

When *Don 2* was released back in 2011, many South Asians living in Malaysia stormed the local cineplexes and halls to watch the movie. A remake of an old Indian gangster flick, a star cast, including Shahrukh Khan and Priyanka Chopra, pulled in quite the throng. As a part of an international conference in Kuala Lumpur at the time, a bunch of journalists from Bangladesh decided to watch the movie as well, catching one of the late-night shows after dinner.

Even though it told the same old story from decades ago, the remake was slightly different in terms of the character sketches. Instead of playing a damsel in distress, Priyanka Chopra, a heart-throb in India and elsewhere, played the role of an officer of an intelligence team, travelling the world to find the culprit. Not only did she smile less and never once played flirtatiously with her hair (as many female characters are made to do), she actually trained in martial arts and other forms of defence techniques to play her character. Her character was seen fighting with the villains, wrestling for the weapon, and blasting a car or two.

"One of the worst films I have ever seen," commented one of the participating journalists, hailing from Chittagong, after the movie was finished. "What kind of a movie did we just



PLAYING THE DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

ELITA KARIM



Still from *Don 2*

watch? Does it look nice for the heroine to be all manly, fighting with the villains? That's not her job!" he added.

"Bhai," added a fellow participating journalist from Bangalore, Karnataka, "I was snoring half the time! This film did not make any sense to me—no proper dances or songs or colours. What was the point of having a heroine in the movie in the first place?"

(Of course, many a critic around the world did find the movie to be a waste of a remake of a 1978 classic, but thank God they had different reasons.)

It's a fact that the majority of the audience living in South Asia like to see female actors play the damsel in distress,



Still from *Dhaka Attack*

whereupon she is swept off of her feet by the ever-confident hero. The perfect formula to a box-office hit would also probably include scenes where the heroine is being dominated by the hero and she is enjoying it!

Celebrated director Rubaiyat Hossain, says, "Women characters in most films made all over the world are certainly not the lead. When a woman is shown in a main role the films are called 'women-oriented' films. This goes to show that the norm is that the male is the subject and the woman is the object. Women in cinema from the beginning of its history have been used to add an erotic surplus on screen. Also, the damsel in distress is

a phenomenon not only in cinema but also in literature. Just think about fairy tales and you will understand."

"I would not say that I like the damsel in distress character, but yes, I do like to see the softer side of the female when I watch a movie," says Mukit Islam Tonoy, a 23-year-old medical intern, at a discussion that took place amongst friends after watching the recent blockbuster hit, *Dhaka Attack*. "I like to watch romance flicks. I don't agree with the fact that the female character is undermined in any way. They, in turn, help many of us to dream of something positive and enjoy ourselves!"

Farhana Ahmed Nitol, however,

thinks otherwise and talks about how the character of Mahiya Mahi from *Dhaka Attack* was disappointing for many. "Her character showcased a courageous journalist in the beginning, and turned into a nagging girlfriend in the end!" she exclaimed.

This inconsistency in the character sketch was brought about only because the majority of the audience would never acknowledge a female taking decisions, coming up with more ideas by collaborating with her cop boyfriend to showcase stories on her channel, says Farhana, or simply not screaming in her squeaky, nagging-girlfriend voice when the bomb disposal unit member rushes to do his job.

One must admit, however, that *Dhaka Attack* is definitely one of the biggest hits this year, and rightly so. The storyline, cinematography, the cast, music, costumes—everything seemed to blow people's minds. The polished SWAT uniforms, the bomb disposal suit and the certain nuances that a police official showcases in the real world were fantastically introduced into the film, as opposed to the typical FDC police movies that are usually made. And the ostentatious character played by the female lead should probably be forgiven. "I appreciate Mahiya Mahi very much!" said director of the movie, Dipankar Dipan at a live discussion. "It's also

because of the fact that she is very popular and loved by the common filmgoer in Bangladesh that we got so many halls right in the beginning," he added. Not only was *Dhaka Attack* shown in more than 100 halls all over Bangladesh right from the time of release, but the movie also earned massive profits.

We are living in an era of change, and we always hope with our hearts that the change is positive. Many such positive changes are happening right now in Bangladesh and *Dhaka Attack* happens to be one of them. No matter where you are, grab a ticket at the nearest theatre and enjoy the movie!

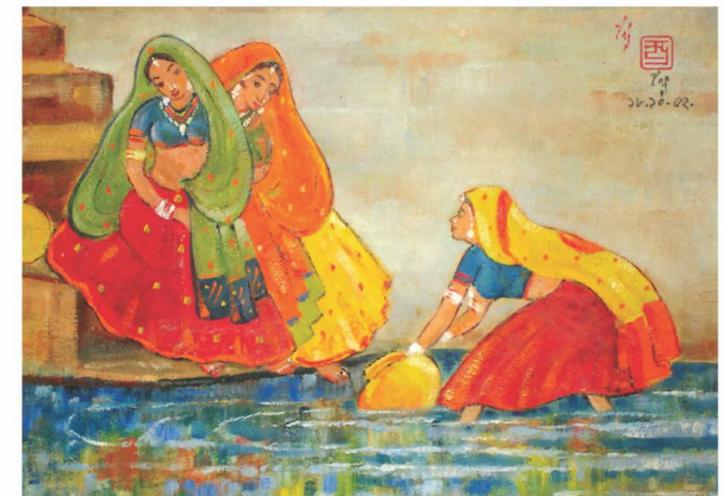
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| FILM |

| EXHIBITION |



Abdus Satter, *Korean Fish*, 2006



Indra Dugar, *Village Woman*, 1952

AN ASSIMILATION OF CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY ART

7th Oriental Painting Exhibition under spotlight

ZAHANGIR ALOM

Such a grand-scale oriental painting exhibition has never been held in Bangladesh before.

51 Indian and Bangladeshi masters and contemporary artists from different academies including Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan; Government College of Art and Craft, Kolkata; Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Dhaka; Rajshahi University; Indian Society of Oriental Art, Kolkata; Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata; and Oriental Painting Study Group (OPSG), Dhaka took part in this exclusive show held at Zainul Gallery.

According to Nandalal Bose, a pioneer in the field, the speciality of oriental art is to express the mood of art with motion, gesture, and rhythm.

During the first decade of the 19th century—inspired by Rabindranath Tagore—a group of artists from Bengal, including the prominent Shilpacharya Abanindranath Tagore incorporated all oriental trends—including Ajanta, Elora, Mughal, Persian, Chinese and Japanese art heritage—into forming the Neo-Bengal School that upheld Swadeshi (patriotic) values. Later, following that trend, Abanindranath's disciples, especially Nandalal Bose and others, established and popularised the practice of oriental art in the entirety of India.

Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin established the Department of Oriental Art in the Government Institute of Arts (now the Faculty of Fine Arts in the University of Dhaka) in 1955 so that the naked imitation of western art did not swallow our culture.

The artworks at Zainul Gallery were evocative of the use of subtle and sensitive colours. A game of light and shade; unparallel compositions; blends of classicism and modernity and their two-dimensional and three-dimensional presentations attributed an exceptional quality to the display.

Among the displayed works by Indian masters, Benode Behari Mukherjee's watercolour on silk cloth pasted on board was a rare display of the 1943 piece. The disciple of Rabindranath Tagore beautifully depicted a blossoming tree. This pioneering maestro grew up with impaired vision and turned completely blind by 50, but continued teaching in Visva-Bharati University until his death in 1980.

The work of Gopal Ghose, founding member of Calcutta Group, showed how the artist changed the genre of landscape painting during his lifetime.

Many of the artists presented were under the direct tutelage of Abanindranath Tagore, who founded the Indian Society of Oriental Art. Kshitindranath Majumdar's oriental female figure aesthetically depicts the sensation of Indian Eros and held his tutor's mantle. Stunning landscapes by the Padma-Shri-winning Biren De and Padma-Bhusha-winning Devi Prasad Roy Chowdhury were masterpieces that Dhaka art connoisseurs had the opportunity to view.

The feminine grace of Bengal is poetically portrayed in Indra Dugar's *Village Women* (1952) with its lyrical lines. Sudhir Khastgir's mixed media work *Face of a Boy* (1944) is a stunning beauty of a rough-brushed, melancholic visage. Works by Maniklal Banerjee, Mrinal Kanti Das and Nikhil Biswas, master

painters from the Neo-Bengal School, works were also on display.

The works of living legends Nandadul Mukherjee, Ramananda Bandyopadhyay also graced the walls of Zainul Gallery. Contemporary master Swapan Das created a centrifugal glow in his piece titled *Omar Khayyam* by keeping the midpoint almost white. His other work *Owl* depicts the poetic imagery of Jibananda Das. His student Rina Roy also displayed five paintings. Inspired by the unique watercolour wash technique of pioneering master Abdur Rahman Chughtai, she depicted aesthetic figures and landscapes on kent paper using bright colours and compositions of animals like deer, water-fowl, and lotuses with a close affinity to nature. Anuradha Gaye from the Kolkata Academy of Fine Arts painted birds feeding in the natural ambience of the morning.

Other Kolkata-based artists, namely Ananaya Roy Chowdhury, Apurba Sengupta, Arghya Diptakar, Benoy Dalui, Enakshi Das, Mintu Naiya, Parag Halder, Soma Mukherjee, Sukanta Saha, Susmita Saha, and Tanmoy Dasgupta, also showcased their works at the exhibition.

Among Bangladeshi artists, Shawkatuzzaman's painting is stroke-based. Pioneering oriental art maestro Abdus Satter's outstandingly soft work is a depiction of Korean fish. Tajul Islam and Rofique Ahmed have portrayed folk-



Amit Nandi, *Philosophising the Political Anatomy of the Opposite*, 2017

based and liberation war-inspired works. Chairman of the Department of Oriental Art at the University of Dhaka, Malay Bala beautifully intertwined Shakuntala with banyan boughs like the tree nymph she was. Lakshman Kumar Sutradhar's vegetation painstakingly outlined how each leaf caught the sunlight.

The other participating Bangladeshi artists were Sushanta Kumar Adhikary, Zahid Mustafa, Jean Nesar Osman, Kantideb Adhikary, Zahangir Alom, Amit Nandi, Bikash Ananda Setu, Shankar Majumder, Suman Kumar Sarkar, Fahmida Haque Mahi, Hasura Akter Rumky, Horendranath Roy, Nipa Rani Sarkar, Nondita Sutar, Eite Rajbongshi, Kazi Nowrin Misha, Nargish Parvien, Samina Zaman, and Sanjida Akter.

"The purpose of holding this exhibition is to inspire both artists and art connoisseurs to search for their cultural roots and nurture the same shared legacy of art in both Bangladesh and India," said Malay Bala who is also the curator of OPSG.

The style of oriental painting broadly captures Chinese, Japanese, and Persian paintings as well as the time-honoured artworks of the Indian subcontinent that range from the line-based vase paintings of the Indus Valley civilisation to present-era paintings.

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