

International Partnership Programme for Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage
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COUNTRY REPORT: BANGLADESH

Governmental Mechanism for Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage

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Introduction

Bangladesh emerged as an independent sovereign nation in 1971. Thus, compared to many countries of the present day it is quite young. Nevertheless it is the home of an ancient civilization. Relics of old civilization and culture are evident all over the country, some of them with worldwide significance. The deep-rooted socio-cultural heritage of Bangladesh reflects a distinct mode of living and a rich aesthetic past. In Bangladesh, as elsewhere, a combination of our traditional values and practices interwoven with external influences, has moulded our country. Bangladesh's culture has its own strong personality and unique character formed by its nature, history, traditions, customs and long arduous struggles for national identity and survival. The centuries old cultural traditions of Bangladesh are reflected in a diverse tangible and intangible heritage - in archaeological sites, sculptures, stones and terracotta, architectures, museums, archives, libraries, classical music, songs and dance, paintings, dramas, folk arts, festivals, games as well as ethnic cultural activities.

Roles of the National Government

The Constitution of Bangladesh provides that, “The State shall adopt measures to conserve the cultural traditions and heritage of the people, and so to foster and improve the national language, literature and the arts that all sections of the opportunity to contribute towards and to participate in the enrichment of the national culture.”

The Government. of Bangladesh has adopted the following policies in accordance with the constitution of the country:

1. To identify, protect, preserve and present the cultural traditions and heritage of the people.
2. To adopt measures for the safeguard against the disfigurement, damage or removal of monuments, objects or places of special artistic and historic importance or interest.

The present government is responsible for the organizations under the Ministry of Cultural Affairs namely:

- 1) Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy
- 2) Bangla Academy
- 3) National Museum
- 3) Directorate of Public Library,
- 4) Department of Archaeology
- 5) National Archives & Libraries
- 6) National Book Centre
- 6) Nazrul Institute
- 7) Folk Arts and Crafts Foundation
- 8) Copyright Office

- 9)Cox's Bazar Cultural Centre
- 10)Tribal Cultural Institutes Rangamati
- 11) Tribal Cultural Institutes Bandarban
- 12) Tribal Cultural Academy, Birisiri
- 13) Bangladesh Culture and Heritage Foundation (BCHF)

These organizations have been making untiring efforts to safeguard and promote cultural activities across the country to keep pace with ongoing cultural developments of the world. The activities of the major organizations are summarized below.

Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy

In the capacity of the national academy of fine and performing arts, Bangladesh Shilpakala academy bears the vital responsibility for the safeguarding, preservation and promotion of cultural heritage in the country. The duties and responsibilities of the academy are promotion of the arts and national culture and creation of necessary facilities for their development keeping consistency with the hopes and aspiration of the nation. Also organizing workshops, seminars, discussion meetings, short-term specialized trainings, providing scholarships, financial grants for talented artists and many other activities for the promotion of art and culture, organizing competitions in the various fine and performing arts and awarding prizes to the winning artists, encouraging the arts through film shows, either by importing educational films or by locally commissioning such films on the various branches of the arts.

Of the cultural activities, the Biennale Asian Art Exhibition stands out as one of the most prestigious. The Shilpakala Academy itself has conducted many activities promoting Fine Arts and Music. It has held Mobile Art Exhibitions in 47 districts out of 64 and has presented awards to ten renowned musicians for their outstanding contribution to music. As a part of promoting our Folk Art, especially traditional art, many Musical and Dance programmes were held. A video of *Zari Gaan* (Traditional Folk Songs) has been sent to the UNESCO Head Quarter for the exposure of our cultural heritage throughout the world. The Academy took special efforts to construct our National Art Gallery and National Theatre. It has also taken measures to train young persons in performing Art, Theatre, Fine Arts, Dance and Music.

Bangla Academy

Bangla Academy stands as the National Conscience and acts as the principal forum of cultivation of Bangla literature. It is also the leading publishing house of research works in the country. 140 titles have been published during the last three years. The Academy also celebrated the Golden Jubilee in 2002 of the Martyrs Day on the 21st February and International Mother Language Day. It has also paid homage to two of the greatest social reformers and writers of the country by establishing "Begum Rokeya" and "Mir Mosarraf Hossain" Memorial Centres.

Nazrul Institute

The Nazrul Institute is entrusted with upholding the memory and image of our National Poet *Kazi Nazrul Islam* and conducting research on his life, literature and music. Likewise the Ministry of Cultural Affairs and the organizations under it also celebrated the birth anniversary of the Noble Laureate Poet Rabindranath Tagore with great honor and enthusiasm

Bangladesh Folk Arts and Crafts Foundation, Sonargaon

A mini-Bangladesh Project to give tourists an authentic impression of the geographical and environmental traditions of Bangladesh has been undertaken by the Sonargaon Folk Arts and Crafts Foundation. The Foundation also holds its month-long fair of folk arts and crafts every year as its regular activities.

National Archives & Libraries

The Directorate of Archives and Libraries has done a most creditable job by collecting vast amount of historically important documents, manuscripts and rare books lying scattered in government and semi-government organizations throughout the country. It has also undertaken the latest technological help in permanent preservation through digital archiving of the most rare historical documents. It has also opened a new corner for children in its library.

Tribal Cultural Institutions

The Ministry of Cultural Affairs has given special care and attention to the cultural promotion of the peripheral areas and ethnic minorities. The Cultural Centre at Cox's Bazar and the Tribal Cultural Institute at Bandarban, Rangamati and Birisiri have been completed, fulfilling the demand of the local people for a long time.

Bangladesh Culture and Heritage Foundation (BCHF)

1. The Foundation is a non-profit association, within the meaning of Section 28 of the Companies Act, 1994 organized and established for promotion of cultural heritage & social development activities in Bangladesh. The aims and objectives for which the Foundation will be established are any or all of the following:
2. To preserve cultural heritage which are gradually disappearing.
3. To encourage people of various communities in projects designed for preservation of cultural heritage.
4. To undertake projects for preservation of cultural heritage and to ensure sustainability and economic viability of such projects.
5. To build appreciation and awareness among the people about their own cultural heritage and motivation to preserve them.
6. To sponsor, promote and provide in various forms and manners, assistance including financial, institutional, advisory and training, to Government, Semi-Government and Non-Government Organizations, Voluntary Agencies and Societies, Local government bodies, institutions and groups of individuals undertaking activities with a view to culture and heritage development generating income or employment opportunities and alleviating poverty through our cultural activities in conformity with the objectives of, and in a manner approved by Foundation.

Since 1987 the Government of Bangladesh has been implementing the development project for safeguarding, preservation and presentation of the ICH. I would like to mention some recent ongoing projects on safeguarding of ICH of Bangladesh. Such as-

- 1) **Project name:** “Action plan for the Safeguarding of Baul Song Bangladesh, UNESCO masterpiece of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity project”

Major Objectives of the project -

- (i) - To ensure that new generation of Bauls are properly trained in accurate performance or transmission of Baul songs
- To identify the Baul communities of Bangladesh;
- To raise awareness among the population of Bangladesh about the Baul songs;
- (ii) Specific : Restore & promote the ‘Baul song’

In order to ‘safeguard’ and promote the Baul Song, as well as to create awareness mass people has been involve to restore Baul songs. Arrangement seminar symposium and Baul evening at deferent levels will be done like upzilla, District Division and National levels As a result, the best Baul songs and the best Baul erformance would be identified and those would be recorded in the CD/ DVD for archives.

Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy under the Ministry of Cultural Affairs will take active measures to institutionalize the project objectives under Bangladesh National Commission for UNESCO for the safeguarding and promotion of Baul Songs.

2) **Project name:** “Construction of Hasson Raja Academy”

The major objectives of the project are:

- a) To give repleteness to the existing Hasson Raja Academy established by the local elites in 1975 to memories the mystic poet Hasson Raja and to collect his literary works of musical notation for permanent preservation and research.
- b) Construction of structures and installation of equipments for auditorium, seminar hall library, museum, classroom, office building, open air stage and rest house.
- c) To facilitate research, devotee and the general mass go through the life, literary works, musical notation, melody and other works of the great saint and mystic poet Hasson Raja.

Role of the Local Government:

Though there is local government in Bangladesh in the form of Union council, Upazilla (sub-district) Council and District Council but for various reasons. This institution could not develop in past. Now the Govt. is taking measures to develop the local Govt. by framing laws in this regard and decentralize power through the local Govt in the new future. For this reason the local Govt. of Bangladesh could not play significant role in safeguarding and promoting the cultural heritage of the country.

To promote and safeguard the intangible cultural heritage of the country Bangladesh Shilpakala academy has set up 64 branches in all the 64 districts of Bangladesh. The managing committee headed by the Deputy commissioner of the districts runs these district academies. Besides the district Shilpakala Academies, there are upazilla (sub-district) Shilpakala Academies through-out the country. Both the district and sub-district Shilpakala Academies are safeguarding and fostering the regional and local traditional cultural heritage of the country, which are very rich. Every district and sub-district academy has its teachers of art, song, drama, dance, recitation and musical instruments for teaching boys and girls in this subjects.

To collect information, tribal folk history and to conduct research, survey regarding the life style, language, religious tradition, social customs, beliefs etc of concerned tribal people of the country, Bangladesh Shilpakala academy formed different Tribal Cultural Academy/Institute in different parts of the country. Tribal Cultural Institute/Academy are working to preserve and promote tribal songs, dance and various types of traditional cultural heritage of the tribes as a part to enrich the mainstream of national culture. These institutes also have museums, where their cultural heritage is preserved and displayed to the public.

Of the folk singers of Bangladesh, Lalon shah was very famous among the Baul singers and composers. He composed more than 2000 spiritual songs, most of which we have been unable to recover yet. Bangladesh shilpakla academy has set up an academy called Lalon Academy in the district of kustia, (Lalon's birth place) for collecting and preserving the lost songs of Lalon shah. Lalon songs and Baul songs are also taught in the academy.

In conclusion it may be said that the Ministry of Cultural Affairs and other cultural institutions are fulfilling their commitments for the cultural promotion of the nation by putting faithfully into practice the government. Bangladesh has quite a bright future in attaining cultural growth and the safeguarding of cultural heritages as well. In this regard Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO might extend its co-operation and assistance to safeguard the tangible and

intangible cultural heritage of Bangladesh. Thus ACCU can play a vital role to the greater cause of overall cultural development of Asia/Pacific.