British Journal of Arts and Humanities, 8(5), 849-859, 2026

Publisher homepage: www.universepg.com, eISSN: 2663-7782

British Journal of Arts and Humanities

Journal homepage: www.universepg.com/journal/bjah

OPEN ACCESS | Research Article

Changes and Challenges of Contemporary Intaglio Prints in Bangladesh Throughout Liberation War

Keya Chakrabarty[1]* and Shantwana Shahrin[1]

[1]Printmaking Discipline, Fine Arts School, Khulna University, Khulna-9208, Bangladesh

*Correspondence: keya@pm.ku.ac.bd (Keya Chakrabarty, Assistant Professor, Printmaking Discipline, Fine Arts School, Khulna University, Khulna-9208, Bangladesh).

Received Date: 18 August 2026 Accepted Date: 18 September 2026 Published Date: 25 September 2026

Abstract

The history of Printmaking in fine Arts is quite old and rich itself. The Subcontinent content the history of its origin and development. There are four main categories - Relief, Intaglio, Stencil Based (screen-printing) and Planographic (lithography). Intaglio is one of the process among many forms of printmaking, which means to engrave, carve or cut. The main aim of my research is to examine how current intaglio prints in Bangladesh changed and faced difficulties during the Liberation war. The 1970s marked a major turning point in the evolution of printmaking practice in Bangladesh. This work intensity analysis the artistic point of view, as well as the cultural perspective from where the printmaking work created a social documentation of the society. We have sought to give special attention on two section firstly, to collect reliable information and defend their historical value, secondly to discuss the various Intaglio printmaking practice of this period and their form and quality. This paper emphasizes on both the historical and analytical aspects in this work. It focuses on artistic practices in post-liberation Bangladesh and the evolving current scene, influenced by currents of globalization, holding new challenges for artists. Configurations of identity and their changing perceptions have played a major role in fashioning its form.

Keywords: Contemporary Art, Printmaking, Intaglio, Liberation war, and National identity.

1. Introduction

Print in actual sense, means the execute icon of picture and scripts with wood or metal block print, originally means, the reflected image of scripts and image which originated almost eleven hundred years ago in Bengal. The study of printmaking in Bengal has been following the Western style for a long time. After partition in 1947, Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin left the job of Calcutta Art School and moved to Dhaka, the capital of East Bengal and one of the provinces of the Muslim majority state. Since then, he took the responsibility of starting the fine arts movement in this country. In 1948, the artists were faced with many obstacles in the establishment of the Fine Arts Institute in East Pakistan's capital Dhaka (University of Dhaka, n.d.; Fairooz *et al*., 2024).

Socially, there was no acceptance of fine arts. Nobody could think of someone living to draw in the picture. After a lot of effort, finally, an institution for fine arts, then was established in Dhaka city. In 1948 Shilpacharya inaugurated the institutional practice of art in Bangladesh by establishing 'Government

Institute of Art' in Dhaka. Artist Anwarul Haque, artist Shafiuddin Ahmed, Patua Quamrul Hasan, Khwaja Shafiq Ahmed, Shafiqul Amin and artist Mohammed Kibria struggled equally with him (University of Dhaka, n.d.). The prints of our country were led by Shilpoguru Safiuddin Ahmed. At first started with wood-cut and wood engraving, but in the course of time, the practice of Etching, Aquatint, Linocut, Dry point, Lithography were also expanded. In 1963 the institute turned into Government Degree College and was named East Pakistan College of Arts and Crafts. Through the initial two decades that is from 1950-1970, most of the Painters, Sculptors and even Applied Artist of the Institution of Fine Arts such as Abdur Razzak, Hamidur Rahman, Murtaza Basair, Monirul Islam, Kalidas Karmakar indulged in Printmaking - sometimes as a subsidiary course to their main subject and sometimes as one interested in working in a new medium (Shahid, 2018; Alom, 2024).

This artist, who acquired some form of aid or scholarship, could continue to work within the conductive art-atmosphere in the Institution and at the same time work with a new medium. Certain artist from other art - institution, but with a similar urge and intention to continue work under some eminent artist also worked in the Intaglio medium; in these decades many from the Faculty also availed of foreign scholar ships and took up Printmaking as their medium of expression. They returned with experience and expertise to continue work in this medium. According to Selim, (2019) contemporary Bangladeshi art is shaped by an interaction between historical memory, regional cultural traditions, and global artistic practices.

2. Methodology

This study explores a qualitative, analytical and art-historical research methodology to analyze the development, techniques, materials, experimentation and contemporary practice of intaglio printmaking in Bangladesh throughout liberation war. Intaglio is a printmaking technique where the image is created below the surface of a plate through engraving, scratching, or chemical etching; etching, drypoint, aquatint, and engraving are among its main techniques. In the part of analysis of art work extensive use of literature published on printmaking and contemporary visual arts. Literature sources also took from of books, exhibition catalogues and journals on Bangladeshi art. Besides these different types of journals, articles book will be used as instrument to accomplish the research work flawlessly.

3. Results and Discussion

Safiuddin Ahmed

Safiuddin Ahmed (1922-2012) is a master artist and a great teacher of arts in the field of modern printmaking. In the first half of 20th century, only a few respected artists worked to transform printmaking of the Indian subcontinent into modern art- Safiuddin Ahmed is one of them (Falvo, 2011 and University of Dhaka, n.d.).

Fig. 1: Safiuddin Ahmed, *The Cry*, copper engraving, 31x22cm, 1980. Source: Correspondent, S. (n.d.). SAFIUDDIN AHMED A legend of prints. The Daily Star. https://www.thedailystar.net

The techniques he dealt with success-fully are: wood engraving, dry point, etching, aquatint, metal engraving and so on. He has demonstrated man, nature, the relationship between man and nature, political and historical incidents, lifestyle of marginalized people of the society and many things like these throughout his artwork (Rob, 2025).

Moreover, the sufferings of the flood affected people, the horrible images of the language movement and liberation war have been depicted through his print works simultaneously. Print work was not that much influential in 1970s but a lot of experimental works were noticed in 1980s and these were created using intaglio technique. Symbolical use of eye sight got more importance at that time. 'The Cry' (See **Fig.1**) and 'The language Movement' in these two artworks his observation of economic and political struggles of the people of this country can be seen. This glorious struggle holds two great movements. One is the language movement of 1952 and another is the liberation war of 1971. To keep the memories of language movement and liberation war, he portrays the horrible memories, sufferings and sorrows of the people through his artworks of different techniques. In 1988 famous artwork was completed by Safiuddin titled 'In memory of 71' (**Fig. 2**).He used copper engraving technique for it and vertically its dimension was 20x32 cm. Eyes of different shapes are found at the underneath of the picture.

Fig. 2: Safiuddin Ahmed, In Memories of 71, Copper engraving 32 X 20cm,1988. Source: Rahman. (2022). Welcome to Shilpaguru Safiuddin Ahmed. https://safiuddinahmed.com/

This picture retains not only the mixed feelings of people but also focuses on the unrest time when the Bengalis were fighting for liberation. An eye can express a huge symbolical meaning too. Eyes can express hatred, frustration, depression and anger towards a person on the other hand eyes can hold teardrop in it. Eyes of different kinds like of men, women, infants, fighters all are presented here by the delicate strokes. His extreme sense of patriotism has been expressed through this picture. He wanted to keep the sorrowful memories of this country along with its originality and emotional attachment with

other things. To keep the memories of language movement and liberation war, he portrays the horrible memories, sufferings and sorrows of the people through his artworks of different techniques (Falvo, 2012 and Ahmed, n.d.). In sharp contrast to that was his neat and precise prints where waves, curves, lines and dots blended with one another to reflect sunshine and harmony over the land of rivers, boats, and birds in the valleys. After the massacre of March 25, Safiuddin and his family- wife, two sons and daughter, stayed back in their Shamibagh house as they had no village home to escape to. At one point however, his wife and children went away to his sister-in law's house in Manikganj and Safiuddin remained all alone in the house with his dog. The days were filled with the terror of being picked up by the Pak Army any time and the horror of the atrocities all around; this is reflected in his drawings at the time which later became colored engravings. Safiuddin and his family - wife, two boys, and daughter - stayed at their Shamibagh home during the March 25 slaughter because they had nowhere to flee to in the community. However, Safiuddin was left alone in the house with his dog when his wife and kids moved out to live with his sister-in-law in Manikganj. The days were filled with the anxiety of being picked up by the Pak Army any time and the horror of the atrocities all around; this is represented in his sketches at the time which subsequently became colored engravings. Millions of people were displaced across the border in 1971 as a result of the refugee experience, making displacement an historical and cultural subject for artistic representation (Dasgupta, 2016; Biswas, 2023).

Mohammad Kibria

Mohammad Kibria is one of the pioneers of printmaking of Bangladesh who worked to take Bangladeshi printmaking into the modern era. His contribution to fine arts of Bangladesh is unavoidable and he worked to develop the field as it is now. Following the modern techniques of west and he mixes the indigenous consciousness and tradition the western modernism (Selim, 2007; Phoutrides, 2019). His mastery in practicing expressive abstract art and his originality, creativity transcendence in printmaking are rare. Artist Mohammad Kibria did many experiments on etching and aquatint techniques and was successfully created his own style. He searched life in nature, or immersion, or grief; that made the idea of modernism lively. Following the thoughts of his unconscious mind, he created abstractions.

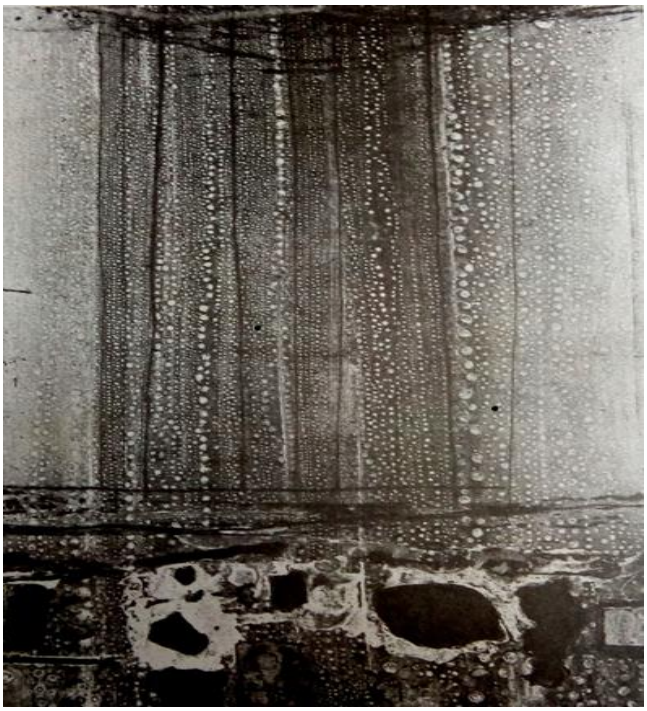

Fig. 3: Kibria, Memorial VII, Etching, 1979. Source: Nazir, A. (2004). Mohammad Kibria. (S. Choudhury, Ed.) Dhaka: Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy.

The late 1970s print work "Memorial VII" (See **Fig, 3**) proves his proficiency and talent. In this picture the use of spruced form and texture got more importance than diversified etching strokes. Rustic and fatty strokes come down from up rhythmically. In the lower part, some broken black strokes can be seen. Countless white dots are coming down from the upper side. As if raindrops are coming down in natural command. In the underneath, on white color black forms stone alike can be seen. Examples of medium experiment can be found here. Use of different tonal variations and textures on one color take this picture into another level. Though it is a one-colored picture, it appears as a colored picture. His print works reflect the matter of monochrome. Another important contemporary print work of him is "Memory III" (See **Fig. 4**) .Form and color covering the texture of underneath create an antiphony which enchants one's soul. Besides, he did not use one texture everywhere rather textures were diversified in nature. There is an inner form of any picture which conflicts with the surface, he points that out successfully (Zaman, 2011).

Fig. 4: Kibria, Memorial VII, Etching, 1979. Source: Nazir, A. (2004). Mohammad Kibria. (S. Choudhury, Ed.) Dhaka: Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy.

At first appearance, Kibria's artwork seems to be less strongly connected to political and social history than that of artists like Safiuddin Ahmed, Quamrul Hassan or Zainul Abedin. Nevertheless, this does not mean that his work was unrelated to Bangladeshi culture. Rather his experimentation may be developed an abstract visual Language within the institutional and cultural context of Bangladesh (Chakrabarty, 2026).

Murtaza Bashir

Murtaza Bashir is arguably one of the most well-known and influential artists of the 1950s. Born on 17 August 1932 in Dhaka. His father was Muhammad Shahidullah who was a renowned linguist of the sub-continent. In 1949 Murtaza Bashir started a fine art education as a second batch student in Dhaka Government Institute of Arts (now the Institute of Fine Arts). He wandered in almost all the sectors of art. In almost all aspects of the painting such as drawing, graphics or printmaking, oils, mosaics his roaming spontaneity, he is working from a student life. He worked occasionally in the style of print, with a break. In 1954, he graduated and then in 1956-58 he studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence and then in Paris. Printmaking attracted him after going to paris. Especially, he learned about the creativity of the Intaglio method. He studied mosaic and etching at

École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts (ENSBA) in Paris during 1971–73. In 1970s, his works were in intaglio technique and there were a lot of tonal strokes and diversification intextures. Etching, aquatint and dry point techniques of intaglio successfully expressed his feelings and emotions. According to Fayza Hoque, "Murtaza Baseer presents his age-old theme of mother adoring her child, done with careful lines. This 1973 etching, done in a single plate, is a symbol of hope, and is completed in yellow-ochre and leafy green" (Star weekend magazine, 2009).

Fig. 5: Murtaza Bashir, Epitaph, Aquatint, 1979. Source: Bashir (2015). Bonik barta. https://www.bonikbarta.com/home/news_description/238319/ Examples for Murtaza Bashir Artists

While he was in Paris, he got chances to see the print works of experimental etching technique of the contemporary artists. While learning the new form of print in Paris, he showed that renowned artists like Gaya, Rembrandt, Turner, have created a series using more than one form. He was encouraged to work in etching, dry points and aquatint. Bashir signed his talent using a strategy he invented in Aquatint. Generally In this process an aquatint box is used to apply resin powder. Then the powder is at the bottom of the box, a crank or a bellows is used to blow the powder up into the air of the box. When the powder covers the plate, it can be extracted from the box for the next process. But he did not follow this traditional way. Artist Murtaza Bashir did many experiments on etching and aquatint techniques and was successfully created his own style. He used to spread the resin on his plate by hand without blowing it on the plate. Due to this, diversity texture were created. This strategy was very successful especially in abstract print works.This idea is clearly presented in his print work titled 'Epitaph' (See **Fig. 5**).

The art work is presented in the 29.5x24 cm size vertically in etching. Examples of medium experiment can be found here. This work has been printed with deep orange color and there are some black curved lines. Many spruced strokes are presented with a rhythm which express. He portrays nature in his own style using native materials. . Countless white dots are present rhythmically in the form made with white strokes. His print works reflect the matter of monochrome. His smooth and bound use of color adds a peaceful environment to the print works. He always breaks the traditional rules and works in his own style. Always searching for something new, he experimented a lot with these techniques. Some of Murtaza's graphic works are combinations of several techniques. His growing mastery of the medium and his inventive genius soon enables him to venture into domains new to etching and to achieve bold and striking effects. About Epitaph, he says, "I also created another series titled 'The Wall' in 1969. It portrays the ambience of suffocation that engulfed us all. During the War of Liberation, I, along with my wife and our two

daughters, fled to Paris. When I watched the plight of the freedom fighters and common people on television, I was driven by a deep sense of guilt. Then I created the 'Epitaph for the Martyrs' series as my homage to the freedom fighters. The idea of the series struck me when I came across a small stone on the streets of Paris" (Alom, 2017).

Monirul Islam

In the Bangladeshi history of Fine Arts, Printmaking created its influence in the first half of 1960s with the print works of Monirul Islam. Monirul Islam is one of the Bangladeshi artists who live in a foreign country and are internationally acclaimed for representing our Fine Arts to the international audience. Artist Monirul Islam was born in Jamalpur district on 17th August, 1943. His paternal residence was in Chandpur. He passed his childhood days in Kishoreganj as his father worked there. He had passion for fine arts from his childhood though he did not know who an artist is or how one becomes an artist. Sometimes he did carto-oning for school magazines, sometimes he skipping study painted at the back of rickshaw and sometimes he designed posters. Examining printmaking, Islam has found a way out. He established his own language in printmaking what many could not do. Especially, Monirul Islam's etching expresses a different feature. He did his research in fine arts by working with etching and aquatint (Selim, 2007).

Fig. 6: Monirul Islam, *Bangladesh*, Etching on paper, 1973. Source: Monirul Islam, Bangladesh (1973, Mutual Art. (n.d.-b). https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/Bangladesh/EAC8B8F5FC5C31DD1B38446595F9D643

Monirul Islam used simple strokes, form and texture in etching. When he was a student, he worked with water color- he used the wash feature of water color in many print works. It is known as 'Monir's School' in Madrid. At the same time he gave the Bangladeshi fine arts an international recognition. He gradually added new dimensions in his works and tried to include the main themes. It will be clear if one sees his early works (Alom, 2015). In 1970s while Islam was living in Spain he did some art works in black and white using etching, dry point and aquatint techniques. He did not blindly follow the ongoing tradition. Though he was living in Spain, he was connected to his motherland.

Monirul Islam's 'Bangladesh' (See **Fig. 6**) is an example of it. A terrible face of war is portrayed in the art work. The art work is presented in the 56.5x105 cm size horizontally in etching and on paper. The work presents a terrible sight of Bangladeshi war of inde-pendence where numerous human-like forms within the composition creates a strong connection with destruction nation. Monirul Islam's 'Creation of a Nation' (See **Fig. 7**) is another example is presented in

the 42x52 cm size horizontally in etching and aquatint. The presence of skeleton alike human figure is holding the national flag (the map of Bangladesh is in the middle of the flag) whose body is encircled with the flame of war. This picture shows that even when a nation is about to collapse, it can rise again. On the other hand in the upper right side of the art work, a giant is coming through the dark clouds symbolizes the destructive force. The sunlight like the sunflower wants to devour the flame of destruction created by the giant. Under the giant, there is a half picture of a naked woman. Her eyes express the fearful sights of war. Her right hand is at the naked child and her left hand is at the devil as if she wants to save her child from the devil. The misery of mother and child is observed by the naked male figure. His one hand is at his head and he is worriedly looking at the woman. At the lower right side of the picture there is a half-naked woman and there are animal like human figures around her who want to destroy the nation. At the left side of the art work, there is another animal like human figure who wants to cause destruction.

Fig. 7: Monirul Islam, Creation of a Nation, Etching, 1971. Source: Zillur Rahman, S. (Ed.). (1979). Monirul Islam, Contemporary Art Series of Bangladesh-15 (catalogue). Dhaka: Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy.

In the circle of flame, there is a shadow of a woman's face. From this destructive war even animals could not save themselves. In the picture it can be seen that at the lower part a domestic animal cow is holding the half -naked woman's body. Even tigers, donkeys, fishes were not spared from this destructive force. In the every corner of the picture there is dark shadow of the black color, the artist mixing black and white successfully portrayed the terrible sights of war. This picture show how a nation becomes independent through sacrifice and struggle. A famous Cubism artist, Picasso's "Guernica" expresses the terrible sights of war too, Islam's work is partially similar to Picasso's.

Kalidas Karmakar

In 1970s, artist Kalidas Karmakar developed the process of printmaking with different types of experimental works. He was born in 1946 at Niltuli, Faridpur district. Karmakar completed a two-year pre-degree course at Institute of Fine Arts, University of Dhaka. In 1969, he later graduated from Government College of Art & Craft in Kolkata. Receiving government and non-government scholarships, he managed to go abroad. As a result, he acquired huge knowledge regarding printmaking from many countries. In 1981, he got scholarship from France Government and at that time he learnt intaglio printmaking technique. From 1981 to 1984, he was under the supervision of a great artist named Prof. S.W Hayter. He was actually the creator of the famous printmaking "Ateliar-71". From this great artist he learnt multi-color etching technique. After returning from France, he tried to arrange several workshops to train other artists of the country. Actually through these trainings and workshops he wanted to impart his

acquired knowledge regarding etching and aquatint technique. To enhance the practice of printmaking in our country, he established a printmaking studio named Atelier-71(Debnath, 2017).

Fig. 8: Kalidas Karmakar, Subconscious Respect for Martyrs, Etching, m1979. Source: Islam, M. (1996). Drawing and paintings of Liberation War. Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy. https://abahon.weebly.com/uploads/1/0/7/9/1079125/war_71.pdf

Moreover, the memories of liberation war in 1970s also became the subject matter of his pictures. 'Subconscious Respect for Martyrs' (Fig.8) was a print work of Kalidas where he drew the pictures of freedom fighters. Through the picture he tried to show how dedicated they were to sacrifice their lives for the sake of independence. At the same time the pictures showed the pain, sufferings and the agony of the martyrs. He used etching technique to complete it. In the picture a man's face was visible whose eyes were tied with a piece of black cloth. His lips were closed as if he were forced to accept all the situations. His face was also covered with worries. He appeared with a rope in his neck that convey a meaning that he is going to hang. Huge spots of weapons were visible in his back and neck. At the center of his chest in a horizontal geometric form there is a gun and at the lower side in a triangle geometric form there is a figure of a child who is sleeping in its mother's lap. He accepted all the pain silently so that the new generation could get the light of the independence. In the right side of his chin, there is a bird sitting on the corner of the wooden fence. It is showing respect to the martyrs by holding flowers in its beak. He perfectly used the technique of etching in this picture. Both the features of geometric forms and the proper base were applied in the art works. Kalidas was expert in using the technique of intaglio etching, aquatint, sugar aquatint, open byte and viscosity. Contemporary society, their lifestyle, human instinct these all were the subject matters of his pictures (Hamid, 2014).The roots of his works were planted in this country. Every day's life style of Bengali nation, combination of different religions, and their folk arts are the elements of Kalidas's art works.

Limitations of the Study

Research is never without limitations, and this study was no different. We experienced various methodological and personal constraints during the research process. The research concentrates on selected Bangladeshi artists who have made major contributions to intaglio practice throughout liberation war. The research also focuses on intaglio printmaking techniques - such as etching, engraving, drypoint, aquatint, and mezzotint - and does not include an in-depth comparative analysis of other printmaking process

such as relief, lithography, or screen printing. Besides, existing research and articles on intaglio printmaking in Bangladesh are scarce and this lack of prior studies posed challenges during the research process. For this cause, the study depends on journal articles, exhibition catalogues, artist interviews, and institutional publiccations, which may not give extensive historical documentation. Overall, despite these limitations, the study provides a valuable overview of the historical development, technical evolution, artistic significance, and contemporary practice of intaglio printmaking in Bangladesh. Notwithstanding these drawbacks, the study offers a useful summary of the artistic value, technical advancement, historical growth, and current state of intaglio printmaking in Bangladesh.

4. Conclusion

The 1970s was an important chapter for Bangladeshi fine arts. In 1971 when Bangladesh became independent, artists became interested in creating art works about a new born nation and about its people. Many arts works portrayed the fearing memories of the war of independence. Many artists physically took part in the war. After independence, they shared their experiences throughout their works. Artists became independent and their creativity flourished in different mediums of printmaking. The history of art, particularly the intaglio of prints, has not received the same level of attention as the socio-economic examination of politics and economics. But it can be said without a doubt that the intaglio of printmaking was founded in this decade of historical change. Because at this time, the efforts of artists to express the national identity of Bangladesh through the medium of art are rare in history. From that point of view, Monirl Islam's Intaglio works, who worked in the post-Kibria's abstract painting style, seem to be successful. On the other hand, artists Kalidas Karmakar had played important contributions to art creation through various experiments through Intaglio prints. The refined language that we see in the works of these great artists who emerged in the seventies will be exemplary for the next generation of artists in Bangladesh.

5. Author Contributions

K.C.: developed and designed the study, collected and analyzed the data, interpreted the results, and drafted and corresponding the manuscript. S.S.: read and approved the final version of the manuscript. Both approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

6. Acknowledgment

The authors would like to t say that we are blessed by almighty God for having me in this boundless opportunity to complete our research. We are particularly grateful to our institution, teachers, colleagues, and participants for their valuable support, guidance, and cooperation throughout the research process. Finally, our heartfelt appreciation goes to our family for their unwavering support, understanding, and encouragement. Their belief in our abilities has been a constant source of strength.

7. Conflicts of interest

The authors of this research paper declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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Citation: Chakrabarty K., and Shahrin S. (2026). Changes and challenges of contemporary intaglio prints in Bangladesh throughout liberation war, *Br. J. Arts Humanit.*, **8**(5), 849-859. https://doi.org/10.34104/bjah.02608490859

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