



fact, throughout his entire career, Hassan was heavily influenced by Matisse, and also Pablo Picasso.

In creating the much acknowledged effect, Quamrul made profound use of lines, and techniques taken from the cubists. Even in his pastoral depictions, often, rather than going for plain realism, he deconstructed figures and landscapes, and then put his creative zeal in the reconstruction, at times making use of geometric forms.

#### THE SOUL OF AN ARTIST

Although quintessentially Bengal, neither did Hassan rely on motifs, nor do his *patas* explore religious depictions. In every painting of Hassan, one can easily relate to his sense of belonging to what he explored, and the obligation and nationalistic fervour that he upheld. It would not be wrong to say that in each of his works, one finds an enthusiasm to explore the ethos and the essence of the land he was born in; the land he traversed.

Art is often a spontaneous outcry; at times it is a deliberate attempt to accomplish and present a certain theme and set a trend. Throughout his career, Hassan seems like a believer of the second.

He experienced Bengal in its myriad forms, and his art reflects that very experience. When one attempts to explore the entire gamut of his works, it becomes clear that all his creations are mere reflections of his mind and soul, and the journey of his life. Thus, we see him engage in creating art and crafts in post-71 Bangladesh, borrowing even from his pre-partition experience.

Women are his most recurring theme. One finds the women in Hassan's works in groups, at times engaged in a chit-chat; on the fields in times of harvest. As a painter, Hassan was an observer. Although modern by all means, he utilises a fusion, but never



allows his urban existence touch the rustic landscape.

Although the formative years of his life was spent in West Bengal, it was only after his migration to East Pakistan that he was fully exposed to the beauty of rural Bangla. In the course of his career, the pastoral setting of Bengal was ever changing, yet Quamrul remained loyal to the images captured in his memory.

Hassan was also one who's creations were built on his personal journey, and the varied depiction of women throughout his entire career is a testament to that. The phases encompass the experiences of a child and dreams of youth; the bliss of marriage; and the sour notes of nuptial bonding. Yet, one must realise in none of this periods did his imagery take a scornful tone.

The first stage marks the memories of his late mother in utter simplicity. This phase also sees him draw women in groups, mostly in three. Perhaps — a mother, a wife, and a daughter. One can never say.

Hassan painted women, but he also painted experiences. The bare-breasted images of women in his later paintings may have been a symbol of vitality of life. When he chooses to draw his muse, often



a woman taking a bath, it is more of a reminiscent of the glory days of Bengal, the lyrical picturesque setting that has been lost with time.

What some critics finds most exhilarating is his repeated use of poster colours for his imageries. Loud in their tones, he completely abandons the *pata* style and creates a new form of painting, ubiquitously Bengali, but quintessentially global.

#### A LINGERING CONSCIENCE

The evil he encountered in society troubled Quamrul Hassan; it touched his inner conscience and his response was multi-dimensional. His presence in the socio-po-

litical scenery was not only visible, he was one of the trend breakers.

Experimenting on art in East Pakistan was not an easy task, as the people of the entire Pakistan were burdened with a religious overtone, and artists could not help but respond. Ever since the formation of Government Institute of Fine Arts at Dhaka, Quamrul took it upon himself to bring acknowledgement and recognition to what was then a highly neglected arena, commercial art. He was the mastermind of several art events, and through them, art was presented to the people in a new form.

In 1960, Hassan gave up his position at the Art Institute and helped establish the East Pakistan Small and Cottage Industries Corporation, and between 1960 to 1974, Quamrul played one of the most pivotal roles an artist can play in shaping the minds of a nation. He was active in the struggle against the autocratic regime of Ayub Khan, and became engrossed with the freedom floating in the air after 1 March, 1971.

On 23 March, he put up at least ten propaganda posters, portraying a monstrous face of Yahya Khan, which inspired the freedom fighters. This would later form the basis of the iconic demonic depiction of Yahya Khan, with the simple, powerful slogan — 'Annihilate these demons'.

Following the events of 25 March, Quamrul Hassan left for India, and joined the struggle for liberation by serving as the Director of the Art Division of the Information and Radio Department of the Bangladesh Government in exile.

Following Victory on 16 December, Quamrul returned to Bangladesh, and once again, played a pivotal role in establishing art in a new country, just as he did post partition.

Between 1971 and 1974, he masterfully executed the designs of the state monogram of Bangladesh, Freedom Fighters Welfare Trust, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, Bangladesh Bank, and Biman Bangladesh Airlines.

He played an active role in creating a positive image of an emerging nation by overseeing the designs of stamps and currency — tiny ambassadors that often contribute more to creation of a national image than any other means.

That is not where he stopped. In 1974, in a series of prints done in linocut and woodcut, he presented his anguish for what he felt was the degeneration of the zeal of freedom; he vividly presented the erosion of spirit, the corruption of morals and ethics over personal gains.

Perhaps, for an artist who is so moved by the beauty around him, and disturbed by the injustice engulfing us since, the artist Quamrul Hassan was always the one to protest through the medium he knew best — art! He took the oath of a Bratachari in his youth, and true to his conviction, he did stick to the pledge till his last breath.