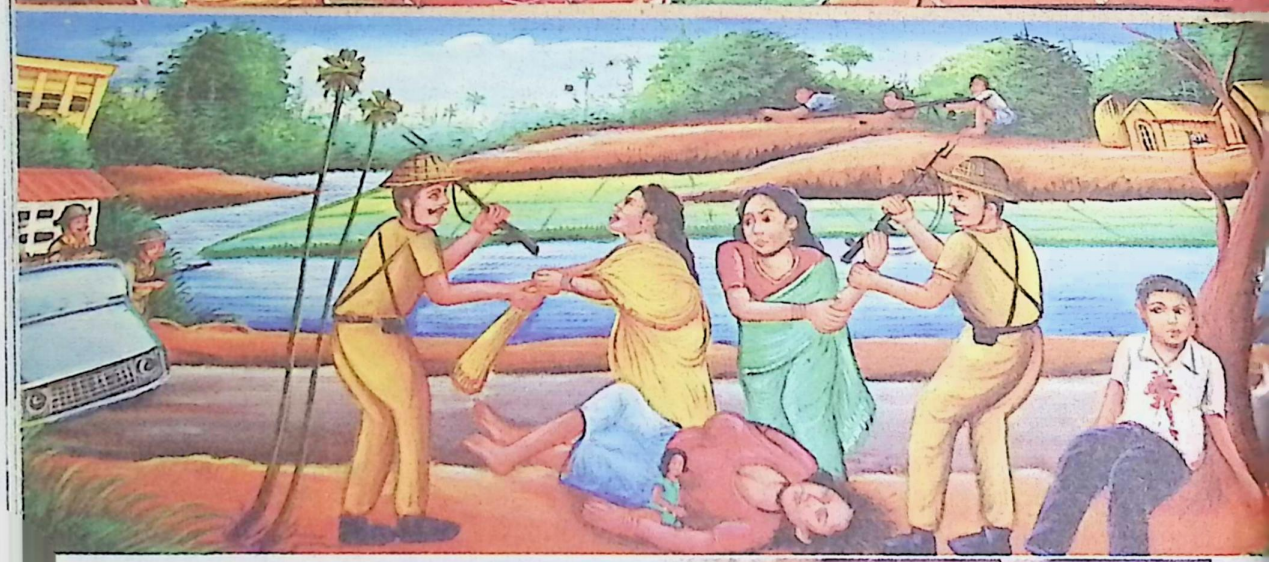




Honouring Crafters

UPASHANA SALAM



Creativity, fortunately, has still not been declared a property of the rich and wealthy. Starting from the complex art of weaving a sari to the simple task of sketching images on village homes, you are surrounded by the art of creation all around you. We may admire these works of art from a distance but few attempts are actually taken to bring these traditional crafts to the forefront.

Since 1989, the Mastercrafspersons Awards, introduced by the National Crafts Council of Bangladesh (NCCB), has been awarded to crafts persons from all parts of the country. The objective was straightforward – to revive traditional crafts and to value the artisans who spend a lifetime preserving their traditional art form from the invasion of modern culture. Ever since 2010, when Bengal Foundation joined hands with the NCCB to honour craftspersons, the awards are conferred to artisans of four different craft forms, and are awarded a cash prize of Tk 50,000 each, along with a crest recognising their craftsmanship.

Artworks on the back of a rickshaw are nothing out of the ordinary for us. But for the international world, the rickshaw is a national symbol of our country. And the reason is simple. The bright, vibrant, kitschy images that we see at the back of the rickshaw is quite representative of our populace. We are a people that wears its heart on its sleeves. We take pride in declaring our emotions at the top of our lungs; Bangladeshis are a positive, optimistic, loud, emotional, warm people, and all these qualities are reflected in these images painted at the back of a vehicle that is uniquely ours.

Rafiqul Islam, a rickshaw painter of Sutrapur, Dhaka, admits shyly that he enjoys his work because he has the freedom to create. Unlike your typical artist, Islam was not educated from any institute. He took to this profession from a young age because he had to feed a family, and drawing came naturally to him. Over the years, Islam became a celebrated rickshaw painter, his paintings were displayed in exhibitions in Japan and at the Bangladesh National Museum. Currently, Islam