

Graffiti as Resistance during the July 2024 Uprising in Bangladesh: A Postcolonial and Semiotic Analysis

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Abstract

Graffiti has long been as a medium of political expression that holds oppressed voices to challenge dominant power discourses. This study exposes the role of graffiti as a functional form of resistance in crucial time during the July uprising movement in 2024 in Bangladesh, justifying through the lens of postcolonial literature. The July uprising is the outcome of student-led protest against the government assigned in quota system. With the unsavory reaction of the government, it evolved into a nationwide movement demanding as 'one point' as fall down of the government to reclaim the democratic decorum. As a form of counter-discourse, graffiti formed a structural framework upholding dissent, symbolizing resistance, and maintaining solidarity among protesters. This study analyzes key visual and textual elements including prominent chanting, calligraphy, portraits, theoretical concepts to understand how graffiti operated as dominating discourses challenging state hegemony. Within the framework of postcolonial resistance, this study argues that graffiti as visual texts serve as sites of resistance and turns into archives of collective memory. This paper contributes to the broader discourse on art as activism, how graffiti played role as act of defiance and became the voice of unvoiced people during the resistance movement like the July uprising in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Graffiti, Art, Resistance, Infrapolitics, July uprising in Bangladesh

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1.0 Introduction

Bangladesh has become the witness of its new phase through a seismic wave of uprising. Many citizens perceived the political transition as a significant moment of change following widespread public dissatisfaction with the government. The whole month of July, 2024 becomes the memento of the wind of change. The moment gets in peak on August 5, when the authoritarian Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned and fled away under an extreme revolt of the youths. The most beating word, Gen-Z (the generation of people born between the mid-to-late 1990s and the early 2010s) comes forward as a spokesman demonstrating their manifestation, protesting against tyranny through different ways. However, graffiti, the visual street art, gets as an uplifting scenario to seeing the whole nation's vibe into its framework like each and every walls, streets, campus buildings and etc. It becomes the only literal weapon for protest,

identity expression, and the pathetic storytelling of the authoritarian government. Notable newspapers states, Every wall became a canvas of protest as the July revolution against the misrule of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina gained steam, reviving graffiti as a means of expressing dissatisfaction in the nation and expressing youths' dreams and goals as well as their rage, disillusionment, and revolt, Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha, (2024, December 27).

As graffiti has emerged as an iconic platform against authoritarian and neo-colonial legacy, therefore, a discussion arises in the field of postcolonial academia in where it criticizes dominating colonial discourses and narratives as well as explores the urges of affected cultures, identities, and societies. Postcolonial literature confesses that the colonial discourses, truly in relation to power, representation, and voice. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak coins the marginalized people as 'subaltern' who can ever express themselves within dominant discourses of colonial project. She argues, "The subaltern must always be spoken for, because they are structurally written out of historical narratives" (*"Can the Subaltern Speak?"*, 1988). The purpose of postcolonial literature should be uphold the voice of "unvoiced" and strive for rewriting the own history that have been deprived as she mentions, "To be postcolonial is to be caught between the desire for identity and the necessity of critique" (*A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 1999). The demonstration of graffiti, being as a tool for the token of resistance, it has been protested against colonial and authoritarian regime, all over the world. It is stated, "In Algeria, where public space has been severely restricted for decades, graffiti artists seek to arouse nationalistic sentiment. Numerous images and statements recall Algeria's struggle for freedom from French colonial control. Today's activists still use symbols from the war's slogans, heroes, and martyrs" (What's Behind Protesters' Graffiti in Algiers and Beirut, October 29, 2019). As working symbolic protest, graffiti has also turned into its shape as an artistic form that must be culturally highlighted in literary field. This area should be covered as supporting another notable critic, "The cultural resistance of the colonized people often finds expression in the literary and artistic sphere before it finds political articulation."— Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind* (1986).

This study is a qualitative interpretive analysis of protest graffiti produced during the July 2024 Uprising in Bangladesh. Treating graffiti as visual texts, it employs semiotic analysis and postcolonial theory to examine how graffiti articulated resistance, collective memory, and counter-discourse in public spaces.

2.0 Background of the Study

On 21 March 2018, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced to remain continuing the quota system facilities to the children and grandchildren of freedom fighters in 1971 in govt. job over general candidates. Students counted

Prime Minister's decision as 'the benefit of her choice' and discrimination against constitutional equality. With a long time ups and downs, lots of chanting, drawing, and graffiti have been sketching in various educational institutions and public places in Bangladesh. 'Quota or Medha (Knowledge)?', 'Medha, Medha (Knowledge, Knowledge)' - This chanting has been raised as the dictum of equality and the govt. forces tried to squashed protesters' voices fiercely. It hit in peaks when in July 1, 2024 Sheikh Hasina, the president of the Awami League, and Obaidul Quader, the general secretary, addressed the protesting students "Razakars," (collaborators in Pakistani Armed forces in 1971). As a result, the movement intensified and broke out all over the country. Abu Sayeed, a student at Begum Rokeya University in Rangpur, was shot and killed by police in the first recorded casualty. The widespread protests were heightened by this incident. The portrayed of Abu Sayeed and lots of graffiti literally hit the movement as an occasion of the downfall of dictatorship. A lots of suffering that have been anguished the different thoughts, got strengthen with that spur of moments. Graffiti demonstrates Bangladeshi people's vision and works as the powerhouse of inspiration in that movement. A news that comments from one of the spokespeople, According to *The Daily Star* (2024), Graffiti was a subtle but effective language of protest used in the early phases of the quota reform campaign in Bangladesh. As a powerful form of protest, university students, who were leading the Anti-Discriminatory Student Movement that began in July, expressed their rage and frustrations on public walls and in the streets. Boldly displayed in public areas, these phrases came to represent resistance to a repressive government. Phrases such as "Pani lagbe pani?" (Do you need water?) "Desh ta karo baaper na" (The country does not belong to anyone's father) reflected the annoyance of a generation that refused to be hushed. Who can forget the graffiti that reflected the sentiment of young people against the prevalent practice of tagging: "Chaite gelam odhikar, hoye gelam Razakar (We asked for rights and you tagged me as a traitor)".

3.0 Literature Review

Notable critical studies regarding on the July Uprising in Bangladesh have contributed significant phenomena in academia. Before that it is significant to understand the context of resistance from the point of view of Hannah Arendt that the author's book, *The Origin of Totalitarianism* (1951), investigates the methods used by authoritarian governments to keep power through propaganda and coercion. In most of the research lens of the context, have been analyzed as socio-political turning point as revolution and overall movement gaining democracy. Likewise, it is asserted, "July Movement's effects on Bangladesh's political landscape" (Siddik, A. B. 2024). Most of the studies have been focused on political background and the background shape of the July

uprising movement in Bangladesh. Like the research titled, *The Role of Political Parties in Bangladesh's July Revolution of 2024: Insights from Sufi Perspectives* (Chowdury, S. R. H. 2024), focuses on the rule of political parties and how Sofi (mystic) thoughts becomes influenced and impacted on. From the focal point of views, this study mentions the contribution of graffiti but divers it into the politician's ideologies. Being the most important token of inspiration, Graffiti is considered as an academic issue of protest against the authoritarianism in Bangladeshi people's perspective. As stated, the article titled, *The Return of Politics in Bangladesh*, hints that the painted graffiti moves on with protesters a parallel way as consolidation against Bangladeshi authoritarianism (Chowdhury, N. S. 2025). July Uprising in 2024 has been basically researched far and wide through historical and socio-political corners but from the postcolonial literary perspective, the role of graffiti is hardly presented. Being a part of British colonial legacy, Bangladeshi people's desire for freedom never highly discussed from this academic field. Thus, this study makes the sense and different aspects of graffiti be scrutinized effectively also examines graffiti as a postcolonial tool of resistance in July uprising its symbols, themes, and impact on public consciousness, while previous studies have mainly explored through political protest hardly concerning that graffiti can make a revolutionary discourse. Existing scholarship on graffiti primarily focuses on urban culture, protest art, and political communication in global and South Asian contexts. Recent studies on the July 2024 Uprising in Bangladesh have largely examined its political, sociological, and historical dimensions. However, the role of graffiti as a visual text and symbolic form of resistance has received limited scholarly attention. More specifically, no substantial study has systematically analyzed July Uprising graffiti through a combined postcolonial and semiotic framework. This study addresses that gap by examining a corpus of protest graffiti as visual texts that articulate resistance, memory, identity, and counter-hegemonic discourse.

4.0 Problem Statement

Existing studies have paid little attention to graffiti produced during the July 2024 Uprising in Bangladesh, particularly from integrated postcolonial and semiotic perspectives. This study addresses that gap by exploring graffiti as a visual language of resistance and decolonial expression. Addressing graffiti in those struggling and painful memoirs that have been shaped by depriving rights, research on the July uprising in Bangladesh from the postcolonial standpoint remains limited and badly poor making discourse in academic arena. Although graffiti, art, calligraphy and chanting incorporate the July uprising movement framed on social, political and ideological shake, this study from the postcolonial literature has been hardly felt so far. This research endeavors to address this gap

through a comprehensive deep analysis on the idea and discourse of demonstrating graffiti as the sign of resistance (being the othering process and addressing as marginalized) throughout the lens of postcolonial literature, with an aim of unfolding colonial legacy as well as highlighting the conceptual framework.

5.0 Objectives of the Study

Thus, this study systematically searches theses mottos:

- i. To highlight graffiti as the symbolic art form of resistance that serves as a powerful medium of protest during the July uprising movement in Bangladesh in 2024.
- ii. To probe the postcolonial outlook in graffiti demonstration that reflects the literary urges of struggles and resistance against authoritarian oppression.
- iii. To explore the role of graffiti making a collective memory that contributes holding on the spirit of the July uprising movement in Bangladesh.
- iv. To analyze the literary and conceptual perspective of graffiti as making discourse within the framework of postcolonial literature.

6.0 Research Methodology

This is a qualitative interpretive study of protest graffiti as visual texts, using postcolonial theory and semiotics. The analysis followed five stages:

- i. Corpus compilation and image selection.
- ii. Transcription and translation of graffiti texts.
- iii. Thematic coding of recurring motifs such as martyrdom, resistance, sovereignty, satire, religion, and collective identity.
- iv. Semiotic analysis based on Barthes' concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth.
- v. Postcolonial interpretation using Spivak's notion of subaltern voice and Scott's concept of in/ra/politics.

The study does not claim statistical generalization; rather, it aims to provide an in-depth interpretive understanding of graffiti as a cultural and political text.

All images analyzed in this study were obtained from publicly accessible media archives and online repositories and are used solely for scholarly purposes with proper attribution. No personal or private information was collected. The study complies with standard ethical practices for visual-textual analysis.

7.0 Corpus of the Study

The corpus of this study consists of graffiti texts and visual representations produced during the July Uprising 2024 in Bangladesh. The data has been

collected from multiple digital and media-based sources, including social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram), online news archives, activist pages, and documented street photography that captured protest-related graffiti in urban spaces.

A purposive sampling technique has been employed to select relevant graffiti items that explicitly reflect themes of resistance, political dissent, and socio-cultural commentary. A total number of 25-30 graffiti samples have been included in the corpus for detailed analysis.

The inclusion criteria for the corpus focus on graffiti that convey protest narratives, anti-authoritarian messages, expressions of collective identity, and symbolic representations of resistance during the July Uprising. Both textual graffiti (slogans, handwritten messages) and visual-symbolic graffiti (images, icons, hybrid semiotic forms) have been considered to capture the multimodal nature of protest communication. Graffiti that are unrelated to political discourse, commercial in nature, or visually unclear have been excluded from the dataset to maintain analytical relevance and consistency.

For analytical purposes, the corpus has been further categorized into three broad types: (i) linguistic graffiti, (ii) visual-symbolic graffiti, and (iii) multimodal or hybrid graffiti combining both textual and visual elements. This categorization facilitates a semiotic and discourse-oriented interpretation of graffiti as a form of resistance during the July Uprising 2024.

8.0 Visual Graffiti Resistance



Figure 1, Location-Dhaka



Figure 2, Location-Dhaka



Figure 3, Location-Narayanganj



Figure 4, Location-Cumilla

9.0 Analysis

The selected graffiti visually represent resistance against oppression and authoritarian control during the July Uprising of 2024 in Bangladesh. The artwork employs bold colors, powerful symbols, and emotionally charged slogans to communicate the collective frustration of the protesters. From a semiotic perspective, the central image functions as a signifier of resistance, while its associated meanings signify the public demand for justice, freedom, and political accountability. The use of large and striking visual elements attracts public attention and transforms ordinary urban spaces into sites of political expression. Through a postcolonial lens, the graffiti can be interpreted as a counter-discourse that challenges dominant narratives imposed by state power. The visual text not only documents public dissent but also empowers marginalized voices by reclaiming public space as a medium of resistance. Therefore, the graffiti serves as both an artistic expression and a socio-political statement reflecting the spirit of the July Uprising. These graffiti depict the courage and sacrifice of the participants involved in the July Uprising. The visual composition highlights themes of collective struggle, national identity, and resistance against injustice. The symbolic representation of protesters, combined with revolutionary slogans, creates a powerful narrative of solidarity and determination. Semiotic analysis reveals that the visual signs operate beyond their literal meanings and evoke broader concepts of freedom, dignity, and social transformation. The graffiti challenges official representations of the movement and preserves alternative histories produced by ordinary citizens. Consequently, the artwork functions as a form of visual resistance that communicates political messages to a wide audience and contributes to the construction of collective memory surrounding the uprising.

10.0 Calligraphic Graffiti Resistance



Figure 5, Location-Chittagong



Figure 6, Location-Dhaka

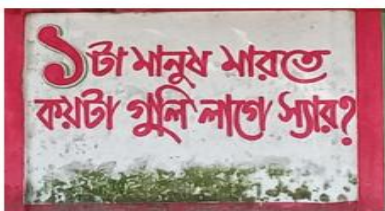


Figure 7, Location-Rajshahi



Figure 8, Location, Dhaka



Figure 9, Location-Khulna



Figure 10, Location-Noakhali



Figure 11, location-Sylhet



Figure 12, location-Dhaka



Figure 13, location-Cumilla



Figure 14, location-Dhaka



Figure 15, location-Dinajpur



Figure 16, location-Sylhet



Figure 17, location-Faridpur



Figure 18, location-Begum Rokeya University, Rongpur



Figure 19, location-Dhaka



Figure 20, location-Brahman Bria



Figure 21, location-Cumilla



Figure 22, location-Munshiganj



Figure 23, location-Dhaka University



Figure 24, location-Khulna University



Figure 25, location-Dhaka

From left of above: Figure 11, Location-Sylhet. Figure 12, Location-Dhaka. Figure 13, Location-Cumilla. Figure 14, Location-Dhaka. Figure 15, Location-Dinajpur. Figure 16, Location-Sylhet. Figure 17, Location-Faridpur. Figure 18, Location-Begum Rokeya University, Rongpur. Figure 19, Location-Dhaka. Figure 20, Location-Brahman Baria. Figure 21, Location-Cumilla. Figure 22, Location-Munshiganj. Figure 23, Location-Dhaka University. Figure 24, Location-Khulna University, Figure 24, Location-Dhaka.

11.0 Analysis

The corpus of this study consists of twelve selected graffiti images collected from the July Uprising of 2024 in Bangladesh. These graffiti can be broadly categorized into three interconnected forms: linguistic graffiti, visual-symbolic graffiti, and hybrid graffiti. Together, they function as powerful instruments of resistance, transforming public spaces into sites of political expression, collective memory, and ideological contestation. The linguistic graffiti found in the corpus primarily includes Bengali slogans, Arabic calligraphic inscriptions, and quotations from poetry and revolutionary texts. These textual expressions serve not merely as written messages but as acts of resistance against dominant political narratives. The use of Arabic phrases invokes moral and spiritual legitimacy, while Bengali slogans and poetic quotations articulate demands for justice, freedom, and social transformation. Through language, protesters construct a counter-discourse that challenges state authority and amplifies marginalized voices. From a postcolonial perspective, these textual interventions reclaim public space and language as tools of political agencies.

The corpus also contains several examples of visual-symbolic graffiti, particularly portraits and symbolic representations of figures such as Abu Sayeed

and Mugdho, who emerged as iconic symbols of sacrifice and resistance during the movement. These visual depictions transform individual experiences into collective political memory. Similarly, representations of Sheikh Hasina often function as symbolic critiques of state power and authoritarian governance. The visual elements operate semiotically, where images signify broader ideas such as oppression, resistance, martyrdom, and national consciousness. Consequently, the graffiti transcend their aesthetic function and become visual narratives of dissent. Furthermore, many images in the corpus exhibit characteristics of hybrid graffiti, combining textual and visual elements within a single composition. In these instances, calligraphic writings, slogans, or poetic quotations are integrated with portraits, symbolic imagery, or political caricatures. The interaction between text and image produces layered meanings that strengthen the communicative power of the graffiti. Such hybrid forms enable protesters to convey complex political messages more effectively, engaging both emotional and intellectual responses from viewers. The fusion of linguistic and visual signs demonstrates how graffiti operated as a multimodal discourse of resistance throughout the July Uprising.

Overall, the corpus reveals that graffiti during the July Uprising of 2024 functioned not only as artistic expression but also as a significant medium of resistance. Through linguistic, visual-symbolic, and hybrid forms, these public inscriptions challenged hegemonic power structures, commemorated collective sacrifice, and articulated alternative political visions. The graffiti therefore emerged as a powerful counter-hegemonic discourse that documented, interpreted, and actively participated in the resistance movement

12.0 Theoretical Framework

This study is all about on the basis of postcolonial approach that delves into the specific spots in where marginalized voices, identities have been affected by the authoritarian or colonial strong discourses. It also scrutinizes the legacy of that power shaping counter discourses exploring themes like resistance, identity, hybridity etc. Prominent thinkers like Gayatri Spivak, provide significant theories how 'ignored voices' challenge the mainstream structure of power throughout the form of cultural, linguistic and different symbolic expression, like graffiti. Therefore, this study applies 'the theory of resistance' by scholar like James C. Scott helping graffiti as a tool of defiance and how the oppressed communities illustrate this art challenging hegemony. This study also acts decoding the embedded meanings in graffiti by Semiotic analysis (drawing from Roland Barthes) exploring how language, symbols, and imagery function as political statements.

By integrating these theories, this study aims to analyze how graffiti during the July Uprising in Bangladesh serves as a postcolonial act of resistance, reflecting historical grievances, reclaiming space, and amplifying subaltern voices.

13.0 Discussion, Analysis and Findings

13.1 The concept of resistance; through the lens of postcolonial literary framework

Basically, resistance is one of the most discussing contents of the postcolonial literature. It is the act of writing that challenges the dominating ideologies, conventional social norms, tries to upheave the voices of the marginalized group of people that have been suppressed and critiques the power dynamics. The concept of resistance encompasses multiple ideas in postcolonial literature, like focusing on marginalized voices, challenging and exposing dominant narratives, the flaws and injustices. Resistance literature is crucial to modern social movements because it expresses common goals and hardships, strengthening the bonds of solidarity among underrepresented groups. It highlights societal injustices and inspires people to band together against oppression through personal stories and experiences. This literature's potent imagery and emotional relevance not only inspire activity but also add to a larger cultural conversation about equality, justice, and rights in society. Resistance literature gives subaltern voices a forum by recounting their viewpoints and experiences, which are frequently left out of popular historical narratives. It challenges dominant historical narratives and highlights the value of incorporating a range of perspectives in historical analysis by recording these stories. This inclusion emphasizes how marginalized groups shape societal change and helps expose the systematic injustices they endure. It exemplifies hybridity by incorporating features from both colonized and colonizer cultures, resulting in distinct expressions that question dominant narratives. Mimicry is visible when writers borrow the language or structures of their oppressors while undermining them in order to criticize colonial rule. This interplay emphasizes the complexities of cultural connections and allows for a more nuanced examination of identity within oppressive institutions.

In academic point of views, according to Franz Fanon⁽¹⁾, resistance is inherently reaction to colonialism in where colonialism creates violence and the resistance even in its most aggressive forms, is an inevitable response to oppression. As he states, the colonial world is a compartmentalized world. The colonized guy will initially act aggressively against his own people, a trait that has been ingrained in him. The police and magistrates are at a loss for what to do when the niggers start beating each other up. The colonized individual then transforms into the colonizer during a subsequent phase. The big showdown is

about to happen. This repressed rage turns into a vacuum and destroys the oppressed creatures themselves if it is unable to find a release, (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961).

In context of another postcolonial point, the concept of subaltern is highly discussed to rescue the colonial legacy and dominant discourses which are being suppressed and coined as 'separatists' and 'extremists'. By addressing these, the resistance against dominating discourse, becomes lower and unspoken. The term "subaltern" refers to a person of "inferior rank." Because of their position, authority, power, and behavior, they are submissive. This idea puts differently describes the subjection of race, language, culture, gender, caste, and class. It also serves as a reminder to the social groups that the ruling classes control. Peasants, workers, and other groups that have been excluded from 'hegemonic' power are often considered to be part of the subaltern classes. In general, the term "subaltern" refers to a type of disadvantaged individual who is grouped together with the oppressor/oppressed. Additionally, it indicates those who have been oppressed or disadvantaged. Gayatri Spivak⁽³⁾ asserts that the subaltern cannot speak...There is still representation today, ("Can the Subaltern Speak?", 1988).

13.2 Graffiti as the Form of 'Everyday Resistance'

James C. Scott⁽⁴⁾ puts a notable idea making a different dynamic transition of resistance. He considers resistance is an ongoing process by the oppressed groups as invisible as the collective action of protesters through subtle and indirect ways. He explores the covert ways of the marginalized group of people resist domination. It plays role of protest forming of small, un-institutional acts rather than formally action rebellion. It never shows the form of large scale uprisings but incorporates in daily acts of defiance that holistically undermine dominant structures. As he states, The mundane but ongoing conflict between the peasantry and those attempting to take from them labor, food, taxes, rents, and interest is known as "daily resistance". It consists of foot-dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth.

- *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (1985)

This idea challenges the authoritarian governance as a powerful tools shaping collective works of their daily activism like social media platform, sharing memes, gossiping, cultural expression like songs, folktales, creating satire pages, demonstrating versatile typographies like graffiti, symbolic images and others. Alongside graffiti can be demonstrated as the tools for weaponing

closely as James C. Scott's idea of covert defiance against authority. As a form of expression, it allows oppressed groups challenging narratives, power in public spaces. It reclaims the spaces and identities of minorities, immigrants and the working classes to uphold their presence in where they are often silenced. Much like Scott's idea of 'hidden transcripts' (the ways the oppressed challenges power through coded speech and actions), graffiti demonstrate humor, irony that irritates to the authoritarian clubs. The author agrees to incorporate graffiti in his pragmatic notion of 'infrapolitics' (resistance often manipulates in the shadows and voiding direct confrontation. It makes the basis for larger movements unnoticed by elites) in a general way as he refers: "Much of the political conduct of subordinate groups falls into the category of what we might call 'infrapolitics.' These struggles typically avoid any open declaration of intent and instead take the form of resistance that dares not speak its name." - *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990).

Genuinely it can be said that the shape of graffiti discloses with coding and debunking the mystery of protest that have been demonstrated. It's the essence can be seen but demonstrates through metalanguage and hidden transcript. The concept of it, transmitted over symbolic grafts and metalanguage. It states, "Of course, graffiti is anything but hidden. Its very essence is to be seen. Regardless of how obvious and obvious the message may be, it is given anonymously, which is arguably a disguise in and of itself (Scott 140–152). However, I contend that the language and metalanguage of this graffiti stage it in a way that produces ambiguity. Since its vocabulary is not completely clear, the tagging subculture that underlies the "torture" piece pretty obviously compares it to a secret transcript. Marche, G. (2012).

13.3 Graffiti Plays as Infrapolitical Role in Bangladesh

Graffiti serves as a powerful tool of infrapolitics incorporating with James C. Scott's idea of every resistance that oppressed groups show dissent in hidden rather than through direct conflict. In Bangladesh, it has been used as challenging to social and political authorities. It has been demonstrating as a soft protest in Bangladesh in where it decodes many inconsistencies. Sometimes it addresses itself different nicknames in scared of the authoritarian atrocities of Hasina regime. There is a mysterious and famous graffiti holds in every focal points of Dhaka city's wall portraying 'subodh', it creates different vibes and thoughts in the common people recollecting their traumatic oppression, social and political anarchies. The interesting fact is that the artist of 'sobodh' graffiti is still unknown. The authoritarian regime vows its concerning regarding this. This unnamed series of protests is still the sources of inspiration that has been fueled to the uprising in July, 2024. One of the prominent news of Bangladesh shows the enigma on this and states, "Tor bhaggey kichhu nei/Subodh tui paliyey ja

ekhon shomoy pokkhey na." (Flee Subodh, nothing is predetermined for you and time is not on your favor). "Bhuleo fire asis na/Subodh tui paliye ja"(Avoid Subodh and don't even unintentionally return).

Such ominous warnings have started appearing as mysterious graffiti on the walls of Dhaka's streets over the last few months.....The security agencies, however, are still in the dark about the people or person behind this "Subodh" graffiti. Recently, the Subodh series was painted on an Old Airport street wall along the Agargaon-Mohakhali Link Road. In one illustration, a rooster laughs as it looks at the sun, signifying that the sun is rising, while a caged sun is hanging on a wire, waiting to emerge. Another piece of art next to this graffiti shows a female seated with a man and the words, "Subodh, kobe hobe bhor?" (When will it be daylight, Subodh?) According to a number of the nation's intelligence authorities, all of whom requested anonymity, detectives and intelligence organizations are taking the hunt for the series' creator more seriously. They claimed that, presuming the graffiti is antigovernment, an intelligence team has already begun an inquiry to find the artist. Masudur Rahman, Deputy Commissioner (Media) of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police, told to the Dhaka Tribune: "We are attempting to gather information regarding its elusive creator after hearing about such types of enigmatic wall-writing." Residents of Dhaka have had conflicting reactions to the graffiti. While some believed that a group was attempting to convey a unique message to the masses, others claimed that these protests were a response to the nation's sociopolitical instability", (The Dhaka Tribune, October 17, 2017).

In political turmoil in Bangladesh, especially in 2014, 2018 and 2022, three most controversial elections rigging, graffiti emerged the vibrant role for protest. Literally it was the time for nightmare of the opponents. These unnamed graffiti upheaved conscious notions in a risky time. These unlucky time was full of suffocating even the democratic atmosphere, freedom of speech and so forth. Hasina regime had been compressed will full of judicial, administrative and political misconduct. A lots of graffiti have been passively emerged noting protest showing like, "No more fake votes!", "Democracy under attack", etc.

One of the renowned press states, On Monday morning, an election official declared that the ruling coalition led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had won Sunday's vote in a landslide, paving the way for her Awami League party to stay in power and ensuring her a third term as head of government. But the result has been clouded by pre-election violence and allegations of a crackdown on the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), as well as widespread reports of vote-rigging and intimidation on

election day, some of which was observed by TIME on the ground (TIME, DEC 31, 2018)

The authoritarian Hasina regime put on its ground by vote rigging, massive corruption, nepotism and so forth. It becomes stronger within a vicious circle day by day. At last it goes to the climax, the July Uprising in Bangladesh. Graffiti has been probed its position and shows passively its resistance facing under Hasina authoritarian all propaganda and pressure.

13.4 The Role of Graffiti in Resistance in July Uprising-2024 in Bangladesh

The uprising begins as a student-led demonstration against the reintroduction of a contentious quota system in government positions, the July Uprising of 2024 in Bangladesh became a significant movement. People with ties to the ruling Awami League party were seen to benefit from this arrangement, which limited possibilities for many students, particularly those who were deserving. Initially, the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement staged peaceful protests that started in early July. Demanding changes to the quota system, students from institutions around the nation joined the demonstrations, which grew in number. On July 15, 2024, students at Dhaka University were attacked by people brandishing sticks, rods, and even guns during a nonviolent sit-in. It was determined that these attackers were members of the ruling party. The world sees people's upheaval as protest and how much it is intensified like, Even though the government shut down mobile internet across the country once more, hundreds of thousands of demonstrators flocked to the streets over the weekend, calling for a march on Monday afternoon on the Ganabhaban, the prime minister's official house in the capital, Dhaka. According to students, many have already gotten past the security perimeter to join the protests, despite police erecting barricades at key entry points into the city ('Bangladesh on Brink as Anti-Government Protests Become 'People's Uprising', Aug 05,2024).

When law enforcement forces used excessive force to interfere, the situation worsened and many people were killed. In an effort to quell the movement, the government implemented curfews, blocked internet access, and sent out security personnel who attacked demonstrators with live ammunition, rubber bullets, and tear gas. Instead of calming the discontent, these measures made people even more indignant. Abu Sayed, a 23-year-old student from Begum Rokeya University in Rangpur, passed away, marking a major turning point. He was shot dead by police during a demonstration, and his brave defiance of the law made him reminiscent of the famous 'Tank Man' of Tiananmen Square. The protests grew more intense after Sayed's death, which inspired support across the country. Students from private institutions,

universities, and even high schools throughout Bangladesh joined the campaign in response to the growing violence. The protests moved beyond Dhaka to other major cities, with people obstructing highways, railways, and organizing enormous rallies. Under the heading "Bangladesh: UN report finds brutal, systematic repression of protests, calls for justice for serious rights violations," the UN Human Rights report According to the research, which is based on deaths reported by numerous reliable sources, up to 1,400 people may have died between July 1 and August 15 and thousands more were injured, the great majority of whom were shot by Bangladesh's security forces. According to the research, up to 12–13 percent of those deceased were children. According to Bangladesh Police, 44 of its officers were slain (UN Bangladesh, February 12, 2025).

Graffiti became a powerful means of expression and resistance during the July Uprising in 2024 in Bangladesh, effectively expressing the public's discontent and hopes. Cities' walls became canvases that reflected the movement's collective voice as demonstrations against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's administration grew more intense.

This graffiti, <https://eastasiaforum.org/2024/08/17/bangladesh-faces-a-hard-road-to-overcome-hasinas-legacies/> becomes notable as a memento of protest in Dhaka during the July uprising, where the students hurled shoes as showing reaction of hatred. This of Sheikh Hasina on a metro rail pillar near Raju Sculpture on Dhaka University campus naming as "Pillar of Hatred". Reinforcing the themes of defiance, rage, and political opposition that characterized the July Uprising of 2024, this graffiti is a potent example of visual resistance. It also emphasizes the significant influence street art had on the protest movement's narrative. People show full of their wrath as soon as Hasina's fleeing over India under students' protest. Many of the people are gathering hurling shoes competitively on it still now as protest against her authoritarian ruling regime. From the horse mouth of newspaper states, Students at Dhaka University's Teachers-Students Centre (TSC) threw shoes at a portrait of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Monday, referring to it as a 'pillar of hatred'. During the programme by several student organizations, they chanted slogans and criticized the removal of graffiti from the TSC area. They also called for Sheikh Hasina to face legal action. (The Financial Express. Dec 30, 2024).

The students expressed their anger by chanting slogans such as "Throw shoes in rhythm, on killer Hasina's cheeks," "We demand the death penalty for killer Hasina," and "We gave blood, we will give more blood." They also

shouted, “In the flood of blood, injustice will drown (The banglanews24.com. Dec 30,2024)

Abu Sayeed, a 25-year-old student at Rangpur's Begum Rokeya University, played a crucial role in Bangladesh's July Uprising in 2024. He was a key organizer of the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement and actively participated in demonstrations against the reinstatement of a contentious quota system in government offices. Law enforcement began a violent attack on demonstrators on July 16 during a nonviolent protest at Begum Rokeya University. Sayeed faced the oncoming police with his arms outstretched in a scene that would come to symbolize the revolution. Police officers shot him several times at close range even though he didn't seem to be a threat. This violent conduct was caught on camera, and it quickly went viral online, sparking fury and more demonstrations around the country. The Amnesty International reports, Abu Sayed, an English student at Begum Rokeya University in Rangpur, refused to back down. He displayed defiance by spreading his arms wide as the police drew closer. The police shot straight at his chest in what appeared to be a deliberate and unjustified attack. He was only 15 meters away when at least two policemen across the street fired 12-gauge shotguns in his direction. As authorities fired at least two more rounds using birdshot ammunition—which is very hazardous, fundamentally inaccurate, and illegal to deploy in protest policing—Sayeed gripped his chest on hit. The police did not appear to be in danger from Sayed. According to his death certificate, Sayed was taken to the hospital ‘brought dead’ (The Amnesty International. July 29, 2024).

There is an important turning point in the rebellion was Sayeed's passing. Many joined the movement as a result of his unyielding stand against deadly force, which went beyond the first student-led demonstrations to include a more general demand for democratic reforms. Sketches, graffiti, poetry, songs, and other forms of artistic and cultural expression arose in his honor, demonstrating the deep influence of his martyrdom on Bangladeshi society as a whole. It has been stated,

“His death sparked widespread outrage, with cultural and artistic responses emerging in the form of sketches, graffiti, poems, and songs. This parallels the cultural impact of Asad's death, showing how the deaths of individuals at critical points can galvanize a movement (Jan 20, 2025, The Daily Star).

This vivid graffiti of Abu Sayed (https://www.newagebd.net/post/opinion/245348/why-did-abu-sayeed-fellows-sacrifice-lives#google_vignette), Makes a historical iconic momentum of the July uprising movement in Bangladesh. It builds a multilayered unification of

Bangladeshi people's thousands in one frame hat hints either change, or death! The graffiti of Abu Sayed kindles to the uproaring sparks of resistance movement. Students in every corner of the country make him as an unsung hero and the powerhouse of the protest. The nonviolent standing with scratching over hands in front of the aggressive Hasina's forces, reminds the thousands suppressed voices like,

“Buker vitor darun jhor,Buk petesi goli kor” (There is a tremendous storms inside the chest, Just shoot upon me, I am ready).However, a lots of graffiti, sketches of Abu Sayed become vivid and live during the July uprising movement that incorporate the voice of unvoiced people.

Mir Mugdhu, a visionary graduate students of Bangladesh University of Professional in Dhaka, his pathetic death incident becomes another climax of the July uprising movement in Bangladesh. This graffiti, (<https://ca.pinterest.com/pin/do-you-need-water-say-this-boy-he-is-mir-mugdho-he-is-no-more--304767099803133017>) holds that Mugdhu helps to his friends who are also protesting against Hasina regime's illegal quota system by offering water. “Pani lagbe,pani?” (Who needs water?), he is martyred in this circumstance.This pathetic words becomes the inspiring chants of the graffiti in resistance. A huge portraits and posters of Mugdhu's speech make him immortal and animated among protesters. One of the authentic sources addresses the moments,

Mugdho accepted martyrdom on July 18 after participating in the quota reform movement that the students in Azampur had called for. The police opened fire on the students during the quota reform movement, and one of the bullets struck Mugdho's forehead and pierced his right ear. When he was taken to the nearby Crescent Hospital, the doctors pronounced him dead. Just before he was shot, Mugdhu was giving out water and biscuits to the students who were protesting, saying, “Water, water, anybody needs water, brother?” (Dhaka Tribune. October 28, 2024).

This iconic graffiti, “Desh ta Karo Baper Na” (The country is not someone's father to possess) https://globalvoices.org/2024/08/04/resistance-art-as-a-weapon-in-bangladeshs-ongoing-student-movement/_hits in ultra-level of protests' vein that stings Hasina's authoritarian legacy. During her time, she has been justified her autocratic practice referring her father's supremacy. By hook or crook, she imposed her father's cult personality to legitimize herself as well as the rule of her party,(Awami league).Being the daughter of Sheikh Mojibur Rahman (The founding father of Bangladesh) her pride addressing herself a lots of time (‘I am the daughter of Sheikh Mojib’),transformed the multi parties of the nation into the authoritarianism as she made the opponents as the 'evil force'

of the country. This othering process of Hasina's regime turns into her monarchy smashed down. During the uprising time, by addressing this graffiti “Desh ta Karo Baper Na” students protested against quota system and 'One-point demand' against her narratives ironically. It refers a country should rebuild with the dignity of equal system not by the supremacy of nepotism and cult culture.

There has been a term coined as 'July 36' and it has been portrayed as graffiti in roads and walls that time. It alludes to the symbolic date of August 5, 2024, when Sheikh Hasina, the prime minister, resigned and left the nation in the midst of a widespread rebellion. This phrase first appeared in the July uprising of 2024, a prodemocracy movement that started as a student led demonstration against a contentious government employment quota system and spread across the country to call for political reform. The movement, which began in early July 2024, persisted unabatedly all month long. Those who participated in the protests after July 31 jokingly dubbed the days that followed "July 32," "July 33," and so forth, ending with "July 36" for August 5. This innovative approach to dating highlighted the demonstrators' tenacity and the ongoing character of their fight. The graffiti on ‘The Bloody July’ (<https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/bangladesh-ouster/>) discloses all over the country picks up the remembrance of the protest against authoritarianism. All things considered, "July 36" is a potent symbol of tenacity and the unwavering determination of the Bangladeshi people to pursue justice and democracy.

Another important part in graffiti in July uprising is that the appearance of Arabic calligraphy that brings the movement in forward. It is well known that Hasina government has faced multiple protests irrespective of cast, creed, and color. A huge number of Madrassah students have been protesting against her authoritarian regime. As Arabic language prominent to them, It becomes reflected as the tools of resistance in July uprising movement. Students draw Arabic proverbs, the specific Qur’anic verses on resistance, shaping the country’s map with Arabic typography and those create a revolutionary vibes from the aesthetic views. In most of the cases, it has been demonstrated in the middle east war-crisis nations. Graffiti became a potent means for expressing opposition, unity, and the people's collective goals during Bangladesh's July Uprising in 2024. There were significant examples where Arabic lettering and themes were used to convey deeper ideas, even though the majority of the graffiti was in Bengali, reflecting local beliefs. In Bangladesh, Arabic, the Islamic liturgical language, is highly valued both religiously and culturally. Graffiti using in Arabic forms have the following benefits:

- i. It Promotes solidarity among the largely Muslim populace.
- ii. It creates religious feelings to motivate and inspire demonstrators.

During the July Uprising, Arabic graffiti essentially acted as a link between local and international movements, enhancing the movement's cultural fabric and reaffirming its resistance and solidarity sentiments. The most viral Arabic iconic calligraphy in resistance during uprising is here: <https://tbsgraduates.net/writeup/meet-the-mind-behind-one-of-the-largest-arabic-calligraphy-in-bangladesh/>

Apart from UN, the collection of protest has been complied memorandum from the European Union Commission to uphold the story in world wide. A publication titled, "Bangladesh, 36 July 2024" deals with the street painting and graffiti has been launched and stated, Our book has been designed to capture a sense of the blazing canvas that is Dhaka, and which marks the horror of repression and the hope of a country now in transition-tragedy, pride. It is an insistence on justice and accountability. This is what you see each and every day going to work, school or the market. It is very impressive for an outsider to see, (EU Ambassador Michael Miller, The Financial Express. Dec 11, 2025).

Renowned Bangladeshi photojournalist Shahidul Alam compiled the gripping collection "Satire and Ridicule: Cartoons That Demolished a Dictator (July Uprising)". It serves as a vivid chronicle of the pivotal events during the July Uprising of 2024 in Bangladesh and demonstrates how cartoons and graffiti evolved into means of protestor unification and dissent expression. The book highlights the ability of art and humor to subvert authority in addition to documenting the artistic forms that were thriving during the rebellion. It has received praise for encapsulating the spirit of a country pursuing fairness and democracy. Professor Muhammad Yunus, the Chief Adviser of the interim government of Bangladesh, formally introduced the book on September 24, 2024, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

14.0 Limitation of the Study

This study is limited by its qualitative design and relatively small corpus of graffiti images. The interpretation of visual texts inevitably involves researcher subjectivity. Future studies may incorporate larger datasets, audience reception studies, and comparative analyses across different protest movements.

15.0 Conclusion

In over all, this study has focused on the significant role of graffiti as also the 'everyday residence' tools during the spotlighted moments in the July uprising movement in Bangladesh in 2024. It is also rooted in postcolonial discourse that demonstrated how graffiti both served as an artistic expression of dissent and a symbolic act of defiance against the authoritarian rule that time. This analysis also demonstrates graffiti as a counter narrative tool in postcolonial academic arena.

Through the textual and visual representation, this study has established that graffiti in any form of writing transcended 'an alternative mode of storytelling for unvoiced group of people'. Graffiti, as a weapon of oppressed, amplifies across the border of the country in where creates a sense of freedom criticizing the authoritarian policies like media propaganda, tagging politics, othering process, imposing multilayered oppression to the opponents. Drawing from postcolonial literary theories, this writing argues that graffiti is as a medium of counter-narratives and it prevails functionally over the government dominant discourses during movement, reclaiming public spaces much like postcolonial literature reclaims history from the colonizers' perspective. The findings emphasize that the appealing of graffiti makes impact on the political consciousness of students, Gen-z's, working classes of people, female, minority groups also holds the collective memory and global solidarity. It also incorporates to another postcolonial struggles that the visual and textual elements of graffiti in the July uprising represent a modern form of resistance, reinforcing that the form of art reminds an inseparable medium for social and political transformation.

Authors' Declaration

We declare that the submitted manuscript is our original work and has not been published, nor is it under consideration for publication elsewhere. All sources have been appropriately cited, and the work is free from plagiarism, falsification, and fabrication. Any use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in preparing this manuscript has been transparently disclosed, and full responsibility for the content rests with the authors.

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