

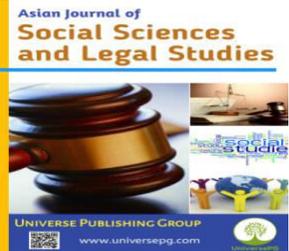


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## Role of Bangladesh National Museum in Preservation of History, Culture and Heritage of Bangladesh

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to assess the role and contributions of the History and Classical Art Department of Bangladesh National Museum in the context of acquisition and preservation of history and heritage of Bengal through analysis of gathered artifacts. This study adopts a comprehensive analytical approach, employing both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The primary data sources include interviews with museum visitors, focus group discussions involving visitors and stakeholders, and key informant interviews with experts and specialists. Secondary data sources consist of museum visitors' comment books, previous stakeholders' opinions, and comment books from mobile exhibitions. Additionally, this research seeks to identify potential avenues of future growth and development within the department. The research has unraveled multifaceted role of the department's key artifacts, namely coins, sculptures, architecture and inscriptions in forming and preserving history. The FGD and KII responses have yielded insightful feedback on the role of these artifacts in ensuring the continuation of history. The responses from the survey, FGD, KII and comments from the content analysis reveal the degree of fascination visitors harbor for the liberation war galleries. Many of these responses have suggested the liberation war gallery is successful in instilling the sense of patriotism among its visitors and inspiring them to cherish the spirit of liberation. The recommendations of this article offer avenues for the museum to further excel and contribute to the preservation of our cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** History, Heritage, Classical art, Sculptures, FGD, Terracotta, Artifact, and Conservation.

### INTRODUCTION:

The Department of History & Classical Art, one of the most prominent curatorial departments of Bangladesh National Museum, was established in 1983. It currently manages a significant portion of the museum's artifacts, accounting for about 78% of the total collection, with 72,998 artifacts out of the total 93,738 collected till the 30<sup>th</sup> of the June, 2022. The collection of this department encompasses a diverse range of the artifacts, including ancient sculptures, terracotta plaques, inscriptions, coins, seals, manu-

scripts, personal mementos, decrees and documents. This department is also responsible for acquisition, collection, conservation and exhibition of objects related to the language movement and the war of liberation, which includes memento of notable personalities. Among the oldest artifacts are small fragments of Paleolithic petrified wood. Notably, among the artifact collections of this department, the coin collection is the largest, encompassing gold, silver, and other coins from various eras of Bangladesh and Indian history. Moreover, the department houses a

notable collection of stone, metal, & wooden sculptures, as well as inscriptions.

The idea of classical art is to glean the history and knowledge of an era bygone, which is to say, every object in possession of such knowledge can qualify as a “classical art.” As such, the idea of classical art is not limited merely to aesthetics. Although treated as an intellectual pursuit, for the post-colonial non-western world, the pursuit of classical art equates to a quest for recovering lost identity and finding the path back to the root. Our subcontinent as a whole is abundant with antiquities that qualify as forms of classical art, ranging from sculptures, architecture to coins and terracotta art. The subcontinent’s civilizational past aside, being the home to a myriad of religion has shaped the subcontinent’s culture, the practices and heritage. As an important region of the subcontinent, Bengal too is home to a vast repository of artifacts, antiquities and important archaeological sites. As the national museum of Bangladesh, Bangladesh National Museum houses an impressive collection of these artifacts in a bid to unearth and preserve the obscure chapters of our history.

### **Review of literature**

#### **Understanding Classical Art and Its Historical Significance**

Vout, (2018:1) defines the classical art as a “battle-ground”. According to her, “Real knowledge” comes not from antiquities that have been ripped from their original context, cleaned and the reconstituted for display in galleries and glass cabinets. “Real knowledge” comes from antiquities that carry their dirt with them. Only if we can trace them back to where the ancients left them-better still, to where they used them-can we appreciate what these artifacts mean and did-give them back their agency (Vout, 2018:1). As Vout, (2018)’s conceptualization of classical art indicates, the idea of classical art is far from being exclusively concerned with aesthetics of antiquities. Rather, it is the knowledge that we extract and preserve from these antiquities is what qualifies them as “classical arts. As Summers, (2013) pointed out, the fixation with aesthetics is a misguided approach toward defining classical art since cultures around the world initially developed in relative or complete isolation. Today, they are no longer isolated and are now engaged in entirely new forms interactions. Therefore, it is important to temporarily set aside discussions about the specific art objects and their

perceived quality and take into consideration the broader history of art as inherently beautiful in its own right. This history, according to the Summers, (2013) encompasses diverse traditions of skill and meaning, each of which has the potential to represent their own culture and traditions. For example, Elsner, (1996) points out that histories of classical art share a tendency of neglecting religious nuances and associations while focusing overly on styles and forms. However, as Kahane, (1967) put it, primitive forms of artworks, including images of humans and animals, served both magical-religious and aesthetic purposes. He further emphasized that many artworks from early epochs carried significant meaning and were created for specific functions, namely ceremonial and ritualistic purposes. This provides us with an insight as to the role religion may have played in fostering art.

These insights make classical arts significant to the formation of the historical narrative. For instance, Zanker, (1988), in his assessment of Augustus Caesar’s political image, contends that visual imagery provides a window into the inner workings of a society, revealing its values and imagination in ways that written sources may not capture. He highlights that images have a significant impact on individuals, including those in positions of power. The way they perceive themselves and their role in public life is heavily influenced by the images they project, which is an essential element of any historical narrative. As Knell, (2007:8) points out, collections of physical objects face challenges over time due to limited resources and inadequate curation. Such neglect can lead to a loss of context and reliability in historical understanding. In contrast, collections of the written words, found in the archives, libraries, and museum files, tend to survive longer while providing more accurate and reliable information uncovered by the historians. Written records are, therefore, more precise, less open to interpretation, and can be directly quoted. Therefore Knell, (2007:8) find these materials (artifacts and art) valuable for historians because they allow them to reconstruct a more accurate understanding of the past, thereby creating historical knowledge.

#### **Classical Art in the Non-Western World**

The Citing Hegel, Bahrani, (2013:7) discusses how during the foundational moment in Enlightenment aesthetic thinking, a distinction was created between

high art and primitive art based on a geographical & temporal axis, where East was attributed to “ancient” whereas West to “modern.” While Bahrani, (2013) draws upon Hegel’s argument that European aesthetics and self-identity could only be constructed owing to the East, there is a lack of emphasis on the actual artworks & their ontological status in antiquity in this process. Likewise, according to Winter, (2020). European understandings & representations of Asian religions, particularly in the context of China & India, were heavily premised upon stereotypical preconceived notions of European modernity. However, many scholars have argued against the notion in the context of the coloniality. Mathur and Singh, (2015:4) assert that the development of museums in former colonies played out differently from those in European metropolises. While European museums were influenced by democratic and historical processes, colonial museums were shaped by colonial patronage and the acquisition of material objects for imperial knowledge projects (Mathur and Singh, 2015:4). As such, they were often seen as lesser counterparts to the exemplary European institutional paradigm, a sentiment that persists to the present day. Capistrano-Baker, (2015) however, the interestingly points out a different dimension which separates western history of art from their non-western counterpart. She discussed how the study of artistic heritage takes on a different significance in cultures with a colonial history. According to the Capistrano-Baker, (2015) for these cultures, examining their artistic legacy is not merely an academic pursuit, but rather a deeply personal and idealized quest to reclaim their authentic, precolonial identity. It can also be seen as a collective effort to construct a shared national identity. Recovering cultural traditions and their visual expressions, which have been obscured by the centuries of colonial influence, is closely intertwined with issues of identity & national belonging. Therefore, a fundamental conflict exists between the Western tradition of the supposedly “objective” art historical analysis, typically conducted by outsiders studying non-Western art, and the more emotionally charged and subjective search for lost identities and meanings by those who were the formerly colonized.

### **Classical Arts of Bengal and the Subcontinent**

Asher, (1980) contends that Indian art is not a singular style, but rather a fusion of Western, Middle Eastern, and Far Eastern artistic influences. Over UniversePG | [www.universepg.com](http://www.universepg.com)

time, it evolved from a primitive form and gradually absorbed these external influences. This fusion is evident in various forms of art, including architecture, sculpture, and painting. As a landscape with diverse culture and enriched civilization, the Indian subcontinent has always been lush with antiquities of major cultural and historical significance. Alongside being the home to one of oldest civilization in the world, the Indian subcontinent is also the melting pot of three major religions in the world: Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam as well many other religions (see Kossak and Watts, 2001). Beginning in the third millennium B.C., the oldest centers of Indian culture were found in the Indus River Valley, and artifacts from this time period generally consisted of stonework and inscriptions from an undecipherable language, until the arrival of the Sanskrit-speaking people near the middle of the second millennium (Stadtner, 1990). Moreover, as Nayagam, (1975) pointed out, the cultural development of South and Southeast Asia was nurtured by prosperous & influential dynasties during the zenith of their power and affluence. In the history of each of these countries, there were phases when victorious rulers or dynasties played a crucial role in inspiring and activities in the various artistic pursuits, including town construction, the creation of religious and civic architecture, sculpting, painting, metalwork, bronze craftsman-ship, & other arts and crafts (see Nayagam, 1975). Inscriptions from the Hindu-Buddhist era, including those attributed to the Chandras, the Varmans, the Senas, Isvaraghosha, & Damodara, serve as primary historical sources and provide significant insights into the dynasty of their origins, the physical characteristics, linguistic attributes, script forms, ruling authorities, & intended functions (Majumdar, 1929).

The earliest form of Indian art emerged between 300 to 800 AD as part of the Gupta dynasty and continued to evolve, which by the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD, had transformed into Pala art (Asher 1980). One of the earliest Pala art was found in the image of the goddess Chandi, bearing an inscription dating back near the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century (French, 1924). This image was found in the district of Tippera in Eastern Bengal, currently known as Tripura (French, 1924). Sculptures constitute one of the earliest classical artifacts unearthed in the Bengal region as well as the subcontinent. According to Guy, (2007:13), the art of sculpture in the subcontinent was intricately connected to the domain of the sacred. Its emergence

as a distinct form of art can be said to have stemmed from an ancient practice of the crafting standalone images associated with the reverence of the nature spirits. Marcus, (1967) asserts that Indian sculptures possess distinctively regional features and style, as well as material, in contrast to their western counterparts. Metal and the precious as well semi-precious stones were materials of choice in many of the Indian sculptures (Marcus, 1967). Nearly all sculptures from Bihar and West Bengal as well as Bangladesh are carved from a single type of dark grey or black rock (Asher, 1998). According to the Asher, (1998) sculptures from the Pala period (from mid-8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century) are most commonly found in in Bangladeshi districts close to the Padma River, which is to say, in Dinajpur, Rangpur, Rajshahi, Bogura, Dhaka and Cumilla Districts. Another form of art dominant in the subcontinent since the ancient times is terracotta. Showrov, (2009) estimates that terracotta art began to grow prevalent in the subcontinent around the Neolithic age, and flourished in Bengal throughout the early middle ages. According to Jayaswal and Krishna, (1986:1), clay was one of the most popular media of artistic expression in the subcontinent owing to its availability, cost-effectiveness, and easy-to-mould elastic nature. This use of clay in baked figurines is what became terra-cotta art (Jayaswal & Krishna, 1986:1). Haque, (1997) writes that the early terracottas of Bengal offer an extraordinary variety of themes & subjects. They not only represent manifold affairs of social life that the artists could see around them, but often scenes conceived with imagination. They are conveniently classified as individual male and female figures often described as Yakshas, Yakshis, Apsaras, Kinnaras etc., animals, birds, toys of animal figures, some of which were recognized as emblems of cults, narrative plaques representing legends, mythology, erotic motifs, decorated pottery, & seals and sealings (Haque, 1997; Hasnat and Ahmed, 2023).

Haque, (1997)'s writing reveals that the terracotta art was a particularly flourishing form of art in ancient Bengal as well as one of the earliest forms of art to have survived to date. Not only Hindu and Buddhist architecture, but Muslim architecture in Bengal particularly around 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries also share a distinctive use of ornamental terracotta, which according to Waez, (2007) was an independent & distinct development rather than influence of Persian traditions. These architectures display a unique blend of

Islamic as well as the indigenous elements (Alamgir, 2013). For instance, the practice of constructing Muslim tombs originated during the Sultani period and has persisted to the present day (Begum, 2015).

According to Begum, (2015) the artistic and diverse architectural attributes of Bangladeshi Muslim tombs have pervasively influenced Muslim and Bengali cultures. It is noteworthy that ancient Bengal blends a unique style of architecture encompassing Islamic, Hindu and the Buddhist style. McCutchion, (1972:1) classifies the history of religious architecture of Bengal in three distinct phases, the first of which he labels "early-Hindu" period (up to the 12<sup>th</sup> century), the second being "sultanate" (from 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century), and lastly, "Hindu revival" (from 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century). This change in trend explains the myriad of architectural style encompassing multiple religions commonly found in this region. A prominent site of historical and archaeological significance in Bangladesh is the Somapura Mahavihara, which is also a site famous for its terracotta plaques. Also known as Paharpur Buddhavihara, the Somapura monastery was built around 8<sup>th</sup> century A. D. under the Pala kings of Bengal (Law, 1945). Ahmed and Sanday, (1986) sees this monumental site as a testament to "one of the great epochs in the development of the Buddhism in Asia" (Ahmed and Sanday, 1986).

Somapura Mahavihara is far from being the only location of historical significance. Objects like semi-precious beads, the Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW), punch-marked coins, Janapada coins & terracotta artifacts were uncovered from two archaeologically reputed villages, Wari and Bateshwar, located in Narsingdi district of Bangladesh (Rahman & Pathan, 2013). Black-and-Red Ware, a distinctive type of pottery commonly associated with the Chalcolithic Age, has also been unearthed from Wari-Bateshwar (Rayhan, 2011).

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to assess the role and contributions of the History & Classical Art Department of Bangladesh National Museum in the context of acquisition and preservation of the history and heritage of Bengal through analysis of gathered artifacts and input from diverse sources, including general visitors, civil society, field experts, and researchers. Additionally, this research seeks to identify potential avenues of future growth and development within

the department. The findings of this study will offer valuable insights to the general public, civil society,

experts, & researchers, and contribute to the enhancement of the department's activities.

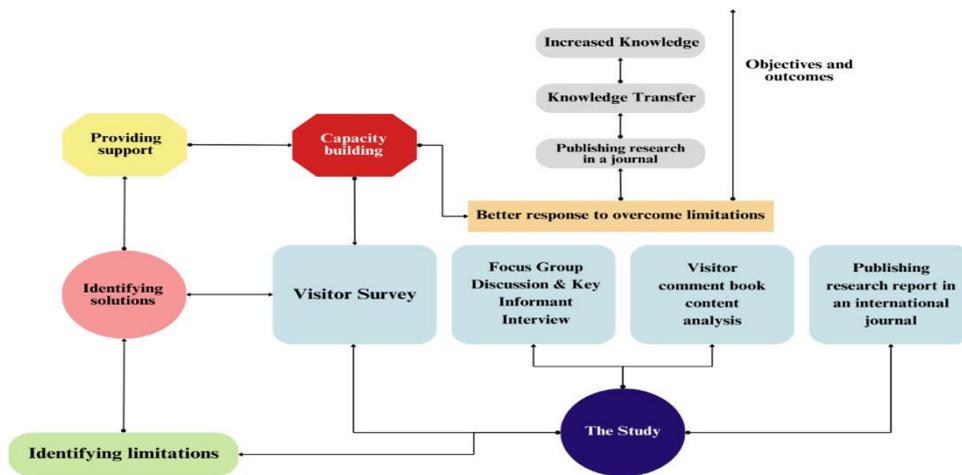


Fig. 1: Expected outcome of the study.

**METHODOLOGY:**

This study adopts a comprehensive analytical approach, employing both quantitative & qualitative research methods to delve into the underlying meanings and concepts associated with the main issues. The primary data sources include interviews with museum visitors, focus group discussions involving visitors & the stakeholders, and key informant interviews with experts and specialists. Secondary data

sources consist of museum visitors' comment books, previous stakeholders' opinions, & comment books from mobile exhibitions. An inductive thematic approach was employed to analyze the data and derive research outcomes. Additionally, quantitative data were analyzed using the statistical software SPSS. The data collection methodology has been outlined in the following flow chart.

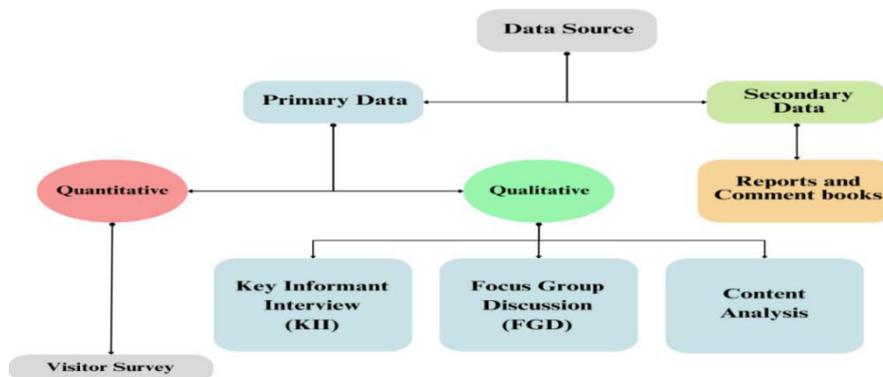


Fig. 2: Data collection methodologies.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:**

**Purpose and Nature of the Visiting Bangladesh National Museum**

The survey reveals that 75% visitors choose to visit Bangladesh National Museum hoping to know more about history and culture of the nation, whereas nearly 11% visit for learning purpose. Almost 11% visitors visit Bangladesh National Museum hoping to spend time. In contrast, only 3.3% of visitors actually visit the museum for conducting research. The statistics indicate that Bangladesh National Museum provides an appealing collection of historical arti- UniversePG | [www.universepg.com](http://www.universepg.com)

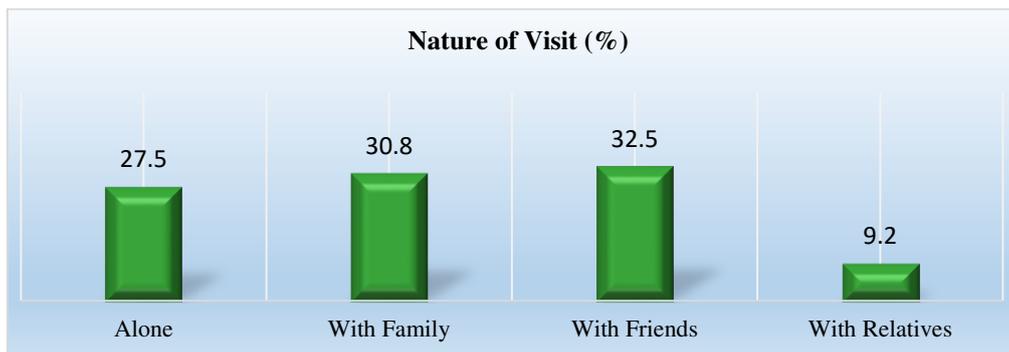
facts and exhibitions to the attract a very significant number of visitors aspiring to gain greater insights into the country's history and culture. However, the number of visitors visiting for research purposes is notably low, suggesting there are yet rooms for improving Bangladesh National Museum's facilities to be more research conducive and highlighting the available facilities for researchers. Additional measures can be adopted to accommodate the number of visitors hoping to spend a quality time with their friends and families.



**Fig. 3:** Purpose of visiting museum.

According to the survey data, approximately 27% of the visitors visited the museum alone. On the other hand, nearly 31% visitors opted to visit with their families, whereas 32.5% visitors chose to visit with their friends. Only 9.2% visitors chose to visit with their other relatives. The statistics suggest that a

majority of the visitors prefer visiting the museum with their friends or family. A significant number of visitors also choose to visit on their own. However, a very small number of the visitors come to visit with relatives.



**Fig. 4:** Nature of visiting museum.

### Popular Artifacts in the Manuscripts and the Documents Gallery

Based on the responses to the survey questionnaire, among the artifacts displayed in Gallery 33: Manuscripts & Documents, around 19% visitors liked the “Kabin Nama from 1923” the most and nearly 18% liked the “Deed of self-sale” the most. Almost 45% visitors, on the other hand, liked the “Handwritten Qur’an” most. In contrast, around 7% visitors liked the “Mahabharat”, whereas 3.4% visitors liked the “Shahanama” and “Kamil pass certificate” respectively. Only 2.5% visitors liked the “Ramayan” and the “Picture of Eid-Muharram”. The statistics reveal that the “Handwritten Qur’an” is very popular among the visitors compared to the other displays Gallery 33: Manuscripts & Documents. The “Kabin Nama from 1923” and the “Deed of self-sale” are also fairly popular among the visitors.

### Preservation of the History from 1757 to 1947 Through Photographs

According to the survey responses, almost 81% visitors agree that history and culture are being preserved by narrating the emergence of Bengal between 1757-1947 through the rare photographs and artifacts in the Gallery 37: Struggle for Liberation (1757-1947). On the contrary, 4.3% visitors did not agree with that sentiment, whereas nearly 7% visitors believed it to be partially true. Around 8% visitors, on the other hand, refused to comment on the matter. The statistics indicate that the narration of emergence of Bengal between 1757-1947 through rare photographs and artifacts Gallery 37: Struggle for Liberation (1757-1947) has been a successful initiative given the vast majority of visitors’ agreement to the notion.

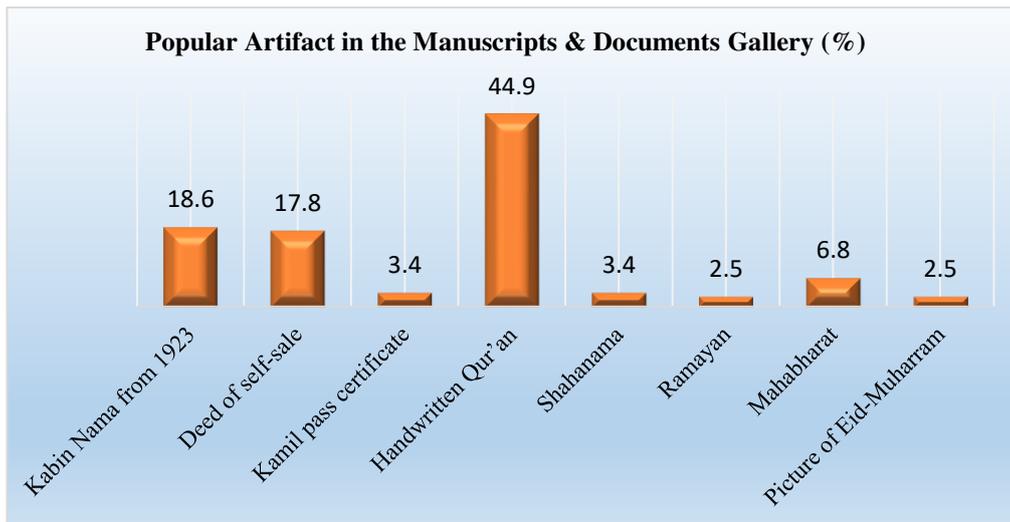


Fig. 5: Popular artifact in the manuscripts & documents gallery.



Fig. 6: Preservation of history 1757-1947.

**Popular Artifacts in the Struggle for Liberation (1757-1947) Gallery**

Based on the responses to the survey questionnaire, among the artifacts displayed in Gallery 37: Struggle for Liberation (1757-1947), 22.5% visitors liked the “Indigo boiling pot” the most. 21.7% visitors liked the “Letter of Rabindranath” and “Weapons from the Swadeshi Movement” the respectively. Almost 27% visitors, on the other hand, liked the “Sword of Siraj

ud-Daulah” most. In contrast, around 7% visitors liked the “Gold coin of the Mughal emperor Shah Alam”. Given the very similar percentage of the artifacts in Gallery 37: Struggle for Liberation (1757-1947), the statistics indicates that apart from the “Gold coin of Mughal emperor Shah Alam”, which has a relatively low popularity, all the artifacts are significantly popular among the visitors.

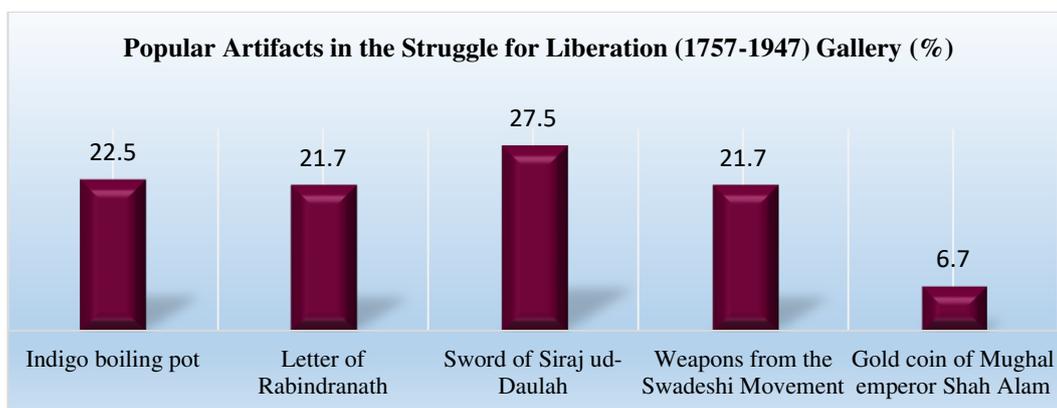


Fig. 7: Popular artifacts in the struggle for liberation (1757-1947) gallery.

### Preservation of Liberation War History through Photographs

According to the survey responses, almost the 85% visitors agree that history and culture of Bangladesh’s liberation war are being preserved by the narrating the history of the liberation war through rare photographs and artifacts in Gallery 38: Struggle for Liberation (1948-1971). On the contrary, 5.2% visitors did not agree with that sentiment, whereas

nearly 4% visitors believed it to be partially true. Around 5% visitors, on the other hand, refused to comment on the matter. The statistics indicate that the narration of the history of Bangladesh’s liberation war through rare photographs and artifacts in Gallery 38: Struggle for Liberation (1948-1971) has been a successful initiative given the vast majority of visitors’ agreement to the notion.

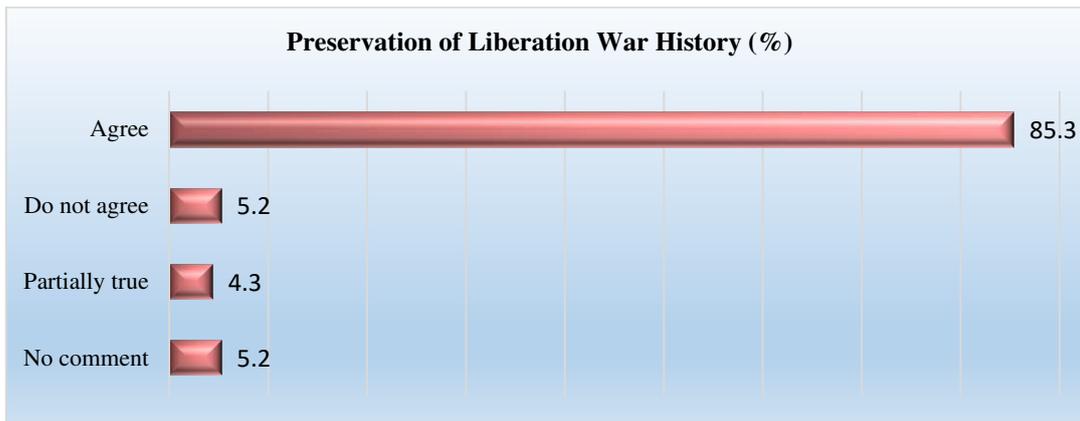


Fig. 8: Preservation of liberation war history.

### Popular Artifacts in the Struggle for Liberation (1948-1971) Gallery

Based on the responses to the survey questionnaire, among the artifacts displayed in Gallery 38: Struggle for Liberation (1948-1971), 39.5% visitors liked the “Bloody shirt of language martyr Shafiur Rahman” the most. 7.6% visitors liked the “Booklets & Magazines related to the liberation war” and “Weapons used in the liberation war” respectively. Nearly 13% visitors liked the “First flag of Bangladesh” and around 11% liked the “Table of surrender and related photographs”. Nearly the 7% visitors favored the “Artifacts of Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra”, 5%

liked the “Torture device” and around 4% liked the “Photographs and deeds related to the liberation war”. In contrast, around the 2% visitors liked the “Photographs of refugees” and 1.7% visitors liked the “Letters from freedom fighters”. Only 0.8% visitors liked the “Chorompotro”. The statistics reveal that the “Bloody shirt of language martyr Shafiur Rahman” is the most popular artifact among visitors. The “First flag of Bangladesh” and the “Table of surrender & related photographs” are also moderately popular compared to the other artifacts displayed in Gallery 38: Struggle for Liberation (1948-1971).

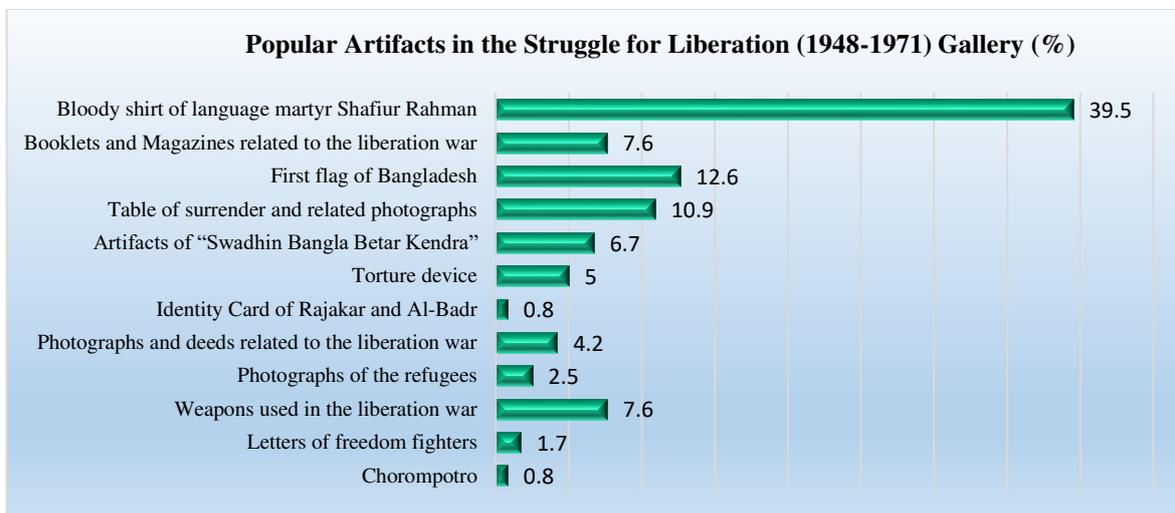
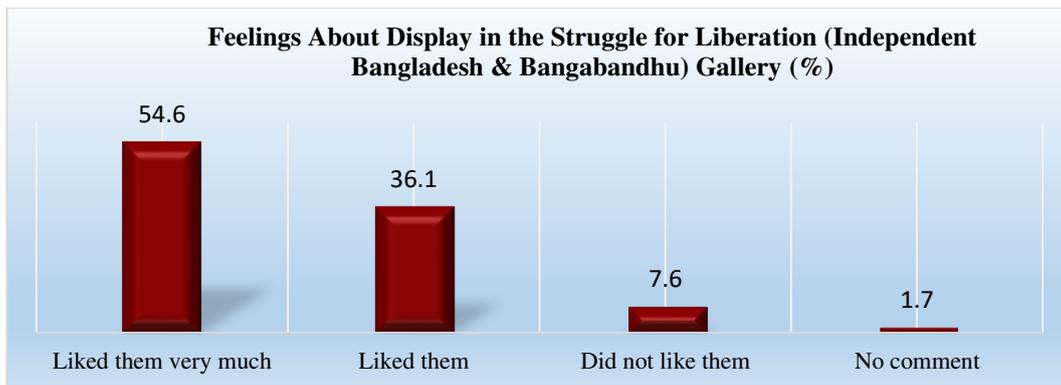


Fig. 9: Popular artifacts in the struggle for liberation (1948-1971) gallery.

**Feelings about Display in the Struggle for Liberation (Independent Bangladesh & Bangabandhu) Gallery**

The survey responses reveal that nearly 55% of the visitors were very appreciative of how the life and achievements of the Father of the Nation was being narrated through rare photographs and papers in Gallery 40: Struggle for the Liberation (Independent Bangladesh & Bangabandhu) and nearly 36% of the

visitors liked them. In contrast, around 8% visitors did not like the display, whereas nearly 2% visitors chose to refrain from commenting. The statistics indicate that the narration of the life and achievements of the Father of Nation through rare photographs and papers in the Gallery 40: Struggle for Liberation (Independent Bangladesh and Bangabandhu) has been a successful initiative given the vast majority of visitors’ favorable impression.

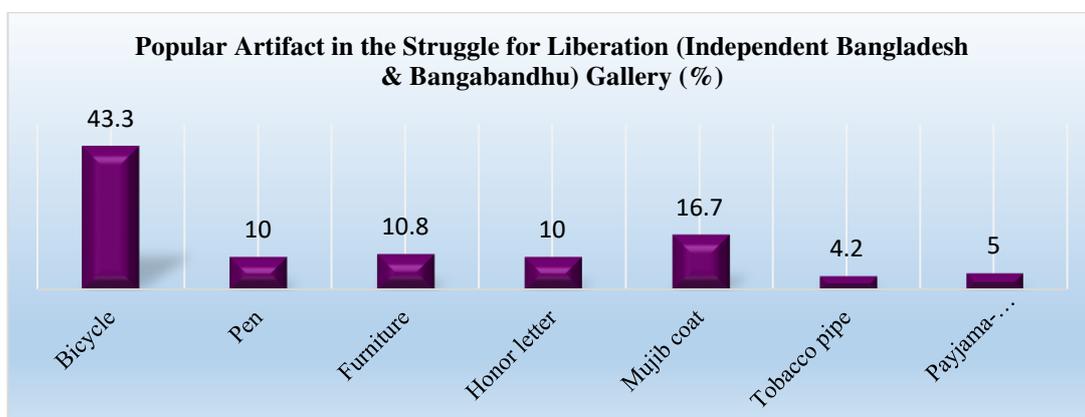


**Fig. 10:** Feelings about display in the struggle for liberation (Independent Bangladesh & Bangabandhu) gallery.

**Popular Artifacts in the Struggle for Liberation (Independent Bangladesh and the Bangabandhu) Gallery**

Based on the responses to the survey questionnaire, among the artifacts displayed in Gallery 40: Struggle for Liberation (Independent Bangladesh & Bangabandhu), around 43% visitors liked the “cycle” most & nearly 17% visitors liked “Mujib Coat”. Approximately 10% visitors found the “Pen”, “Honor letter” and “Furniture” to be most appealing. On the contrary, only 5% visitors liked the “Payjama-Panjabi”

and 4.3% liked the “Tobacco pipe” most. The statistics indicate that the “Bicycle” is the most popular artifact among visitors compared to the other artifacts displayed in Gallery 40: Struggle for Liberation (Independent Bangladesh and Bangabandhu). The similar percentage of other artifacts indicate they are almost equally popular, although compared to the “Bicycle”, they are evidently less appealing to the visitors. The “Tobacco pipe”, in contrast, has a very low popularity along with the “Payjama-Panjabi”.



**Fig. 11:** Popular artifact in the struggle for liberation (Independent Bangladesh & Bangabandhu) gallery.

**Popular Artifacts in the Struggle for Liberation (Genocide & Intellectual Massacre) Gallery**

Based on the responses to the survey questionnaire, among the artifacts displayed in Gallery 39: Struggle UniversePG | [www.universepg.com](http://www.universepg.com)

for Liberation (Genocide & Intellectual Massacre) nearly 34% visitors found the “Memorial of the Birshreshtho” most appealing, whereas around 32% visitors liked the “Memorial of the intellectuals” the

most. In contrast, around 9% visitors liked the “List of the Rao Forman Ali’s intellectual massacre” and “Bust sculpture of the Birshreshtho” respectively, and around 8% visitors liked the “Fragments of the first Shaheed Minar”. Only 6.7% visitors liked the “Diorama of Boddhobhumi”. The statistics indicate that among the artifacts displayed in the Gallery 39:

Struggle for the Liberation (Genocide & Intellectual Massacre), the “Memorial of the Birshreshtho” and the “Memorial of intellectuals” are most popular among visitors. The other artifacts are moderately popular, however, compared to the previous two artifacts, they are found to be less appealing by the visitors.

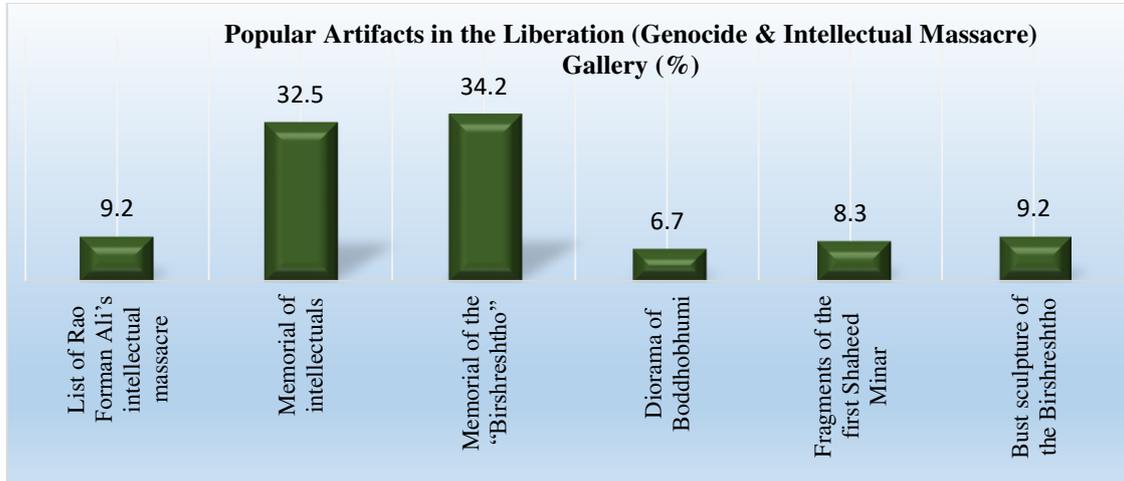


Fig. 12: Popular artifacts in the liberation (Genocide & Intellectual Massacre) gallery.

**Martyred Intellectual Memorial in the Struggle for Liberation (Genocide & Intellectual Massacre) Gallery**

Based on the responses to the survey questionnaire, around 96% of the visitors share the opinion that the martyred intellectual memorial in Gallery 39: Struggle for Liberation (Genocide & Intellectual Massacre) accurately depicts the genocide and violence committed by the Pakistani army in 1971, whereas

only 4.2% visitors think otherwise. The statistics indicate that the martyred intellectual memorial displayed in the Gallery 39: Struggle for Liberation (Genocide & Intellectual Massacre) plays a very successful role in evoking the memories of brutal violence and genocide committed by the Pakistani army during the liberation war given the very high percentage of affirmative response.

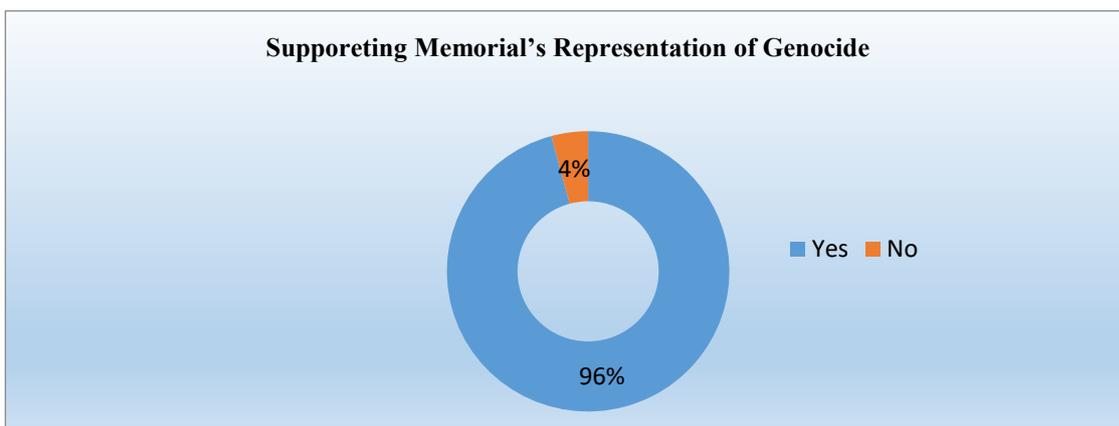


Fig. 13: Supporting memorial's representation of genocide.

**Perception about the Printing Machine on the Premises**

The survey responses reveal that nearly 57% visitors liked the printing machine of the country's first constitution located on the museum premises very much, whereas around 35% visitors liked it. On the con-

trary, only around 8% visitors chose to refrain on commenting. It is, however, noteworthy that there has been no visitor who did not like the printing machine according to the survey responses. The statistics indicate that the printing machine of the first constitution of Bangladesh, which is located within

the premises of the Bangladesh National Museum outside the main building, is a very popular display among the visitors given the majority of the responses were in support of it.

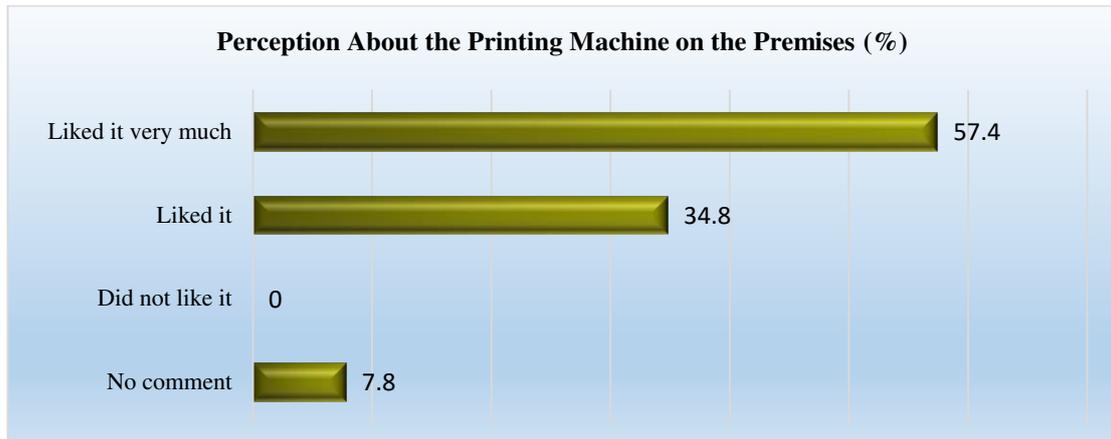


Fig. 14: Perception about the printing machine on the premises.

**Rating the Galleries**

The survey includes a segment dedicated to evaluating the visitors’ opinion on each of the gallery managed by the Department of History & Classical Art. The ratings reflect the appeal of each gallery to the visitors, the general perception pertaining to the artifacts displayed within, the facilities, and overall

impression as well as any dissatisfaction a visitor might have after their visits to these galleries. The ratings have been provided in the form of a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 to indicate the overall level of the satisfaction of the visitors. A comprehensive summary of the ratings provided by the participants of the survey has been presented below.

Table 1: Rating of the Galleries.

Gallery Information	Rating (Rounded %)					Weighted Avg.
	5	4	3	2	1	
Name of Galleries						
Terracotta Artifacts	32	33	21	7	7	3.76
Sculpture-1 (Metal)	32	35	20	10	3	3.83
Sculpture-2 (Stone)	31	37	17	10	5	3.79
Architecture	32	25	29	10	4	3.71
Inscriptions	40	26	23	10	1	3.94
Coins, Medals & Ornaments	53	30	11	3	3	4.27
Manuscripts & Documents	49	35	12	3	1	4.28
Struggle for Liberation (1757-1947)	57	22	14	6	1	4.28
Struggle for Liberation (1948-1971)	56	27	14	2	1	4.35
Struggle for Liberation (Genocide & Intellectual Massacre)	58	27	11	2	2	4.37
Struggle for Liberation (Independent Bangladesh & Bangabandhu)	64	20	11	3	2	4.41

Based on a weighted average calculation of ratings for each gallery, Gallery of Struggle for Liberation (Independent Bangladesh & Bangabandhu) has the highest weighted average, indicating its high popularity among the visitors. Based on the high weighted average, it is notable that the galleries dedicated to the liberation war, are the most popular, followed closely by Gallery on Manuscripts & Documents and Gallery on Coins, Medals & Ornaments. Gallery on the Architecture appears to be the least popular among the 11 galleries under the Department of History & Classical Art, with the lowest weighted average rating.

**Opinion of the Civil Society**

The responses from the Focus Group Discussion and Key Informant Interview have been affirmative followed by the numerous prudent recommendations. Participants has remarked that this department plays a vital role in the preservation of history and heritage. The department has published various catalogs based on the artifacts under its management. Further publication of descriptive artifact catalogs would allow a wider presentation of the department’s role to the public. The participants of the Focus Group Discussion have expressed support for the idea of establishing a sculpture park within the premises of

Bangladesh National Museum. They see it as a commendable initiative and believe that the displaying sculptures in open spaces can be beneficial for educational purposes. One of the participants remarked that such sculptures used to be displayed openly during the time of Dhaka Museum (then known as Dacca Museum), as such, a sculpture park in a similar fashion would be an excellent choice. However, there were concerns about security and possible vandalism among some of the participants. The participants shared the sentiment that is essential to ensure the deciphered inscriptions are labelled both in Bangla and in English. Descriptive labels would improve the audience's understanding and attract them to read further. Most importantly, emphasizing informativeness and descriptiveness will increase the inscriptions' significance. The participants have unanimously agreed that there is a need to establish a separate gallery for coins. One of the participants pointed out that coins constitute over 60 percent of the artifacts, with a total collection of approximately 58000 coins. However, only 850 of them are currently in display. Another participant remarked that gold coins have not been put out for display although the department has a collection of over 747 gold coins. Creating a dedicated coin gallery would allow for a multi-dimensional exhibition of currency artifacts, benefiting students, teachers, & researchers alike. As such, it is necessary to establish a separate coin gallery. According participants, Bangladesh National Museum is effectively carrying out the tasks of artifact collection, preservation, & exhibition. However, there is a need to further engage officers in research activities. It is recommended to increase the allocation for the research sector. Another participant expressed that the History & Classical Art Department of Bangladesh National Museum is playing a commendable role in preserving the country's history and heritage. However, with the increasing number of monuments, there is a need to construct a new building to display at least 50 percent of the preserved monuments adequately.

### **Opinion of the Experts**

The respondents of the Key Informant Interview shared the consensus that the department is playing a paramount role in preserving the history and culture of our nation by engaging the public and creating cultural consciousness. As identified by a former keeper of the Department of History & Classical Art, the rich collection of artifacts housed within the

department, which includes a myriad of coins, inscriptions, sculptures, manuscripts, terracotta and others, play an instrumental role in forming historical narratives. As such, being responsible for the conservation of such priceless artifacts puts the department in the position of shouldering a key responsibility to preserve our history and culture. According to the respondents of the Key Informant Interview, terracotta plaques and artifacts showcased in Gallery-16 contribute significantly to the formation of religious and cultural history; these artifacts play a crucial role in the construction of historical narratives. The respondents unanimously acknowledged the necessity of procuring more of the artifacts from Wari-Bateshwar for the purpose of preserving our history and culture given they are vital elements of our historical heritage. Respondents insightfully remarked that Wari-Bateshwar is a representative of the ancient civilization fostered in this region and this place has already contributed immensely to the excavation of archeological sites. As such, acquiring more artifacts from this location is of vital importance to conserve our history and culture. The respondents affirmed the significant role of the sculptures in contributing to the formation of our history. As the respondents pointed out, these sculptures serve as symbols of our historical tradition and culture. Accordingly, they are markers of forgotten chapters of our history, making them essential components of shaping the history of a nation, sculptures often contain inscriptions which provide greater insights into their era of origin, which is a significant contribution to history and heritage preservation. The respondents have avidly praised the ancient architectural practices of Bangladesh. As testament to our enriched historical heritage, it is imperative to take active measures to bring out more of these architectural wonders before the visitors. The participants recommended curating the photographs in chronological sequence while adding more relevant photographs, which would make for a beautiful presentation and successfully draw out the significance of our architecture craft.

The respondents shared the consensus that it is imperative to make the information available in both Bangla and English languages, it would allow both domestic and international visitors to learn in-depth about the inscriptions and their significance. These inscriptions are perhaps the strongest testaments to our rich historical heritage, comprising of languages

encompassing Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit or other forms of language used in ancient Bengal. Presenting the deciphered texts in both Bangla and English would make this precious knowledge available to a wider range of audience. According to the key informants, coins play a unique role differing from every other form of artifact in the context of history construction, as they allow a closer glimpse to the situation of their contemporary era. The use of coins made of metal were prevalent in these bygone eras. Affluent rulers would often issue gold coins in their names. Besides, the custom of bestowing awards also existed for rewarding bravery. Coins & medals, therefore, speak much of lost history. The respondents have unanimously agreed that there is a need to establish a separate gallery for coins, they pointed out that the department houses a total collection of approximately 58000 coins, which require a separate gallery for display. The opinions from the respondents reflect their deep admiration for this museum.

However, some concerns have been expressed, particularly pertaining to the limited display capacity and the need to expand galleries. According to the respondents, although the photographs of liberation war gallery are adequately preserving our history of liberation, there remains room for further enrichment. Although the respondents have acknowledged the gallery's role in adeptly preserving the memory of martyred intellectuals, they have stressed the necessity of collecting more exhibits. The respondents have also stressed on the necessity of conducting research and engaging the museum officers in further research initiatives through providing additional opportunities.

#### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The responses from the survey reveal the degree of fascination of visitors for the liberation war galleries. Many of these responses have suggested the liberation war gallery is successful in instilling the sense of patriotism among its visitors and inspiring them to cherish the spirit of liberation. Keeping future development in mind, the following proposals can be taken into consideration for the Department of History & Classical Art to reach greater heights in its role. These recommendations offer avenues for the museum to further excel and contribute to the preservation of our cultural heritage. Firstly, the matter of expanding gallery space should be given greater attention. As the largest curatorial department with a

collection of 72,998 out of 93,738 of the museum's total artifacts, the department houses enough artifacts for a separate museum. The existing gallery space of the department falls far too short of meeting the requirement for such an enormous number of artifacts. As expansion is a long-term process, department may take into consideration allocating these artifacts to some of the branch museums periodically, or arrange frequent thematic special exhibitions to bring these artifacts into public attention. Secondly, artifact-based research should be given highest priority. The department is highly resourceful in terms of artifacts with historical significance, which ensures a large avenue of research. Lastly, proposal of the establishing a separate coin gallery should be taken into consideration owing to the fact that nearly 60% of the department's collection consists of coins. To address once more the research inquiries posited at the initial stage of this paper, the Department of History & Classical Art is holding a crucial position in ensuring the preservation of our history and cultural heritage.

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#### **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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