

Tracing the Evolution of Children's Art in Bangladesh: from the Early Twentieth Century to the Digital Age

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Abstract

Children's art practices are a prevalent feature in contemporary societies, including Bangladesh. This topic has not been thoroughly addressed, particularly in the Bangladeshi context. There is a lack of historical records and a formal documentation process for children's art, making it challenging to trace its evolution. Based on my research, I aim to understand and articulate the changing landscape of child art in Bangladesh. This research draws on case studies and existing publications related to child art to provide a clearer picture. My focus is on uncovering the historical context of Bangladeshi children's art and analysing its subject matter and visual language from the analogue era to the digital age. Moreover, I explored the preliminary stage of the digital age to understand the pattern of influence of the conventional academic system and the method of transformation of knowledge in the age of new media.

Key words: Child art, Digital age, Visual language, Authenticity of expression, Art education in Bangladesh.

Introduction

Children's art is a prominent feature of contemporary culture globally, including in Bangladesh. However, the exploration and documentation of this phenomenon in Bangladesh remain limited. There is a noticeable lack of historical records and a systematic approach to documenting children's art. Child art publications mostly refer to exhibition catalogues, where organizers added a brief note on their competitive arrangements. These publications are valuable as primary documents about this field. Bangladesh National Museum published a book with an introduction by Rokonzaman Khan in 2001 titled 'A Note on Juvenile Art'. Khan wrote an introduction mostly from his memory. He stated that

*We do not know for certain who is the pioneer in the initiation of juvenile painting in our country, Shilpacharyya Zainul Abedin was the first person to organise the programme of juvenile paintings in our country in the near past. That was in the late fifties.*¹

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1 Rokonzaman Khan, 'A Note on Juvenile Art', *Children Art Album*, (Bangladesh National Museum, 2001).

Bangladesh Shishu Academy published a book in 2018, titled ‘Art of Bangladesh Shishu Academy’, with an essay by one of the most important contributors to this academy, artist Hashem Khan. In this essay, Khan sketched the history of art practices at the Shishu Academy. This historical skeleton undoubtedly helps us know about this academy very precisely; on the other hand, this rare publication reveals the ignorance of the documentation process regarding children’s activities. This gap complicates efforts to trace the evolution of children’s artistic expressions. Drawing from my observations and experiences, I have sought to shed light on the changing landscape of children’s art in Bangladesh. My research includes specific case studies and existing literature, aiming to uncover the historical roots of Bangladeshi children’s art. Additionally, I have examined the subject matter and visual language of children’s art in Bangladesh during the 20th century, as well as how digital-age art reflects contemporary challenges and transformations within Bangladeshi culture in the early 21st century.

Methodology

A qualitative approach is used for this research, focusing on experiences, opinions, and meanings using interviews and observations. Primary data is the leading force of this research, though secondary sources are used, too.

Zainul Abedin is considered the founder of Bangladeshi Modern Art. So, he was studied as the prime clue to start this research. Zainul Abedin’s childhood and his artistic journey illuminate the historical trajectory of children’s art in Bangladesh. That’s why I studied the old schools’ libraries as a form of data source from that time in the Mymensingh district to understand the references for children, as well as Zainul, of that time. Hundred-year-old school libraries were also studied to understand the art materials.

At the same time, I studied the public library’s rare collections section to study the illustrated journals of that time to understand the history of the circulated image and its style. In that way, for documentation, the primary sources of literature or publications are studied. To analyze the psychological evolution and development, or the journey of child art over centuries, this research focused on the chronology of the images. 19th century journals, paintings, and publications of children’s art, like catalogues and children’s journals mostly based on literature, are studied to understand the comparative development.

This review process helps me to find out the old schools and events where children joined. So, Zainul's scholars, including contemporary living artists and all relevant individuals, are interviewed (unstructured), and their information is cross-checked and fact-checked. Through the interviews, two things became clear: first, how they learn about art. These sources make sense of child art schooling. Second, which works earn attention as being awarded? Who were the organizers? The organizers' identity also makes sense of child art schooling.

In the second phase of this research, almost 100 children's performance during their drawings was studied in different places and at different times using qualitative methods to determine what they actually want to draw and what they are forced to do through the system. This study was randomized. Urban and village children from different classes were observed and interviewed to understand their desires and pressures from the academy and their guardians. An unstructured questionnaire was used minimally as a tool, focusing on differences in children's guided and independent artistic performances.

History of Children's Art Practices in Bangladesh during the British Era

To explore the history of children's art in Bangladesh, we must consider the British colonial period, particularly through the lens of Zainul Abedin. Zainul Abedin, a pioneering figure in modern Bangladeshi art, provides crucial historical references for understanding children's art in Bangladesh. Before Zainul, we have significant names of artists who could have given a sense of understanding of the early phase of children's art in the British era. Dr. Neelima Afrin's work on tracing the roots of Bangladeshi art sheds light on children's art education. Neelima, in her book titled 'Bangladesher Shilpakalar Utshashandhan', writes about Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury, Hemendranath Majumdar, Rohinikanta Nag, Fanindranath Basu Rai Chowdhury, Sasi Kumar Hesh, Shashibhushan Paul, Mukul Dey, Atul Basu, Sarada Charan Ukil, Barada Charan Ukil, Ranada Charan Ukil, Hironmoy Roy Chowdhury, Devi Prasad Roy Chowdhury, etc. Her work shows that all of them were eager to do visual art in their own way, and they were recognized by educated people or art connoisseurs.² There is no record of how they became art lovers and artists as children. The local art scenario and context of this phase were not addressed or revealed in depth in art history. Their art education was only recognised when they became students of the former Calcutta Art School. This phase should be written

² Neelima Afrin, *Bangladesher Shilpakalar Utshashandhan*, (Kathaprokash, 2015).

in a different article. In the literature review, we find a piece of information not about a child, but an adolescent, who participated in an art competition. That was Zainul Abedin.

Zainul, for the first time, won a significant award in a competition while he was in class nine or ten.³ The competition was organized by the Bombay Chronicle, a prominent newspaper based in Bombay (now Mumbai), which had advertised an art competition themed around golf.⁴ Zainul's participation in this competition took place between 1930 and 1931, while he was enrolled at Mrittyunjy School.⁵

To fully grasp the context, it is important to understand the artistic milieu of the time. The stylistic distinctions between Kolkata and Bombay, influenced by E.B. Havell,⁶ played a crucial role. Havell's Neo-Bengal School, developed under the guidance of Abanindranath Tagore, contrasted sharply with Western art education.⁷ Meanwhile, Bombay was more engaged with Western art traditions introduced by the British.⁸

The Bombay Chronicle, described as a significant nationalist newspaper chronicling political upheavals in pre-independent India,⁹ also reflects the artistic values and competitions of the time. This particular competition offers insights into early 20th-century children's art.

In Mymensingh, where Zainul Abedin grew up, there was a vibrant artist community, including notable figures such as Hemendranath Majumdar and Atul Bose. Both were associated with Kolkata and its art scene. Majumdar and Bose studied at the Jubilee Academy, founded by the reformist Ranada Prashad Gupta, who had left the Calcutta Art School due to disagreements with Havell's approach to Orientalism.¹⁰

Havell's contributions to children's art included a series of instructional drawing books published by Macmillan & Co., which were well-regarded during the British period.

³ Syed Azizul Haque, *Zainul Abedin: Sristishil Jibonsomogro*, (Prothoma Prokashan 2015), pp. 21, 211.

⁴ Ibid, p. 21

⁵ Ibid, p. 20

⁶ Sovon Som, *Shilpa Shiksha O Aupaniveshik Bharat*, (Publication Department, Tattya O Betar Mantranalaya, Government of India 1998), p. 118.

⁷ Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India*, (Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 156.

⁸ Mrinal Ghosh, *Bingsha Shatake Bharater Chitrakala: Adhunikatar Bibartan*, (Kolkata 2005), pp. 270-277

⁹ 'The Bombay Chronicle'. <https://www.granthsanjeevani.com/jspui/collectionView?id=7&filtername=publisher&filtertype>equals&filterquery=The+Bombay+Chronicle>

¹⁰ Mrinal Ghosh, *Bingsha Shatake Bharater Chitrakala: Adhunikatar Bibartan*, (Kolkata 2005), p. 110.

He published three volumes of this book in three steps to teach drawing.¹¹ These books, similar to contemporary children's publications, reflect the era's educational interests and methods. Vidyamoyi Girls' School in Mymensingh, established in 1873, had two sets of these books in its library, indicating their availability and the educational emphasis on children's art during the British era.



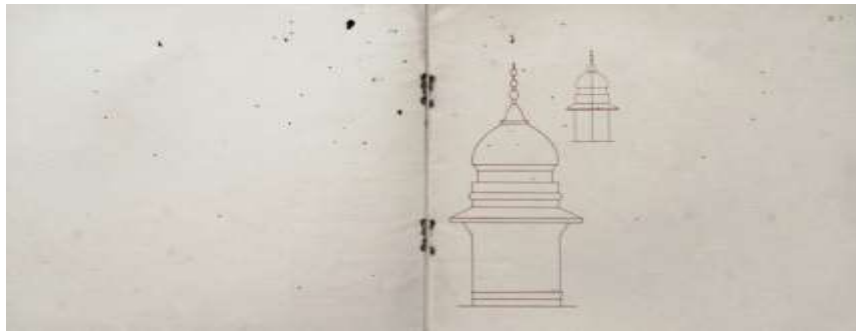
1,2: Cover page and First drawing of the First Book; E. B. Havell, *Bengal Students Drawing Books*, (First Book), (Macmillan & Co Limited n.d.).



In his first book (1, 2), Havell depicted sixteen objects in a simplistic form, lacking detail. Each subsequent book continued with the same number of objects. In the second book (3, 4), he introduced more detailed shapes, featuring specific animals such as cows, elephants, goats, and egrets. By the third and final book (5, 6), the objects were depicted with distinct, recognizable features. So, these books indicate

¹¹ E. B. Havell, *Bengal Students Drawing Books*, (First Book), (Macmillan & Co Limited n.d.).

the type of children's art education of the early 20th century and give us hints to understand the grooming of the 20th-century artists.



3, 4: Cover page and First drawing of the Second Book; E. B. Havell, *Bengal Students Drawing Books*, (Second Book), (Macmillan & Co Limited n.d.).



5,6: Cover page and First drawing of the Third Book; E. B. Havell, *Bengal Students Drawing Books*, (Third Book), (Macmillan & Co Limited n.d.).

“Gaganendranath Tagore is often noted for his lack of formal academic training in painting. However, he did acquire some artistic skills while studying at St. Xavier’s School, where he was also awarded for his painting efforts.”¹² This piece of information indicates that missionaries contributed to children’s art education through their schools, attempting to uplift indigenous tribes around the world in their own way. This represents another facet of art history that should be analyzed in a separate study.

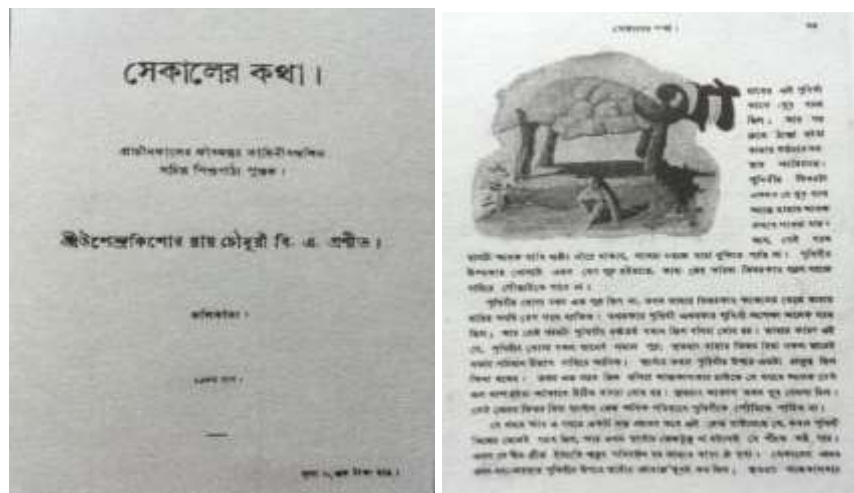
One of Havell’s most significant disciples was Abanindranath Tagore, who authored and planned an art book for children and adolescents titled *Shahaj Chitra Shikkha*. Published by Visva Bharati in 1946, this book was illustrated by Nandalal Bose, a favoured student of Abanindranath. The book is divided into six chapters, guiding

¹² Mrinal Ghosh, *Bingsha Shatake Bharater Chitrakala: Adhunikatar Bibartan*, (Kolkata, 2005), p. 176.

readers from basic to advanced art techniques.¹³ It can be seen as an extension of Havell's educational approach to art.

Before Abanindranath, Rabindranath Tagore had published his acclaimed children's book *Shohoj Path* in 1930, which was also illustrated by Nandalal Bose and focused on alphabet-based learning. Going even further back, Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury had written and illustrated books for children (7, 8).¹⁴ However, the key difference is that Abanindranath's work was specifically aimed at teaching drawing, reflecting a shift towards a more focused educational approach to art for children.

This trend highlights a growing 20th-century awareness of children's education in the arts, with an emphasis on providing visual learning experiences rather than merely historical evidence.



7, 8: Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury, Title-page and drop letter with the images, *Shekaler Katha*, (Kolkata 1903).

The question is where and how intellectuals, art connoisseurs, and epistemologists derived their insights about art. While we know that adults in British India had established institutions for art education, there is less discussion about institutions for children. Since modern art education in India was influenced by British practices, it is crucial to examine the history of child art in Europe to understand the connections between Britain and India regarding children's art.

¹³ Abanindranath Tagore, *Shahaj Chitra Shikkha*, (Viswa Bharati, 1401 (Bengali Calendar)).

¹⁴ Soumik Nandi Majumder, "Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhurir Granthachitra", *Charbak*, Vol.1, No.1 (June), 2014, p. 179.

Another pertinent question is what ancient art reveals about children or childhood. Although this article will not delve into this aspect due to space limitations, it will explore it in a separate discussion. However, Jo Alice Leeds's findings are valuable for understanding centuries of children's art practices, which can be noted here. He stated that-

*Not until the nineteenth century were the spontaneous drawings of young children thought worthy of adult study and comment, and not until the early twentieth century did radical changes in aesthetic standards allow child art to be appreciated on its own aesthetic terms.*¹⁵

In these circumstances, we found that during the colonial era,

One of the earliest exhibitions of children's art was organized in 1890, by Thomas Robert Ablett, an English artist and educator, influential for promoting the values and benefits of teaching art to children. Ablett was a founding member of the Royal Drawing Society, which fostered children's artistic development by focusing on their imagination and memory rather than on rote memorization and drawing from observation.¹⁶

The Royal Drawing Society was founded in London in 1888 and held annual exhibitions of children's art from 1895 to 1980.¹⁷ There appeared to be an upper age limit of about 16 years.¹⁸ At the same time,

In 1887, Cizek began teaching a free art class, known as Jugendkunstklasse or the Juvenile Art Class, to local Viennese youth aged approximately 5 through 14. His pedagogical goal was for his students to come up with their own visual vocabularies and process-based workflow with minimal adult intervention.¹⁹

During the 1920s, Franz Cizek (1865 –1946) collaborated with a British art educator and refugee relief worker and the Save the Children Fund, marking the start of a longstanding practice of children's art.²⁰ Save the Children was established in 1919 in London. This organization expanded to Asia and the Middle East in 1959.²¹ So, all these initiatives, which started in Britain, were not far from British India, as informative sources, if we consider the history of colonial India.

Another significant series of exhibitions focused on children's art, began in 1917, through the Bloomsbury Group's Omega Workshops initiative. The inaugural exhibition featured

¹⁵ Jo Alice Leeds, 'The History of Attitudes Toward Children's Art', *STUDIES in Art Education*, Vol. 30, Issue 2, (National Art Education Association 1989), p. 93. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1320776>

¹⁶ Adam Zucker, "A Brief History of Children's Art Exhibitions", *Artfully Learning*, (May 2, 2021), <https://theartsandeducation.wordpress.com/2021/05/02/a-brief-history-of-childrens-art-exhibitions/>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ "Royal Drawing Society", *Artist Biographies*, <https://www.artbiogs.co.uk/2/societies/royal-drawing-society>

¹⁹ Adam Zucker, Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ "Our History", *Save The Children*. <https://www.savethechildren.org/us/about-us/why-save-the-children/history>

artwork by students of British artist and critic, Roger Fry, as well as students of Marion Richardson.²²

Marion Richardson is regarded as the founder of the Child Art movement in the United Kingdom, and Roger Fry was a leading critic who also inherited the essence of the Art and Craft Movement, following a precedent that had been set by William Morris.²³ E. B. Havell is considered an idealistic disciple of William Morris,²⁴ by whom the Neo-Bengal School and children's drawing books were both initiated in Calcutta, the second capital of Britain.

Havell, along with Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Basu, Rabindranath Tagore, and Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury, was involved in children's art, although their primary focus was literature. From early on, art attracted the attention of writers, who supported it through journals and newspapers. This intersection of art and literature persisted in child art practices, particularly in Bangladesh. At the same time, these personalities' efforts created a distinguished aura for child art.

The annual Scholastic Art & Writing Awards began in 1923 and have been given to student artists (in visual arts, writing, film, and performance) throughout the United States who show "originality, technical skill and the emergence of personal voice or vision."²⁵

Similarly, the Sankar's Children's Art Competition, initiated in 1949²⁶ and expanded to an international competition in 1950, also highlights literature and art. This competition, which compiles winning entries into the 'Shankar's Children's Art Number',²⁷ remains a prestigious platform for Bangladeshi competitors, with notable artist Abul Barak Alvi receiving awards twice as a child artist in 1962 and 1963.²⁸

In summary, it can be said that children's art in India gained significant attention and development, which is related to the context of Europe, particularly British child art history during the early to mid-20th century. Thus, undivided India paved the way for children's art to embark on an independent journey in this century.

²² Adam Zucker, "A Brief History of Children's Art Exhibitions", *Artfully Learning*, (May 2, 2021), <https://theartsandeducation.wordpress.com/2021/05/02/a-brief-history-of-childrens-art-exhibitions/>

²³ "Roger Fry", *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Roger-Fry>

²⁴ Sovon Som, *Shilpa Shiksha O Aupaniveshik Bharat*, (Publication Department, Tatthya O Betar Mantranalaya, Government of India 1998), p. 90.

²⁵ Adam Zucker, "A Brief History of Children's Art Exhibitions", *Artfully Learning*, (May 2, 2021), <https://theartsandeducation.wordpress.com/2021/05/02/a-brief-history-of-childrens-art-exhibitions/>

²⁶ "A Feast of Colour and Rhythm: Shankar's International Children's Competition", <https://www.childrensbooktrust.com/about-sicc.html>

²⁷ *Sankar's Children's Art Number 1960*, (Mahindra and Mahindra Limited 1960), p. 219.

²⁸ Abul Barak Alvi, Interview by Author, 8 December, 2022, Dhaka.

In the Era of Pakistan

Former East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) established several children's organizations. These included Khelaghar in 1952,²⁹ Kachi-Kachar Ashor in 1955,³⁰ and Kachi-Kachar Mela, which was inaugurated on October 5, 1956.³¹

Artist Hashem Khan provides insights into Khelaghar's child art initiatives. When Khan was admitted to Dhaka Art College (now the Faculty of Fine Art at the University of Dhaka), he was still eligible for Khelaghar's art competition, which was open to children up to age 16. At 15 and a half, Khan submitted his artwork in the elder group category. It was the first children's art competition that took place at Bangla Academy in 1956.³²

Khan's account highlights his submission of a drawing of a pigeon and a landscape sketch, which led to his winning the first prize. In his words,

*Sir (Zainul Abedin) let us draw a pigeon in our class, which he liked very much. So, I submitted this one, along with a sketch that basically shows a landscape. And surprisingly, I was awarded the first prize.*³³

Another participant, Md. Mahasin, who also later attended Dhaka Art College and worked at the museum, won the second prize.

Kachi-Kanchar Mela, which began in October 1956, was initially discussed at a meeting held at Sufia Kamal's residence in Hathkhola. The gathering included notable figures such as Rokonuzzaman Khan, Golam Murshid, and various writers. Despite being a newcomer, Hashem Khan was made a committee member in the inaugural year.³⁴

Kachi-Kanchar Mela's role in the Bangladeshi art scene grew with Hashem Khan's involvement. He said that he asked Dada-Bhai to start the drawing with the children. Then it was decided that every Sunday they would draw with the children at the office of Kachi-kancha at Ittefaq. It is important to note that Kachi-Kanchar Mela was distinct from Ittefaq, although Ittefaq had initiated the Kachi-Kanchar Ashar, a literature-based page.³⁵

²⁹ Mahfuza Khanam, *Kelaghar*. <https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Khelaghar>

³⁰ "Shishu Shongothok, Lekhok o Shangbadik Rokonuzzaman Khan Dada Bhaier 20 Tomo Mrityubarshikite Shradhyanjali", *somewhereinblog.net*. <https://m.somewhereinblog.net/mobile/blog/nurubrl/30285424>)

³¹ Campus, *Central Kachikanchar Mela*, <http://centralkachikancharmela.com/>

³² Hashem Khan, Interview by Author, 13 July 2022, Dhaka.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

Art-related activities for Kachi-Kanchar Mela commenced in 1958. In 1957, they organized a children's art exhibition. Artist Abul Barak Alvi, who was the first student to benefit from this preschool initiative, invited children to participate. During this period, Rafiqun Nabi, who had just completed his matriculation, won first prize with his submission. Shahadat Chowdhury, who later became Alvi's classmate at Art College, won third prize.³⁶

Rokonuzzaman Khan wrote that-

*Kendriya Kachi Kanchar Mela, a nation-wide juvenile organisation formally started a training centre for juvenile painting. Painter Quamrul Hassan inaugurated this programme at Shilpa Bitan in 1959. Kendriya Khelaghar Asar organised an exhibition of juvenile paintings prior to this occasion. The second Shilpa Bitan (Juvenile training centre for painting) was opened in the campus of Azimpur Agrani Balika Vidyalaya. It was inaugurated by Shilpacharyya Zainul Abedin.*³⁷

There is a gap between artists' statements and the information provided by Rokonuzzaman Khan. This gap shows that Kachi-Kanchar Mela started their activities in many layers. Senior personalities like Khan can only memorise or experience the specially recognized inaugurated programs.

The publication "Kachi O Kacha," associated with Central Kachi-Kanchar Mela, did not feature any child art in its first year or volume 3 of 1965 (Bangla 1372), though it included a sketch by Zainul (9).

During the early years of Pakistan, there were only two notable art schools for children, as remembered by former child artists like Abul Barak Alvi.³⁸ These were 'Kachi-Kanchar Mela' and 'Shishuniketan'. In contrast, 'Khelaghar' did not operate as regularly as 'Kachi-Kanchar Mela'. The 'Shishukala Bhaban' was inaugurated by Zainul Abedin, likely in 1959, on the premises of Dhaka Art College (present Faculty of Fine Art, University of Dhaka).³⁹

According to Professor Syed Azizul Haque-

During the construction of the Fine Art building, a small tin shed was used for storing materials and supplies. When the contractors planned to demolish it, Zainul Abedin intervened, preventing its demolition and establishing the Children's Shilpalaya there in 1958. This initiative began with support from the Shishu Kalyan Parishad, whose president at the time was Shamsun Nahar Mahmud (1908-1964). Following her death, the institution was renamed 'Shamsun Nahar Shishukala Bhavan'. Initially, UNICEF provided paint supplies for the children, and the Shishu Kalyan Parishad funded teacher

³⁶ Hashem Khan, Interview by Author, 13 July 2022, Dhaka.

³⁷ Rokonuzzaman Khan, 'A Note on Juvenile Art', *Children Art Album*, (Bangladesh National Museum 2001).

³⁸ Abul Barak Alvi, Interview by Author, 8 December, 2022, Dhaka.

³⁹ Ibid.

salaries for several years. After Zainul Abedin's passing, the institution was renamed 'Zainul Shishukala Niketan'. Currently, the institution has no formal connection with the Shishu Kalyan Parishad.⁴⁰



9: Kachi O Kancha, frontes of Central Kachi-Kanchar Mela, Bangla 1372.

Zainul Abedin was a pivotal figure in art education during that period; any art-related initiative was often incomplete without his input. Thus, the history of child art education in Bangladesh is inherently linked to his contributions.

On a visit to Japan, Zainul observed that children were taken on field trips to explore rivers and mountains, which helped them understand their environment and express their experiences through writing and drawing.⁴¹ This approach influenced Zainul and later generations, affecting how children's art programs were developed in Bangladesh. Several child-friendly organizations were established during this period, such as the Azimpur Ladies Club. The Agrani School, founded in 1957,⁴² also engaged in child art activities.⁴³

⁴⁰ Syed Azizul Haque, *Zainul Abedin: Sristishil Jibonsomogro*, (Prothoma Prokashan 2015), p. 109.

⁴¹ *Great Masters of Bangladesh: Zainul Abedin*, Ed. by Rosa Maria Falvo with essays by Abul Monsur, Nazrul Islam, and Abul Hasnat, (Bengal Foundation & SKIRA 2012).

⁴² Homepage, *Agrani School and College*, <https://agranischoolandcollege.weebly.com/>

⁴³ *Abul Barak Alvi, Interview by Author, 8 December, 2022, Dhaka*. And an Advertisement. Jobeda Khanam (ed.), *Shishu Journal* (October-November), (Bangladesh Shishu Academy 1978).

“Bulbul Lalitakala Academy, an institution of fine arts established in Dhaka on 17 May 1955 commemorating Bulbul Chowdhury and his efforts to popularize dance among conservative Bengali Muslims, is also known as BAFA (Bulbul Academy for Fine Arts) ...It is primarily an academic institution. It has produced singers, musicians, and dancers.”⁴⁴ Drawing was introduced at Bulbul Lalitakala Academy at a later date.⁴⁵

Overview of Art Organizations and Competitions in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, two main types of organizations focus on children's art. The first type consists of state-run institutions dedicated to cultural development for children. The second type includes various organizations that, while having diverse objectives, also organize art exhibitions and festivals for children. Both types of organizations participate in national and international art competitions. Below is an overview of some significant organizations and exhibitions related to children's art.

Bangladesh Shishu Academy: Established in 1976,⁴⁶ the Bangladesh Shishu Academy has played a pivotal role in promoting children's art.

Since 1977,⁴⁷ it has published the children's journal 'Shishu,' which showcases the Academy's commitment to art. The Academy has hosted several important art exhibitions, sharing international art trends with local audiences.

*“In 1982, Bangladesh Shishu Academy organized an International Children's Painting Exhibition. As far as I can remember, 11 countries participated in that competition.”*⁴⁸ However, this event was not held annually. Between 1998 and 2013, the Academy hosted only seven International Biennales.⁴⁹

The First Biennale International Children's Painting Competition was held successfully in 1998, the Second Biennale International Children's Painting Competition was held in 2000, the Third in 2004, the Fourth in 2006, the Fifth in 2009, and the Sixth in 2011.⁵⁰

In these circumstances, the Seventh, which is the last biennale, was organized in 2013.⁵¹

⁴⁴ Mohammad Abdul Hye, “Bulbul Lalitakala Academy”, https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Bulbul_Lalitakala_Academy

⁴⁵ Abul Barak Alvi, Interview by Author, 8 December, 2022, Dhaka.

⁴⁶ Hashem Khan, “Shishu Chitrakala O Bangladesh Shishu Academy”, Anjir Liton (ed.), *Art of Bangladesh Shishu Academy*, (Bangladesh Shishu Academy 2018), p.8

⁴⁷ *Shishu*, Vol. 1, No. 1

⁴⁸ Hashem Khan, “Shishu Chitrakala O Bangladesh Shishu Academy”, Anjir Liton (ed.), *Art of Bangladesh Shishu Academy*, (Bangladesh Shishu Academy 2018), p.8

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ “Introduction”. Md. Nuruzzaman (ed.), *7th International Children-Art Biennale Bangladesh-2013*, (Bangladesh Shishu Academy 2013).

⁵¹ Ibid.

The initiative for these biennales has since been discontinued. The Shishu Academy also organized other sporadic events, such as the International Women's Day 2007: AED/BHRAP Children Poster Art Competition.⁵²

Kachi-Kanchar Mela: Though this organization has expanded with many branches around Bangladesh, few have survived. Gandaria Kisholaya Kachi-Kanchar Mela, Dhaka, is one of them, established in 1972. The first branch of this organization started in a classroom of Agrani School, Azimpur Colony.⁵³

Zainul Abedin Shongrahashala: This institution, inaugurated in 1976 by Zainul Abedin,⁵⁴ included a children's art school. Rezaul Karim, an art teacher from Mymensingh's Teachers Training College, was appointed by the Shongrahashala committee to teach at the children's art school.⁵⁵

Probhati Art School: Professor Mostafizul Haque founded this school in 1989, after teaching at Azimpur Ladies Club since 1975. In 1981, he was invited by founder Zobeda Khanam to start the painting department at Shishu Academy.

In 2013, he established the Mostafiz Academy of Fine Art to unify his various initiatives. Additionally, he inaugurated 'Kachi-Kanther Ashor' in 1981, which was later dismantled during the decline of Ershad's regime.⁵⁶

Mitsubishi Asian Children's Enikki Festa: This festa started in 1990. "The competition is being held under the joint auspices of the Mitsubishi Public Affairs Committee, the Asian Federation of UNESCO, and the National Federation of UNESCO Associations in Japan. Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy has been given the responsibility to hold countrywide competitions to ensure the participation of Bangladesh."⁵⁷

In addition to these organizations, various international art competitions have been held in various countries worldwide. These competitions are open to all international entities. Many countries around the world participate by submitting paintings. Judging is organized centrally in the mother country of that specific organization. These art initiatives also helped Bangladeshi art schools and individuals become a part of the global stage.

⁵² Samina Nafies, *International Women's Day 2007*. (Bangladesh Shishu Academy 2007).

⁵³ Abul Barak Alvi, Interview by Author, 8 December, 2022, Dhaka.

⁵⁴ Amirul Islam, Interview by Author. 26 December 2022, Dhaka.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Mostafizul Haque, Interview by Author, 8 December 2022, Dhaka.

⁵⁷ Liaquat Ali Lucky, "Foreword", *Mitsubishi Asian Children's Enikki Festa*. (Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy 29 March to 7 April 2013). And "Collections of Asian Children's Enikki", *Mitsubishi Asian Children's Enikki Festa*, (Mitsubishi Public Affairs Committee n.d.). <https://enikki.mitsubishi.or.jp/e/gallery/collections.html>

These include:

- Sankar's Children Art Competition (internationally started in 1950)⁵⁸
- KAO International Environment Painting Contest for Children (Japan, started in 2010)⁵⁹
- Kanagawa Biennial World Children's Art Exhibition (Japan, in 1981)⁶⁰
- International Environmental Children's Drawing Contest (Japan, in 1999)⁶¹
- International Competition of Children's and Youth Art: Creativeness 'Always Green, Always Blue' (Poland, since 1980)⁶²
- World Children's Picture Contest (Japan, since 1993)⁶³
- China Tianjin International Children's Painting Competition (China, since 1998)⁶⁴

These competitions provide valuable opportunities for children to engage with global art communities and showcase their creativity on an international stage.

Developmental Stages of Children's Art

Children's art typically progresses through three major stages: Scribble, Schematic, and Realistic or True-to-Appearance.⁶⁵ These stages reflect different levels of artistic development and are associated with specific age ranges. According to Peggy Scribble, the Schematic stage generally occurs between ages two and five, while the Realistic or True-to-Appearance stage typically spans from ages five to nine, and extends from nine years and older.⁶⁶ These developmental stages are consistent with observed patterns in the Indian subcontinent and align with findings from both national and international exhibitions of children's art.

The Digital Age

Cambridge Dictionary defines the digital age as a Synonym for the information age. Cambridge writes that "the present time, in which many things are done by computer and large amounts of information are available because of computer technology."⁶⁷

⁵⁸ *Sankar's Children's Art Number 1960*, (Mahindra and Mahindra Limited 1960), p. 219.

⁵⁹ "Booklet", *Kao International Environmental Painting Contest for Children*. https://www.kao.com/global/en/children_painting/booklet/

⁶⁰ "Homepage", *Kanagawa Biennial World Children's Art Exhibition*. <https://kanagawabiennial.jp/en/>

⁶¹ "Homepage", *International Environmental Children's Drawing Contest*. <https://childrens-drawing.com/en/contest.html>

⁶² "About US", *Children's Creative Art Centre and Gallery in Toruń*, <https://galeriadziecka.com/o-nas/?lang=en>

⁶³ "Homepage", *World Children's Picture Contest*, <https://www.ienohikari-koubo.com/zugacon/english/>

⁶⁴ "Peace, Friendship and Future: 2024 Tianjin International Children's Art Festival attracts more than 1,200 children from around the world", *CGTN*, 24 July 2024. <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2024-07-24/VHJhbnNjcmlwdDc5OTgw/index.html>

⁶⁵ Peggy Pat Martin, "Child Art: A Brief Review of The Developmental Stages", *CYC Network*. <https://cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cycol-1201-martin.html>

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ "Digital Age", *Cambridge Dictionary*. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/digital-age>

In 1964, computers were first introduced in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).⁶⁸ However, “IT began to assume greater acceptability in this country from the middle of the nineties.”⁶⁹ The global spread of the Internet accelerated in 1990, and Bangladesh joined this trend somewhat later.

Use of the Internet in the country started in 1995 for the first time in a limited way through offline e-mail. VSAT (Very Small Aperture Terminal) was first set up in 1996 for Internet purposes. Online Internet connection started mushrooming through an Internet Service Provider (ISP) by the name ISN.⁷⁰

Access Telecom (BD) Ltd. was founded in 1997 and quickly emerged as a leading Internet technology service provider with a strong national presence. They were notable for launching the country’s first broadband Internet services in 2000.⁷¹ By 2021, Bangladesh’s digital market had significantly expanded, evolving from a landscape dominated by a few corporate giants to a more generalized and diverse sector.⁷² In this context, the 21st century is increasingly recognized as the Digital Age for Bangladesh.

The telecommunication facilities like Radio, Television, Landline telephone, Cell phone and final edition, the internet play a significant role in the development of digital culture and thus digitalizing our lives.⁷³

Considering the expanded history of the internet and its impact on the subject matter and visual language of 20th- and 21st-century children’s art, I conducted a comparative study to analyse how digital culture has influenced the landscape of child art.

Shifting tools in the Digital Age

Before explaining the subject and visual language of children’s art, we need to focus on how art materials have changed from the 20th century to the digital age. Children’s artistic practices in the 20th century in Bangladesh were shaped through

⁶⁸ Sadiqur Rahman, “Bangladesh’s first computer and the man behind its arrival here”, *The Business Standard*, 17 June, 2020. <https://www.tbsnews.net/feature/panorama/bangladeshs-first-computer-and-man-behind-its-arrival-here-94324>

⁶⁹ “Background of Computerization in Bangladesh Information Technology Essay”, ukessays.com <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/information-technology/background-of-computerization-in-bangladesh-information-technology-essay.php>

⁷⁰ “Background of Computerization in Bangladesh Information Technology Essay”, ukessays.com <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/information-technology/background-of-computerization-in-bangladesh-information-technology-essay.php>

⁷¹ “About Us”, *Accessstel*. <https://accessstel.net/about-us/>

⁷² Fazlul Kabir, “Google-Meta ke Matite Namanor Bochor”, *Independent Television*, 31 December 2022. <https://www.itvbd.com/science-tech/83644>

⁷³ Rasel Hussain, “The Emerging Digital Culture of Bangladesh: Problems and Prospects”, *Researchgate*, January 2015, p. 19. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330400697>

analogue materials such as pencils, crayons, coloured pencils, watercolours, poster colours, ink, paper, sketchbooks, and brushes. In the digital age, these traditional tools have increasingly been harmonized with digital tools that coexist with traditional materials. In the digital age, devices such as tablets and smartphones accompany children in their daily lives. It didn't start just for drawing purposes; instead of playing physically in the field or yard, children have taken these devices as their only way to play and spend time. From the very beginning of their childhood, they start to play with images. Note that these images are not printed, not even still images, and finally, access is not limited.

So, what do they see in these devices? Here, just mentioned a few notable, popular sites which were repeatedly found from the children's preferences, like Ms Rachel, Cocomelon, Minecraft, Blippi, Free Fire, or later Kids TV, etc. When this research was conducted six years ago, the US-based platform was very dominant. Six years later, many local sites have now already flourished, and the scenario has been changing radically.

So, primarily, content did not carry the users' own history and context. It's about global cultural politics. Three issues could be mentioned from this discussion-

1. New generation adopted new devices
2. Content is not created from their own context, especially for educational purposes.
3. There is no adequate care or oversight regarding the design of content for children.

So, they learn and adopt new visual culture from a very wide perspective. Since they start this from their infant or alphabetical phase, this visual culture builds a virtual pedagogy, which creates a fundamental mindset for children's learning. Buckingham's 'Beyond technology: Children's learning in the age of digital culture' helps to understand that digital technology changes how children learn, communicate, create, and participate in culture.⁷⁴ But in the context of Bangladesh, it still needs to be explored. Digital content and the learning process should be researched distinctly. In this article, the shifting of art tools and their type of presence in academic practice are focused.

Beneficial children get a chance to access styluses, graphics tablets, and digital drawing applications such as Sketchbook, Procreate, and other creative software. It's another issue of who and how could be a creative being in this digital era and how the state is planning its education system.

⁷⁴ D. Buckingham, *Beyond technology: children's learning in the age of digital culture*, (Polity 2007).

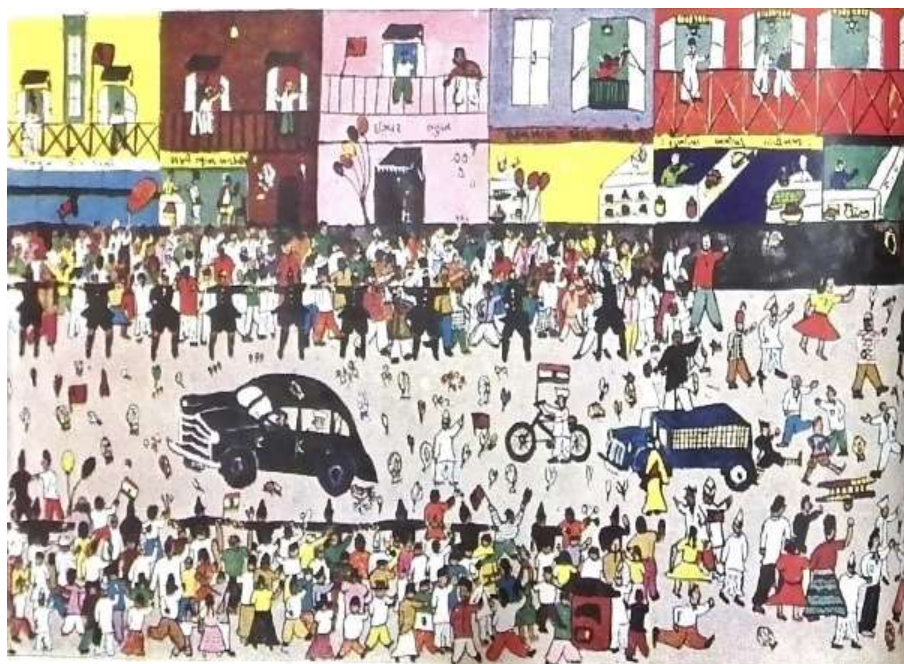
However, this technological shift has transformed children's modes of artistic production and experimentation. Despite the growing use of these digital tools, they remain largely absent from discussions of child art and are seldom recognized in formal art education and academic scholarship in Bangladesh.

Subject and Visual Language of 20th Century Child Art of Bangladesh

This article examines some of the earliest examples of child art from the British era in Bangladesh, which predominantly reflect a realistic approach. These artworks fall within the Realistic or True-to-Appearance stages of artistic development. Zainul Abedin became acquainted with the Shankar Art Competition, which featured images of award-winning children's art published under the title 'Sankar's Children's Art Number 1960,' found in Zainul's collection. This publication provides insight into the standards of child art across different age groups and offers a glimpse into the international art scene. However, for the purpose of this article, only the works by Indian and former Pakistani children are considered. It is notable that in the 1958 competition, while there were no prize winners from Pakistan, many Indian children received awards. Despite this, Indian artworks are included in this study to gain insights into the characteristics of child art. Interestingly, this absence of participation highlights the artistic landscape in former Pakistan.

In addition to the Shankar Art Competition, Zainul's personal collection includes a few local publications from child art organizations, which offer some context for 20th-century child art in Bangladesh. More substantial historical evidence from the second half of the 20th century, particularly the last three decades, can be found in the 'Shishu' journal.







10: This scroll-type painting of Praful Amichand Jhaveri, is 109.5" long and 15.5" wide. It is presented in the publication in four equal panels in connected order from top to bottom. Praful Amichand Jhaveri (13), India, President's Gold Medal, 1958, *Sankar's Children's Art Number 1960*, (Mahindra & Mahindra Limited 1960), p.128-129.



11: Snow Mountain, Hisae Jernishi (15), Japan, First Prize, 1958; *Sankar's Children's Art Number 1960*, (Mahindra & Mahindra Limited 1960), p.186.



12: Backyard, Katsuyo Nishikawa (11), Japan, First Prize, 1958, *Sankar's Children's Art Number 1960*, (Mahindra & Mahindra Limited 1960), p.95.



13: At the Zoo, Seiichiro Takeda (5), Japan, First Prize, 1958, *Sankar's Children's Art Number 1960*, (Mahindra & Mahindra Limited 1960), p.31.



14: Two Sisters, Shyama (9), India, First Prize, 1958, *Sankar's Children's Art Number 1960*, (Mahindra & Mahindra Limited 1960), p.88.

In 1958, there were a total of 156 award winners, among whom 47 were Indian.⁷⁵ The Shankar Art Competition considered children up to the age of 16. This raises the question: what factors should be prioritized besides age considerations for this competition?

⁷⁵ *Sankar's Children's Art Number 1960*, (Mahindra & Mahindra Limited 1960).

Among the 156 prize winners, 4 received first prizes, with one being honoured with the President's Gold Medal. Of the first prize winners, 3 were Japanese, and 1 was Indian. The priority for the prizes was influenced by how well tradition was integrated with contemporary life, as exemplified by Praful's work (10), which impressed the jury and earned the Gold Medal. Similarly, the works of Hisae (11) and Katsuyo (12) drew from traditional art techniques and styles, such as brushstrokes and architectural spaces.

The younger participants in the competition, who won prizes (13, 14), used mixed media to create a visual language that, while spontaneous and playful, was well-managed. This prompted questions about the authenticity of their work, a concern that the organizers had raised early in the competition. As a result, 'Shankar's On-the-Spot Painting Competition' is held annually in New Delhi. It was started in 1952 when doubts were expressed about the originality of the paintings received in the Shankar's International Children's Competition.⁷⁶

The second half of the 20th century in India could have been acknowledged as "the idea of childhood...corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult...".⁷⁷ This notion also has historical ties to former Pakistan, which has been briefly touched upon earlier and will not be repeated here.

In this context, Zainul Abedin demonstrated significant awareness during the 1950s through his fellowship in 1952-1953 and travel grant in 1956-1957, particularly during his second trip to Europe and Japan. Following these experiences, he established 'Shishuniketon' at Charukola, where Mohammad Mahasin, a former student of Zainul and a supporter of preserving children's artwork, became an art teacher.⁷⁸

Amirul Islam notes that Zainul initiated the exhibition of these preserved works in London after Independence.⁷⁹

On June 8, 1973, A.K.M. Abdur Rouf, Cultural Secretary of the Bangladesh High Commission in London, wrote to Dada Bhai (15) regarding a Bangladeshi Children's Painting Exhibition scheduled for November 1973 at the Commonwealth Institute. This letter also mentioned an earlier exhibition held in 1972, organized by the

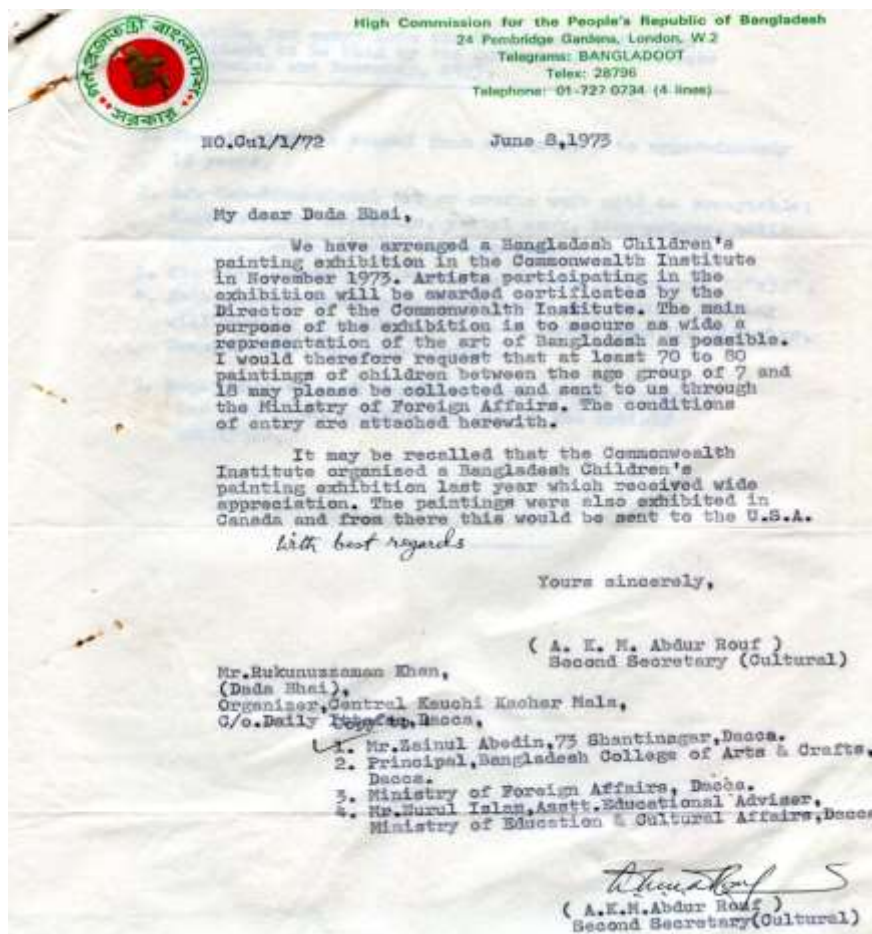
⁷⁶ "The Institution and Its Many Wings: Children's Book Trust", About Us, *Children's Book Trust*. https://www.childrensbooktrust.com/shankars_ots_2022.html

⁷⁷ Phillipe Aries, Quoted by Jo Alice Leeds. "The History of Attitudes Toward Children's Art". *STUDIES in Art Education*. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1320776>

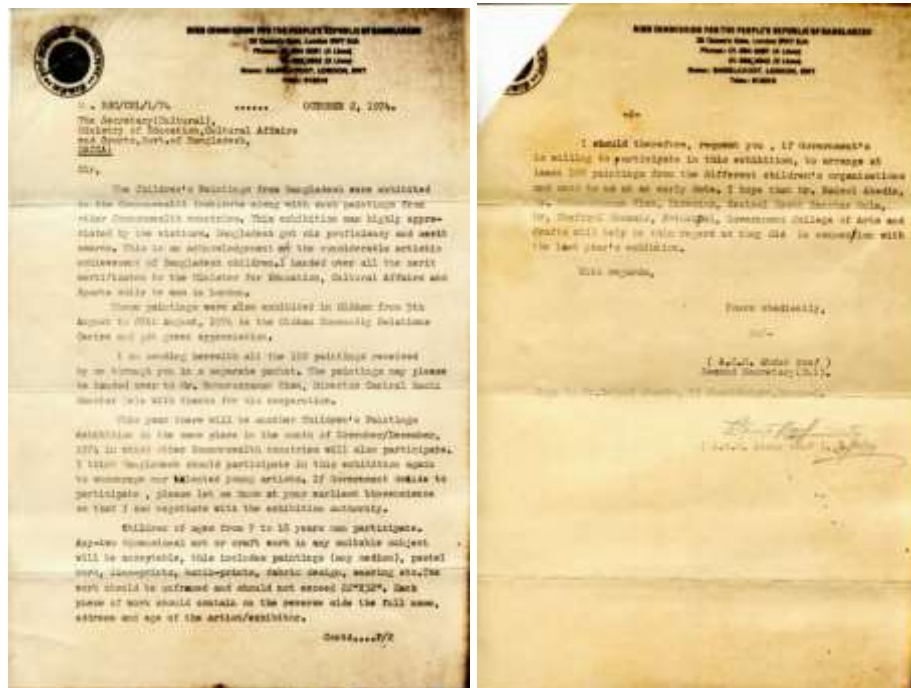
⁷⁸ Amirul Islam, Interview by Author. 26 December 2022, Dhaka.

⁷⁹ Amirul Islam, Interview by Author. 26 December 2022, Dhaka.

On October 2, 1974, Abdur Rouf wrote another letter (16, 17) to Zainul Abedin, informing him that the Commonwealth Institute was regularly organizing children's art exhibitions from Commonwealth countries.⁸¹



⁸¹ Letter to Zainul Abedin from A. K. M. Abdur Rouf, Cultural Secretary of Bangladesh High Commission, London (Family collection, courtesy: Mainul Abedin)



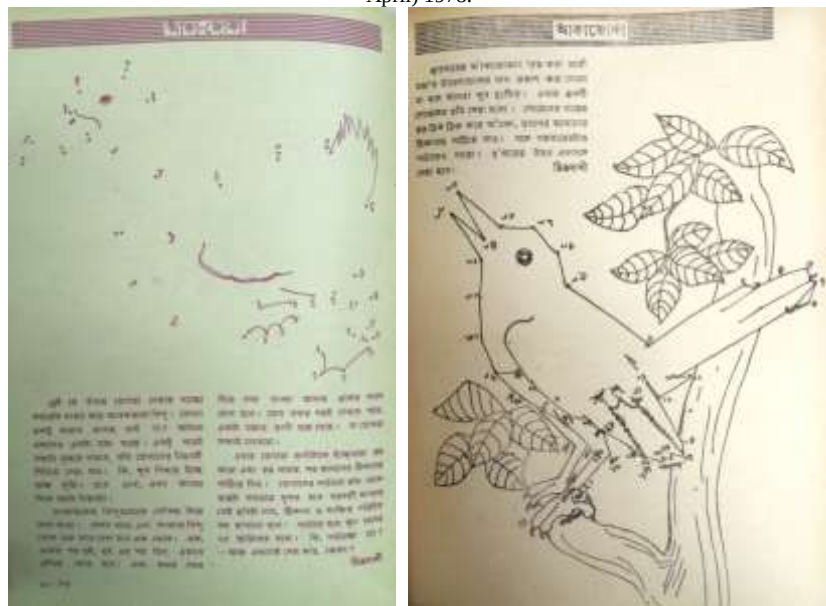
16, 17: Letter to Zainul Abedin from A. K. M. Abdur Rouf, Cultural Secretary of Bangladesh High Commission, London (Family collection, courtesy: Mainul Abedin)

Following a dynamic period of activity, children's publications were quite scarce until the release of 'Shishu' by the Bangladesh Shishu Academy in 1977. Although 'Kachi-Kanchar Mela' had a central publication called 'Kachi O Kancha', its 1965 issue featured only a single sketch by Zainul Abedin. These early publications primarily focused on literature, often illustrated by adults.

It wasn't until the first year, Volume 7 of 'Shishu' in 1978, that children's art was first featured alongside children's literature, specifically in the Independence Day issue. Additionally, children's art was used for the cover design of Volume 9 in the same year. Since then, including child art has become a regular feature of this journal. This inclusion aimed not only to complement children's literature but also to draw individual attention, including on the cover pages (18, 19). In the same year, 'Shishu' also introduced an art education segment titled 'Anka-Jokha' (20, 21).



18, 19: Kanak Khan (6) and Pupu (7), Zobeda Khanam (ed.), *Shishu*, Year 1, Issue 7 (March-April) 1978.



20, 21: Zobeda Khanam (ed.), *Shishu*, Year 1, Issue 9 (May-June) 1978, and Issue 10 (June-July) 1978.

This publication serves as a key reference for understanding 20th-century child art of Bangladesh, particularly from the 1970s and 1980s. It reveals that during these decades, the covers of children's art publications favoured vibrant, colourful works with minimal negative space. Conversely, the interior pages featured a significant number of artworks by younger children, who typically drew familiar objects—often people—without worrying about filling the spaces completely.

Two examples illustrate this contrast: one from the cover (22) and one from an inner page (23). This disparity highlights a broader trend where adults influence and dictate the aesthetics of child art, favouring a more polished and complete presentation. When comparing images (24 and 25), it becomes clear how adult expectations shape the portrayal and appreciation of children's art, steering it towards a more mature and 'complete' visual style.

The authenticity of the artworks featured on the inner pages is also questioned, particularly regarding their adherence to the publication's themes. It appears that these artworks were not always created spontaneously by children but were often influenced by adult preferences. While human figures are predominant in child art, other subjects like plants, animals, and village landscapes are also depicted, but these representations are typically framed by adult interpretations and expectations.



22, 23: Shanta (5) and Faria Lara (8), Zobeda Khanam (ed.), *Shishu*, Year 1, Issue 10 (June-July) 1978 and Year 2, Issue 2 (October-November) 1978.



24, 25: Hashem Khan and Suraiya Akhter Jahan (6), Zobeda Khanam (ed.), *Shishu*, Year 1, Issue 1 (September) 1977, and Year 8, Issue 7 (April-May) 1985.



26, 27, 28: 1st prize winners of ka, Kha and Ga group, *Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin Children Painting Competition '83-84*, organised by Canvas Artists Association, Institute of Fine Arts, University of Dhaka.

The themes of space and subject matter have been consistently reflected in the awarded entries of the Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin Children's Painting Competition for 1983-84, organized by the Canvas Artists Association at the Institute of Fine Arts, University of Dhaka (26, 27, 28).

In the 1990s and early 2000s, the artistic tendencies observed in previous decades persisted, with additional new subjects and trends emerging in children's art. Urban scenes began to attract more attention from the jury, although village landscapes continued to hold significant importance. However, the depiction of villages evolved, with representations resembling suburban rather than rural settings of the 1980s. This shift in depiction sparks curiosity about which artists are selected for these competitions.

In the 1997 Zainul-Quamrul National Children's Painting Competition, 56 children were awarded in four categories: one for cityscapes, one for Bangabandhu's March 7 speech, eight for the language movement and liberation war, and the remainder for village-based landscapes.⁸²

By 1999, the competition had expanded, with 64 children receiving awards in four categories: five for cityscapes, one for Bangabandhu's March 7 speech, one for national monuments and cityscapes, and eight for intimate village-based landscapes. The remaining images, while seemingly depicting village scenes, actually represent a variety of other subjects—such as animals from zoos, nature from parks, national monuments, ethnic people, football, flooded houses, old roadside houses, Baul music festivals, bazaars, fairs, and puppet shows—often sourced from photographs.⁸³

It is noteworthy that these images are frequently circulated by the media for various purposes. Urban scenes in these artworks often portray crowded, marginalized areas rather than the more polished, desirable parts of the city, reflecting a focus similar to NGO portrayals or images from third-world cities (29, 30, 31). This raises questions about whether the children selected these images based on their own experiences or if they were guided by adults in line with the exhibition's themes. Experienced teachers have noted that art teachers are often invited by guardians to help create the "perfect" painting for the competition, even if the students are not regularly engaged in art education.

⁸² Catalogue. *Zainul -Quamrul National Children Painting Competition 1997*. (Gandaria Kisholoy Kanchi-Kanchar Mela 1997).

⁸³ Catalogue. *Zainul -Quamrul National Children Painting Competition 1999*. (Gandaria Kisholoy Kanchi-Kanchar Mela, 1999).



29, 30, 31: Merit Prize; Sharmin sultana, Dhaka, First Ka group; Adiba Jamal Esha, Dhaka, Gold Medal, Ga group; Md. Raju Mia, Dhaka, Gha group. *Zainul -Quamrul National Children Painting Competition 1999*, Ganderia Kisholoy Kanchi-Kanchar Mela, Dhaka.

Do children lose their personal vision through this process, or do they gain the opportunity to choose their own subjects? In the 1970s and 1980s, when village scenes were prominently featured, were these themes selected by the children themselves? Reflecting on my own experience as a child artist in Mymensingh, the village scenario was not a reflection of my reality but rather a concept imposed by teachers as a form of mimicry. These scenarios might now be seen as romanticized reminiscences.

To understand the evolution of child art in Mymensingh during the 1990s, the annual painting exhibition catalogue from Zainul Abedin Art School, located in Shongrahashala, Shaheb Quarter, Mymensingh, is insightful. The 1998 exhibition monotonously featured village scenes, which were initially introduced by teachers and later adopted by students for years. However, there were a few still-lives and outdoor studies included, such as a notable piece by a child aged 13-18 who depicted a letter post-box and won first prize.

This school follows the academic curriculum of the Faculty of Fine Art, University of Dhaka, from where the first few generations of art students became art teachers across the country. Dhaka, as the capital, often leads in changes, and Bangladesh as a whole experiences varying degrees of transformation. Despite this, a new reality is emerging, evident in the way children are expressing themselves through visual art. This shift is particularly noticeable in how children are transitioning from real-life experiences to virtual spaces in their artistic expressions.

Subject and Visual Language of 21st Century Child Art

The 21st century has ushered in the information age, marked by the widespread use of computers, mobile devices, and the internet. During this time, globalization has reached unprecedented levels. Despite only two decades having passed, significant changes are evident in various fields, including art. One notable development is the shift in artistic focus towards childlike art, diverging from the traditional academic representational methods that were prominent in 20th century Europe. This shift reflects a broader appreciation for primitive and child art, which has become increasingly influential among contemporary artists.⁸⁴ The Mitsubishi Asian Children's Enikki Festa showcases selected works that illustrate this evolving perspective.

To understand this emerging visual language, it is essential to consider initiatives like Shankar's on-the-spot competition and other relevant efforts. Mostafizul Haque, who has been teaching children since 1975, offers valuable insights. Initially, Mustafizul used blackboard drawings with chalk, but soon realized this approach was insufficient. He transitioned to using photographs of real objects, allowing students to interpret and draw them in their unique ways. This method aimed to help students create original images based on their own experiences of real space and objects. However, maintaining this practice regularly proved costly. Consequently, Mustafizul adopted a mixed media technique that was significantly influenced by his time in Japan, incorporating photographs and other materials.

Despite the advantages of this approach, certain limitations are evident. Photographs used in the classroom are often framed, well-composed, and colour-fixed, with a limited selection chosen by the teacher. This restricted variety influences the children's artwork, which often reflects a blend of urban and rural elements. The

⁸⁴ Ourania Kouvou, "About child art an examination of the historical identity of an influential art educational practices", September 2005, www.researchgate.net/publication/346715191

Zainul-Quamrul National Children's Painting Competition, established in 2001 and later internationalized,⁸⁵ highlights these trends. The Grand Prize of 2001, reminiscent of Japanese children's art, was featured in Sankar, reflecting Mustafizul's experiences and influences from Japan. His exposure to Japanese art during his visits in 1991 and 1995 enriched his teaching, leading to numerous awards and increased international recognition for his school. Mustafizul noted that after two years, he got the result of this experience that he had learned from Japan. His school earned many prizes, and many teachers from his school also explored the country. He did many workshops in many schools in different locations.⁸⁶

The 2001 edition of the Zainul-Quamrul International Children's Painting Competition revealed a preference for village-like scenarios with some urban elements. There were a few urban scenarios that were reminiscent of adult art, especially paintings and photographs circulated through various exhibitions and media. Several images presented the conjuncture period of the subject from a real village to a virtual ideal village, which is animated in various animations as a beautified nature. So, their real experience gradually moves towards virtual reality. And reality became an option from which they choose the images and convert the media. Their images showed this tendency in a banal way. So, to understand the interest in the subject of the very young generation, the question is: what media circulate under the name of culture? Because the children choose and pick the images from that media-directed vessel, in the end, which are circulated as children's creativity.

In 2009, the competition featured 18 participating countries and received 3,200 submissions, with 200 paintings selected across four age categories (3 to 16 years). Bangladesh won 136 of these awards, showcasing significant changes in the landscape of child art.⁸⁷ The artworks often combined rural and urban elements, influenced by readily available images from the internet.

Among all international art competitions, China is one of the countries that has been organising an event since 1998, named the Tianjin International Children's Painting Competition. This 5th international event was organised as a part of the 2009 Tianjin International Children's Culture & Art Festival under the theme 'peace, Friendship and Future.'

⁸⁵ A. K. Koreshi, "Director's statement", *Zainul -Quamrul International Children's Painting Competition 2001*. (Ganderia Kisholoy Kanchi-Kanchar Mela 2001).

⁸⁶ Mostafizul Haque, Interview by Author. 8 December 2022, Dhaka.

⁸⁷ Md. Jalal Uddin, 'Information: Competition 2009', *Zainul -Quamrul International Children's Painting Competition 2009*. (Ganderia Kisholoy Kanchi-Kanchar Mela 2009).

Through these types of competitions and catalogues, Bangladeshi participants can share and experience the digital world with children on the global stage. However, Bangladeshi children are still mostly submitting rural landscapes, even though many of them do not live in such environments. In this competition, Shadman and Amit (32, 33) were the two winners who submitted work on urban life, winning the bronze award along with six Bangladeshi children. The rest of them got their prize from their rural-life-based scenario, childish drawings, and cultural-identity-based paintings. Their works remind us of photographs.



32, 33: Ahmed Shadman Alam (10), "A City", Bronze award 2009, *China Tianjin International Children's Competition: Award-winning Album*, (Tianjin Cathay Future Culture and Art Foundation 2009), p. 68.

Our regular life, Amit Sutra Dhar (11), Bronze award 2009, *China Tianjin International Children's Competition: Award-winning Album*, (Tianjin Cathay Future Culture and Art Foundation 2009), p. 69.

In 2009 and 2018, digital media became familiar and available in Bangladesh. Researchers are revealing the reasons behind this state.⁸⁸ User numbers increased, and digital media became normalized during this period. This phase changed radically two years later during the COVID-19 pandemic. The influence of this period should be analysed in a separate article. During the pandemic, children stayed at home and connected online. After the pandemic, educators and guardians realized the effects of the virtual space-dependent schooling method. Both the decade

⁸⁸ Jude Genilo, Md. Shamsul Islam, Marium Akther, "Narratives on Digital Bangladesh: Shared Meanings, Shared Concerns", *SSRN*, December 7, 2009, p. 15. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1554146.

preceding the pandemic and the period itself helped develop a generation of digitally friendly young guardians who allow their children to explore new media.

These results appear gradually in the competitive art field, but it was still more personal than being appreciated in the academy. Field experience still reveals a suppressed and romantic story of child art education. Awards and appreciation from the academy and the guardians preserve the grade of the old and conservative schooling methods. Publications like ‘Art of Bangladesh Shishu Academy’, which was published by Bangladesh Shishu Academy, are mostly based on art activities of 2017 and 2018.⁸⁹ It proves what the Academy is still promoting.

Children are vigorously involved with the digital culture; they are living in the digital world and making their own world by infusing these elements. But on school grounds or at the premises of competitions, there is very little stress from the culture of this digital world’s generation. In this timeline, we find the influence of digital culture, which is imitated by the children through traditional media. Though children are using digital media, the image selection process is still under academic surveillance. This process recalls the pedagogical stories of the very early phase of children’s art, how it was directed and shaped with the concern of the adults’ guidance and desire.



34, 35, 36: Md. Enamul Haque Anam (Dhaka), Silver Medal; Md. Nasim Ahmed (Dhaka), Certificate winner; Maibam Atia (Sylhet), Gold Medal, D group, *Zainul-Quamrul International Children's Painting Competition*, Ganderia Kisholoy Kanchi-Kanchar Mela, Dhaka 2009.

⁸⁹ Anjir Liton (ed.), *Art of Bangladesh Shishu Academy*, (Bangladesh Shishu Academy 2018)

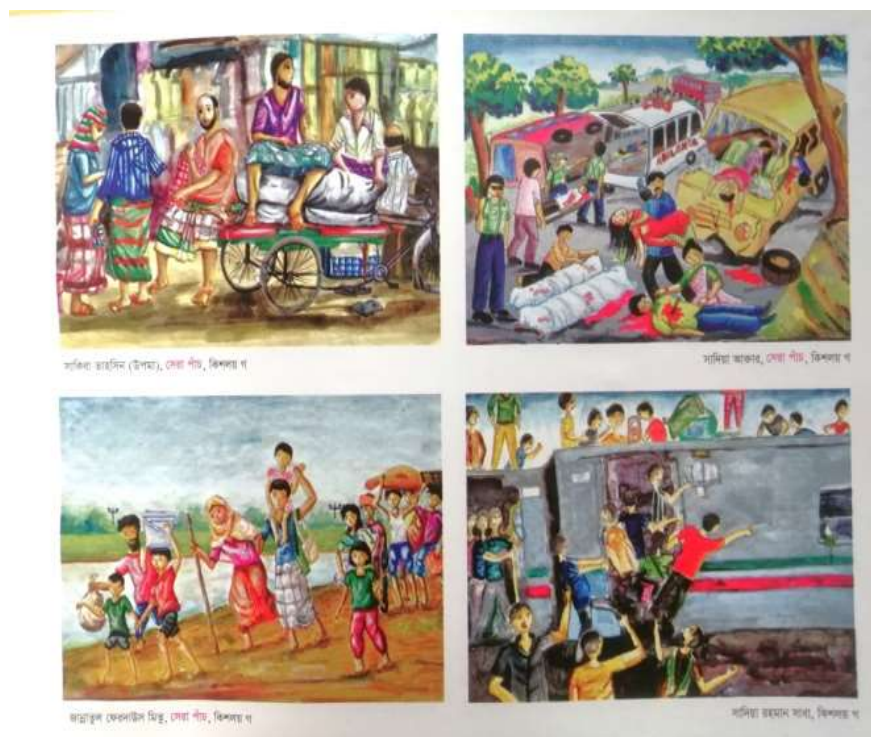
This trend underscores a shift from imaginative creation to the selection and adaptation of pre-existing visual content (34, 35, 36), revealing a new reality shaped by digital media.

The 16th Annual Charukala Exhibition, held in 2018 at Kishaloy Charukola Kendra in Gendaria, Dhaka, features two notable groups (37, 38).⁹⁰ Pages 37 and 38 of the catalogue showcase these groups. The first page highlights the younger group, titled 'Machranga,' while 'Kishaloy' represents the elder group of the school. Both groups select images from their daily lives and widely circulated internet sources as subjects for their artwork, focusing on creating children's art.

The 2021 Annual Show features a notable shift, with less adult direction compared to previous years. This change is attributed to a 5-day workshop organized by the school, during which the children created their artworks on-site. These pieces were subsequently collected for the exhibition. The 2021 catalogue captures the children's genuine sense of space (39). This exhibition serves as a key example of the contrasts between on-the-spot and curated art displays.



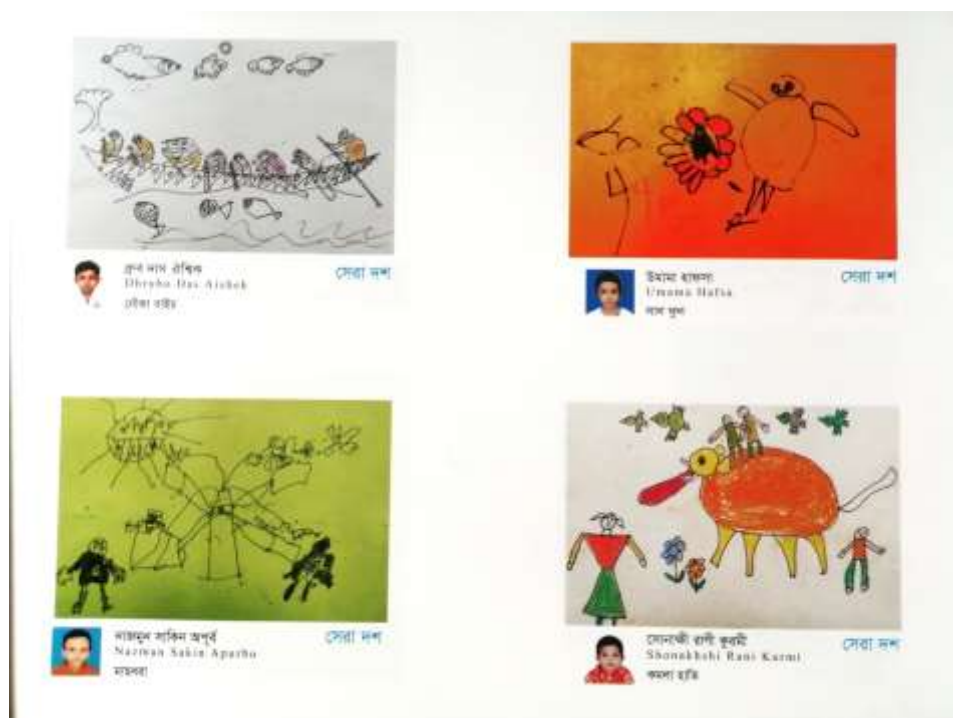
⁹⁰ Catalogue. *16th Annual Charukala Exhibition 2018*, Gendaria Kishaloy Kachi-kanchar Mela, Kishaloy Charukola Kendra, Dhaka, 2018.



37, 38: Two pages from the 16th Annual Charukala Exhibition 2018, Ganderia Kishaloy Kachi-kanchar Mela, Kishaloy Charukola Kendra, Gendaria, Dhaka, 2018.

Lastly, the 2022 Annual Art Exhibition, which took place in December 2022, provided additional insights into the children's artistic processes. During this exhibition, the children shared their experiences and their methods for selecting images with the writer. The Internet remains their primary source of inspiration. The exhibition featured a range of artworks created spontaneously by the children, without guidance from guardians or teachers. Notably, many of these works depict popular cartoon characters, video game imagery, and animals, all drawn from online sources.

Field experiences suggest that boys are particularly favoured in drawing cars, bikes, and superheroes, while girls are particularly drawn to fairy tales. Overall, the artworks reflect themes of the mechanical age, illustrating the children's engagement with contemporary digital culture (40 and 41).



39: First page from the 18th Annual Charukala Exhibition 2021, Ganderia Kishaloy Kachi-kanchar Mela, Kishaloy Charukola Kendra, Dhaka, 2021.



40: Auvro (8), Dhaka, 2022. 41: Drishana Ellora (5), Dhaka, 2021.

Conclusion

Children's art typically lacks the surface polish and complexity often seen in adult art. While adult viewers may perceive a sense of incompleteness in child-created works compared to 'high art', award-winning artworks are often seen as more complete, reflecting a sense of finality. This sense of completeness is akin to that found in European classical art. On the other hand, European modern art allows the colonial mind to break the idea of completeness, which has sometimes been categorized as primitive or childlike.

Initially, adults attempted to create art for children. Over time, child art began to be more actively introduced to children themselves. However, once adult artists realized that child art was being appreciated as a form of modern art, it once again fell under the influence and scrutiny of adult perspectives. This shifting is the shifting of the adult's knowledge-scape under the surveillance of the colonial mindscape. It helps to create a new facet for the children, where they move forward from a conventional representational approach to a new type of mimetic approach. This process did not pave the way for freedom of expression.

Comparing adults' work and children's grand prizes with modern art reveals similarities in approach. The collection of 'Shishu' publication presents examples of child art that differ from 21st-century trends in a subtle way. Gandaria Kachi-Kachar Mela is still practiced conventionally, as shown in their annual art exhibition in Gandaria. But in a broad sense, this organization remains focused on fostering creativity without an overemphasis on awards, allowing children more freedom in their artistic expression. In contrast, outside Dhaka, a more traditional academic approach still prevails.

Traditional art materials and tools are largely replaced by digital media and devices in children's daily lives. Yet this shift is not recognised in academic premises. Art competitions are the most rewarding way for children, which are judged by artists and academicians of the conventional schooling. Children's learning processes, though, are not similar to those of the previous century; still, they are following only the advisory rules of the adults. As a result, the phenomena of the new generation are not properly understood, and they are becoming frustrated or bored living in the gap between generations' understanding.

In summary, child art practice in Bangladesh is influenced by economic and stylistic factors. Economic disparity affects who has access to advanced tools and

opportunities, while stylistic development is hindered by family, societal, and institutional constraints. Social ethics often play a significant role in shaping pedagogy, particularly in the realm of child art, which is closely tied to creative exploration. These constraints have long-term effects on creative development. Despite these challenges, child art in Bangladesh is emerging with a new perspective, reflecting the growing influence of digital and virtual spaces. Children are increasingly drawing inspiration from the internet, which is dominated by global corporate interests. This shift poses questions about nationalism and the future of Bangladesh: Will it become a digitally controlled colony or a self-sustaining nation by the end of the 21st century?