

Woven Roots: Exploring Immigrant Identity, Cultural Heritage, and Social Change Through Symbolic Art

by

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How does immigration affect one's cultural identity and emotional landscape, and how can symbolic art be used to explore this transformative effect?

Abstract

In my thesis, "Woven Roots: Exploring Immigrant Identity, Cultural Heritage and Social Change Through Symbolic Art," over time, the focus of my artwork has become more defined. My pieces now reflect cultural identity through the use of symbols.

Relocating from Bangladesh to Canada profoundly deepened and personalized my understanding of cultural identity. This geographical and emotional distance heightened my awareness of what I had left behind, the textures, rituals, and visual language that shaped my upbringing. In response, I began to incorporate these cultural symbols into my artwork, using them to reconnect and reflect. They became a visual vocabulary through which I could express the layered emotions that come with displacement, longing, and identity in flux.

While researching the topic, I became conscious of the colonial history of my culture and how it reshaped the culture of Bangladesh. This curiosity led me to explore the status of women in the post-colonial era, a subject that felt inherently significant to me as a woman. To examine this idea, I have integrated symbols from traditional Bengali scroll paintings alongside my own symbolic language, illustrating how my culture has transformed over time and how the lasting impact of colonization continues to shape my country.

Preliminary Statement

In past, as an undergraduate student, I found symbolism and expressionism intriguing, driven by a philosophical exploration of existence. As time passed, my focus shifted towards Indian and Bangladeshi mythologies, leading my paintings to become symbolic representations of real-life events intertwined with folklore and traditional art. The influence of Indian Miniature Painting, Company Art, and Bangladeshi Folk Paintings is evident in my deliberate artistic choices. In my recent works, I continue to translate personal experiences into symbolic art. I am constantly questioning the necessity of my creations, which prompts me to search for answers within myself.

A Reflective Inquiry into Identity and Art-Making

My research always revolves around my experience as a human being. Every human goes through different phases in life, and each phase consists of unique experiences. Mine is no different from others; thus, my paintings revolve around different concepts.

Past Research: My previous research largely centered around the personal experiences I encountered in my everyday life, which subsequently evolved into socio-political themes reflected in my paintings. I predominantly employed watercolor on paper, as well as acrylic and oil on canvas, as my primary mediums.

The Immigrant Gaze: Seeing Culture from Afar: Relocating to Canada represented a profound turning point in my life, marked by a period of psychological disorientation as I navigated the complexities of a new cultural and environmental context. During this transitional phase, I developed the project *Where Will You Go?*, a series of watercolors with 12 panels, which explores the consequences of climate change, particularly its devastating effects on the Royal Bengal Tiger and the fragile ecosystem of the Sundarbans.



Figure 1: Laila Fazal, *Where Will You Go?*, 2023-2024, 12 panels of 30.48 x 20.32 cm, watercolor on paper.

This work emerged from a growing awareness of the disproportionate impacts of global warming: while Bangladesh, my homeland, contributes minimally to global CO₂ emissions, it remains among the most vulnerable to climate-induced catastrophes.¹

¹ <https://ourworldindata.org/co2/country/bangladesh>

Current Research and Outcome:

My project has extended beyond traditional painting mediums, as I have experimented with various artistic mediums to enrich my exploration. I have also conducted a thorough review of the literature to provide a scholarly foundation for my artistic endeavor. I have captured the complexities of this experience and how it influences one's sense of self and belonging.

I have created a diverse body of work consisting of a scroll painting, which is about 30 feet long, and a video artwork. The video performance and scroll painting are deeply connected because they both explore themes of identity, cultural hybridity, and transformation. By using traditional Bangladeshi masks and clothing from different cultures, the performance extends the visual narrative of the scroll into movement and embodiment. It shows how identity is not fixed; it's layered, performative, and shaped by migration, colonization, and personal history. The contrasting garments symbolize the blending of cultural heritage and the tension between tradition and adaptation. Together, the scroll and performance create a dialogue between past and present, stillness and motion, memory and reinvention. Each piece has contributed to the multifaceted nature of the immigrant experience and the quest for understanding one's roots amidst the challenges of adaptation and assimilation.

Journey of Identity:

I am currently interested in investigating how a person who practices art is greatly affected by relocating to a foreign country. My sense of self and my nation have become more apparent as a result of my homesickness. My emotions began to take precedence over other feelings; they began to shape who I was and to make me aware of my cultural identity, my heritage, and customs. My sense of getting closer to my roots was restored by studying Inuit art, which is a feeling I did not expect to have. I have read more about the devastating and destructive effects of

colonization, which has inspired me to research the effects of colonization on my Bangladeshi ancestors. Author Ramnath Kesarwani (2014, 222) says that people often encounter the process of acculturation, the blending of two cultures, for two main reasons. Firstly, they are aware of their strong ties to their native culture, which they deeply value and are unwilling to abandon. Secondly, they feel compelled to emulate the behavior of those they regard as models of development, civility, and culture of their postcolonial masters. The idea of cultural identity has been pivotal in all the post-colonial movements that have significantly transformed our global landscape.²

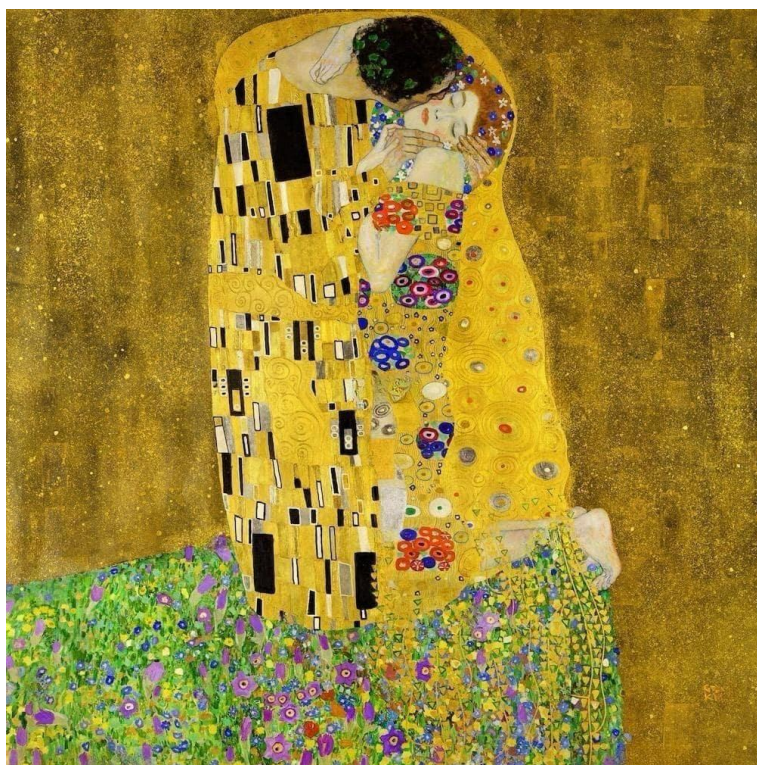
The desire to return home has made me realize how colonization slowly takes over one culture, and how it makes the original inhabitants of that place become confused regarding their own identity. I want to examine how moving to a foreign country has and may continue to affect the conceptual underpinnings of my artistic practice and, finally, how other artists also incorporate concepts related to cultural identity into their work.

Artistic Influences

My paintings typically tell stories through a visual language that employs a variety of symbols to build a story. I was influenced by symbolism and abstract expressionism because, as stated previously, it allowed me to visualize my thoughts in painting. Gustav Klimt's geometric patterns and color palette in works like *The Kiss* and *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer* sparked my interest in symbolism. When I was just starting to explore these themes within my artistic work, Frida Kahlo's *The Two Fridas* had a big impact on me because it made me think about the mental state she was going through at that time. Kahlo painted this image in reaction to her separation from

² Hall, cultural identity and diaspora, 223

her partner, exposing her two selves and encapsulating her experience at the moment.³ When I found myself in a similar circumstance to hers, I created a painting titled *On Contradiction of Self*. I was drawn to the paintings by Indian symbolist painter Ganesh Pyne. Pyne's unsettling early experience with violence and death led to his fixation with the dark realm. During the volatile years preceding Indian Independence, Pyne was raised in Kolkata.



Gustav, Klimt. *The Kiss*. 1907–1908. Oil and gold leaf on canvas. Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna.

Even after a long time, he chose the same dark color palette.⁴ He painted his experiences and recreated painful memories in *The Animal* painting. In this painting, he symbolized a skeletal animal to symbolize his old house memories, as he had to move to a hospital after the communal riot in India in 1946.⁵

I felt imprisoned during the COVID-19 pandemic and started

using expressionism in my artwork to explore my emotions. I painted *Boxed* at that moment to express how I was feeling. In my artwork, I've always used color as a symbol. For example, in this work, I used rich colors of red to symbolize my anxiety, as I was frequently feeling wounds

³ Zsofia, Ban. "The Two Fridas," translated by James A. Tucker. *World Literature Today* 83, no. 5 (2009): 30+. *Gale OneFile: CPI.Q* (accessed April 05, 2025). <https://link-gale-com.uml.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A215865189/CPI?u=winn62981&sid=bookmark-CPI&xid=743fa0a4>.

⁴ Ganesh Pyne: the brooding Modernist, art1st, March, 2022

⁵ Ganesh Pyne: the brooding Modernist, art1st, March, 2022

inside my body. Between these two periods, I created paintings where subjects are contemporary, but Bangladeshi folk paintings influence the style. Drawing nets on my paintings was a way for me to unwind, and I was surprised to learn later that Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama was the creator of the *Infinity Net* series of paintings.



Laila Fazal, *On the contradiction of self*, 2022, 48x65 cm, watercolor on paper.

As I learned more about Kusama and her artwork, I discovered that she also finds relaxation in creating nets and utilizing vivid color palettes. The artist first started creating this series in 1959. She was suffering from obsessional neurosis, which causes hallucinations, and by recording the endless repetitions that torment her, Kusama's intense artistic work became her most effective self-therapy.⁶ I find visual similarities between Sri Lankan artist Rajni Perreras's artwork with my artwork. Inspired by a month-long residency in Sri Lanka, she created an artwork series called *A Vessel with Two Mouths*, where she embodies her yearning for her ancestral homeland and reexamines her diaspora connection to her cultural heritage.⁷



Ganesh Pyne, *The Animal*, 1972, 55.9 x 60.3 cm, tempera on canvas.

⁶ Tran, John L. (7 November 2019). "Yayoi Kusama: The underdog story of a Japanese art maverick". *The Japan Times*. Retrieved 15 January 2023.

⁷ <https://www.rajniperera.com/the-vessel-with-two-mouths>

I found inspiration for my paintings from the works of American artist Shazia Sikander, who was born in Pakistan. During my undergraduate studies, I became interested in Indian miniature paintings, which is why I was drawn to Sikander's small-scale style. Her paintings depict how her immediate surroundings' socio-political climate has responded. She depicted clothes in her paintings *Mirat I* and *Mirat II*, as a sign of cultural transformation.⁸

Another significant symbol in nearly all of my works is clothing. The process of colonization has had a significant impact on the dress customs in my country, leading to a gradual decline in the acceptance of traditional attire among the population. The majority of the population in Bangladesh associates the act of wearing traditional attire with a religious perspective. This idea also includes the Mughal invasion at that time, as the Mughals played an important role in creating opportunities for the British to set up their colony.

Consequently, this led to a prolonged period of confusion over my own identity and how I wished to dress or participate in wearing traditional clothing. Besides this, learning about this has influenced my desire to learn more about my ancestry and how colonization shaped the culture of my native country. One example of this is the disappearance of Muslin cloth, which was once exclusively produced in Bengal before British colonization. Its extinction was largely caused by the Industrial Revolution in England, which led to the decline of traditional handwoven textiles.⁹ Knowing this fact makes me realize we have lost a larger part of our tradition due to colonization, and it becomes more visible in my artwork. Learning about how face tattoos became uncommon in Inuit society reminds me of how post-colonization altered women's

⁸ <https://www.shahziasikander.com/>

⁹ Siddhartha, Bhadra. "The Impact of British Industrial Revolution on a Bengal Industry," *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* 19, no. 4, ver. IV (April 2014): 11–16, <https://www.iosrjournals.org>.

clothing in my nation and how the problem is becoming more visible. The Inuit culture uses art as a silent but effective way to deal with collective trauma.¹⁰

Artist Yinka Shonibare's artwork intentionally confronts simplistic interpretations of cultural identity. His artwork consistently undermines narratives of colonialism. *The Scramble for Africa* or *Decolonised Structures* visually gives the idea of the existence of colonization in his artworks.¹¹ American artist Rashid Jonson mixes personal stories with big ideas, examines cultural limits, and asks deep questions about African American History and Identity.¹² Pakistani artist Mariam Magsi uses inherited textiles, cultural paraphernalia, family archives, food, and orally transmitted intergenerational stories to unpack themes related to socio-political constructions of identity, intergenerational trauma, gender, and migration.¹³ Artist Yinka Shonibare uses clothing, particularly brightly colored, patterned fabrics, to explore themes of colonization, cultural identity, and history. One of his most well-known artistic strategies involves the use of "African" wax print fabrics, brightly patterned textiles that are often associated with African identity, but which have a colonial history.¹⁴ Pakistani-American Artist Shazia Sikander often challenges colonial narratives by reimagining historical figures, symbols, and cultural practices. She uses the visual language of miniature painting, a medium that was historically associated with royal courts and elite patronage, to address themes of colonialism, cultural hybridity, and the tension between tradition and modernity.¹⁵ Artist Njideka Akunyili

¹⁰ Florence, Duchemin-Pelletier. "Catharsis in Inuit art: A way to heal wounds." *Public* 25, no. 49 (2013): 74-89.

¹¹ Rosanna, Greenstreet (30 April 2011). "Q&A: Yinka Shonibare". *The Guardian*. London.

¹² Regina, hackett (August 9, 2007). "Rashid Johnson, the "post-black" art movement, and a new take on Olympia". *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. Retrieved January 11, 2009.

¹³ <https://www.vogue.com/photovogue/photographers/89357>

¹⁴ Milly, Chan, *Yinka Shonibare's colorful artworks subvert colonial narratives*, 2019

¹⁵ Primel, Casey. Anupama Rao, and Susanna Ferguson. "On Artists and Artisans: The Experimental Worlds of Shahzia Sikander." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 35, no. 3 (2015): 486–91. doi:10.1215/1089201X-3426337.

Crosby, who has a Nigerian background, combines traditional painting techniques with collage, incorporating elements of her Nigerian heritage and personal experiences to explore themes of identity and cultural fusion.¹⁶ Bharti Kher, a British-Indian artist who divides her time between India and the UK, often uses the bindi in her artwork as a symbol of cultural identity. Her mixed-media pieces explore themes of femininity, identity, and the complexities of living between cultures.¹⁷ Artist Divya Mehra often addresses the complexities of belonging and displacement, drawing attention to the tension between her personal experiences and the larger, historical forces of colonialism. She uses humor, irony, and satire to critique how colonial power dynamics persist in modern-day institutions, cultural narratives, and social norms.¹⁸

The research I have conducted led me to question my cultural history, deepening my awareness of it, and placing me in a complex position where I am compelled to explore questions of identity, particularly the collective experience of women and the choices they must navigate. All of the work I created when I lived in Bangladesh did not address my tradition; in fact, I never really gave those concepts too much thought. This is why I believe that relocating to a place where civilization is considered to be in the developed world echoes these thoughts.

¹⁶ Solway, Diane (15 August 2017). "Nigerian Painter Njideka Akunyili Crosby Tells an Afropolitan Story in America". *W Magazine*. Retrieved 2019-04-12

¹⁷ "Bharti Kher THE SKIN SPEAKS A LANGUAGE NOT ITS OWN". *Sotheby's*. Archived from the original on 2 October 2017.

¹⁸ "Divya Mehra on "Quit, India" and Her Dark Comedy | Artinfo". *Artinfo*. Archived from the original on 2017-01-16. Retrieved 2016-03-05.

Embodied Practices: Experimenting with Form and Matter

Importance of Scroll: Bangladesh has a long history of scroll painting, which is called patachitra, and has almost been forgotten. The scrolls were made of old 'saree' with vegetable dye. In the scroll, religious stories were demonstrated.¹⁹ Pattachitra, meaning "cloth painting" (from *patta* = cloth and *chitra* = picture), is a traditional form of scroll painting deeply rooted in the folk art heritage of Bangladesh. This vibrant narrative art combines painting, storytelling, and music, most prominently practiced in the southern and southwestern regions of the country, particularly in areas like Jessore, Khulna, and Satkhira.

In Bangladeshi tradition, Pattachitra is not just a visual art form; it is performed by the artist. The *patua*, or scroll painter, sings songs called '*Poter Gaan*' while unrolling the painted scroll, narrating tales from Hindu epics like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, as well as local legends, social issues, or moral stories. These scrolls are painted on handmade paper or cloth using natural dyes, with a distinct use of bold lines, flat colors, and stylized figures.²⁰

Unlike the more decorative forms seen in neighboring West Bengal, Indian Pattachitra, the Bangladeshi version retains a strong performative and socially engaging aspect. It has long served as a medium for oral history, education, and cultural continuity in rural communities.

¹⁹ "Myths and Folktales in the Patachitra Art of Bengal: Tradition and Modernity - The Chitrolekha Journal on Art and Design". The Chitrolekha Journal on Art and Design. 2 August 2015. Archived from the original on 19 May 2018. Retrieved 18 May 2018.

²⁰ "Myths and Folktales in the Patachitra Art of Bengal: Tradition and Modernity - The Chitrolekha Journal on Art and Design". The Chitrolekha Journal on Art and Design. 2 August 2015. Archived from the original on 19 May 2018. Retrieved 18 May 2018.

One of my artworks takes the form of a scroll painting, serving as a narrative vessel through which I articulate the story of my cultural heritage and the evolution of my perspective following my relocation. This piece reflects a dialogue between past and present, using visual storytelling to examine how migration has reshaped my understanding of identity, tradition, and belonging. The scroll narrates the history of my country's colonization and invasion and its enduring influence on contemporary Bangladeshi culture.



Integrating Video Performance into Artistic Research:

My artwork explores themes of identity, cultural heritage, and the resilience that my culture has sustained and continues to sustain through time. It draws from personal experience, making the inclusion of video a powerful extension of the emotional depth I seek to convey. Relocating to a

new country has prompted a deeper reflection on my roots, while also sharpening my awareness of the shifting roles of women in the post-colonial context.



Tiger Mask that I have used in my video artwork

Given the intimate nature of this exploration, the video piece offers a clearer window into my perspective and the purpose behind my work. In the video performance, I cut through layers of clothing, each one representing different facets of identity and the complex transitions of my cultural journey. By the end, only a saree

remains, a potent symbol of cultural resilience and continuity. I wear a traditional Royal Bengal Tiger mask, designed in the folkloric style of Bangladesh. The tiger, as the national animal, holds

deep cultural significance and is often regarded as the spirit animal of the Bangladeshi people, embodying strength, pride, and the enduring spirit of my heritage.



Laila Fazal, অন্তর্গমন(*Antargaman*), *Inner Remnant*, 25, Video. 9.54 minutes.

Symbolism in My Work

Exploring Symbols: My work investigates emotions and cultural identity, with particular emphasis on understanding and articulating my personal experiences through research and artistic experimentation. Throughout this journey, I have drawn upon traditional Bangladeshi symbols to convey a deeper sense of self. A central motif in my practice is the saree, a garment that holds profound cultural significance in Bengali society, especially for women. However, after relocating to Canada, I found myself distancing from this tradition, abstaining from wearing the saree for over a year. Simultaneously, I observed increasing cultural shifts in Bangladesh, where women are increasingly pressured to adopt forms of dress that do not align with traditional Bengali heritage. These experiences have prompted a critical reflection on the historical evolution of Bengali culture, particularly under the influence of colonization and foreign invasions.

During British colonial rule, for instance, notions of modesty were redefined; women began wearing blouses and petticoats under their sarees as the display of skin was deemed inappropriate by colonial standards.²¹ The saree holds a deeply rooted place in Bengali culture, much like in Indian traditions, which is unsurprising, given that Bangladesh was once part of Bengal before the 1947 Partition of the Indian subcontinent. While the exact origin of saree-wearing in Bengali society is difficult to trace, early depictions can be found in the Ajanta and Ellora²² cave paintings, where women are shown draped in sarees and men in dhotis, both garments made from single pieces of cloth. Today, the dhoti has largely faded from daily wear, surviving mainly

²¹ Vaibbhavi Pruthviraj, Ranavaade . *Indian Sari: Sartoria and Semiotics*. 1st ed. United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2023. Page 38 doi:10.4324/9781003430216.

²² The Ajanta cave paintings, dating from the 2nd century BCE to the 6th century CE, are among the earliest examples of Indian mural art. Created by Buddhist monks, these frescoes depict Jataka tales, religious themes, and everyday life, reflecting the artistic and spiritual achievements of ancient Indian civilization.

in traditional ceremonies. Its decline wasn't due to modesty concerns but rather colonial influence; the British informalized the Dhoti and promoted trousers as the more "respectable" attire for men, which later became a symbol of resistance to colonization during the British Period in India.²³

Earlier, the Mughal invasion had introduced the custom of head coverings among women from prestigious families, alongside the imposition of foreign religious and cultural norms.²⁴ These successive historical interventions have profoundly shaped the trajectory of Bengali cultural identity, and they continue to inform my exploration of cultural transition in both personal and collective contexts. I have used the tiger as a symbol of strength and power in my scroll painting, in Bengali culture, which is closely associated with the goddess Durga.²⁵ To explore the cultural shift, I have included the Indigo leaf, which has historical significance tied to the British colonial era and the decline of Bengal's handicraft industry due to the Industrial Revolution in Europe.²⁶ The scroll also includes the Mughal Invasion in my culture to make a clear statement of cultural transition. In the scroll painting, I have examined my emotions through a narrative-based approach, which is not necessarily descriptive as a linear timeline.

Interpreting Color Through Symbolism: As for colour, my palette is vibrant and often includes primary colors. In my scrolls, I have used red to represent the saree, symbolizing the emotional pain and sorrow caused by the cultural changes I have experienced. I have not depicted women with natural skin tones in my work; instead, I use green or red or purple, as I try

²³ "Indian Dhoti". *Indian Mirror*. Archived from the original on 29 July 2020. Retrieved 3 January 2021.

²⁴ Shahid, Amin . "Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India. By Emma Tarlo. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. Xxii, 360 Pp. \$55.00 (Cloth); \$23.95 (Paper)." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57, page 267 no. 1 (1998): 265–66. doi:10.2307/2659088

²⁵ https://truespiritanimal.org/bengal-tiger-symbolism-and-meaning/#google_vignette

²⁶ Pamela D. Toler. *The Ryots "Revolt". (Indian Mutiny from 1857 to 1858). Calliope (Peterborough, N.H.)*. Vol. 23. Peterborough: Cricket Media, 2013.

to reconcile my connection to the saree, my heritage, and my ongoing efforts to grow within that cultural framework. Green is used to signify a powerful sense of renewal and stability, particularly in the face of displacement. It represents life's persistence and the promise of hope, even when one is removed from familiar environments. In moments of exile, when my identity feels fractured, green serves as a visual and emotional thread connecting me to my ancestral roots, a symbol of continuity, resilience, and belonging. It evokes the richness of cultivated land, the depth of monsoon forests, and the silent endurance of roots beneath unstable ground. Purple highlights the dignity and complexity of my immigrant identity, and red conveys emotional intensity, memory, or even resistance to cultural erasure.



Using red in my scroll painting, বিবর্তনের বাংলা(*Bibwartaner Bangla*), 2024-25, Watercolour on paper, 121 cm× 848 cm.



Using green in my scroll painting, বিবর্তনের বাংলা(*Bibwartaner Bangla*), 2024-25, Watercolour on paper, 121 cm× 848 cm.

Draping Identity: The Symbolism of the Saree: In my scroll painting, the saree embodies both continuity and disruption. It is a symbol of cultural tradition that has endured despite colonial attempts to suppress it, while simultaneously serving as a form of defiance and a means of reclaiming cultural identity. Through this symbol, I conveyed the idea that cultural identity is not fixed or static, but rather a dynamic and evolving process, one that constantly shifts in response to both external pressures and internal transformations.



Saree in my painting, বিবর্তনের বাংলা(*Bibwartaner Bangla*),
2024-25, Watercolour on paper, 121 cm× 848 cm.

My scroll painting will also represent how women deal with this identity and how transformation affects them. The saree is more than just a piece of clothing; it represents how power operates to regulate cultural practices, often with the intent of controlling and standardizing them. At the same time, the saree functions as a site of resistance. In response to colonial efforts to suppress or replace indigenous cultural practices, for me, the saree stands as a symbol of resilience and agency, a reminder of the Bengali people's ability to resist cultural erasure.

Birds: Freedom, Exile, and the Power of the State: Birds emerge as a central and multifaceted symbol in my painting. Traditionally, birds are linked to ideas of freedom, transcendence, and the



Birds in my scroll painting, বিবর্তনের বাংলা/
Bibwartaner Bangla), 2024-25, Watercolour on
paper, 121 cm× 848 cm.



Tiger in my Scroll painting, বিবর্তনের বাংলা/
Bibwartaner Bangla), 2024-25, Watercolour on
paper, 121 cm× 848 cm.

potential for escape. Yet, they also embody migration, exile, and subjection to natural forces beyond their control. In the colonial context, Bengal was a region marked by constant migration and displacement, where colonial powers not only sought to dominate the people but also attempted to regulate the movement of bodies across borders. In this sense, birds in the artwork function as metaphors for the forces of displacement and exile that significantly shape the experience of post-colonial identity.

The Royal Bengal Tiger: Strength, Sovereignty, and National Identity

The Bengal Tiger is not merely a straightforward emblem of power; it is a multifaceted symbol that captures both the authority of the state and the resistance to that authority. Just as the tiger symbolizes national strength, it is also shaped by historical forces, reflecting sovereignty's complex and dynamic nature. Similarly, cultural identity in post-colonial Bangladesh mirrors this duality, representing an intricate interplay of sovereignty, power, and resistance.

The Investigation and Discovered Outcomes

The projects I was developing for the past two years focused on the fragility of human emotions, how surroundings influence them, and when these emotions evoke a person's consciousness regarding their own identity, which leads to an artist's visual language. Exploring the fragility of human emotion has inspired me to shape my artwork around the theme of my cultural identity. The goal of this research was, to explore how I can integrate my personal experiences into my artwork, This exploration has prompted me to delve into my cultural history, how other artists might approach this, and how our consciousness and our identities are impacted after

immigrating to a new place, leading individuals to be concerned about the politics of social and cultural transition.

Outcomes and Interpretations:

Encountering a new culture, traditions, and language has broadened my perspectives and challenged my preexisting beliefs. Before moving here, I was not that conscious about my culture or its broader history, as I was engaged with a different phase of my life. After moving here, my homesickness sparked a deeper exploration of my culture and identity. I have become more aware of the political dimensions of identity. Despite my attempts to establish stability in my life, I often felt a sense of emptiness, as everything appeared unknown.

As a Bangladeshi woman, I previously wore the saree occasionally without fully appreciating its significance in relation to my cultural identity. However, after relocating here and adopting Western attire regularly, I have come to realize my desire to wear the saree again, which I interpret as a longing to reconnect with my cultural roots. While reconsidering the history of my cultural transition, I have found that traditional attire in my country was greatly influenced by colonization. I have begun researching how the Industrial Revolution in Europe pressured farmers to cultivate indigo on their lands instead of traditional crops. This shift had a profound impact on the production of handicrafts, such as Muslin cloth, which eventually disappeared due to the exploitative practices of the British colonial system. I have also revisited the early history of European colonization and examined how the Mughal Empire transformed the cultural landscape and daily life of my society. Its influence remains significant even today.

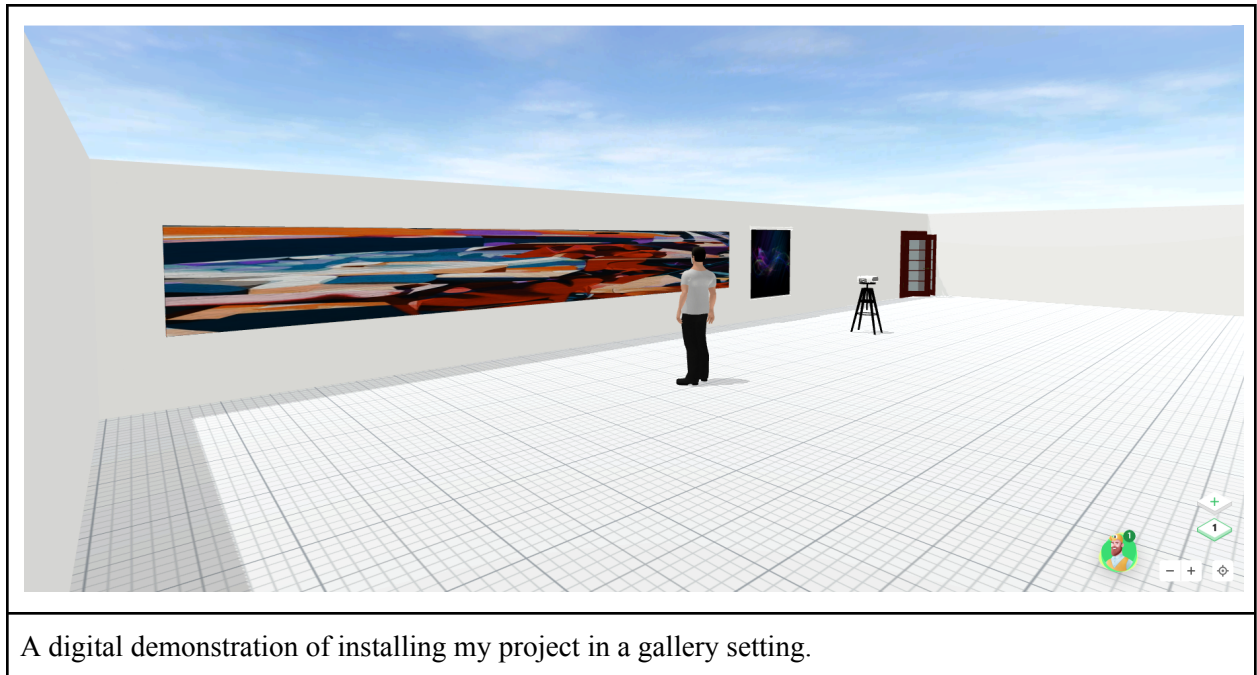
Thesis Exhibition Plan

Artwork-Exhibition title: Woven Roots.

Materials: A 121 cm× 848 cm scroll painting, painted on paper with watercolour, a video work of nine minutes and fifty-four seconds, incorporating a Saree installation which is about 127 cm wide and 365 cm long.

Exhibition plan: To incorporate my study into the artwork, there is one scroll painting. A video record of my performance is recorded and is played on a monitor.

Character and nature of the works to be exhibited: The scroll painting on paper is flat and is installed on the wall. The video work is played on a monitor.



Conclusion

In navigating the terrain of identity, cultural memory, and displacement, my artistic journey has become a deeply introspective and political exploration. Through the thesis *Woven Roots: Exploring Immigrant Identity, Cultural Heritage, and Social Change Through Symbolic Art*, I have uncovered how personal experience, historical awareness, and emotional resonance can intertwine within the symbolic framework of visual language. The evolution of my work reflects a continuous inquiry into my existence as an immigrant, a woman, and a bearer of cultural memory shaped by both heritage and rupture. This process of self-reflection has helped me articulate a visual vocabulary that connects the traditional and the contemporary, the personal and the political.

Relocating to Canada marked a transformative chapter in both my life and practice. It introduced me to a duality that many immigrants face, one of physical presence in a new environment and psychological anchoring in a homeland left behind. This shift awakened a critical consciousness about the fragility of cultural identity and how it becomes even more pronounced when one is removed from the physical and social fabric of their place of origin. The emotional intensity of homesickness, paired with a heightened sensitivity to postcolonial realities, has deepened my desire to reclaim and reinterpret cultural narratives that were altered, marginalized, or erased by colonial forces.

Symbolism has emerged as a central strategy in my art, allowing me to represent the unspoken histories and inner emotional landscapes that conventional representation often fails to convey. Drawing from Bengali scroll painting, Bangladeshi folk traditions, and the intricate language of Indian Miniature and Company School painting, I use historical and cultural motifs not only to

pay homage to my roots but also to interrogate their transformation under colonial and postcolonial influences. My scroll painting and video work stand as a testament to this dialogue between tradition and contemporary critique, serving as vessels that hold stories of loss, resilience, adaptation, and resistance.

Through my research and creative practice, I have also recognized the power of community in the global artistic discourse. By studying the works of Shazia Sikander, Yinka Shonibare, Rajni Perrera, and others, I have discovered how artists from different diasporic backgrounds respond to similar themes of identity, belonging, and displacement. These shared concerns affirm that the immigrant experience, while unique in its personal dimensions, resonates across cultures and geographies, forming a collective emotional and political narrative.

Ultimately, my work aims to bridge the past and present, the local and global, the remembered and the lived. It is a continuous effort to understand how cultural identity is formed, challenged, and reimagined. Art, for me, becomes a method of survival and resistance—a way of preserving what is at risk of being lost and of questioning the frameworks that have long dictated how identities should be constructed. As I move forward, I remain committed to deepening this exploration, allowing my emotional truths and historical inquiries to guide new forms of expression. Through symbolic art, I strive to make visible the invisible threads that connect us to our roots, even as we continue to evolve across borders.

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Inuit contemporary art is sometimes seen as a commercially driven enterprise or as a romantic type of production. However, it seems that art has a more significant impact on Inuit history than just economics, and for the past 20 years, a small portion of the Arctic production, which is not as well-known to the general public, has been addressing both personal and societal themes. This paper aims to reevaluate the societal significance of Inuit art, from its inception in the 1950s to the present. A reminder of the measures implemented by the federal government following World War II will be followed by a selection of works by Inuit artists who experienced pain and attempted to release it through their artistic process.

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production system, as well as the renowned Dhaka muslin and the silk industry. It examines the procurement methods used by European and Asian merchants, the conditions of the artisans who were vital to the textile industry, and the factors that led to its decline.

This is the first comprehensive volume on the Bengal textile industry, resulting from the author's forty-five years of research on different aspects of Indian Ocean trade and the influence of European companies on the economy of India and Bengal.

Please note: This title is co-published with Manohar Publishers in New Delhi. Taylor & Francis does not sell or distribute the hardback edition in India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.

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