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A COMMUNITY-LED INVENTORY OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGES OF BANGLADESH

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Cultural heritage is the legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations. Safeguarding intangible heritage is the protection of cultural identities and therefore the cultural diversity of humankind. Since becoming a State Party to the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), Bangladesh is obligated to carry out measures so as to safeguard ICH elements and the practicing communities that exist within its borders.

Shadhona – A Center for Advancement of Southasian Culture, being an UNESCO ICH Committee accredited NGO, has taken upon itself the ambitious task of creating a 'Community-led Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritages of Bangladesh' via an ICH-pedia which empowers people and communities to upload information about their own cultural practices, which will, then, be published after verification by an expert committee.

As a first step, Shadhona has started training young academics about 'ICH Inventorying' and inspiring them to come up with 'ICH Safeguarding' strategies based on the 'Four Goal Approach' of a) Documenting ICH and living traditions in Bangladesh; b) Recognizing and celebrating ICH with festivals and commemorations; c) Supporting and encouraging the passing on of knowledge and skills; and, d) Exploring the potential of ICH as a resource for community development and achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. The second step is the formation of a coalition of community based organizations who will collectively undertake this task.

Secondly, On June 14, 2020, an informal, multi-organization consortium, led by Shadhona – A Center for Advancement of Southasian Culture, a UNESCO ICH Committee accredited NGO, was formed with the intention of creating a community-led, digital and online ICH-pedia for Bangladesh, for inventorying all Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) practices of Bangladesh with the support of young students and academics. This consortium was named, 'Consortium for



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ICH-pedia, Bangladesh (CIB):

1. The primary aim of the Consortium is to create a National Inventory of ICH practices in Bangladesh, in the format of an ICH-pedia.
2. However, the Consortium would also like to
 - a) encourage good Safeguarding practices of ICH in consonance with the aims of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals;
 - b) inspire Critical Research on ICH issues with tertiary educational institutions;
 - c) work towards inclusion of ICH Studies in all levels of education with the sole aim of maintaining the rich and diverse ICH practices of Bangladesh.
3. Most importantly, the ICH-pedia will be made entirely by the various Communities, and with their written Consent.

The Consortium firmly believes that respect for diverse cultural practices of all indigenous communities makes a nation liberal and compassionate, giving it the ideal groundwork to grown from strength to strength.

Quotes for ICH



Md. Kamruzzaman
Director General
Bangladesh National Museum
14 December,2022

Knowing the past helps us to understand the present and build a better future. The National ICH Inventory, built with the support of the people of the country, is therefore a powerful tool for initiating new horizons of a progressive and sustainable Bangladesh.



Dr. Saymon Zakaria
Chairman, Bhabnagar Foundation

26 May,2020

Working collectively, it is possible to generate a milestone in our cultural arena by harnessing the vitality of our youth to create a community-led inventory of our ICH practices



Ibrahim Ahmad
Independent Researcher

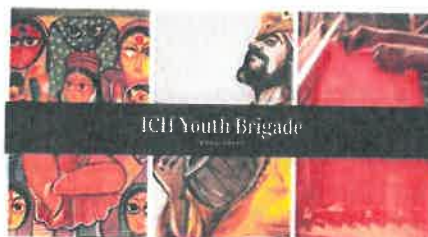
26 May,2020

This has been a unique opportunity to interact with the and train the youth of Bangladesh. I, truly, believe such a community-led inventory is possible, if we join hands

Related Websites



Ich Youth Brigade



ICH Youth Brigade
Facebook group · 62 members

VIEW GROUP

YouTube Channel

Safeguarding List

Urgent Safeguarding Needed

Domain: Performing arts/ পরিবেশনা শিল্প

Name: Test Element

Location: Dhaka/ Dhaka

Contributor: Selina Begum

No Description

No Consent

No Image

No Video

[Details](#)

Domain: Traditional Craftmanship/ ঐতিহ্যবাহী কারুশিল্প

Name: Mudhouses in North Bengal

Location: Rajshahi/ Bogura

Contributor: Maznu Mia

[Description](#)

[Consent](#)

[Image](#)

No Video

[Details](#)

Domain: Traditional Craftmanship/ ঐতিহ্যবাহী কারুশিল্প

Name: Pathin (পাথিন) Weaving of Hajong: Process and Technique

Location: Mymensingh/ Netrokona

Contributor: Mahfuza Arifa Nila

[Description](#)

No Consent

[Image](#)

No Video

[Details](#)

Safeguarding Needed

Domain: Traditional Craftmanship/ ঐতিহ্যবাহী কারুশিল্প

Name: Phul Pitha, Nakshi Pitha

Location: Dhaka/ Narayanganj

Contributor: Sumona Afroz

[Description](#)

No Consent

[Image](#)

[Video](#)

[Details](#)

Domain: Heritage Holder/ ঐতিহ্যের ধারক

Name: Porabarir Chomchom

Location: Dhaka/ Tangail

Contributor: Dr. Shawkat Imam Khan

[Description](#)

No Consent

[Image](#)

No Video

[Details](#)

Domain: Traditional Craftmanship/ ঐতিহ্যবাহী কারুশিল্প

Name: Rickshaw and Rickshaw Art in Dhaka

Location: Dhaka/ Dhaka

Contributor: Armin Hossen

[Description](#)

[Consent](#)

[Image](#)

[Video](#)

[Details](#)

Domain: Performing arts/ পরিবেশনা শিল্প

Name: Potgan: performance and content analysis

Location: Khulna/ Satkhira

Contributor: Armin Hossen

No Description

No Consent

No Image

No Video

[Details](#)

Domain: Performing arts/ পরিবেশনা শিল্প

Name: Traditional dance of Orao community

Location: Rajshahi/ Naogaon

Contributor: Rashedul Alam Prodip

No Description

No Consent

[Image](#)

[Video](#)

[Details](#)

Domain: Social practices, rituals and festive events / সামাজিক অনুশীলন, অনুষ্ঠান এবং উৎসব অনুষ্ঠান

Name: Vows of Chaitra Sankranti

Location: Mymensingh/ Mymensingh

Contributor: Mow Karmaker

[Description](#)

[Consent](#)

[Image](#)

[Video](#)

[Details](#)

Domain: Performing arts/ পরিবেশনা শিল্প

Name: Nagar kirtan

Location: Mymensingh/ Mymensingh

Contributor: Mow Karmaker

[Description](#)

[Consent](#)

[Image](#)

No Video

[Details](#)

Domain: Social practices, rituals and festive events / সামাজিক অনুশীলন, অনুষ্ঠান এবং উৎসব অনুষ্ঠান

Name: Deuli festival of Hajong community: customs and rituals.

Location: Mymensingh/ Netrokona

Contributor: Tania Talukdar

No Description

No Consent

No Image

No Video

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National ICH INVENTORY.



Name of the Element:

Rickshaw and Rickshaw Art in Dhaka

Name of Inventory: National ICH Inventory (NII), 2022 - 2023

Serial No: NII-0001-20DEC22

Brief Description

The Rickshaw, a human-propelled transport on three wheels, is a recognized feature of Dhaka and Bangladesh as a whole. Rickshaw craftsmanship has been highly renowned for its traditional process of fashioning the Rickshaw by hand. Almost every part of a Rickshaw is decorated and painted. Tassels, tinsel and twirling bits hang from its different parts. Some parts are pinned in bright patterns. Plastic flowers sprout on the front and sides. Dhaka's Rickshaw Painting is an enthralling representation of transport art in the world. Painting is the embodiment of the Rickshaw as it is found in profusion on its body. Part of the aluminium sheathing and the entire rectangular plate of corrugated iron, both appearing at the Rickshaw's back, have pictures elegantly painted. The front part of the seat usually displays three popular movie stars. Being efficient and convenient as a mode of transport for short distances and highly decorative with thematic pictures Rickshaws have become significant and attractive. As Rickshaws are slow-moving vehicles, the paintings that they carry are easily visible to the onlookers who can enjoy them fairly well even in the movement. The moving Rickshaws are viewed as a roving exhibition of paintings as mobile panorama which is seen nowhere else in the world. Rickshaws with their decorations and paintings create such a pervasive and emblematic feature of urban life in Dhaka that it has given birth to exhibitions and festive events. New Rickshaws are always a blaze of colours and paintings in Dhaka, why it is often called the Rickshaw Capital of the World.

Region:

Dhaka, Dhaka District, Dhaka Division

Photographs: Video: Consent: Submitted

Submitted by: Ms. Armin Hossen, Project Researcher, Rickshaw and Rickshaw Art in Dhaka, +8801610116612, Bangla Academy, Dhaka
E-mail: arminhossen1996@gmail.com ; Website:
<http://www.banglaacademy.gov.bd>

Content Details

1.1 Identification of the element

Traditional Craftmanship

1.2 Name of the element, as used by the community or group concerned

Rickshaw and Rickshaw Art in Dhaka

1.3 Short, maximally informative title (including indication of domain(s))

Craftsmanship related to Rickshaw manufacturing and Rickshaw Art in Dhaka

1.4 Community(ies)/group(s) that recognize the element as part of their cultural heritage

Bengali Community

1.5 Physical location(s) of the element/how often it is practiced

Different types of images are seen in rickshaws in different areas of Dhaka, Bangladesh. All the rickshaws across the region have motifs of flowers, birds, vines, animals and movie heroes. Around 90% of Dhaka Rickshaws are painted to decorate and attract passengers. The entire Dhaka area is famous for its rickshaw painting.

1.6 Short description (max. 200words)

Rickshaws began to circulate in Dhaka from the year 1930. Later, the popularity of rickshaw paint peaked around 1950. From then on, flowers, birds, vines and leaves, images of animals and pictures of various heroes and heroines began to be used. Around 1960, in addition to the portraits of film stars, various types of pictures of the liberation war gained popularity in the period of independence and post-independence. After the seventies, Dhaka's fictional scene of rickshaw art was a major source of inspiration. Besides, rural folk life, natural scenery and memorial architecture like, memorials, parliament building, Shaheed Minar, Taj Mahal, movie scenes have diversified the rickshaw art. Its popularity peaked in the eighties. Rickshaw owners and craftsmen continue to pay special attention to rickshaw art to beautify the rickshaw. The entire rickshaw is embellished with art such as the rickshaw chassis, seat, delna, hood rickshaw and the back of the rickshaw, along with various animals, birds, flowers, and vines. Among them, the special attraction of the rickshaw is the back board where pictures of rural life, natural scenery, flowers, birds, figures and various heroes and heroines are painted. These arts are very popular in all rickshaws of Dhaka. This art of rickshaw has a special place in Dhaka's heritage.

1.7 Domain of the element (select one or more/suggest alternative domain)

Traditional craftsmanship

2. Characteristics of the element

2.1 Practitioner(s)/performer(s): roles, age, gender, social status, and/or professional category etc)

Practitioner(s)/performer(s) directly involved in the enactment or practice of the element (include name, age, gender, professional category, etc.)/ 1. Name: Nimai Das, Rickshaw Artist, Age: 40 years, Gender: Male, 2. Name: Dharma Das, Rickshaw Artist, Gender: Male, Age: 45 years, 3. Name: Md. Rafiqul Islam Gender: Male, Age: 61 years, Occupation: Rickshaw Artist, 4. Name: Israt Jahan Tisha Gender: Female, Age: 22 years, Occupation: Student 5. Name: Syed Ahmad Gender: Male, Age: 62 years, Occupation: Rickshaw Artist, 6. Name: Md. Salem, Gender: Male, Age: 60 years, Occupation: Rickshaw Artist, 7. Name: Samiron Das Gender: Male, Age: 29 years, Occupation: Rickshaw Artist, 8. Name: Dharendra Chandra Das, Gender: Male, Age: 70 years, Occupation: Rickshaw Artist, 9. Name: Shopan Das, Gender: Male, Age: 55 years, Occupation: Rickshaw Artist, 10. Name: Tapan Das, Gender: Male, Age: 48 years, Occupation: Rickshaw Artist, 11. Name: Sourav Das Gender: Male, Age: 23 years, Occupation: student 12. Name: Jagannat Das Gender: Male, Age: 38 years, Occupation: Rickshaw Artist,

2.2 Other tradition bearers (individuals/groups and their roles)

Rickshaw pullers are indirectly involved in Rickshaw Art. Because they have a special role in practicing and broadcasting this material. After making the Rickshaw, to make it attractive, the craftsmen call artists, who basically decorate the Rickshaw. Rickshaw artists paint the Rickshaw in various ways, to bring variety to the Rickshaw.

2.3 Language(s), register(s), speech level(s) involved

Bangla

2.4 Associated tangible elements (if any)

Tinshade, paint, tuli (paint brush), turpentine, rexin, board. Place: indoors, balcony, works sitting on the ground.

2.5 Associated intangible elements (if any)

Not applicable

2.6 How are women and people of other genders associated with this ICH element

Both men and women are traditionally involved in this rickshaw art. His daughter Tisha learned this art from her father Rickshaw artist Rafiq, Ruma learned this art from her father Alauddin artist. Learning from Dharendra Chandra Das, his sons Swapan Das and Tapan Das are working on the art of Rickshaw. Sourav Das is currently working on rickshaw art after learning from his grandfather and father. The new generation or women have taken this Rickshaw art to new mediums like mobile covers, umbrellas, kettles, cupsets, trunks, various glassware etc.

2.7 Division of labour during the practice of aforementioned ICH element

Men are playing a more effective role than women in the work of rickshaw art. Men and women cannot work equally. Men do most of the art work.

2.8 Customary practices governing access to the element or to aspects of it

Not applicable

2.9 Modes of transmission

Rickshaws are painted Traditionally. Some learn from a young age from a place of interest. Besides, many people learn from father, brother, uncle. In the beginning one learns drawing style, board preparation, color coordination etc. Besides, many become disciples of many Rickshaw artists, thereby spreading the word among others.

2.10 Organizations concerned (non-governmental organizations and others)

An organization named 'Bangladesh Rickshaw Art Society' was formed in 2021. This organization organizes workshops and exhibitions on Rickshaw art. Apart from this, Rickshaw Art has also organized a training program for artists, through which the training is open to all those who are interested. Apart from this, this organization has also exhibited the rickshaw art which has been converted into products such as bamboo products, glass products etc.

3. State of the element (viability)

3.1 Threats to the enactment (if any)

One of the reasons for the threat of Rickshaw Art is digital printing. Rickshaw Art is currently under threat because artists are losing interest in this work due to economic reasons. Besides, with the increase of engine-driven rickshaws, rickshaw pullers are giving less importance to art.

3.2 Threats to the transmission (if any)

There is a threat of contagion due to low commercial value of Rickshaw Art. As a result, the new generation is leaving traditional professions and engaging in other professions.

3.3 Threat to associated tangible elements and resources (if any)

No

3.4 Viability of associated intangible elements (if any)

No

3.5 Safeguarding measures in place (if any)

1. Enacting strict laws regarding digital printing. 2. Making hand art work mandatory in every Rickshaw. 3. Registration of Rickshaws in an area and mandatory Rickshaw Art on the Rickshaws of that particular area. 4. Establishing organizations to improve the quality of life of rickshaw art artists, so that they can be more interested in Rickshaw Art.

4. Data gathering/documentation, Consent and preparation of inventory entries

4.1 Consent of community/group/individuals concerned for data collection with a view to inventorying

All the artists involved in Rickshaw Art of Dhaka area have consented to inscription data and nomination in UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. It is mentioned in the consent paper. It is their ancestral profession and they have long been associated with the image of the rickshaw as part of Dhaka's traditional culture.

4.2 Restrictions, if any, on use of data collected

There is no restriction. Anyone can learn and practice this art. Besides, they have no restrictions on using information.

5. Resource Person

5.1 Persons/groups, including community representatives

1. Name: Shopan Das, Rickshaw Artist, Age: 64 years, Gender: Male, 2. Name: Prashanto Das, Rickshaw Artist, Age: 54 years, Gender: Male, 3. Name: Md. Rafiqul Islam, Rickshaw Artist, Age: 61 years, Gender: Male, 4. Name: Syed Ahmad, Rickshaw Artist, Age: 62 years, Gender: Male, 5. Name: Dharendra Chandra Das, Rickshaw Artist, Age: 70 years, Gender: Male, 6. Name: Shopan Das, Rickshaw Artist, Age: 55 years, Gender: Male, 7. Name: Tapan Das, Rickshaw Artist, Age: 48 years, Gender: Male,

5.2 Date(s) and place(s) of data gathering

Date : 2022-11-22

Place(s) : 2 August to 22 November 2022.

6. Safeguarding techniques

6.1 Existing safeguarding techniques in the community for the safeguarding of the ICH element

The community of folk artists and artisans involved in this art has traditionally preserved the Rickshaw motifs. Artisans, chassis makers, hood makers and Rickshaw artists involved in this industry are imparting knowledge related to this industry. This special knowledge has been being generationally transmitted from families to families. RK Das, known as the first Rickshaw Painting artist of Bangladesh, taught Rickshaw art to his two sons, Swapan Das and Prashant Das. Due to his individual efforts, several of his disciples are still involved in the art of Rickshaw art. RK Das, PC Das, DC Das, Alinoor, Abdul, Alauddin are some of the first generation Rickshaw Painting artists of Bangladesh. Their disciples are scattered all over Bangladesh till now caring for this genre of Rickshaw Art. Among the current Rickshaw artists are: Syed Ahmed Hossain, Rafiqul Islam (nephew of Alauddin), Sahem Mohammad, Tapan Das and Swapan Das (sons of DC Das), Swapan Das and Prashant Das (sons of RK Das), Nasima Noor (daughter of Ali Noor), Saurabh Das (son of Swapan Das). They are traditionally carrying on the knowledge of their community. They have transformed the traditional Rickshaw Art to contemporary art through promoting modern lifestyles in their designs. . As part of their collective efforts to safeguard this element, Rickshaw Artists have recently formed an association named 'Bangladesh Rickshaw Art Society' through which they organise trainings, workshops, exhibitions and if required, ensuring their social welfare.

6.2 Suggestions for safeguarding of the ICH element from the

community

Community have some demands for safeguarding the element: 1. Reducing digital printing. 2. Designating specific areas for rickshaws with Rickshaw Art. 3. Increasing the commercial value of Rickshaw Art. 4. Taking various steps of the government.

7. References to literature, discography, audiovisual materials or archives

7.1 References to/in literature

Joanna Kirkpatrick . " The Painted Ricksha as Culture Theater , " Studies in Visual Communication 10 : 3 (1984) : 73-85 . Henry Glassie . The Spirit of Folk Art . New York : Abrahams and Museum of International Folk Art , 1989 . Rob Gallagher . The Rickshaws of Bangladesh . Dhaka : University Press Limited , 1992 . Henry Glassie , Art and Life in Bangladesh . Bloomington : Indiana University Press , 1997 . Henry Glassie . Traditional Art of Dhaka . Dhaka : Bangla Academy , 2000 . Henry Glassie and Firoz Mahmud . Contemporary Traditional Art of Bangladesh , Dhaka : Bangladesh National Museum , 2000 . Joanna Kirkpatrick . Transports of Delight : The Ricksha Arts of Bangladesh (CD ROM) . Bloomington : Indiana University Press , 2003 . Firoz Mahmud . Book Review of Transports of Delight : The Ricksha Arts of Bangladesh (CD ROM) . Illinois : Journal of American Folklore 118 (2005) : pp . 243-244 . Henry Glassie and Firoz Mahmud . Living Traditions . Dhaka : Asiatic Society of Bangladesh , 2007 . Shamsuzzaman Khan , Firoz Mahmud and Shahida Khatun . Ten Elements of the Intangible.

7.2 Audiovisual materials or archives

Not Applicable.

7.3 Discography or archives

Rickshaw art documentary was made during the field study of rickshaw art in Dhaka. which is mentioned in the documentation.

8. Modalities for updating the information contained in the inventory entry

8.1 Persons/groups, including community representatives, who compiled the inventory entry

1. Name: Syed Ahmad Rickshaw Artist, Mobile: 01711980173 2. Name: Shopan Das, Rickshaw Artist, Mobile: 01869339608 3. Name: Md. Rafiqul Islam Rickshaw Artist, Mobile: 01878607980 4. Name: Prashanto Das, Rickshaw Artist, Mobile: 01839009717 5. Ms.Armin Hossen, Project Researcher, Rickshaw and Rickshaw Art in Dhaka, arminhossen1996@gmail.com; +8801610116612

8.2 Consent of community/group/individuals concerned for data collection with a view to inventorying

The community signed the consent form during data collection and gave their consent.

8.3 Date of community consent to include the entry on an inventory

2022-11-22

8.4 Present condition of the cultural element

Becoming less

9. Community suggestions

(a) Brief description of suggestions for safeguarding of the element by community members/experts/holders, if any

1. The Rickshaw Art has to be promoted through knowledge transfer mechanism that should properly address its own style in the use of colours and the texture of the fabric 2. In order to improve the quality of life and financial stability appropriate patronage of the Government needs to be ensured. 3. The Rickshaw Artists of Bangladesh should be given a place for establishing an office cum museum. 4. Exhibition of Rickshaw Art should be arranged under the sponsorship of various government and private organizations, where participation of all Rickshaw artists will be open.

(b) Brief description of restrictions on use of data collected, if any

No Restrictions.

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Rickshaws and Rickshaw Painting in Dhaka

An Element of the
Intangible Cultural Heritage
of Bangladesh



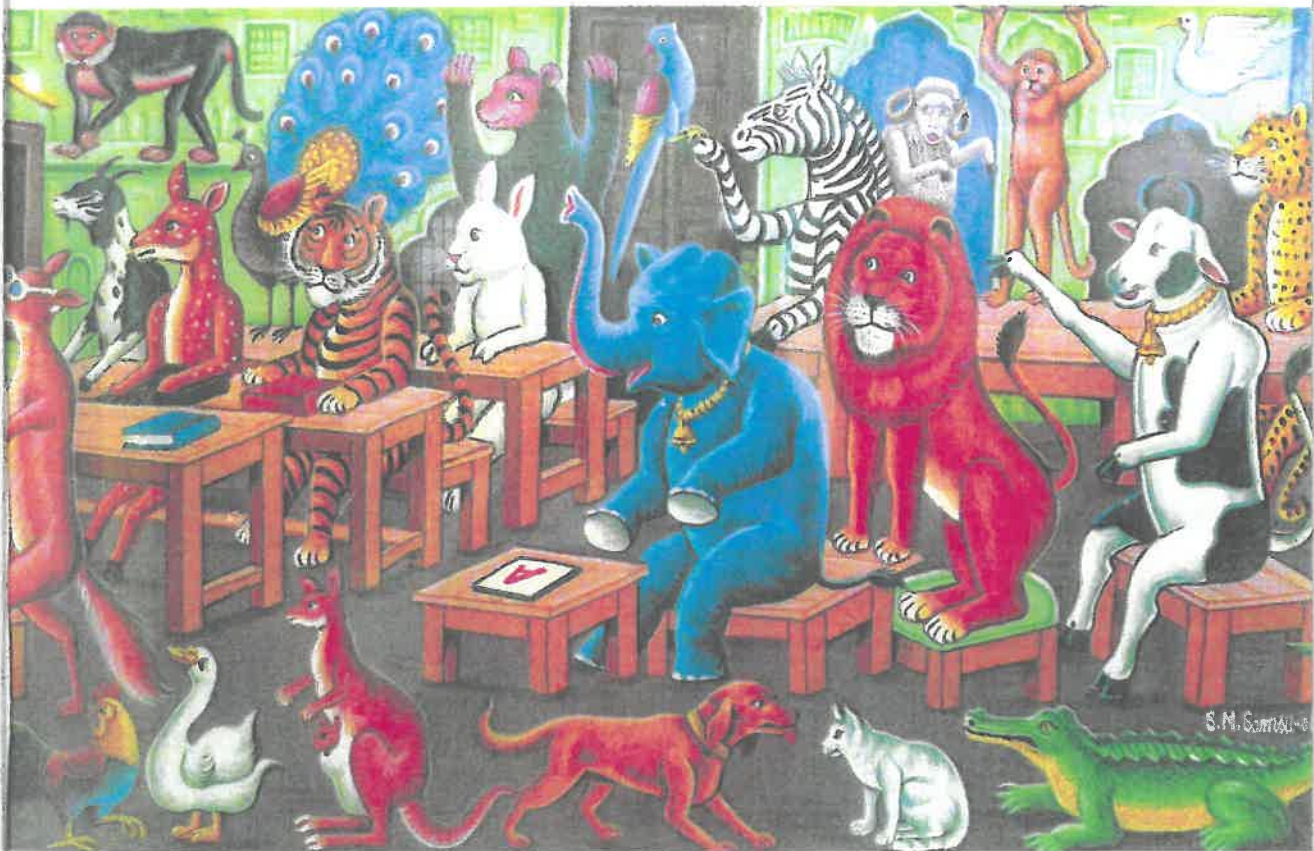
Ministry of Cultural Affairs
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh



Bangla Academy
Dhaka Bangladesh

Rickshaws and Rickshaw Painting in Dhaka

An Element of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Bangladesh



Animals doing civilized acts in a classroom with the cunning fox being the teacher in a rickshaw painting

Rickshaws and Rickshaw Painting in Dhaka

An Element of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Bangladesh

Firoz Mahmud | Shahida Khatun



Bangla Academy
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Rickshaws and Rickshaw Painting in Dhaka An Element of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Bangladesh

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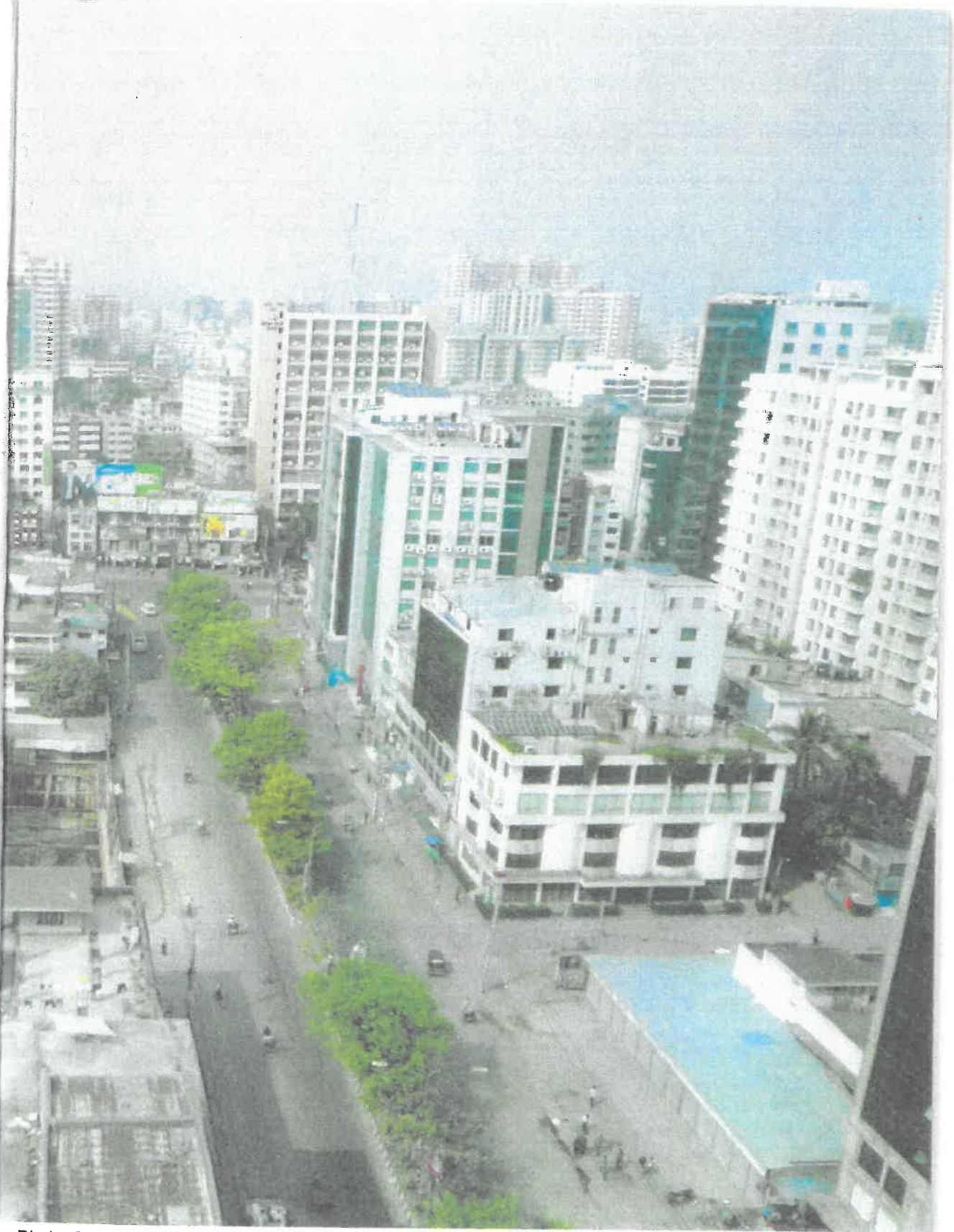
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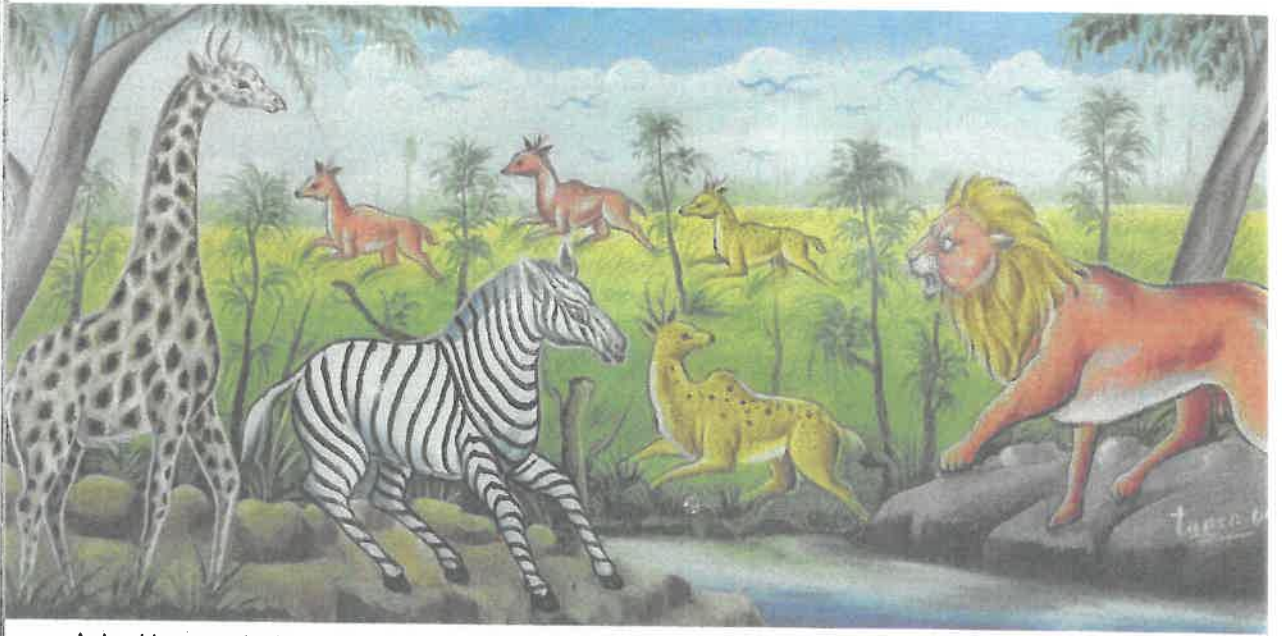
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Dhaka, The Rickshaw Capital of the World



Animal imagery in the jungle, a popular theme in rickshaw painting



K M Khalid MP
State Minister
Ministry of Cultural Affairs
Government of the People's Republic
of Bangladesh

Message

Bangladesh recognizes and documents its intangible cultural heritage with a view to protecting its diverse manifestations and fostering creativity. We have established a cultural policy based on mutual respect, human rights and shared values, and we have a zero tolerance for any attempt that disrupts it. We are highly committed to safeguarding our intangible cultural heritage.

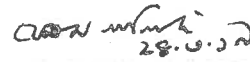
We feel proud that UNESCO has so far inscribed the following four elements from Bangladesh on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity: (1) Baul Songs in 2008, (2) Traditional Art of Jamdani Weaving in 2013, (3) Mangal Shobhajatra on Pahela Baishakh in 2016, and (4) Traditional Art of Shital Pati Weaving of Sylhet in 2017. More importantly, UNESCO included The Historic 7th March Speech of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the International Memory of the World Register on 30 October, 2017.

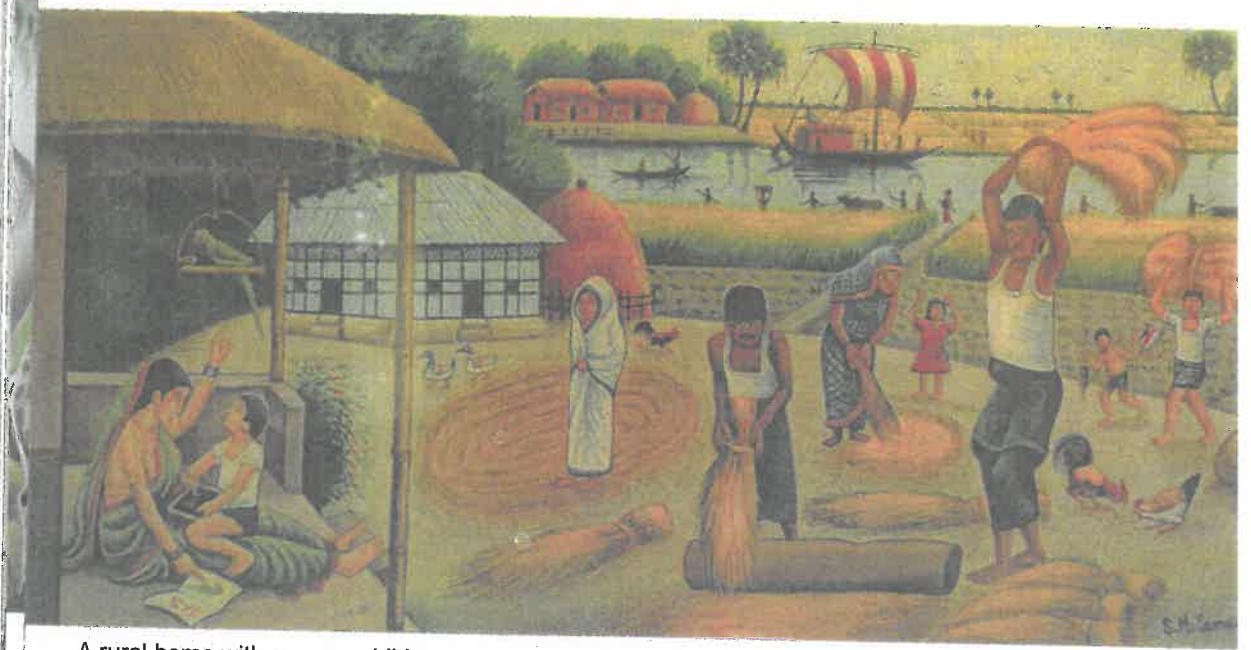
I am very happy to know that Bangla Academy has published an exclusive inventory on Rickshaws and Rickshaw Painting in Dhaka and has thereby brought light into the current status of the element of our intangible cultural heritage.

I wish the success of the endeavour in safeguarding the element.

Joy Bangla, Joy Bangabandhu
Long Live Bangladesh

24 March 2019


28.3.19
K M Khalid MP



A rural home with women, children and men engaged in usual activities
Painted by master rickshaw artist S. M. Samsu



Ministry of Cultural Affairs
Government of the People's Republic
of Bangladesh

Foreword

The Ministry of Cultural Affairs of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, representing the State Party, is resubmitting the nomination of Rickshaws and Rickshaw Painting in Dhaka in accordance with the decision of the Intergovernmental Committee at its thirteenth session held in Mauritius in 2018. One of the criteria for inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity is that the nominated element is required to be included in an inventory of the intangible cultural heritage present in the territory of the submitting State Party, as defined in Articles 11 and 12 of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The nominated element was originally included in *Living Traditions* published in 2007. It was updated in June 2016. I am happy that it has been updated again to comply with Article 12 of the Convention which states that the inventory(ies) "shall be regularly updated."

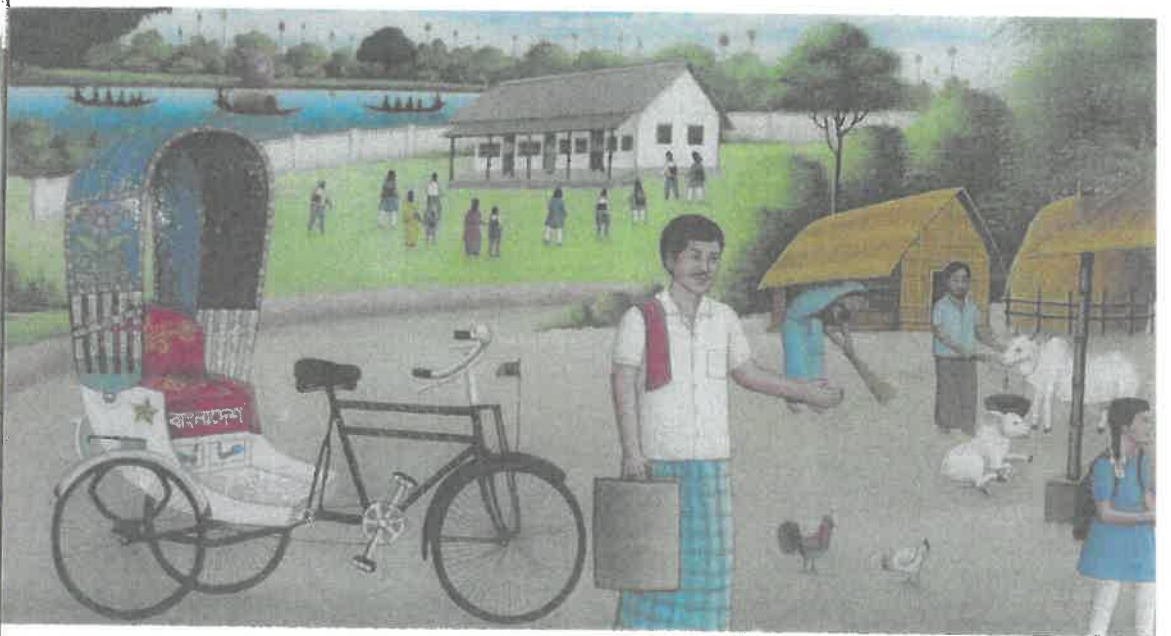
We have taken particular note of this observation of the Intergovernmental Committee: "Reminds the State Party that the communities, groups and individuals concerned must be the key players in any effort to identify, promote and safeguard intangible cultural heritage, and must be involved in every stage thereof."

Within our resources we have tried our best to take necessary measures to raise awareness of communities, groups and, where applicable, individuals regarding the importance and value of their intangible cultural heritage, as well as of the Convention, so that the bearers and practitioners of this heritage may be fully benefitted from this standard setting instrument.


24.03.2019

24 March 2019

Dr. Md. Abu Hena Mostofa Kamal, ndc
Secretary in Charge
Ministry of Cultural Affairs
Government of the People's Republic
of Bangladesh



A decorated rickshaw and its puller waiting for a school-going girl to ride
Painted by master rickshaw artist Tapan Das



Bangla Academy
Dhaka Bangladesh

Preface

It is my great pleasure to write this preface to Rickshaws and Rickshaw Painting in Dhaka, an element of the intangible cultural heritage of Bangladesh. It has been nominated by the State Party for inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Earlier Bangla Academy prepared the nomination file for this element. It is now being resubmitted to incorporate the recommendations of the Intergovernmental Committee. I note with satisfaction that the inventory relating to the element has been updated in accordance with the requirement of Article 12 of the 2003 Convention.

This publication is now an exclusive inventory of the nominated element. Dr. Firoz Mahmud and Ms Shahida Khatun, two ICH Experts, have studied the current status of the element in Dhaka. With a view to preparing the nomination file effectively they have ensured the widest possible participation of the communities concerned in the nomination process.

In accordance with its Act Bangla Academy has been collecting data from the bearers and practitioners of the intangible cultural heritage, promoting its function in society, integrating its safeguarding into planning programmes, fostering scientific, technical and artistic studies with a view to enhancing knowledge, and facilitating, to the extent possible, access to information relating to the intangible cultural heritage while respecting customary practices governing access to such aspects of it.

24 March 2019

Habibullah Sirajee
Director General
Bangla Academy



Rickshaws carrying passengers

Introduction

All the Member States of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) are convinced that no development can be sustainable without a strong component of what we call culture.

Culture embodies a whole way of life more or less peculiar to every society. As people shape and reshape it, it is not static. Collective order is the fundamental principle of cultural identity. Different geographical entities through historical vicissitudes have produced different cultures around the world. Only a human-centered approach to development based on mutual respect and open dialogue among cultures can lead to lasting, inclusive and equitable results. Yet, until recently, culture has been missing from the development equation.

To ensure that culture takes its rightful place in development strategies and processes, UNESCO has adopted a three-pronged approach: it spearheads advocacy worldwide for culture and development, engages with the international community to set clear policies and legal frameworks, and works on the ground to support governments and local stakeholders to safeguard heritage, strengthen creative industries and encourage cultural pluralism.

UNESCO's Conventions provide a unique global platform for international cooperation and establish a holistic cultural governance system based on human rights and shared values. Each Convention with its precise goal is a cultural instrument as well as an international treaty. The Conventions collectively enable the Member States to protect, safeguard and promote the world cultural and natural heritage including ancient archaeological sites, cultural property including museum collections, cultural diversity, the underwater cultural heritage, the intangible cultural heritage, oral traditions and all other cultural expressions, and to support creativity, innovation and the emergence of dynamic cultural sectors.

The concept of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) emerged in the 1990s as a counterpart to the World Cultural Heritage that focuses on monuments, groups of buildings and sites which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science. The 32nd session of the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO),

Rickshaws and Rickshaw Painting in Dhaka

meeting in Paris from 29 September to 17 October 2003, adopted the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage on the seventeenth day of October 2003.

The 2003 Convention sets out the functions and responsibilities of the States Parties in identifying the elements of the Intangible cultural heritage and in safeguarding and promoting them. By signing the Convention, each State Party pledges not only to safeguard the elements present in its territory but also to compile one or more national inventories of its intangible cultural heritage. The States Parties are encouraged to integrate the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage into national planning programs, set up staff and services at the appropriate center(s), undertake scientific and technical preservation and academic research, and adopt measures which give this heritage a function in the day-to-day life of the communities, groups or, where applicable, individuals.

Bangladesh has been a Member State of UNESCO since 1972, that is, soon after independence. Bangladesh ratified UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage on 11 June 2009 and is currently engaged in the implementation of this Convention.

The Bangladesh National Cultural Policy 2006 recognizes dance, music and other forms of cultural practice as part of Bangladesh's cultural heritage. The main objectives of the Bangladesh National Cultural Policy are as follows:

1. To protect and promote all cultural expressions in Bangladesh in order to celebrate the distinctiveness of Bangladeshi culture and foster positive national awareness;
2. To develop cultural activities ensuring integration with economic development;
3. To protect, preserve and develop cultural elements of Bangladeshi life, including indigenous Bangalee culture that had been suppressed in the past; and
4. To promote positive outcomes from international exchange between artists.

Bangladesh has launched a program on the country's intangible cultural heritage since 2012. It needs to be based solidly on the concept of empirical research so that the bearers and practitioners of the different elements can participate more actively in the process of compiling a national inventory as well as in the process of nominating any element for inscription on the List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding or for inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Procedures followed in Bangladesh for nominating an element for inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

The Government of Bangladesh, the State Party, has increasingly realized the significance of an Intangible cultural heritage nomination for inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The Ministry of Cultural Affairs representing the State Party understands that an element, if inscribed, contributes to the visibility of the inscribed element, raises awareness of its importance at the local, national and international levels, encourages dialogue among the bearers and practitioners involved, and promotes respect for cultural diversity and human creativity worldwide.

The Ministry of Cultural Affairs assigns the task of preparing a nomination file to a cultural organization which is best suited for the proposed element. The bearers and practitioners of any nominated element are supposed to participate actively in the process of preparing and elaborating the nomination file at all stages with their free, prior and informed consent. The cultural agency entrusted with the task of preparing a nomination file is supposed to ensure this vital requirement, without which the nomination file will remain flawed.

Preparing a nomination file is a strenuous job requiring expertise in writing with clarity and knowledge of the element to be nominated. It is essential to create a special cell within a cultural organization for capacity building. Bangla Academy, a national institution devoted to the study and development of language, literature and culture, is most competent to house the proposed special cell. This institution, by virtue of its wide range of activities, is in close contact with all sections of the public and enjoys their confidence. It is the only public institution to have the membership program and holds an annual general meeting. Therefore, Bangla Academy has both direct and spontaneous commitments to the safeguarding and development of the intangible cultural heritage of Bangladesh. Acknowledging the expertise of Bangla Academy in the documentation and study of the intangible cultural heritage of Bangladesh the Ministry of Cultural Affairs assigned to it the task of preparing three nomination files: (1) Traditional Art of Jamdani Weaving in 2012, (2) Rickshaws and Rickshaw Painting in Dhaka in 2013, and (3) Mangal Shobhajatra on Pahela Baishakh in 2014.

Traditional Art of Jamdani Weaving was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2013 and Mangal Shobhajatra on Pahela Baishakh was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2016. Rickshaws and Rickshaw Painting in Dhaka was considered by the Intergovernmental Committee in Mauritius in 2018. The Committee decided to refer the nomination of Rickshaws and Rickshaw Painting in Dhaka to the submitting State Party and invited it to

Rickshaws and Rickshaw Painting in Dhaka

resubmit the nomination to the Committee for examination during a following cycle. Accordingly it has been resubmitted.

Procedures of Documentation prior to the Compilation of this Inventory of Rickshaws and Rickshaw Painting in Dhaka

Documentation is vital to the preparation of a national inventory of the intangible cultural heritage. We are not interested in isolated things but in relationships between things and creators. Both material culture and verbal culture reflect the values and shared symbols of identity of a particular community or a group and, where applicable, a few individuals identified as icons or master artists. Form, symbols and tradition are of vital importance in determining whether or not an element can be classed as intangible. "Form is of utmost importance because it is the most persistent, the least changing of an object's components," says Henry Glassie. Every culture, whether communal or not, has a set of symbols. In both material culture and verbal culture, response to symbols is even more implicit because people in their daily lives respond to symbols rather than to objective reality. As for tradition, it is the creation of the people out of the past.

The bearers and practitioners of the nominated element are divided into two distinct communities: the rickshaw craftsmen and the rickshaw artists. Traditional craftsmanship involves traditional skills, such tools as are generally handmade and manually operated, and such devices as are manipulated with little, or without any, mechanical aid. The rickshaw craftsmen who also decorate rickshaws render a depiction of the socially transmitted or recreated ideas and inherited symbols in their products. For rickshaw painting in Dhaka we have concentrated on its social and cultural meanings. We have identified the themes of rickshaw painting. Numerous are the contents within each theme. As contents change in response to the contemporary social and cultural environment, rickshaw painting is being recreated.

Documentation subdivides into three stages: (1) contextual documentation, (2) biographical documentation, and (3) interpretive documentation. We conducted fieldwork in such a way as to complete the documentation of the element contextually, biographically and interpretatively.

(1) Contextual Documentation

Contextual documentation was conducted through observation, photographic or video coverage, face-to-face interaction with a number of rickshaw craftsmen and rickshaw artists, and by gathering pertinent information through dialogue with them.

(2) Biographical Documentation

Biographical documentation is designed to incorporate history's neglected

people. In the past, the intangible cultural heritage was viewed as an outcome of the collective efforts of anonymous artists/craftspeople. Although there were many who attained personal recognition for their masterly performances or works, their names were obscured by the passage of time and the general lack of emphasis on individual creativity. As a result, stylistic features recognizable as belonging to individual masters are rare. Considering that artists/craftspeople contribute significantly to the artistic tradition of their community or group, we have constructed the life histories of some rickshaw craftsmen and rickshaw artists. It is, however, not possible to include their life histories in the nomination file. We will publish their life stories. Their life stories, we believe, will act as a source of inspiration to others. It is worth pointing out here that the life history of a master performer or a master artist, when compiled by an ICH expert on the continuous dialogue method in the environment in which the master performer or the master artist works and creates performances or objects respectively, becomes a mine of data in context. A master performer or a master artist is more experienced, thoughtful and creative. As he/she has been creating performances or crafting objects for a long period of time, his/her performances or products have invariably varied in form and content across time. His/her life history offers a straightforward and intimate picture of his/her traditional attitudes and beliefs across time. We learn about his/her entire life, coming to an understanding of how his/her artistic performance or work has been shaped by social needs and economic conditions. Joining verbal and other types of evidence, we can get a broader and more vivid picture of the master performer's or the master artist's relentless endeavour. Tradition is best reflected in the act of the master performer or in the work of the master artist. Both are capable of exercising control over the other practitioners, especially their apprentices, by retaining the aesthetics and use of tradition.

(3) Interpretive Documentation

Interpretive documentation requires analysis. During fieldwork we were inquisitive and meticulous. Instead of relying merely on verbal information, we took photographs of an event scrupulously. Our strenuous effort to collect data in both words and pictures as well as our investigations into the various aspects of the intangible cultural heritage have enriched the inventory of this element of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Bangladesh. We argue for folk performances or folk objects as evidences of regional cultures. We lead others into an understanding of the country's different artistic traditions, and we relate them to the prevailing trends in the social and cultural sphere.

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Rickshaws and Rickshaw Painting in Dhaka

Goals of this Inventory

The goals of this inventory are as follows:

To search and find the roots of the element;

To learn and understand the cultural legacy of the element and to develop respect for it;

To preserve or protect the element and its creative expressions as a dynamic process;

To focus on those workshops or ateliers where living masters teach performances, skills and techniques in a non-formal way, that is, orally and with practical demonstrations;

To safeguard and promote this intangible cultural heritage by encouraging and supporting the documentation and study of its bearers and practitioners;

To understand the transmission of the practitioners' knowledge, skills and techniques to the succeeding generations;

To focus in particular on the continuous recreation and transmission of knowledge and skills necessary for safeguarding this intangible cultural heritage;

To encourage the practitioners to safeguard their crafts and the social functions and cultural meanings of the element, preferably in community settings, where the practitioners can practice and teach their skills and enrich contemporary designs, themes and motifs;

To enable the people in general to become aware of the importance of the intangible cultural heritage of Bangladesh and its role in strengthening national identity, cultural diversity and human creativity;

To pay particular attention to avoid commercial misappropriation, to find a proper balance between the parties involved in commerce and trade and the practitioners of the element, to ensure that the commercial use of the element does not distort its meaning and purpose for the community concerned;

To develop and manage tourism in a sustainable way;

To locate cultural spaces where the tradition-bearers and practitioners can organize exhibitions, lectures, seminars, debates and training on this element of the intangible cultural heritage;

To ensure that training is imparted to the young in a manner that the concerned element can be perpetuated;

To realize the mutual relationships between tangible culture and intangible culture; and

To understand the social and cultural aspects of the element.

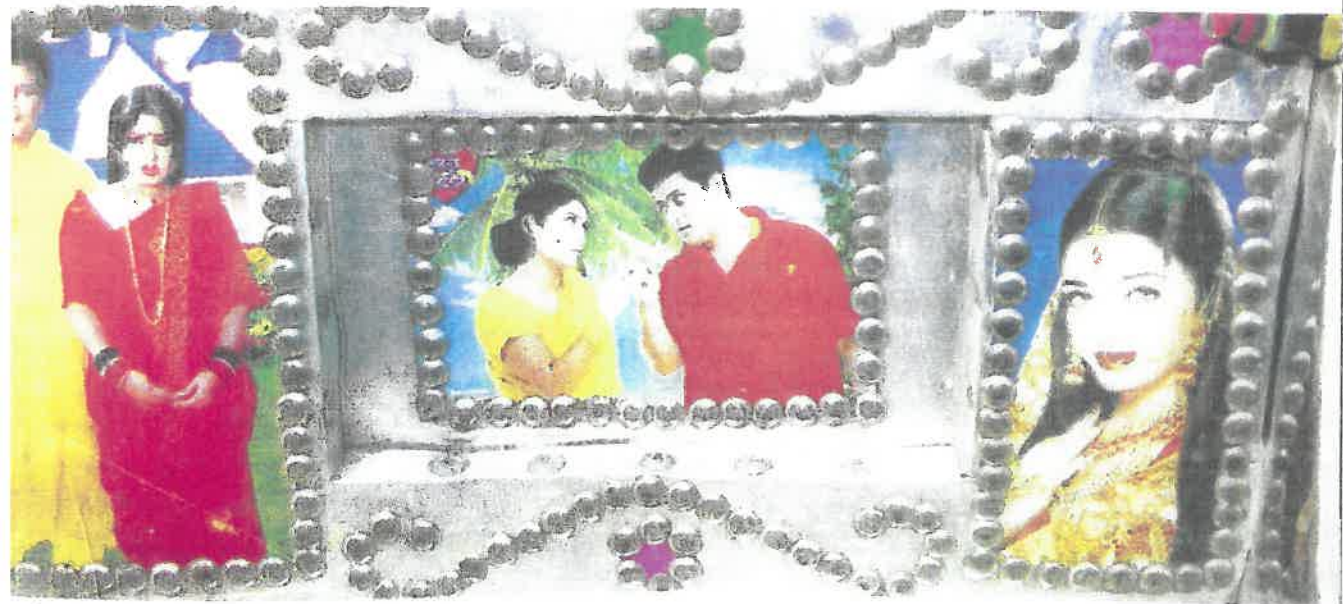
Protecting Our Intangible Cultural Heritage and Fostering Creativity

The intangible cultural heritage is a renewable resource *par excellence* as well as a mainspring of cultural diversity and a guarantee of sustainable development. It is a force for social inclusion and collective mobilization.

In today's interconnected world, the power of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity is enormous. Its diverse manifestations—from traditional practices to art forms—enrich our lives in countless ways. It is a blending of heritage and creativity. While heritage constitutes a source of identity and cohesion for communities, creativity contributes to building open, inclusive and pluralistic societies. Both heritage and creativity lay the foundations for vibrant, innovative, prosperous and knowledgeable societies.

Bringing many positive results to many countries, the 2003 Convention has shown remarkable success over more than a decade. The impact of the Convention on the cultural policy of many countries has also been incredible. Many countries have made new laws or amended the existing ones. Moreover, it has raised awareness and motivation for safeguarding ICH and has established a good foundation for national and community involvement as well as international cooperation.

The intangible cultural heritage of Bangladesh fosters cultural pluralism through diversity and communal harmony through social cohesion. If we can gather tremendous amounts of empirical data from close contact with communities, groups and real individuals through the experience of fieldwork, the intangible cultural heritage will become more vivacious than ever before.



Popular movie stars in a rickshaw painting

Rickshaws and Rickshaw Painting in Dhaka



Two rickshaw craftsmen decorating a rickshaw in Tekka Mistri's workshop



A rickshaw craftsman painting birds on the aluminum sheath of a rickshaw

Rickshaws and Rickshaw Painting in Dhaka



Tekka Mistri sewing plastic sheets to decorate the hood of a rickshaw.



Rafiqul Islam, a master rickshaw artist, painting a thematic picture for a rickshaw



A couple enjoying a decorated rickshaw ride

Basic Information:

State Party

The Ministry of Cultural Affairs representing the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Name of the element in English

Rickshaws and Rickshaw Painting in Dhaka

Name of the element in the language and script of the community concerned

ঢাকার রিকশা ও রিকশাচিত্র

Other name(s) of the element, if any

Rickshaws and Rickshaw Art in Dhaka

Name of the community, group or, if applicable, individuals concerned with the element

The rickshaw craftsmen and the rickshaw artists, all of whom live in Dhaka, are the communities concerned with the element. The rickshaw craftsmen are the skilled workers who are capable of doing structural and artistic work for the purpose of framing, installing, decorating and painting a rickshaw body onto a rickshaw sub-frame. The rickshaw artists paint on plastic sheets and on plates of corrugated iron.

Geographical location and range of the element

The element is present throughout Dhaka where rickshaws are now most numerous. Dhaka is the Capital of Bangladesh. It stands on the Buriganga River. Bangladesh, located in South Asia between India and Myanmar, now consists of 64 districts. The rickshaw now appears in all cities, towns and suburbs of every district. Even though the geographical range of the rickshaw and rickshaw painting is the whole of Bangladesh, the most prolific and predominant center of the same is Dhaka. The rickshaws of Dhaka, apart from being most decorative and dazzling, depict all the known themes of rickshaw painting. More importantly, Dhaka represents the best specimens of rickshaw painting in Bangladesh.

The element constitutes an element of the intangible cultural heritage as defined in Article 2 of the Convention.

The element is related to the following domain of the intangible cultural heritage:

Traditional craftsmanship

Rickshaws and Rickshaw Painting in Dhaka

Origin of the Rickshaw

The word *rickshaw* originates from the Japanese word *jinrikisha*, which literally means the "human-powered vehicle." Jonathan Scobie (1827-1897), also known as Jonathan Goble (Paker 1990), a missionary in Japan, is said to have invented the rickshaw around 1869 to transport his invalid wife through the streets of Yokohama (Diefendorf 2007: 223, Sobey 2009: 172). Yokohama is the second largest city in Japan. It lies on Tokyo Bay, south of Tokyo, in the Kanto region of the main island of Honshu. It is a major commercial hub of the Greater Tokyo Area.

The rickshaw (ricksha in Bangla) is a human-propelled conveyance on three wheels for transport of both people and goods. It can accommodate two persons in comfort, even a whole family consisting of the parents and their two infants sitting on their laps, or a heap of goods with a man holding it tightly.

Brief History of the Rickshaw in Dhaka

The rickshaw first made its appearance on the streets of Dhaka in 1941 when the city had only 37 rickshaws. In course of time Dhaka became known as the city of rickshaws. Rickshaw painting in Bangladesh dates back to the 1950s, and it started in Dhaka as part of movie billboards.

Rickshaw painting is a dynamic form of urban folk art in Dhaka. We can assign it to traditional art since it has remained in fashion for a pretty long time and has already acquired the trait of traditionalism to prolong. This living tradition has survived in Dhaka since the 1950s.

Rickshaw painting is one of the most fascinating expressive arts that Dhaka can boast of, and it deserves to be documented and studied in chronological sequence. Strange as it may seem, to many Bangladeshi art critics, rickshaw painters were not artists, and they totally ignored them. When Bangladeshi art critics, even art historians, were indifferent to rickshaw painting in spite of the richness of its artistic expression, Joanna Kirkpatrick, an anthropologist from the United States of America, was the first to find it exciting and, with the help of her colleagues and friends in Bangladesh, got involved in a full-scale methodical study in 1975-76.

She returned to Bangladesh five times after her first visit in 1975. In 1998, she made her last trip to Bangladesh to shoot the video for her CD-ROM on *Transports of Delight: The Ricksha Arts of Bangladesh* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003). She documented the evolution of Bangladesh's rickshaw painting from 1975 to 1987 fairly in depth, and thereafter she brought her study up to date until 2002, relying on her last visit in 1998 and Kevin Bubrisk's pictures and notes of 2002. As she spent time and energy for the minute and accurate documentation of rickshaw painting, she had the

unique opportunity to observe its manifestations through different phases of change spanning 27 years, and her wonderful work was the culmination of her painstaking effort.

Animal Imagery in Rickshaw Painting

Satirical animals were popular with artists in Kalighat paintings of Kolkata in the mid-nineteenth century. It appears that the rickshaw artists of Dhaka began to depict animals as humans (as they are in folklore) sometime between the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on 15 August 1975 and the accession to the presidency of coup leader Major-General Ziaur Rahman on 21 April 1977.

Joanna Kirkpatrick, who studied the rickshaw art of Bangladesh extensively, writes:

"I began my first year of fieldwork in Bangladesh in September of 1975, shortly after the death of Sheikh Mujib. I was able to return to Bangladesh in the winter of 1978 for a shorter stint of fieldwork, but it was time enough to photograph and study some unusual shifts in Dhaka's ricksha art images. Two of the most notable thematic changes as compared to what I saw during my first visit were the appearance of many sorts of animal fable images, and birds—fantastically designed and feathered, often depicted in courtship poses—billing and cooing on rickshas all over the city."

She further writes: "Animal fables had become common during a time of increasing Islamization within the country."

This American anthropologist observed that Ziaur Rahman "had begun to ally his foreign policy closer to Bangladesh's former ruler, Pakistan (a nation which was then moving toward instituting Islamic religious law as the law of the land), and away from former liberation war helper India. He also adopted public relations strategies of portraying himself in newspaper photos as a pious man in prayerful poses while he actively wooed support from Bangladesh's Islamite political elites, positioning himself to run for the presidency in the 1977 elections." The secularism article in the preamble of the Bangladesh constitution was abolished under pressure from Muslim fundamentalist parties. Coincidentally, rickshaw art, "which hitherto had included riotous celebrations on painted panels of movies and movie stars, sexy women and violent men, moved into restricted modes of expression which avoided depicting human figures, substituting animals in human mufti instead."

Joanna Kirkpatrick noticed the complete elimination of pictures from the rickshaw painting of Dhaka. She writes:

"In the late seventies, the ruling powers in Dhaka were turning back toward emulating their former enemy Pakistan, because General Ziaur Rahman, who was then president of the country, perceived that it would benefit his hold on

Rickshaws and Rickshaw Painting in Dhaka

power to play up to the Islamic political parties and forces. Thus, an old law on the books since Pakistan days (1964) which proclaimed that people should not "paste up pictures on the back of rickshas" was re-invoked both in Dhaka and in Rajshahi by municipal authorities. (I have no information on the policy in Chittagong. This meant that "people pictures" were effectively suppressed."

Prior to the publication of Kirkpatrick's massive work in 2003, rickshaw painting received attention from at least three museums and a few other scholars. A review of their involvement in rickshaw painting would be helpful for a better appreciation of this living tradition in the social and cultural life of Bangladesh.

In 1980, the Dhaka Museum (later the Bangladesh National Museum) embarked upon a project for the photographic documentation of rickshaw painting, but it did not lead to any publication. Nor did the Dhaka Museum collect a rickshaw. Joanna Kirkpatrick's "The Painted Rickshaw as Culture Theater", published in *Studies in Visual Communication* in 1984, was the first piece of prose on Bangladesh's rickshaw painting. Since then she has written or lectured on rickshaw art. In 1986-87, Kirkpatrick purchased a collection of rickshaw panels and hoods, which are now in the collections of the Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

In 1987, Henry Glassie, a leading ethnographer and folklorist of the world, was also excited by the expressive wealth he found in rickshaw painting. "On my first day in Dhaka, my notebooks tell me, I was beginning to formulate a typology of rickshaw ornament," writes Glassie. Firoz Mahmud joined Henry Glassie in fieldwork in 1987. In the beginning of 1988, an exhibition of the rickshaw painting of Bangladesh was held at the British Museum in London. In 1989, Firoz Mahmud went to the United States and got his Ph. D. in folklore under the supervision of Henry Glassie, his mentor.

In 1992, the University Press Limited published Rob Gallagher's *The Rickshaws of Bangladesh*. This work is mainly a sociological study covering in detail many different economic roles involved in rickshaw manufacture and use. Although Gallagher has a chapter on rickshaw painting, he relies heavily on interviews with Kirkpatrick.

Henry Glassie made more trips to Bangladesh to conduct research for an ethnographic study of its material culture, and his extensive fieldwork resulted in the publication of *Art and Life in Bangladesh* (published by the Indiana University Press in 1997). Glassie returned to Bangladesh twice in 1998, and at the invitation of the Bangladesh National Museum he collaborated with Firoz Mahmud, Zinat Mahrukh Banu and Mohammed Mohsin in the creation of a collection that could be organized into an exhibition on Contemporary Traditional Art of Bangladesh. This exhibition, held at the Bangladesh National

Museum in 2000, included items of rickshaw painting and a highly decorated rickshaw.

Henry Glassie, a renowned folklorist of the world, and Firoz Mahmud, his student, studied rickshaws and rickshaw painting in Dhaka and elsewhere extensively. They also made a comparative study of the paintings of the rickshaw and the motorized baby taxi. Their findings highlight rickshaw craftsmanship as well as the social functions and cultural meanings of rickshaw painting.

The thick, turbulent traffic of Dhaka is brightened by a mobile exhibition of art. Through the streets, like fabulous tropical fish or gaudy birds of paradise, rickshaws carry paintings. The man wealthy enough to own an automobile is annoyed by the way that rickshaws snarl the traffic and mark the place as underdeveloped, but rickshaws carry two-thirds of Dhaka's burden of passengers, while supplying employment to nearly a quarter of the city's workforce. Pulling a rickshaw is the labor a poor man from the country can find in the city. Building, repairing, and decorating rickshaws are jobs for poor men who are mechanically or artistically inclined.

Assembled in a sequence of shops, each specializing in some segment of the process, rickshaws end in the hands of decorators and artists like Anis Mistri. He was born in Dhaka in 1962. Attracted to the trade in boyhood, Anis Mistri took up painting at thirteen, and he became the owner of his own shop in 1986. In his shop on Jafarabad Road in Rayer Bazar, he finishes one rickshaw every five days. Anis Mistri receives the forward portion of a bicycle, trailing two wheels, between which, on stiff springs, a slipper-shaped coach is framed of wood and sheathed in bright aluminum. Then he adds the frivolous ornament that, in this place of scarce resources, amounts to a quarter of the cost of the whole. Although some passengers love decorated rickshaws for a ride, most passengers do not choose rickshaws for their ornament; they bargain hard for the price of a ride. The ornament is the pride of the owner who rents the rickshaw to its puller. Working to receive, as is customary, more than the agreed upon minimum, Anis Mistri paints birds and flowers on the iron frame, studs patterns of tacks into the aluminum, upholsters the seat with painted plastic, decorates the folding top with appliqué, and adds a pictorial panel on the rear above the painted bumper. It is worth pointing out here that a master rickshaw craftsman is known as Mistri. Acquiring this title is professionally prestigious. Every workshop where rickshaws are built is owned by a Mistri. A Mistri is not necessarily a master rickshaw artist. Anis Mistri is an exception; he is both a master craftsman and a master artist. We commissioned him to make a gorgeous rickshaw for the Bangladesh National Museum. He made it for a very high price, and it is now one of the most decorated rickshaws ever made.

Rickshaws and Rickshaw Painting in Dhaka

Since the 1930s, Dhaka has been a city for rickshaws—pedal power fits the flat surface—and rickshaws are now found throughout Bangladesh. Regional differences have developed, and these are reflected in Dhaka, where most rickshaws carry separate painted panels, in the Dhaka style, though increasingly rickshaws in the Comilla style, with the picture painted directly on the coach, have appeared in the streets. Since the 1980s, the whirl of traffic has been further confused and ornamented by baby taxis. Like rickshaws, baby taxis vary regionally and carry pictures on the rear. The baby taxi, framed upon the chassis of a motor scooter, is faster and classier than the rickshaw. It costs more to ride; its aura is middle-class. Typically its painting is executed more fastidiously, and, shaded in perspective; it is more realistic and materialistic in conception.

In style and subject, the paintings of the rickshaw and the motorized baby taxi differ. The swift, noisy baby taxi often refers to itself in pictures of modern transport, of trains, steamships, and airplanes. Such pictures are uncommon on rickshaws, but the images on the vehicles remain topically comparable. Both feature birds and animals. On the baby taxi, the parrot or tiger is isolated in a portrait, usually based on a photograph. On the rickshaw, birds and animals mingle in a scene from nature. The tone of the scene has shifted in the recent years. As the horrors of war have receded into the past, the scene has become less violent. Once a lion gripped a deer with its bloody claws. Now peacocks confront a placid cow with her calf, or birds flock in colorful abundance.

Natural imagery is shared by the rickshaw and the baby taxi, but the culture develops differently. The baby taxi presents suburban homes and cities with towering buildings, signs of human accomplishment, but more often it images the cultural through scenes that parallel the potter's terracottas exactly. A river winds by a village. A country boat, its sail raised, glides toward the sunset. Occasionally men and women appear, going about their agricultural labor. In the smoky traffic of the city, this depiction of Bangladesh feels nostalgic. Through it, urban people look backward to a peaceful, rural life. But the vision does not belong to the past. It shows country life today, idealizing the existence of the great majority of the people in Bangladesh.

Since village scenes are far more common on baby taxis than they are on rickshaws, it seems that their appeal is greatest to those most removed from rural labor. The baby taxi sentimentalizes contemporary agricultural life. The rickshaw—the labor and transport of the working poor—celebrates release from the daily grind, exhibiting scenes from popular films that are not to be found on baby taxis. The cinema hall is the resort of poor men; prosperous people stay home and watch television. For the country potter, the hero is the

great poet. For the urban worker, the hero is the movie star. Rickshaw after rickshaw shows one woman and two men in a triangle of passion and violence. Divided by social class in the paintings that reveal the culture through landscapes and heroes, the decorative programs of the rickshaw and the baby taxi then unify in the most common image of all, the Taj Mahal. It is the favorite image of the rickshaw artist Anis Mistri, as it is of Abdul Jabbar, master painter in the Yunus Mistri workshop where baby taxis are made. Its ubiquity proves that they are not alone. The Taj Mahal might be taken as a sign of general pride in the culture of the Indian subcontinent, but when we ask among the rickshaw pullers and artists, we find its connotations to be specifically religious. Some men know that the Taj Mahal is a tomb in India; they call it a symbol of "our Islamic heritage." More men identify it as a mosque, some even specifying it as their own mosque. Their interpretation entails a symbolic reading, rather than a literal one. For them, the dome and minarets mean a mosque, so that the picture becomes capable of representing the mosque where they pray.

An architectural materialization of Muslim effort and spirit, the Taj Mahal is joined on rickshaws, and more often on baby taxis, by renderings of specific mosques, usually the Star Mosque in Dhaka. In Tamil Nadu, rickshaws often carry insistent emblems of the region's religions, of Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. In Bangladesh, the religiosity of the rickshaw image might escape the casual observer. But the Taj Mahal is a sign of Islam. It overarches class differences in religious unity. As a mosque, the Taj Mahal stands in the system of the rickshaw artist as the statue of a god stands in the system of the potter. That it fills the place of the deity in the pictorial system becomes clear when we note that, while the Taj Mahal of the baby taxi occupies worldly space in a garden, the Taj Mahal of the rickshaw rests lightly upon a lotus. In clay sculpture, the lotus is the seat of the deity. It rises from the water to carry the spiritual power of Sarasvati, Lakshmi, or Ganesh. On the rickshaw panel, the lotus lifts and upholds the spiritual power of the mosque, through which, as through the *murti*, God is approached in prayer.

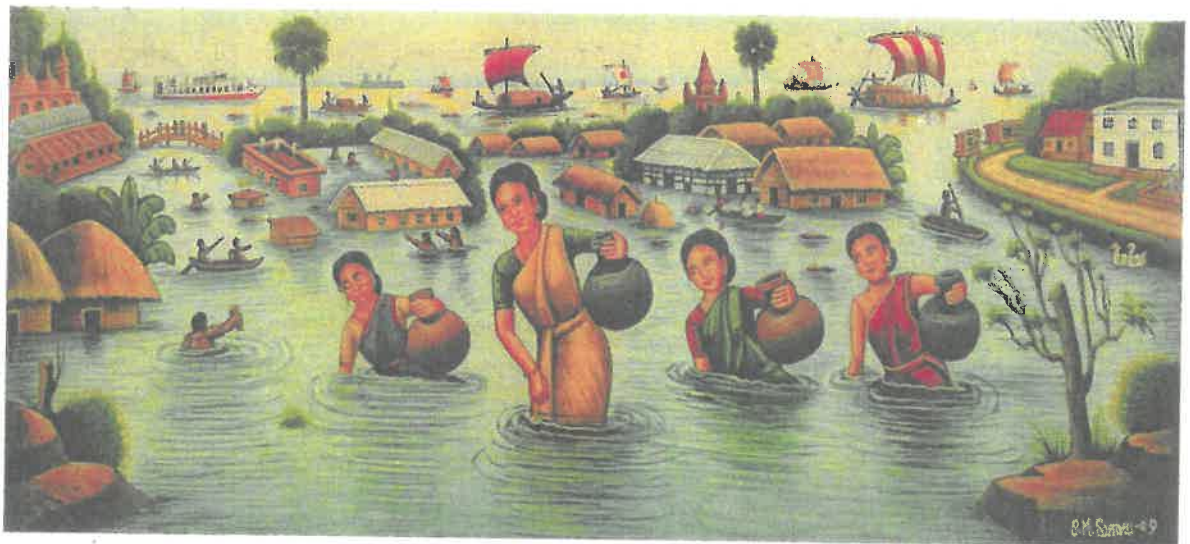
The rickshaw trade is dominated by Muslims even more completely than pottery is dominated by Hindus. It is a trade for men. So we were surprised when we were going through the shops that supply rickshaw parts on Bangsal Road in Old Dhaka, and we met R. K. Dey who took us home to meet his wife, the rickshaw artist Tapati Rani Dey.

In a high, sunny room in their lovely home in Old Dhaka, Tapati Rani Dey works with her sisters, Doly Ghosh and Ani Karmakar, and with her daughters, Songita and Bulu, painting pictures for rickshaws. It is good, she says, because she can stay home and do satisfying artistic work that brings money into the household. When she was a child, her father encouraged her to make

Rickshaws and Rickshaw Painting in Dhaka



A rickshaw painting depicting an episode of Radha and Krishna

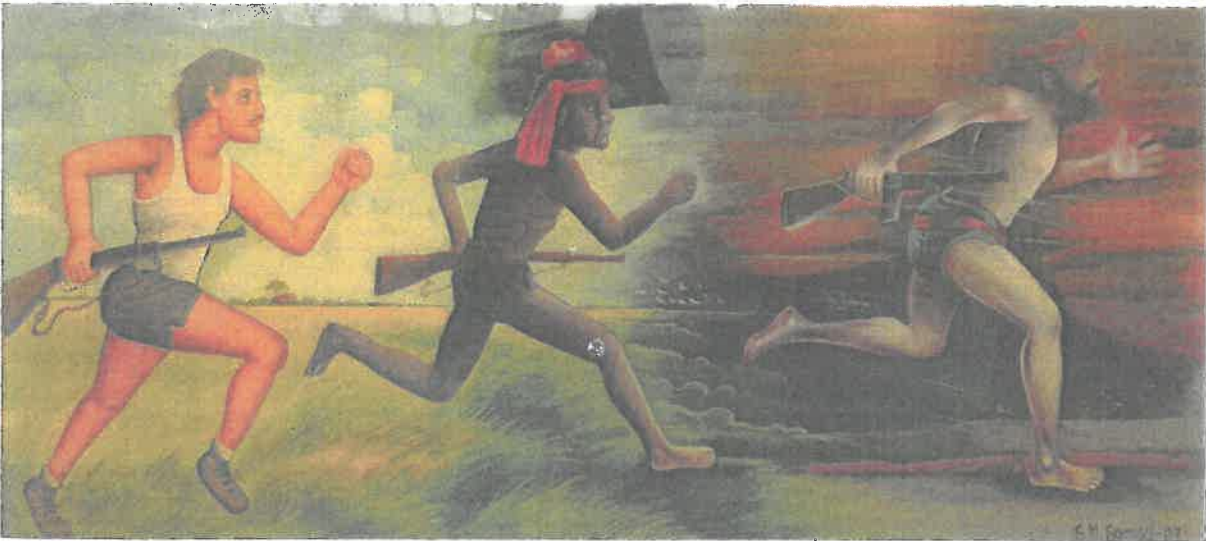


A typical rural scene: women fetching water from a pond in kalshis (pitchers made of clay)
Painted by master rickshaw artist s. m. Samsu

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A rickshaw painting depicts Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivering his historic 7th March speech



Three freedom fighters on the move during the War of Liberation, 1971
A recurring theme in rickshaw painting before 15 August 1975

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paintings for Lakshmi Puja. She came to love art, and when she saw the rickshaw paintings made by her husband's younger brother, she tried her hand at the craft, mastered it, and then taught it to other women.

Together with her sisters and daughters, Tapatī Rani Dey produces something like six thousand rickshaw pictures a year. We were surprised to find refined Hindu women filling a central role in the rickshaw trade, and we were fascinated by the style of their work. The merchant who will buy the result supplies them with pieces of plastic to upholster the seats and pieces of tin for the rear panels of rickshaws. The piece is painted, like a *murti*, white for brightness. Then Tapatī Rani Dey, working entirely freehand, draws into the paint a quick sketch of the design with a pencil. Her sisters and daughters do the painting, mixing color on the surface, spreading and blending it over the background, between the figures. The painting is allowed to dry before its next phase, when the figures are modeled in color. To finish the picture, they put last what another artist might put first—the lines that contain the color, shape the form, and supply the detail. They use color, not clay, but they work like the sculptor of terracottas who models the form and then incises the outlines and details. Painting a flurry of birds or the anguished faces of movie stars, the rickshaw artist lifts forms from the surface in color and then adds the outlines, just as the ancient artists did in the Ajanta caves. Their technique is the opposite of the one Henry Glassie found in Turkey, where artists draw sharp outlines, then fill them with color, treating pictures like textiles. We take the Bangladeshi style to be the way that painting is done in an artistic tradition dominated by sculpture in clay.

Henry Glassie says:

"If the animals stand for people, which they surely do in pictures that show animals performing civilized acts, such as marching in a traditional wedding procession, then the train could stand for modern technology in its malign aspect, ripping into the environment and upsetting the social order. But any interpretation that would identify progress with evil is counterbalanced by favorable portrayals of the modern and by displays of violence in nature—the graceful, innocent deer, bloodied and brought to earth by the lion. People have enemies enough in themselves. They are raised from the idyllic and monstrous state of nature by faith.

"Works in clay ascend to the *murti*. No Hindu deities appear on rickshaws. The single most common image is the Taj Mahal, a symbol of Islam. The religions are different, but their orientations are so consonant that the potential for sacred interpretation diffuses through the whole pictorial system.

Regional Styles of Rickshaw Painting

In the 1980s, rickshaw painting appears to have settled into three major

regional styles: the Dhaka style; the Chittagong style; and the Rajshahi style. Dhaka, the capital as well as the largest city of Bangladesh, is located in the central part of the country. Chittagong, the major port city, is located in southern Bangladesh. Rajshahi is a town located in the northwestern part of the country. There are also two design subtypes: the Comilla design and the Pabna design. Comilla is a town in eastern Bangladesh, not far from either Dhaka or Chittagong, while Pabna is a small town about midway between Dhaka and Rajshahi in the western part of the country.

Dhaka rickshaws, by far most prolific in decoration in the whole of Bangladesh, provide all the dominant features in design. As a result, the Dhaka style is the most varied, elaborate and expensive of the three major regional styles, and in overall appearance it tends to produce the most gorgeous rickshaw paintings in the country. The back panels of the Dhaka rickshaw "carry a bilaterally a symmetrical, tripartite composition achieved by two mirrored forms flanking a central form, itself symmetrical."

Two examples are: two birds flank a flower or the Taj Mahal, or two peacocks flank the head of a lion.

In the 1980s, the rickshaws of Chittagong were recognizable on the basis of several characteristic features: stacked painted bars instead of a backboard, painted plastic floral design seatback decoration, and small sized pictures on the cab body and hoods, which lead to favor a flower or a combination of flowers and birds.

In the 1980s, the Rajshahi style was stereotyped, as it featured either the same landscape scenery or scenes of rampaging film stars brandishing guns and chasing women. A farmer leading his ox home to the distant village was a common painting on the rickshaws of Rajshahi. Most pictures were found on backboards, back cabs being undecorated.

The Comilla rickshaw is identified mainly by its wider seat and squared-off hood shape, and its cab often features all-over floral decoration. The coach of the Comilla rickshaw spreads symmetrically with birds and flowers. The decoration of the Comilla rickshaw is generally geometric and floral in the Muslim taste, though a circle might contain a portrait in profile of the white horse that Husayn, grandson of the Prophet, rode to martyrdom at Karbala. On the rear of the rickshaw, in Arabic, are written the names of God and the Prophet.

Pabna rickshaws exhibit structural design features common to both Chittagong and Rajshahi rickshaws. The handlebars of Pabna rickshaws are sparsely ornamented compared to Dhaka rickshaws.

Further Fieldwork in Dhaka

During 2005-2006 the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh undertook a cultural survey funded by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. This survey covered rickshaw

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painting. Many rickshaw craftsmen and the rickshaw artists extended full cooperation to the researchers to conduct fieldwork in Dhaka. In 2005 and 2006, Firoz Mahmud, accompanied by Shafiqur Rahman Chowdhury, conducted research on rickshaws and rickshaw painting in Dhaka at the request of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh. The inclusion of the element in *Living Traditions* would not have been possible but for the utmost support of the practitioners.

In 2012 and 2013 Firoz Mahmud, Shahida Khatun and Murshid Anwar conducted extensive fieldwork, and they interviewed master rickshaw craftsmen and master rickshaw artists to collect information. In April 2013, Henry Glassie came to Bangladesh again. At this time Firoz Mahmud, his student, presented a paper on rickshaws and rickshaw painting in Dhaka at a seminar chaired by Henry Glassie.

In 2015 and again in 2019, we (Firoz Mahmud and Shahida Khatun) conducted fieldwork. In 2019, we interviewed ten master rickshaw craftsmen and twenty master rickshaw artists. Their names appear in the consent letters and at the end of this inventory. Rickshaw craftsmanship has remained unchanged since the 1990s. Tekka Mistri has strongly asserted that the rickshaw's current design has to be improved. Most of the rickshaw's current faults stem from the fact that it is a tricycle made out of bicycle components. A tricycle is a different vehicle—its steering, balancing and wheel tracking are all different. The rickshaws in Dhaka are also used for carrying goods. A rickshaw often carries almost half a ton in weight. Many of the bicycle components used in the rickshaws make them unsuitable for carrying so much weight. On the other hand, the rickshaw's high profile and high centre of gravity cause several problems. For example, the high profile causes severe wind resistance and restricts the rickshaw puller's rear view, while the high centre of gravity makes the rickshaw more liable to topple over. These problems originate from a common cause—the design of the passenger seat and hood. Tekka Mistri says that it is worthwhile to examine the Comilla rickshaw. Comilla is a town in eastern Bangladesh, not far from Dhaka. Nevertheless the Comilla rickshaw is much different in design. It is identified mainly by its wider seat and squared-off hood shape. According to Tekka Mistri, the Comilla rickshaw is more comfortable for the passengers but tiring for the rickshaw puller. The Dhaka's rickshaw is uncomfortable for the passengers but relaxing for the rickshaw puller.

A rickshaw is fashioned according to a process. Five rickshaw craftsmen participate in the process in a sequential manner to make one rickshaw. Usually two of them frame a rickshaw body and then install it onto a rickshaw

sub-frame; one of them decorates it; and two of them paint floral and animal motifs on various parts including the aluminium sheathing of the rickshaw.

The rickshaw artists, commissioned by the master rickshaw craftsmen, work at home, as they do not paint anything on a rickshaw body. They paint exquisite floral motifs on plastic sheets and thematic pictures on plates of corrugated iron. They deliver these to the master rickshaw craftsmen. Every master rickshaw craftsman then selects a few painted plastic sheets and only one painted plate for each rickshaw. He sizes the painted plastic sheets. His equipment is a sewing machine. He sews the painted plastic sheets. He also uses scissors and templates for cutting out patterns of plastic tacks. Once the plate with a thematic picture is placed above the rickshaw's bumper and all the painted plastic sheets and patterns of plastic tacks are used to embellish the rickshaw's hood, the final product is a gorgeously decorated and painted rickshaw.

The master rickshaw craftsman is traditionally known as "Mistri," which means "Designer." Mistri is the surname of every master rickshaw craftsman. It is he who directs and supervises the decoration of the entire rickshaw, in which others are involved. The master rickshaw craftsman is not anonymous. He writes his name on the rickshaw he has designed. The owner of the rickshaw, who will rent it to the puller, gives no directions to him. "What does the owner know about art?" asks Anis Mistri. He paints whatever he wants on the aluminum sheathing behind the rickshaw.

On the rickshaw, ancillary ornament is created in the artisan's style. The seat is upholstered with paint and plastic, the armrests are painted in shapes that assemble geometrically, most often toward the floral, and the folding hood is studded with tacks and snipped with appliqué. In some rickshaws all available space is colorfully decorated; even the ribs of the hood and the shiny, tin or aluminum-covered footboard are not left out. The ribs are generally appliquéd with cutouts of colored, gold, or silver plastic medallions, some of which may contain at the center a beautiful peacock, a rose, or a burning candle. Golden butterflies or stars and crescents may surround each medallion. A crown is often exhibited at the top of the hood.

The current status of rickshaw painting, based on the information given by twenty master rickshaw artists and found during fieldwork in 2019, is not different from what we found in 2013 and 2015. The current status of rickshaw painting has been discussed below.

Typology of Rickshaw Painting: Recurring Themes and Trends

Thematically rickshaw painting is repetitive. On a careful study we have found a typology of rickshaw painting based on its recurring themes, which are movie

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stars, animal scenes, rural scenes, urban scenes, religious similes, and historical events. In other words, all images of rickshaw painting fall under these six broad categories. Floral designs and written words are subsidiary to the recurring themes. Within each theme there are many images, and these images persist for quite sometime. How long an image will last depends on its popularity or the circumstance that has influenced its depiction, or on the whim of the artist who has introduced it. By citing examples we can elucidate this typology and these trends of rickshaw painting.

Movie Stars

As already stated, rickshaw painting began with pictures of movie stars. While this theme recurs, movie stars constantly change. We all know that movie stars are not lasting figures. As a particular movie becomes popular, its hero or heroine, sometimes both, will appear on rickshaws. If a movie star becomes an icon, he/she will dominate the repertoire of the rickshaw artist as long as he/she does not fall out of favor or is replaced by another icon. During our fieldwork in November 2006, we found the pictures of the same movie stars on many rickshaws. They were then the most popular movie stars. We noticed that some of them were the superstars of Hindi films of India. Shabnur of Bangladesh and Karina Kapur of India were very common among the movie stars appearing frequently on rickshaws in 2006. When we talked to the rickshaw pullers, we found them quite familiar with these two movie stars, and some of them were their great fans. Female movie stars are more common in rickshaw painting. The current famous movie stars are Tanha Tasnia, Nusrat Imrose Tisha, Shabnam Bubby, Shakib Khan, Aupee Karim and Rahsaan Islam. Kirkpatrick emphatically holds that rickshaw art belongs to male public culture, even though she recognizes Henry Glassie's discovery of women participating in rickshaw decoration in Old Dhaka. One of the strongest arguments that Kirkpatrick puts forward in support of her assertion comes from the recurrence of images of beautiful film stars with their "huge, alluring eyes," which are meant to excite the male public values of gazing, seeing, and longing. In fact, she has chosen this female imagery as a "fitting overall visual metaphor" for her study of the rickshaw art of Bangladesh, especially of Dhaka rickshaws on which movie stars dominate.

Animal Scenes

Animal scenes are prolific in rickshaw painting. Unlike the baby taxis's animal which is specific, shaded into three-dimensionality and drawn from the world, the rickshaw's animal is stylized and potentially symbolic. Birds or beasts are painted in different modes and postures or in combination of other scenes. Sometimes two parrots flank a flower or the Taj Mahal. Sometimes two peacocks flank the head of a lion. The animal scenes that are fascinating and

frequently seen include a lion in the act of gripping a deer with its gruesome claws, a peacock confronting a placid cow with her calf, and birds flocking in colorful abundance. Huge animals in combat, such as an elephant and a tiger wrapped in a lethal embrace, are also found.

In the middle of the 1990s, the rickshaw's most usual image of animals showed a pair of peacocks facing a white cow with her calf before her. There were also humorous depictions of animals: animals performing civilized acts, such as marching in a traditional wedding procession. One picture, described by the artist as "The Wedding of Uncle Lion," showed the majestic lion seated in a palanquin which was being carried by two tigers. A deer was leading the wedding procession. Another deer was just behind the rear tiger-bearer. Dressed like a musician, this deer was playing a large wind instrument. A small animal, probably a rabbit, was seen in the center of the moving palanquin. Two peacocks, standing apart, were watching the wedding procession. The floor, upon which this ceremonial event was taking place, was painted in an *alpana*-like fashion with a large central lotus.

Rural Scenes

While rural scenes continue as a theme, different rickshaw artists visualize them in their own ways. A rural scene could be a sprawling village or simply a cluster of houses with domestic animals around; it could be thatched huts near a river or simply a river flowing with crows flying in the sky; or it could be a boat gliding through the river toward the sunset or a heap of straw in front of a hut. In 1995, while conducting fieldwork in Dhaka, Henry Glassie photographed a rickshaw seatback showing three people—the driver with a stick in his hand and two passengers—in a bullock cart on a road with a thatched village in the background. The two passengers appear to be the husband and the wife. Interestingly enough, a peacock standing nearby is watching them.

Urban Scenes

To the rural view, rickshaw artists add progressive urban images: towering buildings, crisscrossing aerial roadways, and visions of swift, mechanical transport. However, when a train thunders through the jungle or an airplane flies above a placid, thatched village, the urban scene becomes contemporaneous with the rural scene.

Religious Similes

Religious beliefs of the majority of the population are often reflected in rickshaw painting. A mosque with its ablution pool, the holy Ka'bah with a little boy praying before a Quran stand, or a blessing written in Arabic are the favorite religious similes. For many years the Taj Mahal has been the favorite theme of the rickshaw artist. Most of the artists and pullers call it a mosque, some identifying it as a particular mosque in Dhaka. On the rickshaw, the Taj Mahal

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Doly Ghosh, a master rickshaw artist, drawing picture after picture, lifting forms from the surface in color and then adding the outlines



The peacock, a popular motif in rickshaw painting



A rickshaw craftsman painting a rickshaw hood

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Rickshaw artist Ratan at work



Three popular movie stars in a rickshaw painting

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stands out from a unified field of color and rises from a pink lotus in an image that captures the syncretistic qualities of culture in Bangladesh.² A mosque, as the Taj Mahal is believed to be, replaces the Hindu deity upon the lotus seat. We found it on many rickshaws in 2006. One can easily find differences in its presentation. There exist different images of the Taj Mahal. Why does it persist? Henry Glassie has explained it adequately.

Historical Events

Rickshaw painting flows with the times, and what we seen on many rickshaws often reflects past or current events, which we would like to refer as historical events. Such events constitute a recurring theme in the sense that the rickshaw artist may be inclined to choose any event or any figure in the context of a situation that once prevailed, existed in the immediate past, or is likely to receive our attention. Here are a few examples:

Immediately after the emergence of Bangladesh rickshaws portrayed battle scenes or freedom fighters in action, scenes of air or sea combat, or the new Bangladeshi flag, a common scene on many rickshaws was a Pakistani soldier being blown up by freedom fighters hiding nearby. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's portrait was also seen on rickshaws. M. Alinoor, a master rickshaw artist, depicted these images more frequently than others. As time went by, these images receded into the past.

Khudiram, a Bengali hero, who was hanged by the British in 1908, appeared in rickshaw painting in 1982. Phulan Devi, India's bandit queen, appeared in rickshaw painting in 1987. Phulan Devi was depicted as holding an AK 47. Saddam Hussein's portrait became common in rickshaw painting in the 1990s, for he became a hero among the urban folk after the Gulf War. In some pictures Saddam Hussein's hands lifted in prayer in the midst of a rocket burning an arc in the air.

In 2019, as in some other years, we found no heroic image on rickshaws. It appears that no one worthy of depiction caught the attention of the rickshaw artists.

Floral Designs and Written Words

Floral designs and written words appear on rickshaws as general features of rickshaw decoration. Floral designs proliferate as more and more artists are involved in rickshaw painting. In 2006, we found some written words appearing on rickshaws. These written words give simple messages: *Ma* (mother), *Mayer Doa* (blessing from mother), *Allah Bharasa* (have faith in God), and *Namaj Kayem Karun* (perform your prayer). Either *Ma* or *Mayer Doa* appears almost on all rickshaws. A peacock is sometimes flanked by the word "Ma" on either side. Another message in Bangla is: "Plant trees, save the country." An

ethnographer needs to watch how long these written words, especially *Ma* and *Mayer Doa*, recur on rickshaws.

The Reason for the Proliferation of Designs and Decorative Features in Rickshaw Painting in Dhaka

Traditional art is not necessarily stable and repetitive; it can be extremely varied, elaborate and expensive in a particular trade, depending on the extent of involvement of artists in response to its demand in a particular place. The wider becomes the trade, the broader becomes its thematic and aesthetic effects through the proliferation of designs and decorative features. This theory is admirably proven in our study of the regional styles of the rickshaw painting of Bangladesh. What accounts for Dhaka's broader variety of thematic and aesthetic effects than what is found in the other locations? In Bangladesh, where motorized vehicles are fewer, people are heavily dependent on rickshaws for transportation. As the population of Dhaka expanded, there developed an increasing demand for affordable transportation. As a result, opportunities for entry into the occupation of makers and artists also increased. Competition and the desire for prestige among the owners of fleets of rickshaws extensively spurred a proliferation in varieties of a decoration and design. Fascinating were the illustrations of the Dhaka style toward increased complexity and intricacy in just five years from 1982 to 1987. Dhaka continues to maintain its lead. Images indicate the outstanding features of the Dhaka rickshaw in front, rear and hood decoration.

Animal Representations in Rickshaw Painting

Kirkpatrick has written extensively on animal representations, covering such topics as animal frolics, icons of power, waterhole variations, combats, peaceful encounters, animal-human interactions, and animal heralds. Bangladesh has a rich folklore replete with animal characters. It is, therefore, no wonder that animal figures are prominent in rickshaw painting. We can emphatically state that in South Asian folk art animals, instead of being totemic symbols, signify moral virtues and vices. Rickshaw artists usually select their favorite wild and domestic animals as subjects for depicting rural, jungle, and animal fable pictures. The most revealing fact is that animal figures became rampant in rickshaw painting after the accession to the presidency of Major General Ziaur Rahman on 21 April 1977. The country was then passing through a period of increasing Islamization, since secularism was excluded from the Constitution. This constitutional amendment allowed the revival of the Islamic political parties. It was during this period of religious fervor that rickshaw artists under pressure from radical Muslims stopped depicting human figures and began painting animals in various postures. As the government was cracking down on the paintings of human figures to woo support from the Islamic

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political parties, sexual desires so common to the natural instincts of the ordinary people were channeled through two thematic modes: animal fables and fantastic birds. This situation no more exists though animals are seen in rickshaw painting as has always been.

Eroticism in Rickshaw Painting

Eroticism, which is part of rickshaw painting, is usually presented in two ways: either through a male movie star's dalliance with a female movie star or through a bitter conflict between a hero and a villain over a beautiful heroine. As movies are a continuing passion with ordinary people in Bangladesh, movie stars dominate human imagery.

The Theatrical Nature of Rickshaw Painting

At another level, rickshaw painting, as Kirkpatrick has admirably shown, is basically theatrical. This theatrical nature was more dominant when human images were temporarily suppressed to pacify the radical Muslims. Animal fables and bird extravaganzas then flourished in full vigor. This proves that expressive freedom is spontaneous; it is deeply seated in human nature. It is such a powerful urge that it cannot be suppressed.

The Motive for Rickshaw Painting

Referring to the rickshaw art of Bangladesh and the truck art of Pakistan, Kirkpatrick has put forward a pertinent question. Why is vehicular art so lavishly decorative in Bangladesh and Pakistan rather than in India? She contends that this bias toward decorative pleasure and exuberance in contemporary surroundings of the absence of public imagery in the two Muslim countries may have been reinforced by the oppression associated with socialization of children in religiously conservative anti-iconic norms. This view does not hold ground for three reasons: one, as some areas of Hindu art in India, such as woodwork, are prolifically decorative, the absence or presence of human imagery as a suppressed cultural norm is not relevant; two, Islamic art tends to be decorative even without human imagery; and three, human imagery is found in abundance at public spaces in Bangladesh today.

Recent Appreciation of Rickshaw Painting

Since 1999 there has been a growing appreciation of rickshaw painting in Bangladesh. The Alliance Francaise de Dhaka has played a significant role in promoting this living tradition.

The Alliance Francaise sponsored a month-long exhibition of 560 rickshaw and baby taxi paintings of 83 artists. This exhibition began at the gallery of the Alliance Francaise in Dhaka on 2 October 1999. Obaidul Quader, State Minister for Youth, Sports and Cultural Affairs, was the chief guest at the opening ceremony of the exhibition. Jean-Guy de Wargny, Charge d' Affaires of France,

and Shamsuzzaman Khan, Director General of the Bangladesh National Museum, were the guests of honor. Obaidul Quader thanked the Alliance Francaise for organizing the exhibition. Shamsuzzaman Khan said: "A lively picture of contemporary life in Bangladesh is evident from the paintings." France Lasnier, Director of the Alliance Francaise, also spoke. She said: "The exhibition portrays a living tradition of Bangladesh." There are about 500,000 rickshaws, 35,000 baby taxis, and 250 artists in Dhaka," she told the audience. France Lasnier announced that the Alliance Francaise would lend the paintings to the Folk Art Section of the Bangladesh National Museum on a permanent basis. The painters said they were facing an uncertain future since the government was thinking to phase out rickshaws from the city streets in a bid to ease the traffic. Their income had already come down. A rickshaw or baby taxi painter used to earn Taka 7,000 to Taka 20,000 a month, "but now the income has declined to Taka 3,000 to Taka 10,000 a month," they said.

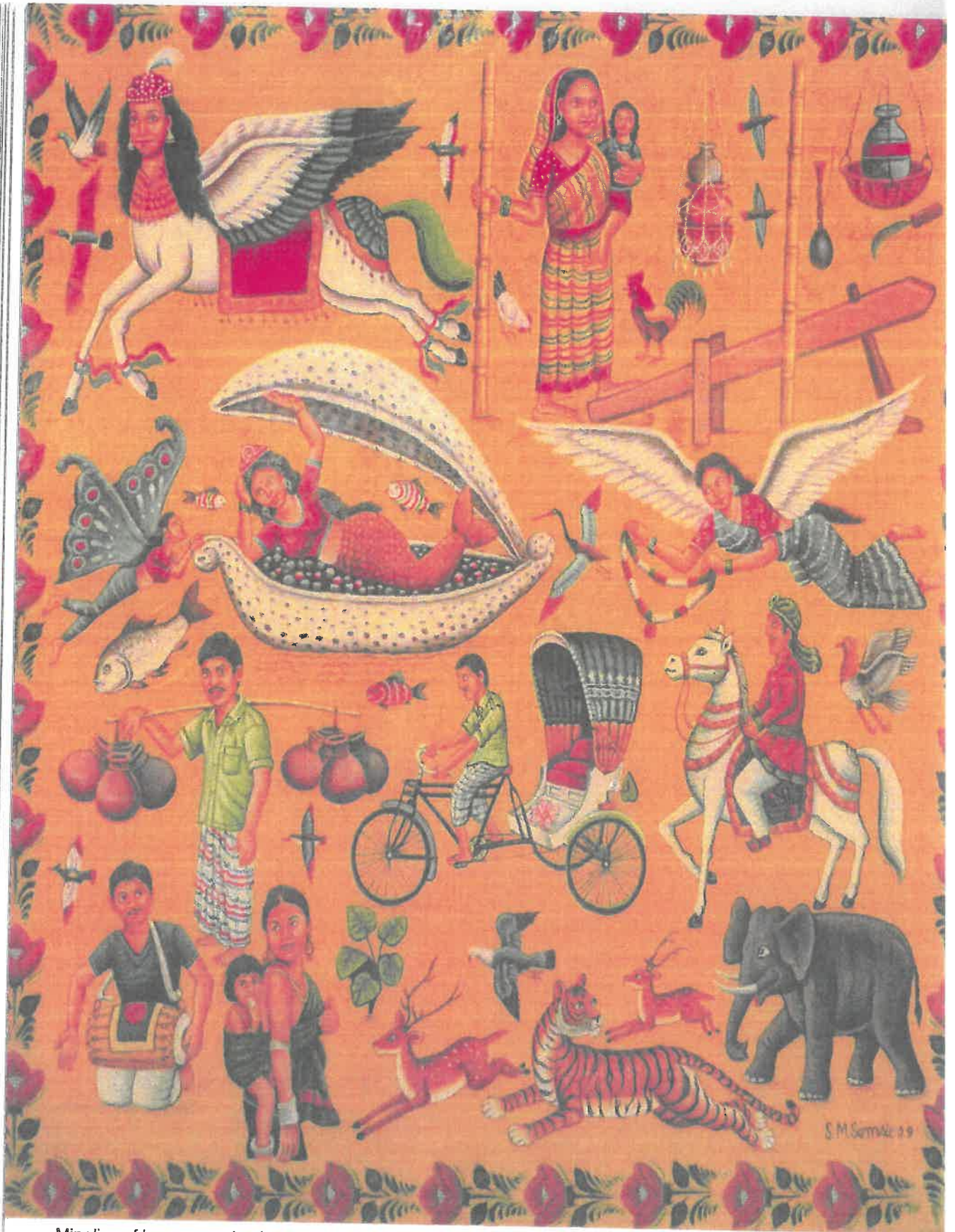
As announced earlier, France Lasnier, Director of the Alliance Francaise, handed over the 560 rickshaw paintings of 83 artists to the Bangladesh National Museum on 29 February 2000. Shamsuzzaman Khan, Director General, received the paintings in his office at the Museum in the presence of Jean-Guy de Wargny, Charge d' Affaires of France.

In 2005, Britto Arts Trust sponsored a 9-day workshop (1-9 April) and a 9-day exhibition (April 11-19) on rickshaw painting. Ten contemporary artists collaborated with ten rickshaw painters in organizing the workshop and the exhibition, both of which were held at the gallery of the Alliance Francaise in Dhaka. The rickshaw painters were M. Alinoor, Syed Ahmed Hossain, S.M. Shamsu, Md. Salim Beeki, Md. Bahram, D.C. Das, Tapon Das, Ruma, Nasima Nur, and Rafiqul Islam Rafique. The contemporary artists were Tarun Ghosh, Nisar Hossain, Atia Islam Anne, Zakia Khan Chandana, Sushanta Kumar Adhikary, Sulekha Chaudhury, Shishir Bhattacharjee, Mahbubur Rahman, Salahuddin Khan Srabon, and Tayeba Begum Lipi. The contemporary artists shared their ideas and thoughts with the rickshaw artists.

Through paintings rickshaw artists articulate their manifold experiences and build their vision. Rickshaw painting is personal and collective, inventive and conventional, material and spiritual, useful and beautiful, a compromise between the human will and the natural conditions.

M. Alinoor: A Master Rickshaw Artist

M. Alinoor is one of the oldest rickshaw artists of Bangladesh. On 2 February 2000, the Alliance Francaise de Dhaka sponsored a solo exhibition of M. Alinoor's rickshaw paintings at its gallery. This was the first solo exhibition ever held of a rickshaw artist in Bangladesh.



Mingling of humans, animals and supernatural beings in diverse activities. Painted by S. M. Samsu



Race of decorated rickshaws in Dhaka

Rickshaws and Rickshaw Painting in Dhaka

Born in Dinajpur in 1939, Alinoor started his painting career in 1956. His father was a government officer, and his mother was taking care of his four sisters and four brothers. He always scored the highest mark in drawing in school until class 9.

He developed his talent alone until his acquaintance, at the age of twenty, with Gulfam, his *ustad*, in Dhaka. His master, who is dead now, was a banner painter and film decorator. Alinoor took to rickshaw, bus, truck and baby taxi painting later to make a living when a rickshaw Mistri discovered his talent. Alinoor got married in 1965. He has two sons and three daughters. Majnu, his son, and Nasima, his daughter, having been trained by him, have become rickshaw artists, and they are doing well in their father's profession.

Alinoor now favors rural and urban scenes in his painting. He was one of the five master rickshaw artists before the independence of the country in 1971. It was Alinoor who depicted scenes of the liberation war and the portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on many rickshaws with his masterful skill and passion.

The Alliance Francaise de Dhaka discovered him while conducting research on rickshaw painting for a major exhibition (referred to above). Alinoor took a great interest in this project and was instrumental in giving it momentum.

When asked what he would do when rickshaws would be abolished from Dhaka City, he said: "I will continue to paint panels, and I will sell my paintings by holding exhibitions.

Dhirendra Chandra Das: A Master Rickshaw Artist

We asked Dhirendra Chandra Das about cultural or social meanings in rickshaw painting. Showing some rickshaw paintings, he said: "This tiger is the Royal Bengal Tiger which lives in the Sundarbans. This bird is the doyel, the national bird of Bangladesh. This fantastic city is Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. This village is only a picture of normal life in Bangladesh. This picture shows some people in a bullock cart on a road with a thatched village in the background. They are visiting relatives in another village.

S. M. Samsu: A Master Rickshaw Artist

"Rickshaw is the richest expression of the rural people and a vital part of common life," says S. M. Samsu. He showed two rickshaw paintings. About the first one he said:

"This rickshaw painting depicts a sprawling village. It illustrates a wide range of rural scenes: harvesting, a cluster of houses near a river, coconut trees, a heap of straw, two cocks roaming in the yard, a woman operating a husking pedal, another woman with a *chalni* (sieve) separating smaller particles, dusts or wastes from a loose substance, e.g., flour, paddy, rice, etc., a boy flying a kite,

a girl looking at the sky, crows flying in the sky, a few boats gliding through the river toward the sunset and a few more plying near the banks. A Baul is singing.” We find that the emphasis of this rickshaw painting is clearly on the Baul who is holding an *ektara* in his right hand. This Baul appears to be captivating the rural folks nearby.

About the second one S. M. Samsu said:

“This rickshaw painting depicts a panorama of animals in a forest. A river, rather narrow in breadth, flows through the forest. Two dears are seen beyond. Two dears are running away from the left bank of the river. A monkey is hanging from a branch on the right bank. A crocodile with a vicious look is rising partially from the water of the river. Of particular interest is a Royal Bengal Tiger standing on the right bank. In addition to the animals which actually constitute the theme of the painting, various birds are flying at different altitudes.”

Seeking to augment their income, some master rickshaw artists have thought of using a wide range of alternative media suitable for creative expression. They have transferred their brightly colored imagery onto paper, cloth, canvas, or wooden panels. S. M. Samsu is one of them. He puts his new creations on display at exhibitions. Visiting academics and connoisseurs collect his alternative paintings.

In rickshaw painting, complexity is clearly visible. Rural life appears in sharp contrast to urban life. That rural and urban scenes are contemporaneous becomes clear when an airplane flies above a placid, thatched village. The cultural meaning becomes explicit when a train thunders through the jungle, scattering the lions and tigers in terror.

Digital Imaging in Rickshaw Painting

Digital imaging, which is coming into use in rickshaw painting, is replacing, though slowly, traditional hand paintings. But digital imaging will not succeed.

A Final Thought on Rickshaw Painting

Through the thick, turbulent streets of Dhaka rickshaws carry paintings, which really expose a mobile exhibition of urban folk art. Kirkpatrick refers to these rickshaws as “transports of delight.”

The Bengali mind always seeks beauty in all creative work—in art and dance, in dress and jewelry, in rituals, and in culinary habit. When we asked rickshaw pullers to give their opinion about rickshaw painting, they categorically said; “It is beauty. I would like to see my rickshaw look beautiful.” The exuberance of rickshaw painting is quite in accord with the creative spirit of the Bengalis. Swarms of bright rickshaws add interest to the city’s slow motion, and they have frequently excited the curiosity of foreign visitors, for collectively they comprise a quantitatively astounding public exhibition of art.

Rickshaws and Rickshaw Painting in Dhaka

Dhaka was once the city of rickshaws. It is our hope that Bangladeshi scholars will further the study of the fabulously ornamented rickshaw, a wonder of Bangladeshi aesthetics. The rickshaw, the task and transport of the people has come under attack by modernizing planners for whom rickshaws are an embarrassing sign of underdevelopment. It cannot be denied that the rickshaw serves the city and its needs, producing money for the poor and no pollution in the sky. Even though its lack of fit with technological advancement threatens its survival, its association with hardworking people will keep it going. Rickshaws snarl the traffic, impeding the speed of the smoking autos of the rich; nevertheless rickshaws will survive for many more years in Dhaka. When pride becomes general, when an object comes to possess symbolic as well as decorative power, the rationale for continuity doubles.

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The following bearers and practitioners were interviewed:

Master Rickshaw Craftsmen

Tekka Mistri, Anis Mistri, Kalam Mistri, Shahjahan Mistri, Mamun Mistri, Rahman Mistri, Sharif Mistri, Shahdad Mistri, Jahangir Mistri and Mohiuddin Mistri

Master Rickshaw Artists

S. M. Samsu, Syed Ahmed Hossain, Dharendra Chandra Das, Rafiqul Islam, Tapan Das, Saikat Mohammad, Nasima Nur, Tapati Rani Dey, Doly Ghosh, Ani Karmakar, Songita Rani, Abdul Haq, Abdur Rashid, Fazlur Rahman, Abdur Rahman, Tajul Islam, Abul Hasan, Khalilur Rahman, Shyam Sarkar and Mohammad Bashir.

The above-mentioned bearers and practitioners participated in the nomination process, that is the preparation of the nomination file at all its stages, providing information, giving their views and collaborating with the ICH experts.