



# IDEALOGY

JOURNAL



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# Rural Life of Bangladesh Reflected in Hashem Khan's Painting

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## ABSTRACT

Hashem Khan is considered as one of the key figures in Bangladesh art scenario. Born in Chandpur, Hashem Khan was graduated from the Faculty of Fine Art, Dhaka University in 1961. He was a Professor at the Faculty of Fine Art, University of Dhaka with 44-year experience and retired in the year 2007. He has achieved Ekushey Padak and Independence Day Award (The highest civilian award in Bangladesh) for his significant contributions in art and culture. Rural lifestyle is very unique in Bangladesh. Many poets, musicians, visual artists have taken inspiration from rural culture and life style of Bangladesh. His works reproduce the natural beauty of the village, rural life, and plenty of other things. He has used traditional folk colours like yellow, orange and green in his paintings and used folk motifs. Hashem Khan has done semi-realistic style of narration to communicate to the common people and also used vibrant colours in his paintings. The researcher here has selected the works of the artist for discussion and analysis from the exhibitions which were held from 1980 to 2018 in different art galleries in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh and also from two catalogues, which articulate 143 plates. The researcher has analysed his contents of the paintings. Besides the researcher also closely analysed the colours, composition and forms of the painting.

**Keywords:** Painting; rural life; Bangladesh; Hashem Khan; art.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Hashem Khan is considered as one of the key figures in Bangladesh art scenario. He was one of the closest associates of Zainul Abedin, who was regarded as the pioneer of Bangladesh art education. He has achieved *Ekushey Padak* and Independence Day Award (The highest civilian award in Bangladesh) for his significant contributions in art and culture. In many of his art works, we can see the ambience of rural life. Hashem Khan is considered as a multi-dimensional art personality in Bangladesh, as he does book illustration, book design, illustration, painting, writing and teaching. This research paper will employ the analysis of rural life of Bangladesh which is reflected in the art of Hashem Khan.

## 2. BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

Rural lifestyle is very unique in Bangladesh. Many poets, musicians, visual artists have taken inspiration from rural culture and life style of Bangladesh. Bangladesh is a densely populated country. Around 90 percent of its people live in villages. Villagers in Bangladesh have built up an agrarian society. There are higher growth rate of population and lower literacy rate in rural areas of Bangladesh, compared to urban areas. In post-independence Bangladesh, the villages in the country are mostly

underdeveloped in terms of infrastructure and economic activities. Traditional manual process-driven agriculture has been the predominant economic activity.

### 3. OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

The researcher will identify the elements of rural life and culture reflected in Hashem Khan's paintings through review, discussion, close observation and analysis.

### 4. METHODOLOGY

Information and data have been collected from different books, journals, catalogues of exhibition, reviews from different newspaper and websites. The researcher has applied qualitative methods to conduct this research. Besides the researcher's personal visit to the artist's studio were considered in this regard. A total of around 50 paintings are kept in the artist Hashem Khan's studio. Besides many of his art works are displayed in the National Museum, Shilpokala Academy, different art galleries and many private collections in Dhaka. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the researcher could not visit these galleries to collect information or capture the images of the painting. The researcher only sheds lights to his personal visit in artist's residence and gallery. Keen observation has been applied to analyse his works. The researcher here has selected the works of the artist for discussion and analysis from the exhibitions which were held from 1980 to 2018 in different art galleries in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. The researcher here has carefully analysed his contents of the paintings. Besides the researcher here also closely analysed the colours, composition, forms of the painting. The researcher has taken help from the catalogues of the exhibition to review his works which features 143 plates. The researcher has engaged photographic research to interpret his art work. Each data or information was checked several times to meet the authenticity.

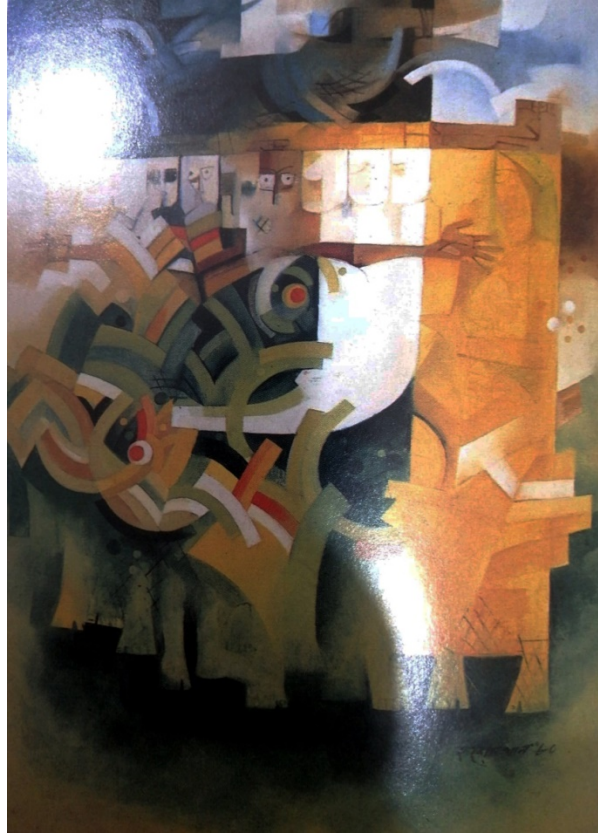
### 5. LITERATURE REVIEW

Born in Chandpur, Hashem Khan was graduated from the Faculty of Fine Art, Dhaka University in 1961. He was a Professor at the Faculty of Fine Art, University of Dhaka with 44-year experience and retired in 2007. As he was born and grew up in a village, his works reproduce the natural beauty of the village, rural life, and plenty of other things. His drawing style is fashionable and has manifested a key contribution within the book covers and illustrations. This artist has been practising art regularly since 1956 and appeared many solo and group exhibitions home and abroad (Daily Sun, 2020).

Hashem Khan said about his themes in painting, "I have created my very own words of expression by uniting the streams of life and sweetness of the village I grew up in. I feel I have incorporated through my brushing the *bhatiali* songs as well as *Ranbindra Sangeet*. I sometimes depict the songs of the luxurious green fields. I try and capture glimpses of the last days of winter (Daily Sun, 2020)."

He told about his childhood memories, "As I grew up in village, so I used to be really keen on playing within the field. Approximately 100% people were peasants in my village. A number of them belonged to the wealthy -class and merely two or three families would be found to be in the government service. Still, I can remember they accustomed to go offices by cycles and wore hats as sun protectors so that they can save themselves against the sun's damaging rays (The Design Magazine, 2019, p.18)." Susan Lager's view that "Art is the creation of forms symbolic of human feelings" implies a framework of artist (one who creates) and a specific kind of subject matter (human feelings) (Dickie, 1997, p.88).





**Plate 1:** Rickshaw-8, Oil on Canvas, 120 cm x90 cm, 1981  
From *Hashem Khan, Contemporary Art Series of Bangladesh-4*. (1992) Dhaka:  
Bangladesh Shilpokala Academy.

In 70s and 80s, Khan did a series on plate, rickshaw, fish etc. These are considered so common objects that no painter ever thought of them as proper objects to paint. They are not merely insignificant objects, for there are political perceptions on them. In his childhood, he saw poor villagers and hungry people whose only dream is to have three-time meal. Thus, a plate is not only a mere container to him, but it is the dream of voluminous starving people (Mamoon, 2000, p. 121).

The 4<sup>th</sup> solo painting show of Hashem Khan was held in Bengal Shilpalaya, Dhaka in 2005. The title of the exhibition was 'Sweet and Sublime'. There were 80 hand-painted paintings for the exhibition. Most of the paintings were finished in oil colour. He has composed women with pitchers, village girls, river, country-boats in his paintings. His predominately figurative canvases sometimes give way to non-objective and semi-realistic composition with chunky paint strokes (Khan, 2005, p.13).



**Plate 2:** Boats and River, Water Colour, 110x90cm, 1998  
From <https://archive.thedailystar.net/magazine/2010/12/01/art.htm>

Country boat is one in all of the commonly used water transportations in inland water transport, and fishes were another source of income for people in Bangladesh, Hashem Khan has reconstructed boats and fishes in his canvases. He was also the follower of folk art in Bangladesh. He has reconstructed the varieties of bird in folk motifs (Osman, 2000, p.113).



**Plate: 3** From <https://www.listal.com/viewimage/6259727>

Surviving a great onslaught from the mechanized or speed boat and trawlers, different types of country boats still move about in Bangladesh. The small boat which is found all over Bangladesh is *Kosha*. This particular easily maneuverable boat is omnipresent mainly in the monsoon flood-hit areas. Besides, people in the relatively elevated areas also use this boat in the years of severe flooding. Completely separate from all these boats once were the fishermen's sleek, long boats.

Boats and rivers occupy a dominant place in the country's folk culture. Hundreds of songs, lore, poretas etc. have been composed in the river-filled Bangladesh since time immemorial (Sarkar, 2019).

## 6. OBSERVATION AND ANALYSIS



**Plate 4:** From <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/rules-and-regulations/2019/09/08/22-day-ban-on-ilish-fishing-from-october-9>

Bangladesh, with its rich inland waters and river systems, has significant fishery and aquaculture potential. The favorable geographic position of Bangladesh comes with a large number of aquatic species and provides plenty of resources to support fisheries potential. Fish is a popular complement to rice in the national diet, giving rise to the adage *Maache-Bhate Bangali* (“a Bengali is made of fish and rice”) (Shamsuzzaman et al., 2017).



**Plate 5:** Fishermen with Net, Oil Colour, 112 cm x 90 cm, 1999  
From Mamoon, M. (ED.), (2000) *Hashem Khan*, Dhaka: Bangladesh Shilpokala Academy.

Fishermen in rural Bangladesh usually live a community life in neighbourhoods or villages around the water bodies. The above is the painting of a fishermen family in Bangladesh. In deem light, the fisherman along with his wife is repairing the fishing net in his small hut. Besides we can see their little baby. The wife of the fisherman is also helping her husband. There is a small traditional pot beside them. It is painted with folk motifs and colours. In the background, we can see the long fishing boats. The boatmen are carrying the fishermen with the oars and logs to move on the boats. On the top, we can see four fishes. Those fishes are symbolic and flying high but painted in semi-realistic style. We can see the poor lifestyle of fisherman in this painting.

Symbolism is a means of conveying meaning and it can be done well or clumsily. Symbolism can be tastefully and economically employed, but it can be overdone and heavy-handed. Symbolism can enhance a work of art, or it can be a burden (Dickie, 1997, 106).

In this painting, Khan has used modest usages of symbolism. The painted pot is a traditional symbol for Bengali. The fishes and net are depicted as the prosperous and simplified lifestyle of common Bangladeshi people.



**Plate 6:** Acrylic on Paper, 61cm x61 cm, 2012

From Mamun, M. (ED.), (2000) *Hashem Khan*, Dhaka: Bangladesh Shilpokala Academy.

This is the figure of a traditional musician who is called as *baul*. The Bauls are mystic musicians living in rural Bangladesh and West Bengal, India. They are called as the folk singers in Bangladesh. The background of the painting was created with the mixes violet white and yellow. This painting was done in semi realistic way. He has applied different lines in white for ornamentation. The musical instrument of baul was ornamented with folk motifs in yellow and red.

## 7. CONCLUSION

After analysing 143 plates from the different catalogues, it is observed here that Hashem Khan has painted in different styles like Cubism, semi-realistic, abstract and others. But his subject matters are very easy to understand. He has painted his experience of time and his native country. We find the ambience of rural life reflected in Hashem Khan's paintings. He has used traditional folk colours like yellow, orange and green in his paintings and used folk motifs successfully. He also used the farmer, fishermen, folk singer as predominant subjects. Besides he has depicted river, fishes, plates etc. in his paintings. He has used very modest usages of symbolism in his work of art. Hashem Khan has basically done semi-realistic style of narration to communicate to the common people and also used vibrant colours in his paintings. We can see the common and simplified lifestyle of Bangladeshi people in his art works. The contribution of Hashem Khan in Bangladesh art is very astounding, as he does painting, book illustration, book design, ceramics and other graphic design work. Many Bangladeshi young artists have taken Hashem Khan as their inspiration. Therefore, more research work should be conducted on his work of art.

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