passengers hanging onto the handrail (Kaul, 2022). The painting 'Madonna and the Passengers' by Rokeya Sultana represents different responsibilities and duties that women experience in Bangladeshi culture. Madonna symbolizes maternity and the societal duty of nurturing, while the passengers reflect the various societal obligations that women balance. Sultana's composition reflects the collective weight that women bear as well as the psychological impact of societal roles. The artwork also emphasizes the conflict between cultural expectations and women's inner psyches, emphasizing the psychological issues that women experience between societal pressures and personal desires.



Figure 5: Rokeya Sultana, *Madonna and the passengers*, Soft-ground etching on zinc plate, 1994,

Artist's Artwork through personal Experiences

Adolescent women often experience higher rates of clinical depression and anxiety disorders than men, leading to increased expression of negative emotions like sadness, guilt, and fear. This has led to a greater focus on personal experiences and feelings in artists.

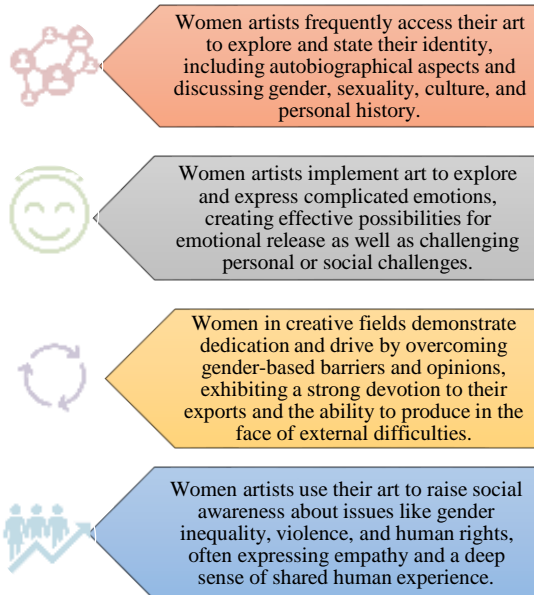


Figure 6: Characteristics of Women artists' artwork

Women often aim to make society aware of themselves and their societal issues. A survey of 56 participants revealed that $(94.9\% + 66.70\%) = 80.80\%$ of them mix their personal feelings into their artwork, while $(5.10\% + 33.3\%) = 19.2\%$ of girls sometimes express their feelings in their artwork. This highlights the importance of expressing personal feelings in art to make society aware of oneself and the issues faced by girls. This highlights the importance of incorporating personal experiences and feelings into art to make society more aware of one's feelings and experiences.

Thematic changes in art through the experience of becoming a 'MOTHER'

The world and nature are often referred to as mothers, as they protect everything and create a refined form of thought. The beauty of a mother begins with the birth of a child, and as a woman, she is born again, expressing joy and fear in her new life. This new life, combined with a range of emotions, creates a new environment for the artist, resulting in a new kind of artwork. The period of 10 months for women to become mothers and the next 2-3 years is delicate, as they are psychologically weaker and face deeper emotional issues. This is evident in the works of women artists who are experienced with these feelings. The artist's position is where they create their world, expressing their desires and the complexities of the new life. The artist's work is a reflection of the mother's journey and the challenges she faces in her new life.

The maternal experience stands as a cornerstone in a woman's life, encompassing a spectrum of emotions and

encounters that often find expression in their artistic endeavors, oscillating between abstraction and realism. In Rokeya Sultana's 'Madonna' series, for instance, the challenges faced by mothers in nurturing their children are poignantly depicted. Sultana portrays each maternal figure as a divine entity capable of enduring immense hardships for the sake of their offspring. Furthermore, her artwork 'Laura's World' revolves around her daughter Laura, offering a personalized exploration of motherhood. Conversely, Asmita Alam Shammi's collagraph 'Love' delves into the intimate bond shared between a child and their mother, illustrating the profound connection between the two. At the focal point of the artwork, a woman tenderly cradles her child within a profound embrace, while the artist skillfully incorporates diverse natural elements surrounding them. Through this composition, viewers discern the artist's portrayal of the inherent bond of love between mother and child. Artist Rokeya Sultana, Joya Shahrin Haque, and Asmita Alam each undergo a thematic evolution in their artistic expression following the arrival of their children. Women artists utilize their creative medium to articulate their personal experiences in an aesthetically expressive manner.

Conclusion

The research focuses on the exploration of gender, identity, and societal expectations in Bangladeshi women visual artists. The study examines their personal stories, artistic motivations, and thematic concerns to provide insights into how their works challenge and reflect the gendered, social, and cultural fabric of Bangladesh. The key objectives of this research were to understand how these artists articulate gendered experiences, negotiate their identities within a patriarchal society, and how their artistic expression serves as a form of resistance and empowerment.

The findings show that Bangladeshi women artists, such as Tayeba Begum Lipi, Rokeya Sultana, Dilara Begum Jolly, often use their art to reflect on the complexities of being a woman in Bangladesh, particularly in the context of traditional gender roles. These artists navigate societal limitations and use their works as vehicles for exploring and confronting gendered experiences. Through the personal narratives shared by artists like Fareha Zeba, Dilara Begum Jolly, and Tayeba Begum Lipi, it is evident that their artworks serve as a space to resist and redefine traditional expectations of womanhood. Fareha Zeba described her art as a way to break free from linear expectations of time and place, symbolizing the fluidity of womanhood. Dilara Begum Jolly portrayed women as active agents who assert their agency despite societal pressures. Tayeba Begum Lipi uses her works to challenge societal perceptions of the female body. At the same time, Rokeya Sultana's 'Madonna' series focuses on women's resilience and strength in the face of societal oppression. This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on gender, art, and resistance in Bangladesh by centering the voices of women artists and their unique perspectives on gendered experiences. Future

research directions could include exploring the ways in which emerging generations of women artists in Bangladesh are responding to both the legacies of their predecessors and contemporary global influences, as well as examining how the intersectionality of class, religion, and ethnicity impacts the artistic practices of Bangladeshi women artists.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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