

## V. The Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

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### 1. Baul Songs



Baul Songs, originally proclaimed in 2005, is inscribed in 2008 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The Bauls are mystic minstrels living in rural Bangladesh and West Bengal, India. The Baul movement, at its peak in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, has now regained popularity among the rural population of Bangladesh. Their music and way of life have influenced a large segment of Bengali culture, and particularly the compositions of Nobel Prize laureate Rabindranath Tagore



Bauls live either near a village or travel from place to place and earn their living from singing to the accompaniment of the ektara, the lute dotara, a simple one-stringed instrument, and a drum called dubki. Bauls belong to an unorthodox devotional tradition, influenced by Hinduism, Buddhism, Bengali, Vasinavism and Sufi Islam, yet distinctly different from them. Bauls neither identify with any organized religion nor with the caste system, special deities, temples or sacred places. Their emphasis lies on the importance of a person's physical body as the place where God resides. Bauls are admired for this freedom from convention as well as their music and poetry. Baul poetry, music, song and dance are

devoted to finding humankind's relationship to God, and to achieving spiritual liberation. Their devotional songs can be traced back to the fifteenth century when they first appeared in Bengali literature.

Baul music represents a particular type of folk song, carrying influences of Hindu bhakti movements as well as the shuphi, a form of Sufi song. Songs are also used by the spiritual leader to instruct disciples in Baul philosophy, and are transmitted orally. The language of the songs is continuously modernized thus endowing it with contemporary relevance.

The preservation of the Baul songs and the general context in which they are performed depend mainly on the social and economic situation of their practitioners, the Bauls, who have always been a relatively marginalized group. Moreover, their situation has worsened in recent decades due to the general impoverishment of rural Bangladesh.

The creator and greatest composer of baul songs was lalon Shah (1774-1890). The place of his birth was the village Bharra in Kushtia' or the village Harishpur in Jessore, according to another tradition. He lived the life of a devotee at a siant's shrine at Chheuriya in Kushtia and there he died. He collected about himself a large band of followers and thewse followers collected their own followers and thus a large community of baul singers was organised. La lon



used to sing himself the baul songs he composed. His disciples like Duddu Shah, Panju Shah Pagla Kanai also composed and sang a number of baul songs following their master. Thew songs of Lalon number 2,000 to 2,500. His disciples added a few hundred more. Baul singers are spiritual

devotees. Their quest is to attain spiritual bliss through transcending the human body. They seek union of the human body with the absolute. Baul songs have a few variety branching out from this philosophy of devotion. The bauls have no attachment for home; they are ascetics. The languorous mood of their songs is weighed down by sadness. Therefore baul songs do not rouse the spirits but induce escapism. Bauls believe that from the human body transcendence to the soul is possible and so they put much value upon the human soul. "O my mind, you know not farming, such valuable human farmland lies fallow, if you farmed it you could reap gold." This is the baul belief. They are the promoters and purveyors of humanistic religion which surmounts all distinctions of caste and

creed. Rabindranath Tagore called it human religion. In consideration of the humanistic angle of baul songs UNESCO, an organ of the United Nations, has decided to preserve these songs for their value as a heritage. The body-soul doctrine of devotion in baul songs has many mystical aspects expressed through devotion to the master ( *Gurutattva* ) and to the Creator ( *Srishtitattva* ) underlined by a yearning for a great union with the Absolute. A famous baul song written by Lalon Shah:

How the strange bird resides into the cage  
And migrates out of it  
If I could but catch it I would tether it with iron chains  
It has eight chambers and nine doors  
With latticed windows at intervals  
Above that is the main chamber  
On which is the hall of mirrors.  
Had I but good fortune  
Could the bird behave this way?  
Opening the cage  
To which woodland does my bird flee.  
my mind, you only craved for the cage  
Which is made of frail bamboo  
Any day it may come down crumbling  
Says Lalon with tears.



*Dotara* (musical instrument)

The main accompanying instrument of baul songs is *ektara* (one-stringed), variously known as *lau*, *gopijantra*, *thunthuney*. Some baul singers keep a small drum tied to his waist. With the left hand they strike the drum and play the *ektara* with the right and sing and dance either singly or in a group. Song, dance and instrument, the three combine to work up to a crescendo of beauty and emotion. Song is a part of their spiritual quest. Baul structurally is akin to *bhatiyali*; it also has elongated note but it possess many other characters which have made it distinctive. The melancholy tune of mystical baul songs can make a deep appeal in the minds of all sections of people. In Bangladesh Kushtia is the place of origin of baul songs; gradually it caught on in neighbouring Jessore, Faridpur Pabna, and then in Dhaka, Mymensingh, up to Sylhet. Similarly, in West Bengal this song spread to Nodiya, Bordhoman and Birbhumi districts. It is now being sung by educated artistes and is being admired at home and abroad.

## 1) Safeguarding Measures



Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy recently has conducted a project in cooperation with UNESCO Dhaka for the safeguarding of Baul Song. The title of the Project is Action Plan for the Safeguarding of the Baul Songs (Bangladesh).

## 2) Project Brief

The Bauls are minstrels who travel from village to village, earning their living by singing. Their music, poetry and way of life have profoundly influenced Bengali culture. Bauls do not identify themselves with any organized religion nor with the caste system. They emphasize the importance of the human body as the place where God resides.

While Bauls are scattered all over the country as well as in west Bengal (India), the project concentrates on the Baul community from the Kushtia region where a great Baul Guru of Bengal, Lalon Shah, lived and created a tradition of intergenerational transmission of Baul songs. The project aims at ensuring the proper transmission of Baul songs through a series of workshops bringing together gurus and young Baul apprentices. Gurus, experts and scholars will study and evaluate the transmission process with a view to extend it to other regions with Baul communities. In parallel, a census of Bauls all over the country will be made to establish a register of minstrels and gurus. Meanwhile, documentation will be gathered leading to the publication of notations and recordings of Baul songs. A book on Baul songs for promotional purposes and the organization of Baul Melas (fairs) will raise awareness among the general public of the Baul heritage and of the importance of supporting its bearers.

The Action Plan focused on the following main components:

- Pilot project for the transmission of Baul Song
- Field Survey and documentation
- Promotion through the organization of *Baul Melas (fair)*

The project was carried under the supervision of a Steering Committee which will have a balanced representation of relevant organizations and of the community of the tradition bearers. The Bangladesh National Commission for UNESCO (BNCU) and Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy will in charge of the general co-ordination of the action plan.

3) The Budget repartition was as follows:

Coordination cost	6,800\$	10.00%
Transmission of Baul Song	19,720.00	29.00%
Field Survey and Publications	18,120\$	26.00%
Promotion through the organization of Baul Melas (fair)	13,860\$	20.00%
UNESCO Dhaka monitoring and evaluation mission and coordination costs	1500.00\$	2.00%
Overhead cost of UNESCO	7,800.00\$	13.00%

4) Details of the Project

- Situation Analysis:  
The situation of the 'Baul song' is not good. Very rapidly they are declining day by day. So we need to "Safeguard" the 'Baul song' of our country.
- Objectives
  - To ensure that new generation of Bauls are properly trained in performance and/ or transmission of Baul songs;
  - To identify the Baul communities of Bangladesh;
  - To raise awareness among the population of Bangladesh about the Baul Songs
- Specific : Restore & promote the 'Baul song'  
In order to 'safeguard' and promote the Baul Song, as well as to create awareness the mass to restore Baul songs by arranging seminar, symposium and Baul evening at different levels will be done like District, Division, National & International levels. Baul

songs and the best Baul performance will be identified and those would be in the CD/VCD for archives.

- **Implementation Arrangements**  
Bangladesh Shilpakaia Academy will act as the administrative and managing the program. Director of Research and Publication will act as Project Director to DG, will co-ordinate the programs at different levels of the country as schedule. The development partner will be involved in preparing, executing, and following up the whole the program. The development partner will release fund in 4 installments through the Ministry of Cultural Affairs after getting specific requisition. Shilpakaia Academy will spent money as per approved TPP following PPR 2008. The Sub-department of finance of the Bangladesh Shilpakaia Academy will provide the accounting support as per rules and regulation and the provision of TPP.

#### 5) Project inputs and Work Plan

- **Pilot project for transmission:**  
Baul is a Guru based system. Gurus train their disciples in the Baul cult. They will therefore be supported to effectively transmit the wealth and know-how of Baul apprentices. A series of workshops should not only support the proper transmission in order to prevent further distortion. They should also sensitise the the importance of transmitting and performing Baul songs faithfully to the tradition to avoid distortion of this heritage, series of four workshops will be organised in Kushtia regions. Before and after these training workshops, two seminars with scholars, researchers, Baul gurus and other members of the community will be evaluate the needs and the gained experiences. Two advisers will part workshops and seminars and provide the midterm reporting as well as the final of this project and formulate recommendations for extending experiences to other regions.
- **Field Survey and Documentation:**  
While the Baul community of the Kushtia, and the neighboring districts is quite well known, there are Bauls in many other regions Bangladesh. It is therefore important to take census of the gurus and minstrels all over the country. A team composed of 3 researchers will survey a number of areas. In addition to the identification of the practitioners, Bauls songs will be collected and

registered. The Field survey will result in a comprehensive registry of Baul practitioners with view to get a better understanding of the situation of this heritage in the various regions. This will serve as a basis for the continuity of the project and the extension of the transmission support to other regions, beyond the duration of this project: In addition, Baul Songs has not been studied in detail. Most of the documents on the chronological development o the Baul songs have been lost or remain inaccessible. No attempt has yet been made to write down Bauai music in notation and no anthology of representative Baul Songs is available. Although the Baul heritage relics on oral transmission, as Bauls are mostly illiterate, there is an urgent need to collect songs, notate them and provide scholars, researchers, as well as the general public with a compilation of notations and documentation of Bauai songs. 50 songs among the collected Bauai song texts and music will be selected and prepared for notation. These notations will be published in a book and an audio CD. This publication is expected to serve as a reference for scholars, aficionados and researchers. Meanwhile, there is a need to promote the Bauls and to raise awareness among the public on their heritage. The educated people in the so-called urban society are little interested of the Baul community and their songs. A general book on Baul (history, development, currents stakes, Baul literature, excerpt of Baul songs, etc.) will be published in both Bangla and English for large distribution.

- Organization of Baul Melas for promotion

There is an urgent need to promote Baul songs among the society to encourage people at local, national and international level to support the community. Baul fairs, or Melas, will be organised with the triple objective to sensitize the population and regain popularity of Bauls songs, to provide support to the community of tradition bearesrs and to create links between Bauls of different regions, especially with the Bauls from West Bengal, i.e. India. These major events, assembling 50 Bauls and hundreds of participants will constitute major events that will be covered by the media and will ensure the promotion of Baul songs at local national and international level.

- Expected Output:  
Get a congenial environment to 'Safe guard' the 'Baul song.

#### 6) Outcome of the Project

- DVD of 50 songs, 500 Copies
- A book of 500 songs with transtation and notation of 100 songs

## 2. Provisional inscribed items (to be examined)

At present Bangladesh does not have any ICH on Provisional List. But Ministry of Cultural Affairs has taken a decision to submit the following two items of the Intangible Cultural Heritages for the inscription in the Representative List in the month of March 2011. Those are:

- A. The Festival of Pahela Baishakh (Celebration of Bengali New Year)
- B. Nakshi Kantha (Embroidered Quilt)

### A. Festival of Pahela Baishakh

*Pahela Baishakh*, the first day of Baishakh, coincides with the first day of the Bangla New Year. It has been a festival of the Bengalis for a long time. It is said that *Pahela Baishakh* has its origin in the Mughal period when Emperor Akbar introduced the Bangla calendar to ease tax collection. Actually no one knows when and how this day of celebration began.

Baishakh is the first month of the Bangla calendar. Most of the events in rural Bangladesh still take place according to this calendar. Baishakh is considered to be the most auspicious month for undertaking any business venture. The day starts with partaking of a heavy breakfast of *cheera*, *gur* and yogurt. Then people get dressed to go to the fairs which take place every year at an appointed place, it being inevitably either the cool shade of a banyan tree or a riverfront usually at the bend of a river. The fair brings commodities of every sort, food of every variety, and sweets of endless kinds. The sight of clay dolls and toys made of plastic and rubber delight the children. A small boy hanging on to his father's arm stubbornly insisting on buying a toy of his liking, his father cannot afford, is a common sight. But tears vanish as soon as the boy sees his favorite puppet show or a clown wearing a mask. Each year the celebration of *Pahela Baishakh* turns

into a human sea in parts of Dhaka. In the morning, processions called *Prabhat Pheri* come out with many fanfares. Cultural programs are organized to celebrate the New Year. *Baishakhi melas* (fairs) are held in the city. People of all ages throng these *melas* to buy toys, handicrafts, and sweets. Snake charmers, jugglers, and magicians mesmerize the enthusiastic crowd.

The following information derived from Wikipedia

- Bengali New Year celebration in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Bengali New Year (Bengali: *Nôbobôrsho*) or Poyela Boishakh (*Pôhela Boishakh* or *Pôela Boishakh*) is the first day of the Bengali calendar, celebrated in both Bangladesh and West Bengal, and in Bengali communities in Assam and Tripura. It coincides with the New Year's Days of numerous Southern Asian calendars.

Poila Boishakh connects all ethnic Bengalis irrespective of religious and regional differences. In India, in West Bengal and Assam it is a public (state) holiday and is publicly celebrated in mid April. In Bangladesh, it is a national holiday celebrated around 14 April according to the official amended calendar designed by the Bangla Academy.

- Names

Bengali New Year is referred to in Bengali as "New Year" (Bengali: *Nôbobôrsho*, from Sanskrit *Navavarṣa*) or "First of Boishakh" (Bengali: *Pôhela Boishakh* or *Pôela Boishakh*). *Nobo* means new and *Borsho* means year.

History

The Bengali calendar is closely tied with the Hindu Vedic solar calendar, based on the Surya Siddhanta. As with many other variants of the Hindu solar calendar, the Bengali calendar commences in mid-April of the Gregorian year. The first day of the Bengali year therefore coincides with the mid-April new year in Assam, Burma, Cambodia, Kerala, Manipur, Nepal, Orissa, Punjab, Sri Lanka, Tamil Nadu and Thailand.

Under the Mughals, agricultural taxes were collected according to the Hijri calendar. However, as the Hijri calendar is a purely lunar calendar, it does not coincide with the harvest. As a result, farmers were hard-

pressed to pay taxes out of season. In order to streamline tax collection, the Mughal Emperor Akbar ordered a reform of the calendar. Accordingly, Fatehullah Shirazi, a renowned scholar and astronomer, formulated the Bengali year on the basis of the Hijri lunar and Hindu solar calendars. The new Fasli San (agricultural year) was introduced on 10/11 March 1584, but was dated from Akbar's ascension to the throne in 1556. The new year subsequently became known as *Bônggabdo* or Bengali year.

Celebrations of Pohela Boishakh started from Akbar's reign. It was customary to clear up all dues on the last day of Choitro. On the next day, or the first day of the new year, landlords would entertain their tenants with sweets. On this occasion there used to be fairs and other festivities. In due course the occasion became part of domestic and social life, and turned into a day of merriment. The main event of the day was to open a *halkhata* or new book of accounts.

- In Dhaka



Students of Charukala (Fine Arts) Institute, Dhaka University preparing for Pohela Boishakh



Colorful celebration of Pohela Boishakh in Dhaka

New Year's festivities are closely linked with rural life in Bengal. Usually on Pohela Boishakh, the home is thoroughly scrubbed and cleaned; people bathe early in the morning and dress in fine clothes. They spend much of the day visiting relatives, friends, and neighbours. Special foods are prepared to entertain guests. This is one rural festival that has become enormously big in the cities, especially in Dhaka.

*Boishakhi* fairs are arranged in many parts of the country. Various agricultural products, traditional handicrafts, toys, cosmetics, as well as various kinds of

food and sweets are sold at these fairs. The fairs also provide entertainment, with singers and dancers staging *jatra* (traditional plays), *pala gan*, *kobigan*, *jarigan*, *gambhira gan*, *gazir gan* and *alkap gan*. They present folk songs as well as *baul*, *marfati*, *murshidi* and *bhatiali* songs. Narrative plays like Laila-Majnu, Yusuf-Zulekha and Radha-Krishna are staged. Among other attractions of these fairs are puppet shows and merry-go-rounds.

Many old festivals connected with New Year's Day have disappeared, while new festivals have been added. With the abolition of the zamindari system, the *punya* connected with the closing of land revenue accounts has disappeared. Kite flying in Dhaka and bull racing in Munshiganj used to be very colourful events. Other popular village games and sports were horse races, bullfights, cockfights, flying pigeons, and boat racing. Some festivals, however, continue to be observed; for example, *bali* (wrestling) in Chittagong and *gambhira* in Rajshahi are still popular events.



Observance of Pohela Boishakh has become popular in the cities. Early in the morning, people gather under a big tree or on the bank of a lake to witness the sunrise. Artists present songs to usher in the new year. People from all walks of life wear traditional Bengali attire: young women wear white saris with red borders, and adorn themselves with *churi* bangles, *ful* flowers, and *tip*(bindis). Men wear white *paejama* (pants) or *lungi*(dhoti/dhuti) (long skirt) and *kurta* (tunic). Many townspeople start the day with the traditional breakfast of *panta bhat* (rice soaked in water), green chillies, onion, and fried hilsa fish.

Panta Ilish - a traditional platter of leftover rice soaked in water with fried Hilsa, supplemented with dried fish (*Shutki*), pickles (*Achar*), lentils (*dal*), green chillies and onion - a popular dish for the Pohela Boishakh festival.

The most colourful New Year's Day festival takes place in Dhaka. Large numbers of people gather early in the morning under the banyan tree at Ramna Park where Chhayana artists open the day with Rabindranath Tagore's famous song, *Esho, he Boishakh, Esho Esho* (Come, O Boishakh, Come, Come). A similar ceremony welcoming the new year is also held at the Institute of Fine Arts, University of Dhaka. Students and teachers of the institute take out a colourful procession and parade round the campus. Social and cultural

organisations celebrate the day with cultural programmes. Newspapers bring out special supplements. There are also special programmes on radio and television.

The historical importance of Pohela Boishakh in the Bangladeshi context may be dated from the observance of the day by Chhayanat in 1965. In an attempt to suppress Bengali culture, the Pakistani Government had banned poems written by Rabindranath Tagore, the most famous poet and writer in Bengali literature. Protesting this move, Chhayanat opened their Pohela Boishakh celebrations at Ramna Park with Tagore's song welcoming the month. The day continued to be celebrated in East Pakistan as a symbol of Bengali culture. After 1972 it became a national festival, a symbol of the Bangladesh nationalist movement and an integral part of the people's cultural heritage. Later, in the mid- 1980s the Institute of Fine Arts added colour to the day by initiating the Boishakhi parade, which is much like a carnival parade.

Today, Pohela Boishakh celebrations also mark a day of cultural unity without distinction between class or religious affiliations. Of the major holidays celebrated in Bangladesh, only Pohela Boishakh comes without any preexisting expectations (specific religious identity, culture of gift-giving, etc.). Unlike holidays like Eid ul-Fitr, where dressing up in lavish clothes has become a norm, or Christmas where exchanging gifts has become an integral part of the holiday, Pohela Boishakh is really about celebrating the simpler, rural roots of the Bengal. As a result, more people can participate in the festivities together without the burden of having to reveal one's class, religion, or financial capacity.

In Chittagong Hill Tracts

In the Chittagong Hill Tracts three different ethnic minority groups come together to merge their observance with Pohela Baishakh. Boisuk of Tripura people, Sangrai of Marma people and Biju of Chakma people have come together as Boi-Sa-Bi, a day of a wide variety of festivities that is observed on the last day of Chaitra i.e. 13 April. The day is a public holiday in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

## **B. Nakshi Kantha**

In one long narrative poem, Jasim Uddin, the *Pallykoby* (the Poet of the Village) made the *nakshi kantha* into the most famed of the traditional arts

of Bangladesh. The poet tells of the love and marriage of a man and a woman. When the man is forced to leave his home, the woman sorrows, stitching her sad life into an embroidered quilt that will cover her grave at death. Suffused with the soft melancholy of village life, the poem won acclaim for its author, but no matter how fine his verse, the *nakshi kantha* would not have so risen in significance were it not, in itself, a thing rich with beauty and meaning.

One meaning of the *nakshi kantha* lies in the silent, private associations that a woman develops in her work, creating traditional motifs that hold memories for her alone. Each stitch traps time. Her work becomes a text of recall and remembrance. Another dimension of meaning lies in her craft. The sari in which a woman wraps her body is a single, seamless piece of cloth. Woven into unity, uncut, her cloth is an emblem of wholeness and oneness. After it is frayed and torn beyond use, her sari is not discarded. It is pieced and stitched into a quilt. Cloth decays into rags that are reunited in a new entity, much as the clay of the *murti* decays into the silt out of which new statues are shaped. The quilter's act of reassembly locates her in the cyclical patterns of the cosmos that turn through birth and death and rebirth. The quilt, the *kantha*, exemplifies the Bangladeshi pattern of recycling in which useless fragments are combined into useful wholes. Men take broken bits of china and glass, fitting them together in intricate *chinitikri* mosaics that cover the walls of the mosques with bright floral patterns. Comparably, women piece rags into patchwork quilts. Patchwork is common in Bangladesh, but Bangladeshi women do not carry patchwork to the heights achieved by rural women in the United States. Instead, they pile up layers of old sari cloth and baste them together, creating a wide white field that they embroider with colored thread raveled from the borders of old *saris*. They finish the work by filling the white background with white stitchery that surrounds the colored motifs and quilts the whole into unity. The great art of the women of Bengal is embroidery, not patchwork. In the past, embroidered quilts exhibited distinct regional styles in the north, south, and west of the nation, forming a rough complementary distribution with the fine cane mats of the east. The great exemplary work was the *nakshi kantha* of Jessore.

At the center expands a radially symmetrical lotus. The lotus rides upon the water as a symbol of the power that abides in dampness, the power of God in nature. Power upon power: the lotus blooms upon the water to provide the seat of the deity, of Laksmi, the goddess of wealth, of Sarasvati, the goddess of wisdom, of Ganesa, the Lord of Beginnings, who is, like the

quilt itself, an embodiment of rebirth, of life despite death. Toward the colorful lotus at the center, linear forms point from each corner. They might be trees of life, signs of the soul in ascent, or they might be flame-like, leaf-like *kalkas*, familiar from the shawls of Kashmir. Then the whole is bordered, protected by a running arcade of mihrabs, each enclosing flowers that stand like the pious at prayer. Framed by its Muslim borders, centered by its Hindu lotus, the field of the *nakshi kantha* is filled, packed with the images we have come to expect in Bangladesh.

There are depictions of nature's beauty and power: flowers and birds, butterflies and fish, horses and elephants. There are the artifacts of common life: agricultural tools, household implements, and village houses. There are the objects of a woman's desire: jewelry, mirrors, and a glorious wedding procession. And there are images that evoke religion: Muslim amulets and Hindu temple cars. With its run of floral mihrabs and its rolling temple cars, the masterpiece of the *nakshi kantha* artist, like the mystical song of the Baul, seeks a synthesis of the land's spiritual traditions, but other quilted and embroidered works are rigorously Islamic. Women make bags to protect the Holy Koran, stitched in abstract geometric designs, and they embroider prayer mats with stylized mosques.

The recent *nakshi kantha* of Rajshahi, cross-stitched on a red ground, made for prayer, carries a domed mosque like the ones woven in cane on the eastern side of the country. Significant in its technology of recycling, significant in its decorative display, the classical *nakshi kantha* was also significant in its social purpose. It was given away to maintain familial bonds of duty and affection. Made as a gift to a daughter, the *nakshi kantha* was taken by the bride to her new home, where it obliterated distance in memory. Every stitch reminded a daughter of her mother's love. Made for a son or husband, the *nakshi kantha* was a transportable piece of the home. It gave him



Map of Bangladesh on a NakshiKantha

comfort when he was gone. Out on the road, rolling himself for sleep in a warm *kantha*, the man wrapped himself in cloth worn soft by the body of a beloved woman. Touching the rippled, densely worked surface, he felt the care she had lavished on her gift to him. A soft sheath of comfort and protection, the *nakshi kantha* incarnates affection, a mother's embrace,

and it is fitting that when the new nation of Bangladesh was born, its fresh constitution was wrapped tenderly in an old *nakshi kantha*.

Meticulous in its execution, demanding in its craft, the *nakshi kantha* belongs to the intimate circle of the family. It becomes the story of one woman, a symbol of [Type a quote from the document or the summary of an interesting point. You can position the text box anywhere in the document. Use the Text Box Tools tab to change the formatting of the pull quote text box.]

her life and an apt topic for the poet, when she gives it the fullness of her devotion, repayment. Art made of love, is unfit to commercial production, in which time must be repaid in cash. Yet, since the 1980s, the craft has become a part of a commercial revival designed to get money to poor women and attractive, evocative commodities to prosperous consumers. Now there are *nakshi kantha* pillow covers and purses, bedspreads and pictorial wall hangings, that recycle traditional imagery for financial gain.

The agencies that effected the revival, training women to the needle and distributing their products for sale, will ensure the continuity of the craft. Art is another matter. The *nakshi kantha* is no longer fastidiously composed of soft, worn scraps. It is made of new cloth. One of its meanings has vanished. Careful stitching can continue to exhibit the quality of a woman's hand. Embroidered motifs can continue to carry deep meanings. But when a woman is pressed to labor for wages and when she is supplied designs to copy, then it is difficult for her to maintain the integrity of her craft or to invest her imagery with personal significance. It is difficult but not impossible, because there are artists who still work alone, stitching with seriousness and creating their own designs, and there are artists who have upheld their personal standards while adjusting their work to meet the demands of the market.

The *nakshi kantha* demands many types of stitch, and each one must be performed with precision. The women in her atelier quilt and embroider large bedspreads with a geometrical interlace of fanciful motifs. They quilt and embroider small mats for prayer. Like the cane mats of eastern Bangladesh, the embroidered mats of western Bangladesh make space sacred, and they become, like the *murti* of the potter, a tool used in ritual, an aid to communication with God. Significance endures as the fine old tradition, so precious to Bangladesh, shifts out of the intimate, familial realm to meet the challenges of a new age.