Participating institution: The University of Oklahoma

Team Members: Prakhyat R, University of Oklahoma | Zakir Hussain, Whitman College

Location and Dates: Quetta, Pakistan from 15th June to 12th July 2021

Description: A project dedicated to helping the Hazara community in Quetta, Pakistan, through the introduction of new art forms in their local art studio and helping them renovate their ill resourced artistic space.

A. Historical Struggles:

Zakir's grandmother used to praise him with these traditional Hazaragi (A dialect of Dari Farsi) verses. Zakir did not know what she meant by words like 'Mazaar' or 'Talibo.' He thought it might have been the region Mazar i Sharif in Afghanistan and the militants 'Taliban.' He thought of the Mazar i Sharif with the beautiful blue mosque dedicated to the son in law of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad. He was happy with that since everyone around him held the city in high regard. However, he was confused by being called the intellectual leader of the Taliban and did not like the second verse his grandmother dedicated him. Little did he know, she did not mean the regional hub of Northern Afghanistan, or Northern Khurasan as it was called, where the Hazaras had set up their lives because of their mystic belief in Ali Ibn Abu Talib, the son in law of the prophet. Neither did she mean the Taliban (Talib is the plural for Talib, which means a student), which made Zakir happier, but his feelings were not compensated for because of losing the opportunity of being in the blue mosque, even in his grandmother's verses. His thoughts were hindered by the first verse.

He often thought of the places that had become historical remains, at least for his Hazara community since there was no way of going back to them. In 1998, the Taliban captured Mazar and massacred thousands of Hazaras living there because of their religious belief (Human Rights Watch). To this day, the political and social turmoil has not been accounted for. Not only that, but other areas also where a majority of the Hazaras were living including Bamiyan, whose Buddhas the Hazaras considered their heritage. The Taliban even demolished those statues. The Hazaras were left with no option other than seeking refuge elsewhere. They found new homes in places like Kabul, Tehran in Iran, and Quetta in Pakistan. Asad Buddha and Khadim Ali’s poem Urbicide powerfully echoes the woeful plight of Hazaras.

B. The Artistic Mazar of Quetta:

The Hazaras, especially their youth is still in search of the intellectual shrine describe in the verses. One such example of Mazar or the shrine as the grandmother had meant it, in the Hazara community living in the Eastern part of Quetta city in Pakistan, is Mr. Fazil Musavi. Mr. Musavi is an artist who has dedicated his life to the artistic awareness, stimulation, and development of the Hazara youngsters.

In 2009, he officially started the club called ‘Sketch Club’ to give art lessons to the local students. (Danial Shah, The Express Tribune). This came at a time when the existential stability for Hazaras in Quetta was deteriorating and they were once again targeted and killed whenever there was a chance. Their distinct facial features amongst that of the other communities made them an easy target yet again. In 2013, two major blasts happened in the two towns that Hazaras live in, in Quetta, “killed at least 180 Hazaras” (Human Rights Watch) and injuring around 500 people.
C. A Symbol of Resilience:
Fazil Musavi and Sketch Club have produced a lot of brilliant students. A significant amount of his students goes on to receive scholarships in the National College of Arts in Lahore, Pakistan, one of the top schools for Art Studies in Pakistan. They have had exhibitions at Oxford Brookes University in England. Along with that, they had local exhibitions and other international exhibitions in Melbourne and Sydney, Australia.

Not only on artistic grounds, but Mr. Musavi is also ready to bridge the gap that the genocide of the Hazaras has created between them and the other communities. Conversing with him, he mentioned, “...any person, irrespective of caste and creed is welcome to Sketch Club as long as they want to pick up a pencil or brush instead of weapons.” He and the Sketch Club have shown that whatever important agenda, be it political or not, is lost in war mongering and slogan shouting, could be depicted through art. The lives of at least those 1500 reported (Hazara.net) could be avenged through this medium, and the artistic knowledge might make up for the social ignorance in the society. He is the real advocate for intellect, tolerance, and inclusivity among hostility for the survival of Hazaras.

D. Plan of action:

There is no denying that Sketch Club has managed to achieve a lot despite the adversity that it faces. The club has produced many notable alumni, showed students the way of peace in a hostile climate, and presented its works all over the world. Despite its success and impact on society, the club is severely under-funded and because of this, a lot of the potential of these students and the community as a whole remains untapped. We plan to introduce new art forms such as Linocut Printmaking, Drypoint Etching and Woodcut Printmaking by organizing workshops with the help of our team members and the expertise of Mr. Musavi. We also plan to provide equipment for Digital Photography, Filmmaking, and Graphic Designing. This expands the scope of artistic expression which until now has been limited to just painting and sketching. We plan to these new forms and present them at an art festival in a major university in the province. We also plan to provide necessary renovations and repairs to the crippling infrastructure of the sketch club. The long-term objective, however, is to improve the self-reliance of the sketch club, which we aim to do through teaching essential outreach skills that would allow the club to function much more independently in the future. Workshops for this include research skills, email skills, documentation of the club’s progress (blogging, vlogging, social media presence, and YouTube), and fundraising. The flagship event we plan to organize is an art festival that would serve to raise awareness of the club, provide a platform for students to display their artwork, and find talented students through the competitions. This is an ambitious undertaking that is very much necessary for a club that is been a symbol of resilience for the community. We hope through the preservation and hopeful expansion of the sketch club, they continue to make the Hazara voices heard and preserve an identity that has been persecuted for ages.

Week 1: Renovation works and setting up
Week 2: Renovation works continued and commencement of outreach skills workshops
Week 3: Commencement of art workshops and the setup of an outreach plan
Week 4: Art Festival and wrap-up

By the end of the project, we aim to establish new art forms in the club, see an improved physical environment through the renovation and repairs, and the expansion of Sketch Club to other communities. We aim to instill strong outreach skills among the members, which will improve the self-reliance and future organic growth of the club. Through these, we hope to achieve our mission of preserving the Hazara identity and culture by amplifying their voices through the artistic mediums.