



Serenading the sublime souls of the soil

Artworks reflecting the glory of our Liberation War

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The Liberation War of Bangladesh is a glorious part of our history. People from all walks of life took part in the war and millions laid down their lives to free the motherland from the Pakistanis. Every year, the nation remembers the sublime sons of this soil with due respect and love. Our independence was hard-earned through a series of magnificent movements starting from the 1952 Language Movement to the 1971 Liberation War. The active participation of so many patriotic and creative persons including artists, sculptors, writers, journalists, filmmakers, singers and playwrights in all the glorious movements, contributed much to the creation of Bangladesh and the subsequent enrichment of its art, literature and culture.

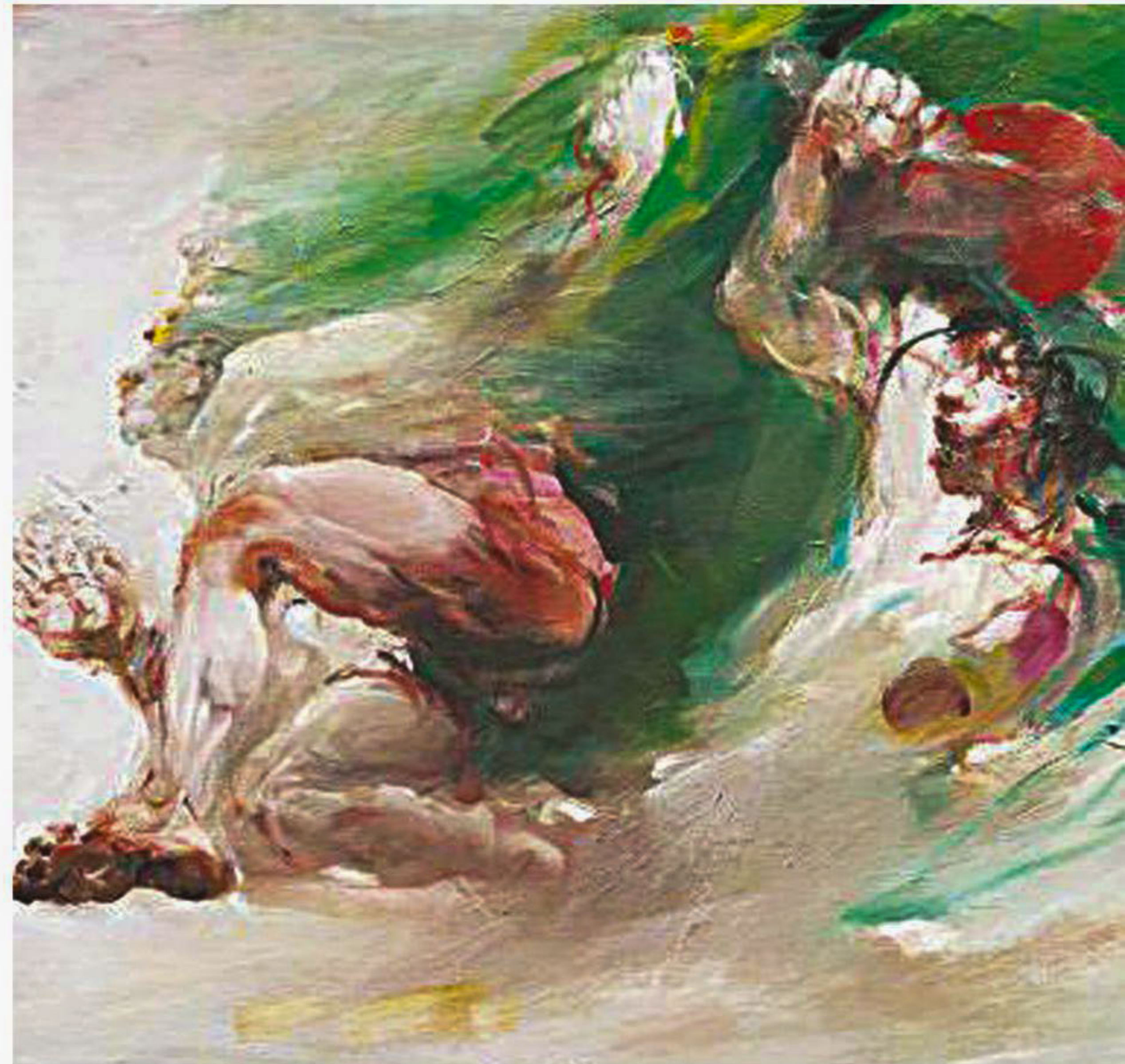
The contributions of the country's visual artists and sculptors to the War of Liberation are immense. Eminent artists Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin, Patua Quamrul Hassan, Nitun Kundu, Swapan Chowdhury, Rafiqun Nabi, Hashem Khan, Shahabuddin Ahmed, Debdas Chakraborty, Nasir Biswas, Pranesh Mandal and Biren Shome, among others, have portrayed the Liberation War in their distinctive styles. Their artworks played a pivotal role in inspiring the Bangalee people. The posters, festoons and banners painted by these artists motivated our people to raise their voice against the oppressive Pakistani rulers. They had painted many posters during every single important movement in the 60s. And every sketch, every poster or painting became as lethal as explosives to the Pakistani

rulers. As a result, the Pakistani army raided the then Dacca Art College (Now Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Dhaka) and other parts of Dhaka city on March 25, 1971. Later some of the artists went to Kolkata to save themselves and started working for the sake of a sovereign Bangladesh.

On March 26, 1971, some of the artists took part in a procession carrying pro-liberation placards in their hands under the leadership of Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin and Poet Begum Sufia Kamal under the banner of "Charu O Karu Shilpi Sangram Parishad". In that procession, they were carrying cartoons, caricatures, slogans and posters drawn by Quamrul Hassan, Qayyum Chowdhury, Rafiqun Nabi, Hashem Khan and others.

During the Liberation War, a team of artists tried to draw the attention of the rest of the world by sketching monograms of independent Bangladesh, stamps, posters, banners, cartoons and leaflets, as instructed by the provisional government's Ministry of Information and Publicity, under the leadership of Quamrul Hassan. Besides, Mustafa Monwar, Swapan Chowdhury, Golam Mowla and others visited different camps and participated in different programmes to inspire the freedom loving people.

Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin was inside the country during the Liberation War. He saved his life by hiding himself on December 14, 1971, when the Pakistani army went on a horrifying killing spree of Bangalee intellectuals. Though in serious danger, he continued his fight using his own



Platoon (2015) Oil on Canvas by Shahabuddin.

weapons: brush and colour. His painting titled 'Soronarhi' depicted the plight of the refugees crossing the border to save themselves from the genocide. 'Muktijuddho', a sketch that inspired many brave warriors, shows a team of Freedom Fighters going forward, their stance one of confidence and fearlessness. He has used a black brush in this sketch symbolising grief and hatred for oppressors. Abedin's solidarity with the Muktijoddhas (Freedom Fighters) was evident in his refusal of a title given by Pakistani government to express his solidarity with the Freedom Fighters.

Quamrul Hassan's most famous contribution to the Liberation War was the iconic caricature of Yahya Khan with the tagline 'Annihilate these Demons' which he did during the Pakistani army's atrocities. The caricature was placed in front of Shaheed Minar for showing.

There were many other artists who played important roles during the War of Liberation. Preminent artist Aminul Islam's oil-painting 'Gonohotya', portrays hundreds of martyrs to illustrate the brutality of the Pakistani army. Moreover, a number of sketches by eminent artist Mustafa Monwar for the novel 'Jahannam Hote Biday' by Shawkat Osman were very impressive. In the canvas, he depicted Pakistani army's war crimes – the genocide and rape they unleashed on the people.

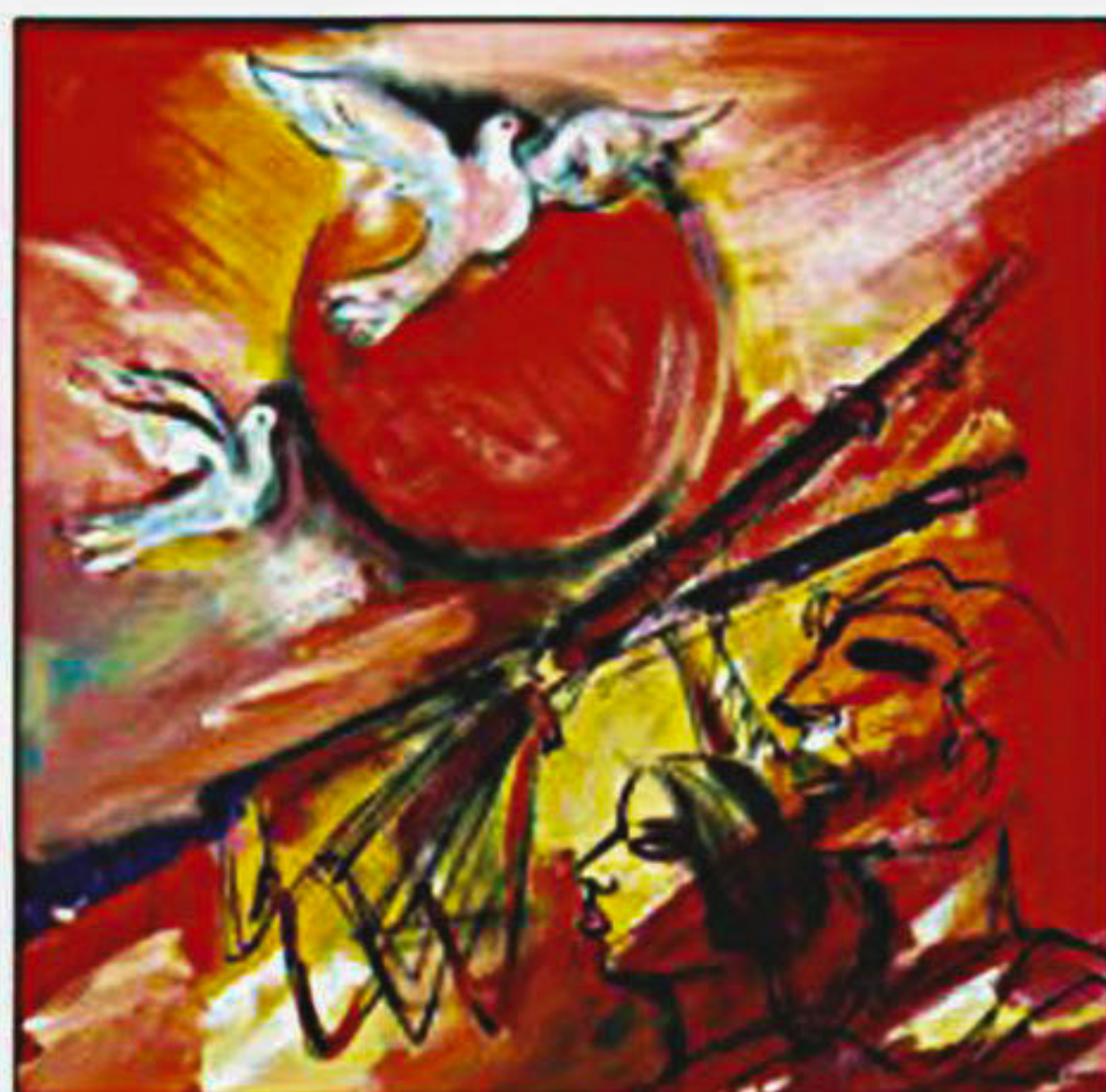
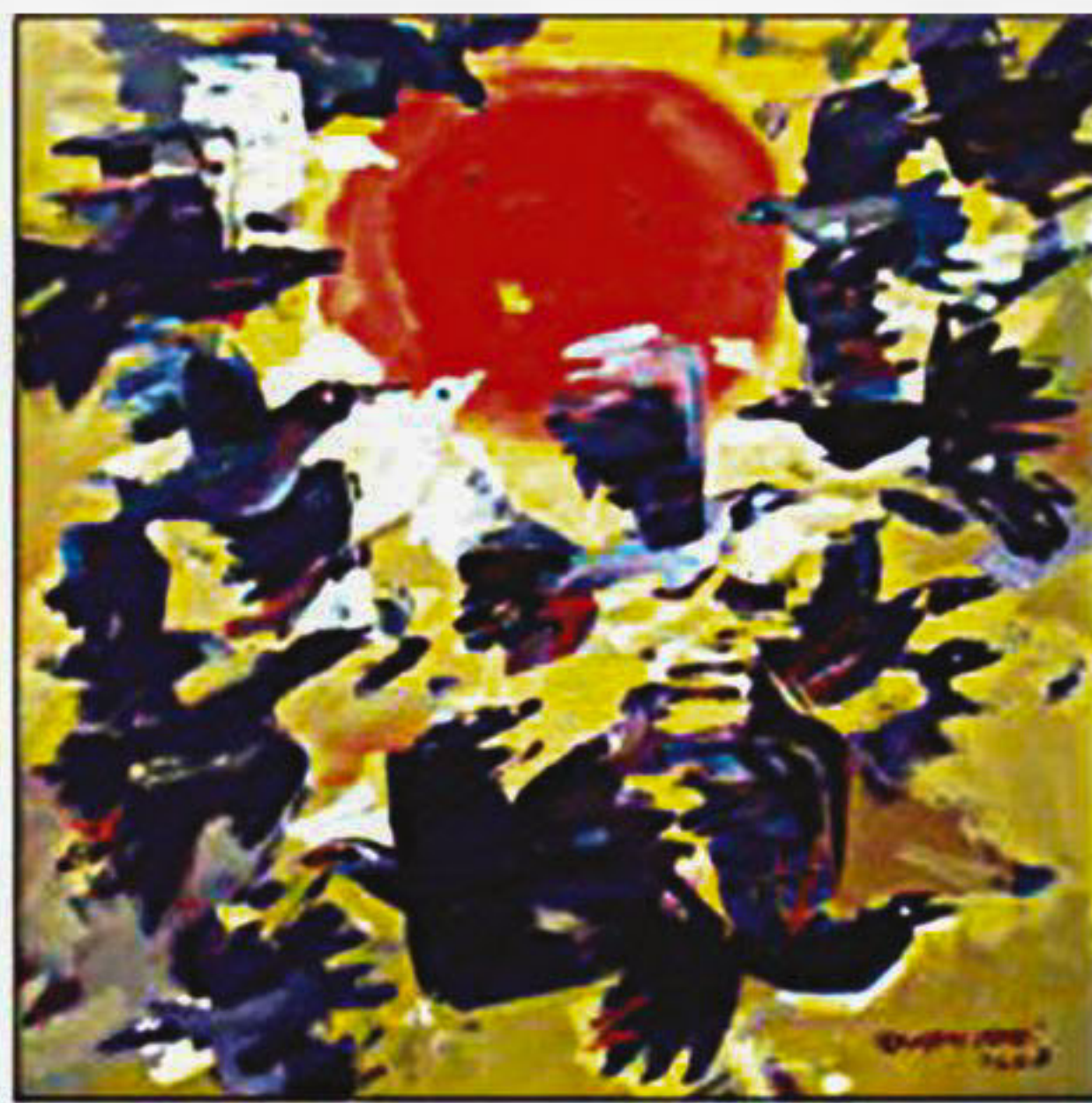
The socio-political turmoil of pre-Liberation War times has been captured in the work of eminent artist Murtaja Baseer, a Language Movement veteran, who created the series 'Wings of Butterfly'.

"I also created another series titled 'The Wall' in 1969. It portrays the ambience of suffocation that engulfed us all", said

Murtasa Baseer. "During the War of Liberation, I, along with my wife and our two daughters, fled to Paris. When I watched the plight of the Freedom Fighters and common people on television, I was driven by a deep sense of guilt. Then I created the 'Epitaph for the Martyrs' series as my homage to the Freedom Fighters,"

Renowned artist Qayyum Chowdhury also did a huge number of paintings on our Liberation War. Many of these were sketched during the war. Rafiqun Nabi, a young painter at that time, was confined during the entire war. From his first-hand experience he drew an image named 'Bijoy'. He used the figure of an elephant to glorify the significance of freedom.

Another young painter of that time was Swapan Chowdhury, who displayed more than 200 paintings and drawings on the Liberation War during those days in Kolkata and other camps. His book 'Ekattorer Chitroguchchho' features those treasured drawings and paintings. He was a member of 'Mukti Sangrami Shilpi Sangstha' that kept up the morale of the Freedom Fighters in different camps by performing songs and poems. Late filmmaker Tareque Masud and his wife Catherine Masud later made a documentary film titled 'Muktir Gaan' (The Song of Freedom) in 1995 that explores the impact of cultural identity on the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, where music and song provided a source of inspiration to the Freedom Fighters and a spiritual bond for the whole emerging nation. American filmmaker Lear Levin did the cinematography of the film.



Clockwise from top left: Paintings on Liberation War by Ranjit Das, Alakesh Ghosh, Biren Shome and Jamal Ahmed.