

Subodh: A Pluralistic Voice of Dissidents [2017–Present]

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KEYWORDS

Subodh; Street Art; Graffiti; Graphic Narrative; Activist Art; Politics; Censorship; Bangladesh

ABSTRACT

This paper examines Subodh, a popular graffiti series produced by unknown artists in the Bengal region in 2017. The protagonist who gave his name to this graffiti series is an archetypal middle-class, subaltern Bengali male figure who appeared on walls in stencil and spray paint (as well as in print in digital form), animating the streetscapes of the capital city of Dhaka in the nation-state of Bangladesh; images of Subodh also appeared in neighbouring Calcutta, India. The graffiti series is titled “HOBEDI?” (Might it Happen?): the image of a powerful male body appears mostly with graphic inscriptions that addresses the need to flee but also to take dynamic action. This image, a kind of Bengali ‘everyman,’ speaks to the horror felt in response to the creeping censorship of the Bangladeshi government and the urgency of escaping from a dystopic nation. The image’s versatility in capturing the diverse relationality of its many viewers has made it an indelible icon of the oppressed – as well as a response to the political situations in Bangladesh and India.

To understand the emergence of this archetypal image of Subodh firstly in Dhaka, one must understand Bangladesh’s complex socio-political history. The nation of Bangladesh—first colonized by the British (1858–1947), and then passed on to Pakistani control (1947–1971)—attained independence only 51 years ago. This region has had a continual history of anti-authoritarian movements for centuries. Bangladeshi street walls have been a canvas for creative activism, and the image of Subodh offers a window into the contemporary graffiti scene of the urban cityscape. The many images of Subodh, each one carrying subtle nuances of visual text and image, shed light on the response to the ever-present forces of censorship and authoritarian backlash across South Asia. I examine how the perceived governmental suppression of freedom and the impact of communal trauma stemming from recent socio-political incidents in Bangladesh, inform on contemporary Bangladeshi activist arts. This artistic phenomenon gained widespread popularity among the Bengali audience from 2017 to the present, at a particularly important moment in the history of Bangladesh. Subodh’s widespread popularity in Bangladesh

indicates how activist artists politically engage with this imagined character by developing an encoded visual language to criticize the authoritarian government. The appearance of his image in Calcutta offers proof that this type of archetypal text-image creation offers artists potent ways to express their response to present socio-political realities.

“Did you know? A spectre is haunting the walls of Dhaka and Calcutta.”¹ Upala Sen, *The Telegraph Online*, 2017

The spectre of a haggard, bearded, forlorn young man holding a cage haunts many of the walls of the crowded zones of Dhaka and Calcutta. From walls to online social media platforms, his melancholic appearance invades the psyche of oppressed and impoverished city dwellers. This despondent average, middle-class young man is Subodh.² The word ‘Subodh’ is a Bengali³ name, meaning ‘good sense, good lesson, or conscience.’⁴

Subodh is a series of graffiti titled “HOBEKI?”, which translates to “Might it Happen?”⁵ In 2017, the Subodh series began appearing in and around the walls of the crowded and industrial zones of Dhaka city—in areas like Tejgaon, Agargaon, and the University of Dhaka.⁶ Subodh, the protagonist of this series, is a forlorn young man with a beard and messy hair, wearing tattered jeans,

¹ Upala Sen, “HOBEKI?” *The Telegraph Online*, August 20, 2017, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/7-days/hobeki/cid/1315826#>.

² Pantha, “Why Is the ‘Banksy of Bangladesh’ Asking Someone Called Subodh to Run Away?” *Global Voice*, June 10, 2017, <https://globalvoices.org/2017/06/10/why-is-the-banksy-of-bangladesh-asking-someone-called-subodh-to-run-away/>. In a report to the Daily Bangla Tribune, journalist Tushar Abdullah asked why Subodh needs to run. In his opinion, Subodh represents an ordinary day-laborer who must work hard to survive in this complex social context, and indeed wants to run away from it. Abdullah’s opinion supports my idea of Subodh.

³ Nasir Islam, “Islam and National Identity: The Case of Pakistan and Bangladesh,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13, no. 1 (February 1981): 55–72. Bengali is a shared language and culture of the Bengal region. Despite the divisive political history, the people living in this geopolitical region are collectively known as Bengali. Situated in South Asia, the Bengal region today remains divided between the Indian state of West Bengal and the nation of Bangladesh. The Bengal region was first colonized, then partitioned by the British, who allocated the western part to the new republic of India in 1947 and handed the eastern part to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The animating principle behind the partition was religion: the western region, predominantly Hindu, came under India’s domain and became the state of West Bengal, while the eastern region, mostly Muslim, became East Pakistan. The nation of Bangladesh achieved its independence on December 16, 1971.

⁴ Mahrubia T. Mowtushi, “The Urban Experience of Displacement: Re-Viewing Dhaka through Street Art and Graphic Narrative,” *South Asian Review* 39, 1–2 (30 Oct 2018): 227–38.

⁵ In Bangladesh, people use “Subodh” interchangeably to refer to the series “HOBEKI?” and its protagonist.

⁶ Mowtushi, 238.

mostly running or escaping with a caged sun in his hand.⁷ Most graffiti come with an inscription. This graffiti series is composed in the medium of stencil and spray paint, and its artist(s) are unknown.⁸ Subodh gained instant admiration among the general public upon its first appearance in February 2017.⁹ When digital images appeared on social media in June 2017, they spread virally, and people called the artist ‘The Banksy of Bangladesh.’

Like Banksy, the unknown identity of the artist is an integral part of the imagery of Subodh. Banksy became popular worldwide for his anti-authoritarian graffiti art in recent decades. His *Balloon Girl* (London, 2002) or *Kissing Coppers* (Brighton, 2004) are well-known globally and are excellent examples of modern subversive art. Banksy, through his pieces, urged critics and apprentices to accept and admire graffiti as an elevated form of public art but, in fact, graffiti art has a long history in many urban cityscapes. As an expression of visual culture, graffiti has always been popular with the masses.

Some critics argue that the history of graffiti traces its origin to the beginning of civilization, with cave art being the earliest example.¹⁰ Since the 1980s, the scholarly literature on graffiti has shown that graffiti can be identified by its subversive character, political context, and its engagement with subalterns.¹¹ Graffiti mostly remains habitually illegal or unsanctioned in character and sometimes connotes as vandalism. Nevertheless, scholars such as Stefano Bloch

⁷ Ibid., 228–29.

⁸ There is no clear evidence whether it is one or multiple artists.

⁹ Tarek Mahmud and Afrose Jahan Chaity, “Subodh: Special message or protest?” *Dhaka Tribune*, October 17, 2017, <https://archive.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/dhaka/2017/10/17/subodh-special-message-protest>.

¹⁰ M.J. Whitford and G.W. Ashworth, “History & trends in graffiti,” *Getting Rid of Graffiti*, ed. Maurice J. Whitford (London: Routledge, 1992), 2.

¹¹ Jeffrey Ian Ross, “Introduction: sorting it all out,” in *Routledge Handbook of Graffiti and Street Art*, ed. Jeffrey Ian Ross (London: Routledge, March 2016), 7.

examines graffiti for “its content, composition, and/or overall aesthetic”¹² instead of its legality.¹³ In his article, “The Illegal Face of Wall Space: Graffiti-Murals on the Sunset Boulevard Retaining Walls”, Bloch explains the shift in public perception towards acceptance, legal decriminalization of graffiti, and further public romanticization of street art.¹⁴ Scholarly research on graffiti art in post-colonial countries like Bangladesh is an overlooked area, a gap that this article seeks to redress. Bangladesh, a country liberated only 51 years ago, has a long and ongoing record of anti-authoritarian movements, and it has a lot to offer in this context. Subodh is just one image among hundreds of powerful graffiti in this region. In this paper, I analyze the socio-political climate of Bangladesh in light of the rapid appearance and popularity of Subodh’s image.

It has been said that Subodh is the prototype of a displaced and impoverished urban dweller who questions the socio-political present status-quo in Bangladeshi society.¹⁵ The fact that Subodh only appeared (until now) in the industrial park of Dhaka city demonstrates that its target audience is the oppressed social strata in the city. Subodh first appeared a few years after the Shahbag movement when several bloggers-activists were brutally slaughtered (2013–2015) by Islamic fanatics. I argue that Subodh represents the perpetual trauma of these young bloggers-activists and their urgency to escape from the creeping censorship and to dissent from governmental backlash. The governmental silence and failure to ensure safety fueled frustration among the young generation, in addition to the implementation of the amended Information and Communication Technology

¹² Ross, 1.

¹³ Ibid., 1–2.

¹⁴ Stefano Bloch, “The Illegal Face of Wall Space: Graffiti-Murals on the Sunset Boulevard Retaining Walls,” *Radical History Review* 123 (April 2012), 111–24.

¹⁵ Mowtushi, 229.

Act (ICT law)¹⁶ that eliminated freedom of speech. As a trapped middle-class, average, Bengali male, Subodh has no choice left but to leave this dystopian socio-political dynamic. Therefore, all captions with the graffiti state the desperate determination to get away until the right time comes.

This paper examines why Subodh gained widespread popularity among Bengali audiences. I analyze how the perceived governmental suppression of freedom and the communal trauma from the cultural and political incidents of recent years, inform contemporary Bangladeshi activist art (virtual and graffiti). The fact that Subodh became so widely popular in Bangladesh reminds us of the many ways that activist artists engage with this politicized imagery, in their responses to state-sanctioned censorship and political intervention to quash dissent. This paper seeks to understand how contemporary Bengali activist artists react to governmental oppression by using a protagonist, Subodh, as a metaphor for urban traumatized blogger-activists in recent years.

Visual Analysis of Subodh

Street art, poster, and graffiti serve an integral part of activism in contemporary Bangladeshi individual and collective resistance movements.¹⁷ Some symbols, such as prison bars, sun, and birdcages, have become communal symbols in Bangladesh's graffiti-scene. The image of Subodh showcases these popular symbols and represents dissent in a subtle way through the deployment of these powerful iconic signs.

¹⁶ The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act 2006 (later amended in 2013) allows law enforcement agencies to arrest, search premises, and seize equipment without a warrant and it can be based on suspicion that someone committed a crime using social media platforms. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/12/09/how-bangladesh-s-digital-security-act-is-creating-culture-of-fear-pub-85951>.

¹⁷ Anupam Debashis Roy, *Not All Springs End Winter Political Economy of Youth Movements in Bangladesh Before, During and Since Shahbag* (Dhaka: Adarsha, 2020), 55–63.



FIGURE 1

HOBEKI? “Run away Subodh, there is nothing for you here,” 2017. Old Airport, Agargaon Mohakhali link road, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Source: Photo by Muhammad Mostafigur Rahman.

In Fig. 1, we see Subodh hunched on the ground, holding a caged, bright, little golden sun. He is sobbing, hiding his face with one hand, and holding the cage in the other. A deep sense of melancholy is expressed in his posture. With the exception of the bright golden sun, black ink and negative space dominates the plastered canvas, which minimally portrays the character of Subodh, the everyman protagonist of the series. The caption, *Subodh tui paliye ja, Tor bhaggae kichu nei* [Run away, Subodh, there is nothing for you here,] accompanies his despondent demeanor and displaced status. On the left bottom of the graffiti art, “HOBEKI?” is written in uppercase, clearly representing the artist(s) emphasis on this part of the message over the rest of the inscription.

In Fig. 2, we see a haggard young man sprinting away, holding a caged, brightly lit sun. Subodh, painted in pitch black in this image, expresses his fear for his life. No doubt, it is a frightful run, but the caption is rather ambiguous. It reads, *Subodh tui paliye ja, Ekhon shomoy pokkhe na* [Run away, Subodh, time is not on your side]. The question then arises, what is he running away from? The absence of further information makes the message open to interpretation. It invites the audience to shape their individual explanation of the graffiti, thus providing Subodh with a larger, more diverse audience. I suggest that the caption “time is not on your side” dictates outside socio-political or cultural pressures that do not favor Subodh. It also imposes a temporality on the situation. It means the current situation will or might change in the future. One may say that he is running, chasing after the hope for change, safety, and security, to eventually return to his land.



FIGURE 2

HOBEKI? “Run away Subodh, time is not on your side,” 2017. Old Airport, Agargaon Mohakhali link road, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Source: Photo by Muhammad Mostafiqur Rahman.

In Fig. 3, we see Subodh trapped behind bars. Instead of running or showing desperation, here, with his eyes full of tears he stares straight ahead at the viewer.¹⁸ The caption reads: *Subodh ekhon jele, paapbodh nishchinte bash korche manusher hridoye* [Subodh is now in jail, remorse has found an abode in people's hearts]. His gaze interrogates his audience directly, potentially evoking a sense of guilt in people's mind.

¹⁸ Mowtushi, 238.



FIGURE 3

HOBKI? “Subodh is now in jail, Remorse has found an abode in people’s hearts,” 2017. Sher-E-Bangla Government Boys’ High School and College, Agargaon, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Source: Photo by Muhammad Mostafigur Rahman.

Implemented Censorship and Emergence of an Icon

To better understand the contextual history of this powerful street image, one must understand Bangladesh's complex socio-political history. Street walls, since the Pakistani rule, have been a canvas for creative activism (for instance, visual forms such as graffiti and political slogans) reflecting Bangladeshi student politics.¹⁹ During the 1971 Liberation War, posters, graffiti, and slogans on city walls were an integral part of activism. Only after a decade of gaining independence, in the early 1980s, the country came under the rule of its first dictator Husain Mohammad Ershad. The censorship implemented by Ershad's government (1983 to 1990) provoked activist artists to develop an encoded visual language to criticize the authoritarian government. Then, the 2006 the ICT Act further limited citizens' freedoms of speech and expression. The most recent amendments ensued in 2013, under section 57, nudged activist art in a new direction; many artists took to the streets, graffitiing slogans and creating simple images in public spaces.²⁰ With the uptick in social media platforms, this communication tool has become a formidable avenue for the dissemination of activist art in Bangladesh. Activist artists, most of whom are anonymous to ensure their personal safety, developed a rich reservoir of iconography to visually broadcast covert critiques of governmental abuse of power, religious hypocrisy, and unfulfilled promises of the Liberation War. One of the most popular subjects of activist art in Bangladesh remains the relaxation of the final sentencing of war criminals by the 2013 International Crime Tribunal (the verdict of which was publicly perceived to be an unforgettable miscarriage of justice), and the consequent widespread retaliatory protests across the nation.²¹

¹⁹ Ibid., 231–33.

²⁰ David Bergman, "Bangladesh: Protect Freedom of Expression," *Human Rights Watch*, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/05/09/bangladesh-protect-freedom-expression>.

²¹ Roy, 32–42.

Within a modern history of Bangladesh, the year 2013 is considered as the most significant episode of its political history. I present a brief synopsis here of these events, so that we can better understand the emergence of the Subodh imagery. On February 5, 2013, thousands of people gathered at Shahbag, a busy intersection in Dhaka, to protest the life-imprisonment sentence of Abdul Quader Mollah. Mollah was one of the war criminals of 1971 and a leader of Jamat-e-Islam, an Islamist political party. Since independence, the Bengali people have ceaselessly demanded the trials of and verdicts against war criminals, like Mollah.²² For several reasons, the judicial verdicts were delayed for over forty years. Subsequently, the Bangladeshi government (led by Sheikh Hasina) committed to bringing the war criminals to justice. This commitment made during the 2008 elections resulted in a huge success for the Awami League.²³ Quader Mollah was convicted for murdering over 300 people, as well as sanctioning and participating in countless rapes.²⁴ The public's expectation of justice was the death penalty.²⁵ On February 5, after the International Crime Tribunal sentenced Mollah to an apparently lesser sentence, lifetime imprisonment, the public felt betrayed by the government. In fact, when leaving the courtroom, Quader Molla made a victory sign to the media, further enraging public sentiments.²⁶ The

²² Ahmad, Ahrar. "Bangladesh in 2013: Year of Confusions, Confrontations, Concerns," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 54, no. 1, (January/February 2014): 190–198.

²³ Roy, 55–63.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 55–63.

²⁵ "Bangladesh amends war crimes law amid protest," Aljazeera website, February 18, 2013, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2013/2/18/bangladesh-amends-war-crimes-law-amid-protest>; "Bangladesh supreme court upholds death penalty for Abdul Quader Mollah," The Guardian website, December 13, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/12/bangladesh-supreme-court-death-penalty-abdul-quader-mollah>. Press releases, media, blogs, and social media were swamped with the demand for Mollah's death penalty. Being a Bangladeshi resident gave me the opportunity to experience the protest in person.

²⁶ "Bangladeshis demand death for war crimes convict Abdul Quader Mollah." NDTV website, Associated Press, February 16, 2013, <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/bangladeshis-demand-death-for-war-crimes-convict-abdul-quader-mollah-513519>.

frustrated public burst with seething anger, rallying at Shahbag, already a place of intellectual gathering during the years leading up to this movement. Bloggers and online activists played a vital part in this movement, which became one of the biggest secular civil movements in the past twenty years of Bangladeshi history.

After ten months of unceasing protest against the verdict, Quader Mollah was finally hanged on December 12, 2013. A month after the Shahbag movement's birth, Hefazat-e-Islam (or "Protectors of Islam") emerged, which is an anti-Shahbag protest organized by Islamic political groups.²⁷ They labeled the Shahbag movement as anti-Islamic, tagging Shahbag protesters as atheists and demanding the prosecution of the protesters under the constitution's blasphemy law. Several names were compiled and added to an evolving hit-list generated by the Islamic fundamentalists. In the following years, many activists and artists fell victim to machete-equipped crowds. Amongst those who were subsequently slaughtered were Rajib Haider (killed on February 15, 2013), Abhijit Roy (killed on February 26, 2015), Xulhaz Manaan (killed on April 25, 2016), and many other such writers and bloggers who dared to voice their dissenting thoughts. Although attacking agnostic, atheist or anti-Islamic writers is not entirely foreign to Bangladesh's history, after this movement—and blessed by the governmental silence—the situation worsened, and hundreds of writers and bloggers fled, seeking political asylum in locations around the world.

²⁷ Roy, 55–63.



FIGURE 4

HOBEEKI? “Run away Subodh, there is nothing for you here,” 2017. Old Airport, Agargaon Mohakhali link road, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Source: Photo by Muhammad Mostafigur Rahman.

As this summary indicates, the image of Subodh is a vivid expression of this dystopian socio-political climate of Bangladesh. All graphic narratives accompanying him insist on escaping since time and luck will not advocate for him. The image also implies a promise: although he is running, he is potentially waiting for the right time to return, hence running with a caged, lit sun. He became an unceasing icon of resistance against the imposed ICT Act of 2013. In Fig. 4, we see Subodh carrying a cage-locked red sun. His perplexed face and backward glance signify his inability to fight back. Then why is he fortifying the red sun? My interpretation is that this red sun symbolizes the dawn, as a representation of positivity and a new beginning. Subodh has decided to defer but has not surrendered his hope. This posture speaks for hundreds of Bangladeshi activist writers and bloggers, all of whom are looking forward to getting a chance for their homecoming.

Subodh is more than a mere victim of the political chaos. His relationship with the urban landscape is multifaceted. He addresses the social crisis, and his character challenges the status-quo. It seems to me that he could be construed as a powerful symbol of the queer people, who flee or are murdered. I anticipate that he could be an unemployed, educated young man, who committed suicide to escape from the corrupt, competitive job market.²⁸ He could be a person of religious minority, who lost his home and farmland because of his religious identity. He could be an atheist writer or blogger who dared to voice his dissenting thoughts and for that being added on an evolving hit-list generated by the Islamic fundamentalists. The image's polysemous nature, which successfully captures the

²⁸ Amanur Rahman Roney, "Suicide on the rise in Bangladesh," Dhaka Tribune website, March 28, 2018, <https://archive.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2018/03/27/suicide-rise-bangladesh>. The recent suicides increase amongst Bangladesh's young populace may be arguably attributed to unemployment, corruption, and the lack or failure of the state-safety programmes leading to persisting frustration. Statics shows the rate of suicides has increased sharply in recent years.

conjectures of its many viewers, has made it an indelible icon of the oppressed and the minorities. Sometimes Subodh is not even in the picture, and we only see the caged sun, which symbolically represents hope for a better future (Fig. 5). The catchword **HOBEDI** correspondingly denotes his presence. Mahruba T. Mowtushi interprets the inscription, **HOBEDI**, in two ways.

[I]t implies “will it happen?” or “might it happen?” This denotes the possibility of something happening in the future. The other meaning is much bleaker, stating that “nothing will happen” or “that nothing happens,” indicating a sense of futility and meaninglessness. **HOBEDI** cleverly plays on the dynamic dialectic of the phrase’s opposing meanings as it fashions a semiotic pun on the precariousness of words and their meanings, which shift with the alteration of the context in which words and signs co-exist.²⁹

I argue that **HOBEDI** carries a more positive connotation, especially as we consider how the image has been variously sub-titled to convey messages of hope and resistance.

²⁹ Mowtushi, 238.



FIGURE 5
HOBEKI? “Bird Cage and Sun,” 2017. Old Airport, Agargaon Mohakhali link road, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Source: Photo by Muhammad Mostafigur Rahman.



FIGURE 6

HOBELI, “Fight back Subodh, compromise doesn’t suit you,” 2017. Jadavpur University, Calcutta, India.

Source: Twitter, (accessed 19 August 2017), <https://twitter.com/ttindia/status/899122910836568064/photo/1>



FIGURE 7

HOBKI, “Don’t run away Subodh, you are destined to fight back,” 2017. Presidency University in Calcutta, India.

Source: Mediabangladesh.net <https://www.mediabangladesh.net/subodh-tui-pala-time-not-favor-hobe-ki/>.

The Image of Subodh Migrates to India

The appearance and adaptation of images of Subodh in India in August 2017 further confirms my argument. As shown in these screenshots from the online newspaper *The Telegraph* (Figs. 6–7), we see images of Subodh that appeared on the walls of Jadavpur University and the Presidency University in Calcutta, India.³⁰ According to the report, Subodh graffiti traveled to the Presidency University around mid-July 2017 and were adopted as an icon of resistance. Arkopaul Dutta, a student of the Presidency University, informed the reported “We came to know of Subodh from the Dhaka graffiti, but he is not a country-specific icon. He is an icon of protest.”³¹ What intrigues me is that artists from West Bengal have contributed to the ongoing conversation of Subodh. They added inscriptions with the graffiti that can be translated as *Subodh tui lore ja, Aposh toke manay na* [Fight back Subodh, compromise doesn’t suit you] (Fig. 6), and *Subodh tui palash na kothao, Tor bhaggae lorai lekha* [Don’t run away Subodh, you are destined to fight back] (Fig. 7). These examples demonstrate that Subodh’s image is appreciated in West Bengal, justifying how people have come to own the character of Subodh. The added inscriptions have a positive connotation that exhibits resilience and the pursuit of hope. It further demonstrates the parallelism between these two regions’ political crisis and the reciprocal culture between the two Bengals. Annando Kutum, a Calcutta college student, explains how article 57 of the ICT Act in Bangladesh is similar to Section 66A of the India’s Information Technology Act.³² He clarifies it to *The Telegraph* by saying “There is no freedom of speech. You can’t talk to the media. You can’t voice views on social media. You

³⁰ Sen, “HOBEDI?”

³¹ Sen, “HOBEDI?”

³² “Digital Repository of All Central and State Acts,” India Code, https://www.indiacode.nic.in/show-data?actid=AC_CEN_45_76_00001_200021_1517807324077&orderno=77.

Did you know? A spectre is haunting the walls of Dhaka and Calcutta. What does it say? @ttindia @SankarshanT #Hobeki telegraphindia.com/1170820/jsp/7d...



FIGURE 8

INSIGHT HOBEKI? “Did you know? A spectre is haunting the walls of Dhaka and Calcutta. What does it say?”

Image source: Twitter (accessed 19 August 2017) <https://twitter.com/upalasen/status/899096071174934528>.

can't blog.”³³ Journalist Upala Sen offers this interpretation of this graffiti with an opening that says: “A spectre is haunting the walls of Bangla capitals, the spectre of Subodh — an enigma that was born in Dhaka and soon spawned a Calcutta doppelganger” (Fig. 8). Subodh migrating to India and people resonating with the graffiti dictates its acceptance and admiration as an enduring icon of resistance; an icon that has been accepted beyond the border of Bangladesh and signifies the relationality between the two Bengals.

Conclusion

To the Bengali people, Subodh empowers cultural and political activism. Subodh, the protagonist, is a city-dwelling, dynamic Bengali male figure, whose form is aligned with powerful signs of hope and resistance. The stenciled image of the scantily-clad Subodh on the wall speaks volumes, despite its minimalism. Not a hero, Subodh expresses fear. His fear bears no description and is abstract, for anyone looking at Subodh can cast their own fear, meaning, suffering onto the scant figure of the protagonist. An everyman figure, Subodh has been dealt an unfair hand in life. As this essay indicates, the inscriptions under each image offer subtle transformations of the imagery. Fighting for his survival, Subodh has not given up his hope, symbolized by sitting / running with the golden sun. Perhaps this is why Subodh has become a deeply resonating icon with millions of Bengali people. They can relate to him; they picture themselves in him, like a mirror to the viewer, laying bare the raw fears of survival in an imprisoning world. No wonder that the image and the message of Subodh has become so widespread and popular throughout the nation, even being adopted in India.

³³ Sen, “HOBEDI?”