

Rickshaw Art: An Emblematic Visual Culture and Social Awareness Tool in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Rickshaw art is considered a significant part of visual culture in Bangladesh. It is not only a form of art, but also a medium for circulating messages among the common people about social, cultural, religious, ethical, philosophical, and national issues. Rickshaw painters and pullers act as campaigners for social awareness. This study seeks to investigate people's thoughts about rickshaw art and its impact on society. It attempts to explain the images and messages painted on the back of rickshaws. Moreover, to illustrate the idea of this paper and evaluate the messages of rickshaw arts, multiple rickshaws from different cities in Bangladesh have been observed critically. Semi-structured interviews have been conducted to better comprehend the perspectives of rickshaw artists and rickshaw pullers. The major findings of the study suggest that rickshaws are very popular and that rickshaw art has changed substantially with the passage of time. Rickshaw artists possess some ideological and philosophical outlook for social transformation. In addition, the rickshaw pullers circulate the viewpoints of the painters in all corners of mega and small cities as well as villages in Bangladesh.

Keywords

Mobile art gallery, moving billboard, popular culture, rickshaw, rickshaw art, social awareness campaign

Introduction

The Bangla word “rickshaw” has been borrowed from the Japanese language. A rickshaw is a popular three-wheeled, non-fuel cart that is seen in most parts of Bangladesh. This moving vehicle is run by the puller day and night here and there. A rickshaw has a hood to protect passengers from sunlight and rain, and a back plate to place artistic work. The back plate and the hood are painted with pictures as well as meaningful texts. The tin sheet at the back of rickshaws is embellished with extraordinarily colourful paintings and vibrant images. Rickshaws are

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particularly visible in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, and for this reason, it is known as the city of rickshaws.

There are multiple divisions of culture such as high culture, low culture, and popular culture. Rickshaw art is viewed as a component of popular culture, or the culture of the masses. Rickshaw art is an inseparable, mentionable, and accomplished element of the traditional art and culture of Bangladesh. The multi-dimensional and colourful rickshaw paintings found on the streets of Dhaka are elaborately described in Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt's and David John Williams' book titled *Moving Pictures: The Rickshaw Art of Bangladesh* (2010). They opine that though rickshaw art has "great commercial and livelihood value," not everyone in Bangladesh appreciates it (57). A negative tendency to rickshaw art is generally nurtured by "modern intellectuals for whom art education means institutionalised training," and they "make a binary division between fine art and commercial art, embodied by gallery art and street art" (Dutt and Williams 57). Rickshaw art "nourishes primarily the poorer sections of urban society," and people who use rickshaws as a means of transport "are not [always] amongst the better-off classes either" (Dutt and Williams 58). In the 1980s, Bangladeshi elites exhibited their ignorance of rickshaw art by describing it as vulgar and detesting it for not being part of classical art. On the other hand, many fine artists in the country regarded it as a reflection of the "taste and interests" of ordinary people (Kirkpatrick). It is difficult to answer the question of "how much of the visual pleasure of rickshaw art is actually experienced by the powerful sections of ... society" (Dutt and Williams 58). Rickshaw art has the power to get access to all classes of people by virtue of its ubiquity on the streets both in rural and urban settings. Rickshaw art and the messages it conveys can be considered moving billboards observed by the masses (see Figure 1).

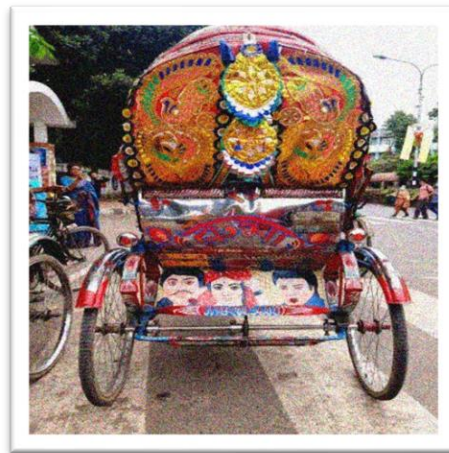


Figure 1 The back of a rickshaw
(Image captured by the author, with no conflict of interest)

Though the rickshaw painters of Bangladesh have little knowledge of art craft and culture as an academic subject, they choose images that describe contemporary social, political, and cultural issues from their point of view. They portray folkloric, filmic, political, and commercial imagery “depicting their heart’s desires as well as their religious devotion” (Komal). The rickshaw painters write several words related to social issues in the middle of vibrant images painted on the tin sheet, while the rickshaw functions as the *moving gallery* driven by the rickshaw puller. Thus, the rickshaw painters and the rickshaw pullers contribute to creating social awareness among the masses by providing various important messages through art. Rickshaw painting is a “dynamic form of urban folk art in Dhaka City” (Mahmud 160). It portrays the picture of the society and culture of Bangladesh as well as people’s “beliefs and aspirations” (Msallem). In the past, rickshaw paintings served as the posters and billboards of Bangla cinema meant for the common people. There is now a government restriction upon the rickshaw painters to the effect that they cannot mimic film stars or use movie posters as themes of their paintings. In the 1940s and 1950s, popular films and film stars were common elements in paintings by rickshaw artists. Later, a variety of depictions of animals, natural objects, and historical experiences were featured in their paintings. Rickshaw painters are not considered classical artists and, in most cases, their artistic creations are rarely exhibited in art galleries. Still, they possess various philosophical insights that they try to share through their artistic creations.

The study incorporates 25 respondents from different regions of Bangladesh. Three rickshaw artists, twelve rickshaw pullers, and ten passersby were interviewed for this study, which makes the total number of respondents twenty-five. The data were collected through semi-structured interview schedules. Three different sets of questions were employed to collect data from rickshaw artists, rickshaw pullers, and the people. Each set comprises five questions. Thus, there were five questions for rickshaw artists, five for rickshaw pullers, and five for people/passersby/passengers. It should be noted that in Bangladesh, the professions of rickshaw painting and pulling are particularly considered and chosen by men. The passersby interviewed for this study were both male and female. The interviews of three rickshaw artists were taken from three different shops in Old Dhaka. Two rickshaw pullers from six different districts (Dhaka, Khulna, Chattogram, Jashore, Gopalganj, and Narail) of Bangladesh were questioned. Passersby and passengers were chosen randomly from different places. Questions were asked in Bangla for the convenience of the interviewees, and then the responses were subsequently translated into English. Confidentiality had been strictly maintained, and no identifying information about the interviewees is provided in this study. The artists are coded as A1 to A3, the rickshaw pullers as R1 to R12, and passersby as P1 to P10, respectively, to make it easier to quote them where necessary. Images of rickshaws were shot

in various places, and pictures were also collected from different social media sites.

In addition, a number of tables have been drawn to categorise different types of messages conveyed through rickshaw paintings. To elaborate on the idea, several rickshaw paintings from different districts have been considered and critically explored. Images and messages painted on the back of rickshaws have been examined methodically, using visual content analysis. Furthermore, to describe the images and the messages observed from rickshaws, the critical content analysis method has been followed. In addition to this, several journals, magazines, and newspapers, as well as images and videos from the Internet have been considered to elucidate and establish the idea of this study.

Rickshaw artists, pullers, and the people

Most of the rickshaw artists were found in Narinda and Bakshi Bazar in Old Dhaka. The responses of the artists reveal that they enjoy their profession and that it is their heart's urge to create artwork. They try to expose their inner feelings for society and their surroundings through their art and craft. All the artists are of the opinion that this profession is hereditary. They inherited this professional love, compassion, and creativity from their predecessors. As A2 responds:

This shop was my grandfather's and he was good at rickshaw painting. After his death, my father became the owner of this shop and continued painting. I also learned some techniques of rickshaw art from my father, and I am willing to continue this profession.

This is the response of a young artist. Most of the painters derive their professional identity from their forefathers. They do not receive any institutional training in art craft, as self-motivation and family training keep them abreast in this art. That is to say, the rickshaw artists earn their artistic depth from their families and transfer their education and training from one generation to the next. In this way, rickshaw artists continue digging art craft with brush and colour, just as the Irish poet Seamus Heaney's (1939-2013) farmers continue digging with spades and Heaney through his pen. Heaney's words reveal a profound feeling: "Between my finger and my thumb / The squat pen rests. / I'll dig with it" (lines 29-31).

While some rickshaw pullers express their professional happiness, others show their contempt by saying they came to this profession for their survival. As R7 puts it: "I enjoy rickshaw pulling because, throughout the day, I get the opportunity to meet various passengers. I carry people happily and help them reach their destination." R3, R6, and R9 stated that they came to this profession to save their family members from the curse of poverty and earn their livelihood. Although some pullers choose this profession involuntarily, they do not necessarily expose their professional dissatisfaction or unhappiness. They accept their fate and try to enjoy their work.

Most passersby/passengers/people prefer rickshaws as a mode of transportation because they are fuel-free. P1 expresses his liking for rickshaws, as they allow him to travel alone. He continues by adding that travelling in rickshaws enables him to observe the surroundings well. P5 concurs, stating:

In my opinion, rickshaws are the best mode of transport in Dhaka city, and I can take a fresh breath while travelling in rickshaws. I cannot tolerate the bad smell of petrol and diesel used in buses, CNGs, and other vehicles. As rickshaws do not require any kind of fuel, I consider rickshaws the fittest mode of transportation for a sustainable environment.

P2, P8, and P10 also express their love for rickshaw as it is the most comfortable means of transport which never creates a feeling of suffocation. Thus, almost all the respondents characterise rickshaw as the easiest, most congenial, and most environment-friendly way of transportation. It is also found that people like to travel by rickshaw as it is convenient and affordable.

Colourful paintings and didactic words

Rickshaws are famous for their multiple bright colours as well as their shiny and eye-catching decorations. Rickshaw artists use colourful ornamentation with didactic messages to entertain, inform, and educate the common people. The artists are driven by the urge to make people aware of and updated about important socio-political issues through their art. All three respondents have replied that they like to portray these images to enchant people. A1 and A3 maintain that they try to introduce the national bird, flower, and animal to the children through rickshaw art. A2 believes that the portrayal of the national flag, the Shaheed Minar, the National Memorial, freedom fighters, and language martyrs encourages people to recall history. A1 emphasises the inscription of religious words since he believes it instills moral values among viewers. Though they have different opinions and ways of portraying things, it is found that all of them paint for pleasure.

Rickshaw pullers use shiny and accomplished decorations to attract passengers. Besides, some pullers express their personal satisfaction because of the catchy ornamentation. When rickshaws are wonderfully furnished, they also feel happy to pull them. R2 and R9 are employed by rickshaw owners, as they do not own rickshaws. They make it clear that rickshaw decoration depends on the tastes of the owners. It is found from some responses that pullers who own rickshaws furnish them according to their preferences. When asked about using didactic words, most of the pullers indicate that they want people to view those words and act accordingly. Some of the pullers emphasise the use of religious words because they believe that it will make God happy and increase their earnings. Moreover, they believe that these religious words help viewers and

passersby develop a sense of morality and deepen their belief in the mercy and bounty of God.

Most of the people express their feelings of joy about rickshaw art. They believe that rickshaw art gives them pleasure, and the inscribed words motivate people to obey the advice accordingly. Some of them mention how new films were circulated through rickshaw art in the past. P6 asserts:

The use of cinematic posters and paintings assisted in increasing the popularity of cinema and film stars among the masses. It also proffered pleasure to the viewers, especially the underprivileged in cities and rural areas.

P2, P8, and P9 believe that written words are also helpful in increasing social awareness in some cases. P3 considers these art crafts “thought-provoking” and utters, “I feel the importance of those words, as they inspire me to contemplate.” According to P10:

The written words make passersby conscious of various life and social issues. For example, the inscription *Life is more valuable than time* makes people aware of the importance of careful, conscious movement while driving any vehicle, running, or walking through the road.

Thus, the majority of the respondents have positive opinions about rickshaw art and about its educational messages. They believe that these messages are helpful for social change and awareness.

Spreading awareness through rickshaw art

Rickshaw artists have philosophical and ideological thoughts in mind that they try to spread through their art. Their understandings and beliefs regarding socio-political and cultural issues are illustrated through kitschy artistic expressions. It has been found from the responses of artists that it is quite challenging to create consciousness among people regarding cultural, political, social, and other important issues in a densely populated country like Bangladesh. Rickshaw artists understand this reality and attempt to be a part of the development mission and social awareness campaign through their artistic creativity. A2 responds that since rickshaws are slow-moving coaches, the creative arts are easily visible to onlookers, as rickshaw arts are viewed as a “moving exhibition of paintings” (“Decision”). However, it is discovered from the responses of rickshaw pullers that their primary focus is on foregrounding decoration. They choose a decorated and colourful design since they believe it can allure viewers and passengers. R7 exposes his feeling of comfort in using attractive and colourful paintings as a tool of ornamentation. Thus, rickshaw pullers, the underprivileged section of the country, act as the bearers of social messages through their profession. Though majority of the pullers respond positively about educational messages through rickshaw art, R11 thinks it is ineffective in reality because people hardly have time to observe trivial things like rickshaw art.

In most of the rickshaws, several social issues are written with colourful decoration. Rickshaws function as *moving billboards* in the context of Bangladesh, though rickshaw art is undervalued by most people. It keeps contributing to raising awareness of such issues as people's responsibilities to society and to the environment. Rickshaw paintings contribute to increasing "subaltern consciousness" regarding cultural and social orientation (Haque 5). Besides, it provides "subtle political messages" to the masses (5). It is a part of subaltern culture, and through this art, the subaltern people try to expose their voice, sayings, and beliefs about society (73). Sometimes, religious messages are inscribed on the backs of rickshaws in Bangladesh to emphasise the importance of believing in God and religion. A1, A3, R5, R9, and R12 believe that religious words foster a sense of morality and ethics and also serve as a form of awareness-raising medium regarding the gravity of religion. Therefore, *Rest in God, Greetings to God, Greetings to Allah (God), Salat (prayer) is the key to heaven, Perform salat (prayer)*, and similar exhortations are written. The paintings and the texts circulate religious homilies among the masses and raise a feeling of religious sentiment in them. Besides, the picture of the masjid (mosque) is also depicted on some of the rickshaws. Rickshaw art sometimes reveals some words about the significance of adoring and respecting one's parents. A1, R6, R11, and P9 believe that these kinds of words remind people of the importance of the blessing of parents. Thus, *Mother, Blessing of mother, Blessings of parent*, etc. are inscribed to raise feelings of love, care, and respect for parents.

The frequently noticeable messages that rickshaw art portrays are issues related to social problems. There are lots of problems that exist in the society of Bangladesh. It is an overpopulated country where a mentionable number of people are illiterate and they live under the poverty line. Rickshaw art helps raise consciousness among the underprivileged about social issues. Social media campaigns, talk shows, human rights campaigns, etc. are held to raise awareness among the common people regarding socio-political issues. A1 claims, "We are neither eloquent and educated speakers who can motivate people, nor are we popular philosophers. We just try to paint with our brushes what we think and believe." As A3 asserts: "Despite being underprivileged, we think of the betterment of this country and highlight its beauty and culture through our artistic creations." Thus, the painters and the pullers try to create a utopian, healthy, and conscious society where people are well aware of civil, political, social, cultural, educational, moral, and health issues. The following table foreshadows some notable messages depicted on rickshaws:

Table 1
Messages related to social issues

English Translation
Plant trees, and save the environment.
Small family, happy family.
No more than two children for wellbeing.
Stop polluting the environment.
Smoking is injurious to health.
Stop corruption.
Killing guest birds is prohibited.
Send your children to school.
Education for all.
Life is more valuable than time.
Give vaccines to your babies.

The above table contains some messages related to social issues that are painted on the back of rickshaws. These illuminating words are easily visible to the people because of the rickshaw's slower speed.

Rickshaw art is a good medium for spreading socio-political, cultural, and national issues of the country among the masses in the context of Bangladesh. The self-taught rickshaw craftsmen sometimes use their art form to mock and criticise social injustices and inequitable acts. The colourful paintings of rickshaw art "bring together humans and beasts in the same setting, belonging to the same social order" and are, "nothing less than an emblematic fable" (Siddiqua). Another notable excellence of rickshaw art is that the subjects of the pictures change according to the demands of time. Whenever any significant events happen in society, the artists connect the artistic theme relevant to those societal issues. P3, P6, and P9 opine that rickshaw art has the ability to delineate any issues through its vivid portrayal. Recently, in Bangladesh, violence against women has increased, and students of fine arts seem to have emulated rickshaw artists to create awareness among people by portraying pictures with words in rickshaws.

One such message reads: *The rapist is responsible for rape, not the victim*. To stop oppression and discrimination against women, words like *stop violence against women* are inscribed through rickshaw paintings. Moreover, to raise awareness among people during the Covid-19 period, rickshaw art carried messages like *wear a mask; stay healthy*. P2, P7, and P10 remark that rickshaw art plays the roles of “moving messages” and “running conscience.” The following table presents messages related to contemporary social issues:

Table 2
Messages exposing topical social phenomena

English Translation
The rapist, not the victim, should be ashamed.
Stop violence against women.
The rapist, not the victim, is responsible for rape.
The rapist, not the clothes of women or girls, is responsible for rape.
Wear a mask and stay healthy.
Wear your mask properly to stay safe.

P1 and P8 maintain that sometimes rickshaw art also focuses on patriotism. The words *Bangladesh, Hail to Bangladesh, May Bangladesh live long* are occasionally engraved in the middle of shiny colours and paintings. The pictures of the National Flag of Bangladesh, the Shaheed Minar, and the National Mausoleum are also painted to evoke a sense of patriotic feeling. Thus, religious, social, political, as well as cultural themes are beautifully portrayed in rickshaw art.

Cultural heritage and rickshaw art

Rickshaw art can be considered one of the most prominent visual cultural expressions in Bangladesh. It represents a glimpse of the culture of Bangladesh by describing the beauty of the country, its natural scenery, rural activities, and contemporary issues. Culture is related to the identity of a particular society or country since it carries the heritage, tradition, and talent of a nation. As culture includes many things, Williams defines culture as “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” (76). According to UNESCO, culture shapes the identity and characterises the achievements of any nation. Therefore, significant and accomplished cultural elements like rickshaw art need to be identified and dignified to preserve traditional culture. In this globalised

world, promoting someone's national culture is related to that country's existence and reputation worldwide. UNESCO claims:

In today's interconnected world, culture's power to transform societies is clear. Its diverse manifestations, from our cherished historic monuments and museums to traditional practices and contemporary art forms, enrich our everyday lives in countless ways. ("Culture")

Culture contributes a lot to promoting the social, political, and regional sophistication of any state. Traditional and distinguished cultural heritage and creativity are essential to building "vibrant, innovative and prosperous knowledge societies" ("Culture"). Rickshaws are full of beautiful and attractive decorations that reflect Bengali culture. As Islam puts it:

Every single inch of this vehicle is crafted in artistic traditional motifs. The design patterns used in Dhaka's rickshaws provide a real impression of local art and culture. In essence, the rickshaw is a mobile exhibit of Bangladeshi folk art. (35)

A1, R5, P1, and P10 mention that rickshaw art is a prominent cultural heritage of Bangladesh because of its unique features and contributions to society.

At the beginning, the tin sheet on the back was decorated only with portraits of famous Bengali movie stars. After the restriction from the government on painting images of movie stars, the artists started using animal imagery to "mimic the activities of the movie stars" (Komal). Since then, birds, flowers, animals, natural objects, villages, forests, historical events, and places have been painted by the artists. In this way, mentionable objects "from intricate designs to rural scenery and casual humor" are highlighted in rickshaw painting (Siddiqua). Besides, several national issues are also often emphasised through rickshaw art.

During the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh, war-related pictures were dominant subject matters in rickshaw art, and even now in some rickshaws, war scenes are painted (Chowdhury). Pre- and post-liberation war scenes like the pictures of the Shaheed Minar, the National Mauseum, the 7th March speech of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1920-75), freedom fighters, letters of the Bangla language, etc. were dyed on the back part of most of the rickshaws. As Siddiqua states:

Right after the Liberation War, the design painted on the rickshaws did not merely present an aesthetic purpose, but also an attempt to depict the darkest hours as well as the most valiant moments of our history. Sometimes, these artworks are an accurate depiction of real events, sometimes they are just an exaggerated vision of the imagination. (Siddiqua)

After the Liberation War, rickshaw art was diversified. Rickshaw paintings sometimes attempt to focus on global issues as well. For example, during the period of the Gulf War, portraits of Saddam Hussein (1937-2006) were painted

on some rickshaws in Dhaka (Komal). This is how rickshaw art has changed and will continue to evolve.

The rickshaw art of present-day Bangladesh

Painters are now losing interest in rickshaw art due to the availability of plastic art, as seen by the responses of the artists. A2 has replied that rickshaw art is their traditional profession, but now this vocation is on the verge of extinction. Most of the artists love this occupation, but now it is a question of the sustainability of their livelihood. Nowadays, the new generation is not interested in continuing this profession due to the negligence of people towards rickshaw art. The mass-emerging plastic industry spoils and kills the skill and craftsmanship of artists. It is observed that rickshaw pullers now buy ready-made plastic paintings as these are less costly. R4, R6, and R10 believe that cost-effectiveness is more important to them than eclecticism. Along with the significant evolution of rickshaw art over time, the rickshaw design has also changed. R4 and R9 state that the rickshaw's body was once made of wood with steel plates on top. Today's rickshaws are entirely made of metal, unlike earlier models that had wooden bodies. According to R8 and R12, the key distinction between present and past rickshaws is that the former were powered by paddling, whereas the latter are motorised vehicles. R2 and R7 mention that the names of the pullers' near ones were mentioned at rickshaws in the past and are used now as well, despite changes in rickshaw art over time.

According to the majority of passengers, new emerging plastic art and the commodification of aesthetic art diminish the artistic significance of rickshaw art. P10 opines it is extremely concerning that rickshaw art is now commercialised and commodified by some capitalist institutions and people use traditional art as a profit-making source instead of promoting it. One of the accomplished cultural heritages is losing its appeal gradually due to the indifference of people. However, P6 responds that rickshaw art is not confined to rickshaws only, it is now expanding by being depicted on various other things. Thus, there is still hope since some institutions work to promote rickshaw art by depicting it in their products like ornaments, ceramics, photo frames, clothes, shoes, etc.

Rickshaw art was always under constant threat from time to time. Under Pakistani rule, there was a restriction on painting human figures. Therefore, the artists started to paint natural scenarios, religious and historical themes like masjids, the Taj Mahal, etc. They also encountered restrictions on changing the subject matter of their paintings even after Liberation. Still, there is a threat to the continuation of this folk heritage, and at present, the threats come from massive industrialisation and modernisation. It has been found from the responses of artists that they do not expect any social recognition for their creative work, but they never want to lose their hereditary works of art due to the development of the plastics industry. At present, rickshaw art has started to lose

its importance and appeal due to excessive population and the modernisation of society (Msallem). Since everything loses importance and significance over time, modernisation and digitalisation have changed people's appeal and taste for rickshaw art as well (Chowdhury). Though rickshaw art brings colour to the streets of Dhaka, this traditional hand-printed artwork is now at great risk due to the lack of patronisation and mass-produced plastic art (Msallem). Most of the interviewees are of the opinion that the massive emergence of the plastics industry, the loss of affection for tradition and heritage, as well as the capitalist tendency of people are responsible for the decline of this traditional art in Bangladesh.

Nowadays, rickshaw art is replicated in showpieces, photo frames, wallpapers, mugs, ceramics, and other artifacts. P7 reveals that once rickshaw paintings had great importance in spreading and boosting the popularity of any film. Now, random billboards, colourful posters, and magazines have taken that place. Consequently, rickshaw art does still exist but not in its original form. P1 and P8 utter that now people can find simulated pictures of rickshaw art, as the previous glory of this art craft has been lost. Most of the interviewees have agreed to the point that rickshaw art is ordinary people's culture, which is sometimes disdained by the elite. Similar results are found by Dutt's and Williams' and Kirkpatrick's investigation. Though Dutt and Williams express doubt about the elite portion's observation of the aesthetic pleasure of rickshaw art, the current study discovers that all classes of people experience this art to some extent. Exhibitions are sometimes arranged to introduce the grandeur of rickshaw art. Though rickshaw art is featured in exhibitions, actual artistic practice by artists is hampered. Despite everything, it appears that the younger generation uses rickshaw art as a medium for providing their messages to society in protest against any violence. The majority of the interviewees are enthusiastic about rickshaw art and consider it a tool for raising consciousness among common people. Besides, they express concern about the absence of awareness-related messages in many of today's rickshaws as the art is on the decline. On a separate note, autorickshaws and CNGs are increasingly replacing rickshaws in metropolitan areas. A passenger can reduce cost by travelling in an auto instead of a rickshaw. Some of the respondents are more concerned about the sustainable environment and transportation system. They believe rickshaws can be an effective medium of sustainable transport which can replace and reduce the use of private cars on the streets of Dhaka. Some of the participants are anxious about pollution and the consumption of petroleum, diesel, and gases. Some respondents believe that it will arguably mitigate traffic jams in Dhaka city by diminishing private cars.

The findings of Dutt's and Williams' study demonstrate that there is regional variation in rickshaw design and ornamentation. Their study also finds that rickshaw arts in Chattogram contain "fewer human faces and more images

of birds, flowers, and animals” (77). However, rickshaws in Sylhet are less decorated (77). The present study has also discovered variations in painting by observing rickshaws in a number of districts. However, the findings of the study illustrate that although rickshaw art is still relevant to social awareness campaigns, its importance is waning. In the conventional system, anything better or worse, displayed in any exhibition or art gallery is considered to be classic art or part of high culture. Rickshaw art thus fails to gain the appeal of classical or high culture because it is part of mass culture. The majority of the respondents found more attractive images and words in rickshaws in their childhood, which they hardly observe now. According to most of the respondents, rickshaw art has undergone massive changes throughout time and has almost lost its appeal and past glory. Findings also show that modernity and capitalism work as a force to destroy this traditional craft. Another noteworthy discovery is that rickshaw art is now used to advertise various products. Additionally, this study finds positive responses about the commercialisation and continued practice of rickshaw art in various other contexts that will aid in the preservation of this traditional art.

Conclusion

Despite being kitschy, rickshaw art serves in diverse ways. Artists have some ideologies, philosophies, thoughts, and beliefs, and their convictions are imprinted on their paintings. The depiction of Bengali society, history, and culture by the rickshaw artists resembles the contributions of others who work to promote art and culture. Although rickshaw artists do not get much recognition from society or the state and their art is undervalued as low culture, they are eager to continue their work for livelihood and avocation. The artists are enthusiastic about inscribing their inner thoughts in their paintings.

Rickshaw art represents the flora and fauna of Bengali heritage and folk culture through its eye-catching and bright decoration. This visual art contributes to bearing some important messages about Bengali culture, heritage, and identity from pre- to post-modern times. Though not recognised as classical artists, rickshaw artists (and pullers) are the silent messengers of society. Proper steps should be adopted to prevent the suppression or eradication of this traditional visual culture. Most importantly, in the era of global warming and environmental pollution, non-fuel rickshaws can continue to contribute to ensuring a sustainable environment.

It is evident from the responses of most of the interviewees that rickshaw art is currently on the verge of decay. Young people hardly show any interest in carrying out this hereditary work. So, when the older artists pass away, the art form will also perish with their departure from the earth. A possible solution to this could be the promotion of rickshaw art in various other ways. Since many institutions now express interest and liking for rickshaw art, artists need to be encouraged to collaborate with these institutions to keep their art alive and

prevent its extinction. The companies can also cooperate by providing them with proper wages, as art is not a cheap object. Art should always be valuable, and artists should be honoured properly. In this way, Bangladeshi visual art can reach the world as a rich and accomplished cultural component.

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