

## Graffiti as Social Narratives: A Thematic Analysis of Student Expression at Jagannath University<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This study analyzes thematic structure of the graffiti painted on the walls of Jagannath University campus, Dhaka to explore the attitudes of contemporary student community. It considers graffiti not as mere aesthetic works, but as visible documents which record contemporary experience of Bangladeshi students. The study follows a qualitative method and reads the language, symbols and images of graffiti through direct observation, collection of 160 photographs and thematic analysis. The analysis shows that structural issues such as administrative criticism, democratic rights and insecurity have emerged strongly in the campus graffiti. At the same time, the quota reform movement, the July mass uprising of Bangladesh, international solidarity, religious, leftist and feminist consciousness and the demand for the rights of indigenous peoples are visible through graffiti. Along with these political statements, personal feelings such as love, loneliness, economic tensions and the search for self-identity have also found a place on the walls, which highlights the psychological reality of the students. The study shows that one of the main themes in the graffiti of Jagannath University is the various adverse conditions of the university students. This graffiti is identified as an important research area in understanding student politics and social movements. It is possible to enrich the knowledge in this field by conducting more extensive research in the future.

**Keywords:** Graffiti, Jagannath University, Student Politics, Protest Spirit, Social and Political Expression

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## **Introduction**

Graffiti refers to writing and images painted or scrawled on walls, sidewalks, and other surfaces, usually using paint, charcoal, or chalk (DiBiasie-Sammons, 2024). Farnia (2014) states that graffiti is a medium that people use to publicly express their voices, express their resentment, express thoughts, affection, personal declarations, political statements, and even cries of pain. Graffiti often uses lexical features such as borrowed words and taboo expressions, which reflect the mental states of students and social problems (Mangila, 2023).

Graffiti in the urban environment is a type of ephemeral art practice that constructs the meaning of urban space through continuous creation and destruction. For example, Jeff Ferrell (1996) has shown in his research that graffiti is situated in the conflict of urban power, control, and resistance; as a result, it often faces the removal policies of authorities. On the other hand, Young (2014) has shown in the context of urban legal frameworks and visual culture that the erosion, removal and rewriting of graffiti become part of the aesthetic and political discourse of the city.

## **Context**

Universities in Bangladesh have always played a role as a hotbed of political movements, cultural practices and social change. Jagannath University is no exception to this reality, and Jagannath University, located in a historic area like Old Dhaka, is a reflection of this larger tradition. Established in 1858 as Dhaka Brahmo School, it became a first-class college in 1908 and was elevated to a government university in 2005. Currently, there are approximately 19,000 students studying in undergraduate and postgraduate programs, most of whom are between the ages of 18-25 (Jagannath University, 2023). It is currently recognized as one of the oldest higher education institutions in Bangladesh. The university attracts students from various social and geographical contexts, including urban, semi-urban and rural areas of the country. Its location in the densely populated capital city and the history of student movements have contributed to the creation of a distinct campus culture shaped by educational, social and political ideas.

In this context, graffiti painted on the walls of the campus is not just an aesthetic practice or informal wall writing; Rather, they serve as visible social scripts through which students express their experiences, frustrations, aspirations, and political opinions. The language, symbols, and visual imagery used in graffiti provide valuable insights into

the everyday realities of student life. Since Bengali is the mother tongue of Bangladesh, the most commonly used language in graffiti is Bengali. However, the occasional use of English reflects the multilingual nature of contemporary students' communication and expression. The purpose of this study is to examine the language, symbolic allusions, and thematic arrangements found in graffiti on the walls of various academic buildings of Jagannath University. Through this, an attempt is made to understand how students express their attitudes, identities, concerns, and experiences through graffiti. By analyzing these linguistic and visual strategies, the study contributes to a broader understanding of student expression, public space, and youth culture in contemporary Bangladesh.

### **Literature Review**

Analysis of graffiti in universities reveals a multifaceted expression of students, reflecting their emotions, social issues and cultural contexts. Various studies have highlighted the common themes in graffiti, showing how students use this medium to express their opinions and experiences. For example, Kan (2006) noted that Kenyan students used graffiti as an alternative means of communication. Especially in situations where decisions were imposed on them and the opportunity to express their own opinions was limited, graffiti became an effective way to express their feelings, opinions and protests.

Green (2003) analyzed graffiti at the University of Otago Central Library in male and female toilets and study booths. It found clear gender differences in content and language use. Men's graffiti was more likely to be homosexual and political, while women's writing was more likely to reflect sexuality, personal relationships, religious and philosophical thoughts. In terms of language, men's writing is more aggressive and argumentative, while women's writing is more sympathetic and supportive. However, there were no significant differences in the areas of education, sports, music, and humor. This study shows that graffiti is an important means of social communication and that gender influences it.

Graffiti inscriptions from 71 students at the University of Cape Coast were analyzed, expressing themes of sexuality, religion, emotions, national issues, and grievances. This emphasized the need for specific spaces for graffiti to effectively address students' grievances (Abane & Acheampong 2025).

Two unauthorized graffiti from the Federal University of Uberlândia were analyzed, interpreting them as expressions of resistance against social isolation and exclusion, revealing the complexity of urban discourse and the relationship of the subject-pichadore with the city (de Araújo, 2019).

In the 1990s, Otta (1993) examined gender differences by analyzing graffiti in the male and the female restrooms of ten universities in Brazil. The results show that the number and variety of graffiti in men's restrooms is higher, with sexual and political themes dominating. On the other hand, women's graffiti is relatively restrained and consistent with social values, and some controversial topics are absent.

By analyzing 378 graffiti messages in Jordanian universities, a study revealed communicative functions related to personal, social, national, religious, political, and taboo topics. Linguistic features highlight simplicity and diversity, which reflect students' attitudes and socio-cultural values (Al-Khawaldeh et al. 2017).

Dombrowski (2011) analyzed a total of 1,346 graffiti in the libraries of four US universities, showing that they can be divided into categories such as advice, academic life, stress, drug use, and personal experiences. The results show that although the content of graffiti in each university is different, it reflects the respective social and cultural environment. In addition, comments on sexuality, academic pressure, love, environment, and self-identification were significantly present, which proves that graffiti is an important means of expressing students' mental states and experiences.

Grffiti samples 391 from a Chinese language university were analyzed, which revealed characteristics such as informality, anonymity, and cultural-counter-culturalism. It focuses on proposed management strategies for identity construction, highlighting cultural, social, and creative identities, and building an inclusive campus culture (Chen, H. 2023).

In a study conducted at İnönü University in Malatya, Turkey, Şad and Kutlu (2009) used content analysis and interviews to explore the psychological and social causes of graffiti, and found that bathroom walls are an alternative and informal medium for students and teachers to express their sexuality, politics, and religious feelings. They divided graffiti into two categories: (1) socially acceptable—where identity, love, humor, and symbolic signs are expressed; (2) anonymous—where sexuality, politics, and religious views are more explicitly expressed. Research shows that these anonymous writings are more likely to be written by men.

In order to explain the motives and motivations behind graffiti, various studies have analyzed the reasons for youth participation. Taylor (2012) noted in her study that the desire to escape boredom, following the behavior of peers, aggressive attitudes, attempts to establish a personal identity, and a vengeful mentality—these factors attract teenagers and young adults to graffiti. This tendency is reflected to varying degrees, especially in early adolescence (12–14 years), middle and late adolescence (15–17 years), and adulthood. In addition, the study shows that the risk-taking mentality, the desire to achieve social recognition, and the desire to gain respect or status through graffiti culture have an impact on participants of all ages.

That is, graffiti is not only a means of creative expression, but can also be considered an important means of constructing an individual's identity, establishing social status, and emotional expression.

Among the studies conducted on graffiti in educational settings, Ball (2004) analyzed students' thoughts, values, and emotional states through graffiti written on desks in a US university classroom. 1,758 graffiti were collected from nine classrooms in two buildings on campus, analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively, and divided into different categories based on thematic. The results showed that university-related and sexual-related topics were the most common. In addition, the type of course also influenced the content of graffiti; for example, sexual-related graffiti was relatively more common in English classes. Victoria, M. (2024). Graffiti was analyzed in a women's restroom at a UK university, where students revealed it as a safe space for communication where they shared advice, personal struggles, and emotional support, which ultimately contributed more to their mental health than traditional university resources.

Graffiti on university desks is analyzed to highlight its unique sociolinguistic characteristics. It explores how these expressions reflect the context, intentions and shared socio-cultural parameters of the sender, emphasizing their communicative and interpretative significance within the academic environment (Muñoz-Basols, J. 2010).

ABAD and DJERROUD (n.d.) analyze graffiti on university tables in Alger 2, exploring its role as a specific medium of expression among students. It examines whether these inscriptions reflect identity and verbal violence within semi-linguistic and socio-linguistic structures. In the current context, no previous research has been conducted on graffiti on the Jagannath University campus. Therefore, there is a clear gap in the analysis of wall graffiti created by students. This lack provides an opportunity for a

new research. The current study contributes to the incorporation of new information and perspectives into the knowledge regarding graffiti on campus.

### **Methodology**

This study was conducted in the light of qualitative research methods. Therefore, instead of statistical measurements, Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis method was adopted. According to them, this method provides a structured explanation of the participants' experiences by identifying recurring patterns or "themes" in the data. They proposed a six-step analysis framework, which sets out a clear process for researchers.

In data collection, 160 graffiti pictures were taken by directly observing graffiti on walls in various academic buildings, premises and walkways of Jagannath University. Out of these, 55 pictures were purposively selected as samples. In order to limit the scope of the study, more attention has been paid to the writings present in the pictures.

The English language writings in the graffiti were presented in the original language and the graffiti written in Bengali were translated into English to make the meaning and speech clearer and more understandable. Through this method, it has been possible to present the analysis of the significance of graffiti in a more coherent and accurate manner by reducing linguistic confusion.

During the observation, the language, colors, symbols, and recurring themes of the graffiti were recorded in the form of notes, and each theme was analyzed interpretively. At the same time, images were saved using a Xiaomi Note 5 mobile phone, so that visual elements could be accurately used in subsequent analysis. Books, journal articles, and news reports related to graffiti research were reviewed for secondary data. Due to ethical considerations, the study is limited to academic purposes only, while maintaining sensitivity while analyzing any personal names or facial images.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Protest graffiti**

The “ভোট চুরি” (Vote rigging) graffiti reflects the deep political distrust and frustration among the students. It highlights the long-standing experience of electoral irregularities, political instability, and disenfranchisement, which directly questions the administration and state system.

On the other hand, “মসজিদে সিসি ক্যামেরা দাও” ‘Give CCTV cameras to mosques’—at first glance, it seems like a simple demand regarding security. However, its underlying meaning points to the inconsistency of administrative surveillance policy. The

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absence of surveillance in a sacred religious place creates a kind of unease, which prompts viewers to think about the limits of security and control.

### **Democratic rights**

Another dominant theme of graffiti is the demand for democratic rights, especially the Jagannath University Central Students' Union (Jnucsu) elections. Calls like “জকসু চাই” (We want Jnucsu) and “অবিলম্বে জকসু নির্বাচন চাই” (We demand immediate Jnucsu elections) are the expression of students' long-standing desire against the absence of student union elections. Through this, they are demanding the re-establishment of representative student politics and ensuring their participation in the decision-making process, which is a fundamental element of democratic culture.

The housing crisis also figures prominently in these graffiti. For a long time, Jagannath University was known as a non-residential university and although a hall is currently open, it is very inadequate compared to the actual needs of students. As a result, most students have to live in expensive messes and rented houses in Dhaka. This reality is reflected in the graffiti “হল কই” (Where is the hall?) through the demands of “অবিলম্বে আবাসন ভাত্ নিশ্চি কর ” (Ensure housing allowance immediately), or equivalent, which clarifies the financial pressure on students and the lack of state and institutional support. Through the slogans “জবি থেকে ভিসি চাই” (We want a VC from JnU) and “#VCfromJnU”, students are opposing the appointment of external Vice-Chancellors and demanding the election of qualified leadership from their own institutions.

### **Education, research and security crisis**

Demands regarding the quality of education, research and financial support can also be seen in the language of graffiti. The slogan “শিক্ষা ও দমন-পীড়ন একসাথে চলে না” (Education and repression cannot go together) can be read as a protest against the disruption of the educational environment due to administrative pressure and control. In addition, statements like “শিক্ষা গবেষণায় বরাদ্দ বাড়াও” (Increase allocation for education research) and “বৃত্তি চাই” (We want scholarships) express the awareness of students towards higher education and research and criticism of the limitations of state investment. “ক্যাম্পাসে যৌননিপীড়ন বিরোধী সেল কার্যকর কর” (Implement an anti-sexual harassment cell on campus) is a clear legal demand. Although this cell is supposed to be there as per the instructions of the High Court, in reality it is not effective—this is the

allegation that has come up here. This wall writing reveals the insecurity of students and the lack of administrative accountability on campus. At the same time, it becomes the language of students' awareness and protest. The importance of demand is highlighted through bold black writing and, while giving courage to the victims, reminds the authorities to fulfill their responsibilities. The presence of the name 'Socialist Student Front' with some graffiti clarifies the ideological basis of the movement. This indicates that leftist student organizations are playing a significant role in these protests and demands. Historically, these organizations have been vocal about fee reduction, housing crisis, democratic rights and educational equality. As a result, the graffiti of Jagannath University can be analyzed not as isolated wall writings, but as a visible manifestation of an organized socio-political consciousness.

Avantika's portrait is a symbolic reminder of violence and injustice on campus. Here, she represents not just one individual, but countless students who are victims of insecurity in educational institutions. The personal tragedy has been brought to the wall and transformed into a collective protest. The phrase "আমরা চাই না ভূয়ো মান, হতে চাই না শিরোনাম" (We do not want false standards, we do not want to be headlines) highlights the contradiction between the so-called reputation of the educational institution and the real security. The students clearly state that they want to study, not to become news of violence or death. This graffiti briefly but powerfully expresses the structural crisis of campus violence, administrative negligence and injustice. The inscription "এভাবেই তারা একে একে ফুল হয়ে যায়" (This is how they become flowers one by one) next to the portrait of Ankan Biswas expresses the pain of untimely death. The metaphor of 'flowering' refers to the students' wasted lives, which is a result of insecurity. The graffiti transforms personal grief into collective protest, questioning the irresponsibility and lack of mental health in the educational system.

### **July uprising and martyrdom memory**

The recent July Uprising and its bloody memory is another dominant theme of the graffiti. The slogans painted on the walls, such as "July Massacre", "এক জুলাই এক বাংলাদেশ" (One July, One Bangladesh) or the names of martyrs, capture atrocities and anger of the violent time. The remembrance and heroic stories of martyrs are a central theme of these graffiti. The names, faces and quotes of the students who lost their lives in the movement have repeatedly appeared in the commentary on the walls. The slogan

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“সাজিদ, সাজিদ, মুফ—শেষ হয়নি যুদ্ধ!” (Sajid, Sayeed, Mughd—the war is not over!) presents the movement as an ongoing historical process, where the death of the martyrs is not an end, but the responsibility of realizing their dreams lies with the current generation.

The portraits of Mir Mughd or Abu Sayeed and phrases like “আমার মৃত্যু নয়” (Not my death) or “শহীদ আবু সাজিদ আমাদের” (Martyr Abu Sayeed is ours) create a strong collective memory on campus. This memory is not only a source of grief, but also serves as a motivation for moral responsibility and resistance. The demands for justice and expressions of anger in the graffiti are very intense and direct. Questions like “বিচারকই!” (Where is justice!) or “বিচার কবে?” (When is justice?) express deep distrust and frustration towards the judicial structure of the state. Here, the question mark is not just a decoration, but a moral question towards the state. The use of red and black colors further intensifies the atmosphere of bloodshed, mourning and protest. Some graffiti have demanded the hanging of specific political leaders, which expresses the desire for direct accountability rather than symbolic justice. This trend highlights the public demand for transitional justice in visual language. The demand for political reform and prohibition is another important dimension of the graffiti.

The slogans published focusing on the Awami League and Chhatra League reflect a deep disgust towards the long-standing regime and student politics. Statements like “আওয়ামী লীগ নিষিদ্ধ কর” (Ban Awami League) or “গড়িমসি বন্ধ কর, আওয়ামী লীগ নিষিদ্ধ কর” (Stop the riots, ban Awami League) indicate a desire for structural change among students. Similarly, the slogan “ছাত্রলীগ নিষিদ্ধ” (Ban Chhatra League) or the symbolic image of breaking chains highlights the demand for a new political order by breaking the existing power relations on campus. These indicate a new polarization of student politics and a rearrangement of power. The rise of a new generation and the reconstruction of nationalist consciousness are clearly visible. The phrase “একটি অসাধারণ জেনারেশন তৈরি হচ্ছে” (A remarkable generation is being created) combined with clenched hands and the national flag declares the confidence and political capability of Generation Z.

Similarly, the statement “লাখে শহীদের রক্তে কেনা দেশটা কারো বাপের না” (The country bought with the blood of a million martyrs does not belong to any father) indicates a strong stance against hereditary power and exclusive dominance. Here, nationalism is no longer just state-centric, but is associated with the concepts of people’s

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ownership, equality and participatory politics. The use of artistic style and symbols has not limited these graffiti to political statements, but has created a rich visual language. The predominance of red, black and green colours has been used as symbols of revolution, mourning and patriotism respectively. The use of the words “Live Long Azadi” or “Azadi” has linked freedom not only within geographical boundaries, but also with the concept of freedom of speech, expression and overall freedom.

The slogan “রক্তের বন্যায় ভেসে যাবে অন্যায়” (“Injustice will be washed away by a flood of blood”) symbolizes resistance against oppression and a willingness to sacrifice for justice. The phrase “This is new generation made by Gen Z” highlights the emergence of a politically conscious generation that identifies itself as an agent of social change.

Graffiti related to the July 2024 mass uprising serves not only as political statements but also as sites of collective memory. Images of martyrs, revolutionary slogans, and references to resistance preserve the memory of a crucial political moment in contemporary Bangladesh. According to Asman (2011), public representations of historical events play a significant role in the formation of collective memory by transforming personal experiences into collective social narratives. The graffiti documented on the Jagannath University campus serves a similar function by keeping memories of protest and sacrifice visible in everyday campus life.

#### **Quota reform and anti-discrimination consciousness**

Another important aspect of this protest spirit is the quota reform movement and anti-discrimination thinking. As a powerful metaphor, the image of a scale is particularly eye-catching, with “মেধা” (Merit) written on one side and “কোটা” (Quota) on the other. The gesture of holding the scale with a clenched fist is a symbol of resistance and struggle. Another graffiti, “কোটা না মেধা, মেধা মেধা” (Quota or Merit, Merit Merit) expresses a clear position in very simple language. Here, “Quota” is a symbol of the reservation system, and “Merit” is a demand for evaluation based on merit. The repetition of the word “Merit” after the question expresses the strong opinion of the protesters. The use of black and red colors indicates the atmosphere of protest, courage and turbulent times.

It has become a monument to the 2024 quota reform movement. This graffiti does not only talk about the abolition of quota; rather, it raises questions about rational reform, recognition of merit and equality. This clearly shows the anti-discrimination consciousness existing among the students and the desire for a just state system.

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### **Ideological politics**

The presence of leftist ideology and political philosophy on the campus walls is also noticeable. The writings “কমরেড লেনিন লাল সালাম” (Comrade Lenin Red Salute) or “কর্নেল তাহের লাল সালাম” (Colonel Taher Red Salute) recall the tradition of progressive politics. They show that a section of the students are still thinking about revolutionary history, class struggle, and the power structure of the state. Added to this is the international revolutionary slogan “Patria o Muerte”, which commemorates Fidel Castro’s Cuban Revolution. The presence of this slogan indicates that the political consciousness of the campus is not limited to the local or national level; it is also connected to anti-imperialist and global revolutionary ideas. The quote from Karl Marx clearly highlights the criticism of class conflict and state power.

“নিপীড়িত জনগণকে কয়েক বছর পর পর সুযোগ দেওয়া হয় কোন নিপীড়ক তাদের নিপীড়ন করবে তা নির্বাচন করার” (The oppressed people are given the opportunity to choose which oppressor will oppress them every few years)—this statement satires the limitations of bourgeois democracy and the misconception of the representative electoral system. The presence of this quote indicates the activeness of anti-discrimination consciousness and left-wing political thought among students.

### **International solidarity**

A powerful expression of international solidarity is the “Free Palestine” graffiti. Painted in the colors of the Palestinian flag, this text symbolizes the students’ solidarity with the oppressed people. It shows that students are aware of the developments in world politics and are ready to take a stand against human rights violations. The graffiti connects the campus to a global moral sphere, where the suffering of a distant population is reflected on local walls, and “75+ Years of LAND THEFT” is used to create a direct political call, which conveys a message of nationalism, survival, and resistance. It attracts the attention of students and passersby and strongly expresses the demand for independence.

The image shows the changes in the territory from 1946 to 2024 through four maps. The areas inhabited by Palestinians during the British Mandate in 1946 are marked in yellow, and the borders of the Jewish state were proposed in 1947 according to the UN Partition Plan. The map shows Israel occupying the West Bank and Gaza, shown in

black, following the 1967 Six-Day War. In 2024, Israeli settlement construction has reduced Palestinian territory to small, isolated islands.

### **Women's awakening**

The phrase “কন্যারা জাগ্রত না হওয়া পর্যন্ত দেশমাতৃকার মুক্তি অসম্ভব” (The liberation of the motherland is impossible until the daughters are awakened) highlights the active participation of women in social and state reform as essential. It is not just a demand for women's rights; it redefines the concept of liberation, in which the role of women is central. This graffiti, initiated by the Student Front, clarifies the need for women's leadership and visibility in student politics

### **Language of revolutionary ultimatum**

“বিপ্লব অথবা মৃত্যু” (Revolution or Death) graffiti creates an alternative public opinion in contrast to institutional discourse or state discourse. This slogan also belongs to the genre, where a final position is declared through short but intense language. The word “revolution” here indicates a radical change in the existing power structure, and the word “death” is used as a symbol of the highest sacrifice for that change. The preposition “or” in the middle presents the dual alternative in such a way that there is no room for compromise or moderation. As a result, the linguistic structure itself creates an ultimatum.

The red and black colors used in the graffiti further reinforce the political significance. Red represents struggle, sacrifice, and the memory of blood, while black symbolizes protest, mourning, and strong resistance. The use of these colors can also be observed in the visual culture of various student movements and mass uprisings in Bangladesh, which gives a visible form to the protest spirit.

The proverb “He who lives by the sword, dies by the sword” carries a moral message about the consequences of power and violence. Here, the ‘sword’ is not just a weapon; it is a symbol of oppression, authority, and force. This graffiti statement criticizes the unjust exercise of power and suggests that the consequences of oppressive behavior ultimately affect the oppressor. Scott (1990) argues that through symbols, language, and cultural expressions, subordinate groups express their dissatisfaction and resistance to dominant power structures. From this perspective, graffiti serves not only as a slogan, but also as a reflection of students’ political positions on power, resistance, and justice.

### **Rickshaw painting and patachitra**

Not just political slogans, fine arts and aesthetics are an important aspect of Jagannath University's graffiti. Colorful fish, folk motifs and creative posters painted by students of the Faculty of Fine Arts have transformed the walls into a canvas. Here, human faces, scenes of struggle and the use of symbolic colors have further strengthened indigenous culture.

The influence of folk art and patua style is particularly noticeable in the graffiti. The images of rural women, tigers, ghoras, birds, palanquins or boatmen evoke memories of traditional rickshaw paintings and patachitras of Bangladesh. This cultural representation not only reflects reality; it also plays a role in constructing identity and meaning (Hall, 1997).

The presence of this folk style in a modern university campus is an attempt to maintain a connection with the roots. It shows that modern political consciousness and indigenous culture are not opposed to each other; rather, they can coexist.

### **Symbolism of exploitation**

A satirical allegory that portrays contemporary power structures, exploitation, and the plight of ordinary people in symbolic language. The entire painting, rather than directly describing any event, expresses a larger reality through symbols. In the center of the painting, a human body is seen burning over a fire. Although this scene is an imitation of real violence, its underlying meaning is symbolic. Here, not individuals, but the general public are represented—who have become helpless under the pressure of the state or institutional system. The pose of hanging over the fire carries an indication of chronic oppression, exploitation, and injustice. It is a metaphor for a situation where people are trapped in the machinery of power.

Characters surrounding the human body intensify the resonance of the painting. The posture and clothing of the characters sitting next to him portray him as representing a dominant or privileged group. His posture and facial expression suggest a kind of indifference or enjoyment, which suggests that the process of exploitation is not only happening, but that someone is controlling it or benefiting from it. On the other hand, the two horned monstrous figures visualize the inhuman and brutal form of power. One of them is spinning a human body in a fire with a handle, which symbolizes the active process of oppression; the other stands as a silent observer. In this way, the artist depicts the structure of power as a cruel force without human characteristics. The small figure on

the right has a helmet-like cap on his head, which could indicate an army or organized force. The indifference or a hint of humor on his face indicates the absence of empathy. As a result, the entire scene becomes a reflection of a social reality where oppression is not just an isolated incident, but has become institutionally accepted or tolerated.

From an artistic point of view, the painting is monochrome, mainly made in black. The use of this color symbolizes protest, mourning, and dark times, and increases the intensity of the scene. In addition, the characters' facial expressions are distorted and exaggerated, which makes the caricature-like satire clear. This distortion is not only an aesthetic technique, but also indicates moral distortion.

### **Religious symbols**

“তোমারে বধিবে যে, গোকুলে বাড়িছে সে” (The saying "He'll kill you, he grew up in Gokul) refers to the conflict of power, resistance and destiny through Vaishnava and Puranic symbols. The first part of the sentence indicates suppression or the fall of power, while the second part refers to the rise of new power.

The images of domes, mosques and Arabic calligraphy on the walls express respect for religious beliefs and architecture. This shows that as there are progressive ideas on the campus, religious identity also coexists as a cultural element.

### **Local identity**

Some writings highlight informal student cultural spaces. Naming such as “মল্লিক চব্বর” (Mallik Square) or “খয়রাতি চব্বর” (Khayrati Square) is a process of making a place meaningful. In the discussion of cultural geography, this is called place-making, where individuals or groups give new meaning to a place through their experiences (Cresswell, 2004). When students identify a meeting place or gathering place with their own name, they associate that place with personal and collective memories. As a result, the place becomes not just a physical location, but a memorable social field.

“লালন চব্বর ” (Lalon Square) symbolizes the practice of free thought, humanist philosophy, and Baul culture on campus. Writings such as “শহীদ সাজিদ চব্বর” (Shaheed Sajid Square) hold the memory of martyrs of recent political conflicts or anti-discrimination movements. It functions as a monument, where a name is not the last character. Rather, it transforms the experience of struggle from one end to the other into a revolutionary monument. This writing, in addition to perpetuating memory, carries a

message: that the value of the lives of the martyrs, the justice of their movement, and the struggle of the students will be respected.

### **Personal emotions, love, and existential crisis**

“তুই যদি আমার হইতি, আমি হইতাম তোঁর” (If You Were Myself, I Would Be Yours)—Linguistically non-standard. Here, the words “if” and “if” are a combination of regional and colloquial language, which makes the writing more personal and domestic. This choice of language deliberately stays outside of formality and directly expresses the feelings of the heart. In particular, the use of the pronoun “you” carries a hint of intimacy, a sense of entitlement, and at the same time a kind of pride and regret. It speaks of a relationship that has not been fulfilled in reality, but exists deeply in the mind. Psychologically, the structure of the sentence is an expression of conditional regret. The word “if” here is not a symbol of possibility, but of unfulfilled desire. That is, what did not happen, but could have happened this sense gives rise to pain and silent protest.

The graffiti “I wish YOU were here” not only expresses the feeling of the absence of a loved one; it also symbolizes the loneliness, mental isolation and emotional emptiness of the students. The use of the word “YOU” in capital letters indicates the intensity of emotions towards the absent person. In a busy urban campus, this expression represents a collective experience as well as a personal feeling, where students can feel lonely even in a crowd.

Another text “আমি কি ডরাই সখী ভালোবাসা ভিখারি বিরহে ” (Am I afraid of my beloved love, beggar, separation?) The graffiti is a creative reinterpretation of Bengali literary tradition. It is an adaptation of a well-known line from Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s Meghnadabadha Kavya, where the language of heroism and struggle is used to express the emotions of love and separation. Through this, the students have created new meanings by combining classical literature with contemporary emotions. The graffiti acts as a reflection of the love, separation and emotional uncertainty of the youth.

“আমাকে তোমার মোনাজাতে রেখ প্রিয়” (Keep me in your prayers, dear) or দেখা হবে তোমার আমায় আজব দেশের ভোরে” (You will see me in the morning of a strange land) the sentences are not just expressions of romantic feelings, but also a desire for emotional shelter. If there is no opportunity to convey your feelings directly to your loved one, walls become an alternative means of communication. In this, love takes the form of a kind of spiritual and emotional liberation beyond the limits of personal emotions. “আমি

আমার আমিত্বে আমিত্বময়” (I am selfish in my selfishness) or “সে যে বসে আছে একা একা” (She is sitting alone) the writings highlight the search for self-identity and the feeling of deep loneliness in modern academic life. These are reflections of how students can feel mentally isolated even in contact with countless people on a crowded campus every day. Existential thoughts and self-doubt are clearly present here.

“টাকা নাই পয়সা নাই খয়রাতি আমরা ভাই ভাই” (No money, no charity, we are brothers and sisters) this writing highlights the economic strain of students through satire. The daily struggles of students from middle-class or lower-middle-class families, the uncertainty of mess life, and anxiety about the future are revealed here under the cover of light humor. “বলতে না পারা কথা বলতে চাই” (I want to speak what I cannot speak) this type of writing indicates that many students cannot express their feelings directly due to social norms, family expectations, or institutional pressure. The wall then becomes a safe canvas, where they can write their own words without any judgment or questioning.

### **Indigenous peoples' demands**

Graffiti is a protest against the rights of indigenous peoples in Bangladesh and the long-standing injustice. The figure of an indigenous woman carrying a basket on her head and a child on her back has become a symbol of labor, motherhood, and the struggle for survival. The slogan “আদিবাসী মানুষের অধিকার নিশ্চিত করি” (Ensure the rights of indigenous people) written in red ink next to it clearly highlights the demand for land rights, state recognition, and social dignity. Here, the red color serves as a reminder of the bloody history and struggle of indigenous peoples. “কল্পনা চাকমা কোথায়?” (Where is Kalpana Chakma?) The question demands justice for the disappearance of Kalpana Chakma, an active human rights activist from the Chittagong Hill Tracts who was abducted in 1996 and has become a permanent symbol against state accountability and the culture of disappearances due to her long absence.

“শাল বৃক্ষের মতো সিনা টান করে সে মানুষ হয়ে বাঁচতে পীরেন ; জান দিয়েছেন।” (He, like a tree, stretched his chest and tried to live as a human; he gave up his life.) The inscription depicts the portrait of Piren Slan, a leader of the Mandi (Garo) community, and the sentence written below it commemorates his martyrdom in the anti-eco-park movement in Madhupur in 2004. It expresses the struggle of indigenous people to protect their land, nature, and existence in humane and emotional language.

## **Conclusion**

Graffiti is usually easily visible in various places—such as the walls of government buildings, bus and train seats, roadsides, educational institutions, and toilet walls. These graffiti reflect various aspects of personal experience and social reality. However, its amount and presentation can be observed from place to place. The present research paper focuses on the thematic analysis of graffiti on the walls of various academy buildings of Jagannath University.

The results obtained from the analysis of graffiti show that the graffiti painted on the walls of the campus can be considered a visible document of the reality of contemporary society and politics. Through these graffiti, the sense of rights, critical perspectives, various crises, demands for justice, mass movements, quota movements, leftist politics, indigenous culture, religious thoughts, and messages of global solidarity are also reflected in them. At the same time, the multidimensional expression of the hopes and disappointments and mental states of the students is clearly evident in these graffiti.

However, this study only included graffiti collected from the exterior walls of campus buildings; if graffiti on classrooms, toilets and tables were included, it would be possible to achieve more reliability and robustness in the analysis of the type and content of graffiti. Sexual content was absent from the data collected for this study.

One of the main issues that emerged from the current study is the various adverse conditions of university students. The research findings are important for understanding the various crises faced by students. Jagannath University is well-known as one of the most prestigious higher education institutions in Bangladesh, where about nineteen thousand students study. However, the facilities available for students are relatively limited compared to other public universities in the country—which is reflected in the graffiti collected in this study.

The data also indicate that graffiti serves as an important linguistic medium of expression of students' thoughts, attitudes and social reality. There is scope for further expansion of this study in the future. For example, similar research can be conducted by collecting more data from the rooms of different faculties of the university. This will make the results more reliable and easier to compare with other universities. Finally, this study recommends that more attention should be paid to students' tendency to write

graffiti, not just as a matter of neglect, but as an important indicator of their expression and psychological state.

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