

An Inductive Study of Pop Culture Versus Visual Art: Redefined from the Lens of Censorship in Bangladesh

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Abstract

The right to dissent through any form of art has been facing challenges through various strict legal measures, particularly since 2018 when the Government of Bangladesh passed the Digital Security Act 2018 (DSA). Therefore, the references to ‘popular’ culture mostly include mainstream religious and national festivals and exclude critical intellectual representation of specific political allusions in any form of storytelling: whether wall art or fiction writing, since the post-DSA period in Bangladesh. Through inductive quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches, this paper aims to study the pattern of censorship, detention or custodial tortures against artists, and the banning approach by the Bangladeshi government in the last five years, specifically against static visual arts, i.e., cartoon and wall art. The pattern drawn from these data attempts to redefine the popular notion of ‘pop culture’ as an unorganized folk or mass culture. The results also hypothesize how the post-DSA period forcefully constructs ‘pop culture’ as a very organized repetitive deception of enlightenment or entertainment. Thus the argument theorizes that this censoring trend is a fascist approach making the artists subaltern. So, in this socio-political context, these two similar and overlapping elements: culture and art, are vastly separated in two streams: the former being appreciated by the power, and the latter is a fearful concern for the power. Therefore, the purpose of art also shifts from entertainment to an act of rebellion, adding more layers to the new postmodern definition of ‘pop culture.’

Keywords: Digital Security Act 2018, popular culture, visual arts, censoring trend, fascist approach, subaltern