

AGENTS OF CHANGE

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How effective is art as a form of protest?

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at the University of Chittagong and Rabindra Bharati University. Through his paintings, he portrays the uniqueness and struggles of the Jumma people. "I want to picture how the people in the hills, amidst lush green nature, are spending their days in insecurity and brutality. What the Jumma people have lost in the past and what they will lose in the future have been a central point of my paintings," he shares.

Tourism in the CHT is obliterating the lives and livelihoods of the Jumma

people. Members from the Mro community in Bandarban recently protested the construction of a five-star hotel and tourist spot in the Chimbuk Hill area. They alleged that Sikder Group and another welfare organisation are trying to grab about 1,000 acres of jhum land in the name of constructing a hotel and creating a tourist spot.

In one of his paintings, Jayatu portrayed Sajek Valley and how it is becoming a tourist destination, dispossessing local Tripura and Lushai families of their ancestral lands. "Local

inhabitants of tourist spots have to sacrifice a great deal because of the activities of the tourism industry," explains the artist. "Sajek Valley is one of the most beautiful places in Bangladesh. People go there to spend their time amidst nature. Not many think about the displaced families and their current whereabouts. As an inhabitant of the hills, I have a responsibility to portray the reality of my people."

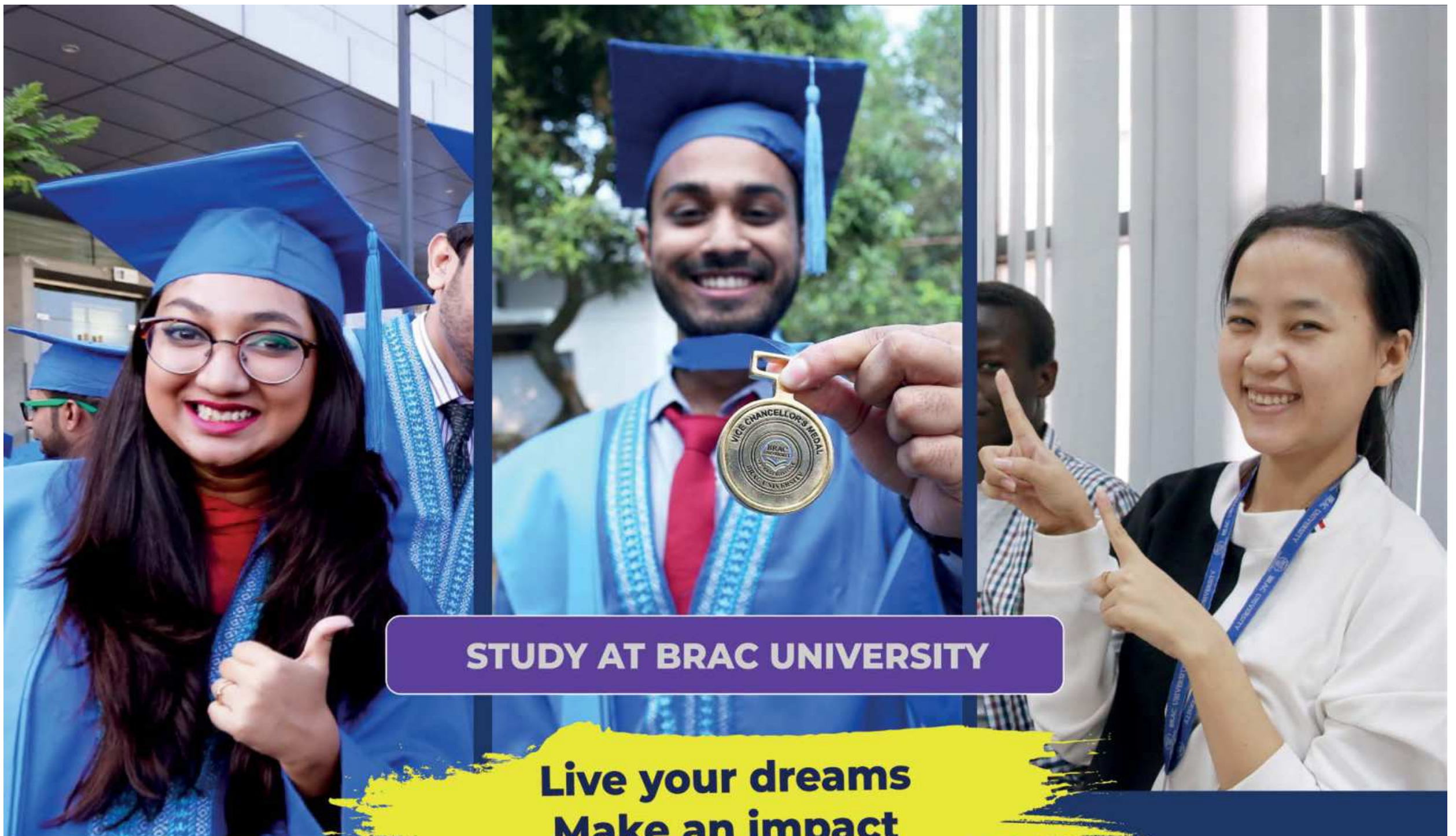
Asifur further explains that the art industry is quite unstructured. "Besides drawing, artists need to acquire other

skill sets, such as animating, graphic designing or web designing, to be successful," he says. "They need to consistently keep learning new things to match the pace of the changing work environment. No one can get by just by drawing." Moreover, Biplob is not so confident about the future. "Young artists in our country are capable and talented, but unfortunately, there are very few opportunities for them. This is especially true for editorial cartoonists. Most newspaper cartoons today are illustration-based. The satirical aspect and influence are missing. Artists cannot

draw what they want to draw freely," he points out.

We find solace in the fact that the best and the most effective ways of resistance often come up in the worst of times. Artists must balance the task of being neutral and witty observers and being activists who attempt to reclaim lost spaces through their creativity and persistence. These are not easy times, but they sure are exciting times.

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