

WOMEN IN ART



ART: KANAK CHANPA CHAKMA

FROM PAGE 3

"There was much negativity in society back then too, but at present, there is an unusual restlessness in most people and today's female artists are trying to represent the ongoing societal issues in their work," she furthered.

Another eminent artist, Fareha Zeba, who is currently working as an art teacher at Scholastica school, feels that the female artists of this generation express their repressed thoughts and unspoken emotions through their work. Both Zaman and Zeba lauded Novera Ahmed as an unforgettable icon who revolutionised the field of arts and crafts.

"Her sculptures and her mindset were both equally modern and ahead of time which made her style so unique and impactful," added Zaman.

On the other hand, Kanak Chanpa Chakma, the renowned freelance artist whose signature style revolves around hill tracts, natural landscapes and tribal community, believes that the golden age for female artists in Bangladesh began around the 80s and is still going on, as more and more brilliant artists are emerging every day.

She believes, contemporary artists like to draw attention to the current societal issues and try to criticise, and raise collective societal awareness against them.

"Various forms of abuse, rape and violence have escalated outrageously and many artists are expressing their opposition to such vile elements on their canvas," added Kanak.

WOMEN AS THE EVERGREEN MUSES

Starting from Da Vinci's mystical Mona Lisa to Picasso's half a dozen female muses, women have been selected by many world-class artists as muse for their works.

"Women have an appealing linear qual-

ity, meaning that drawing them is like sketching mesmerising scenery," remarked Farida Zaman and added that they are also a deprived segment in the society and their voice is most often unheard which makes them the top priority of many artists' works.

A vast portion of Fareha Zeba's works focuses on women and their matters.



ART: FAREHA ZEB

"One of my paintings was based on a female acid victim and it may seem quite crude to many people," she said. However, she believes in being passionate about her work and represents her subjects just as she sees them.

While growing up, Kanak Chanpa witnessed rampant discrimination in the tribal community and thus, many of her works focus on women, particularly tribal women.

"I view women as Durga – a symbol of power, and try to portray their issues, unspoken words, and emotions through my artwork," she explained.

Some of Kanak's outstanding paintings from the series 'Waiting' mean to give away an incredible and crucial message.

The faces of the women are half covered in shadow while their mouths are slightly illuminated – perhaps showing that they are waiting for a golden day when they will finally be free from all unfair bindings in society and be able to express themselves without restraint.

DISCRIMINATION AND DISPARITY

It may be a hard truth to swallow but no matter how much society has progressed in terms of growth or technology over the years, there is still a significant amount of discrimination against women in many professional sectors. All three of the veteran artists agreed that even today the field is still not levelled for female artists.

"Women have struggled throughout their lives — they have to manage all their familial responsibilities and then also spare some time for art," commented Zaman.

From Zeba's perspective, they are definitely much braver and more outspoken than they used to be so they are trying to break through relentlessly. On the other hand, Kanak believes that apart from the evident discrimination, there are some supportive senior artists who definitely play

a vital role in encouraging many present and upcoming female artists.

BUILDING BRIDGES FOR THE UPCOMING GENERATION

Quite often, it is seen that many admirable women artists cannot and do not continue to work in the field of art. The profession is still frowned upon by many traditional minds of the society who opine that there is not enough income to earn in this field. On the contrary, another orthodox segment argues that women should focus more on building their homes rather than building their careers.

Farida Zaman confessed that although she was seldom career-oriented, she never ceased to paint.

"Life gave me fair share of hardships, but I continued to paint no matter what; painting was my source of livelihood, my favourite pastime and my only sliver of salvation," she stated.

Zaman is positive that the key to success lies in a tonne of hard work and a bit of luck that can take one a long way.

Many artists out there strive to gain recognition in the field, whether they are newbies or wanting to make a comeback.

Fareha Zeba and Kanak Chanpa are the founding members of an organisation named Shako, Bengali for bridge, which works to promote female artists and help them make a mark in the mainstream. They have also contributed significantly to train differently abled girls and women and help them become independent.

Zeba and Kanak both believe that today's youth should not surrender their interests to the barriers of their family and society and should persevere through it all to be recognised for their work and talent.

By Nafisa Faruque

Special thanks to Farida Zaman, Kanak Chanpa Chakma, Fareha Zeba