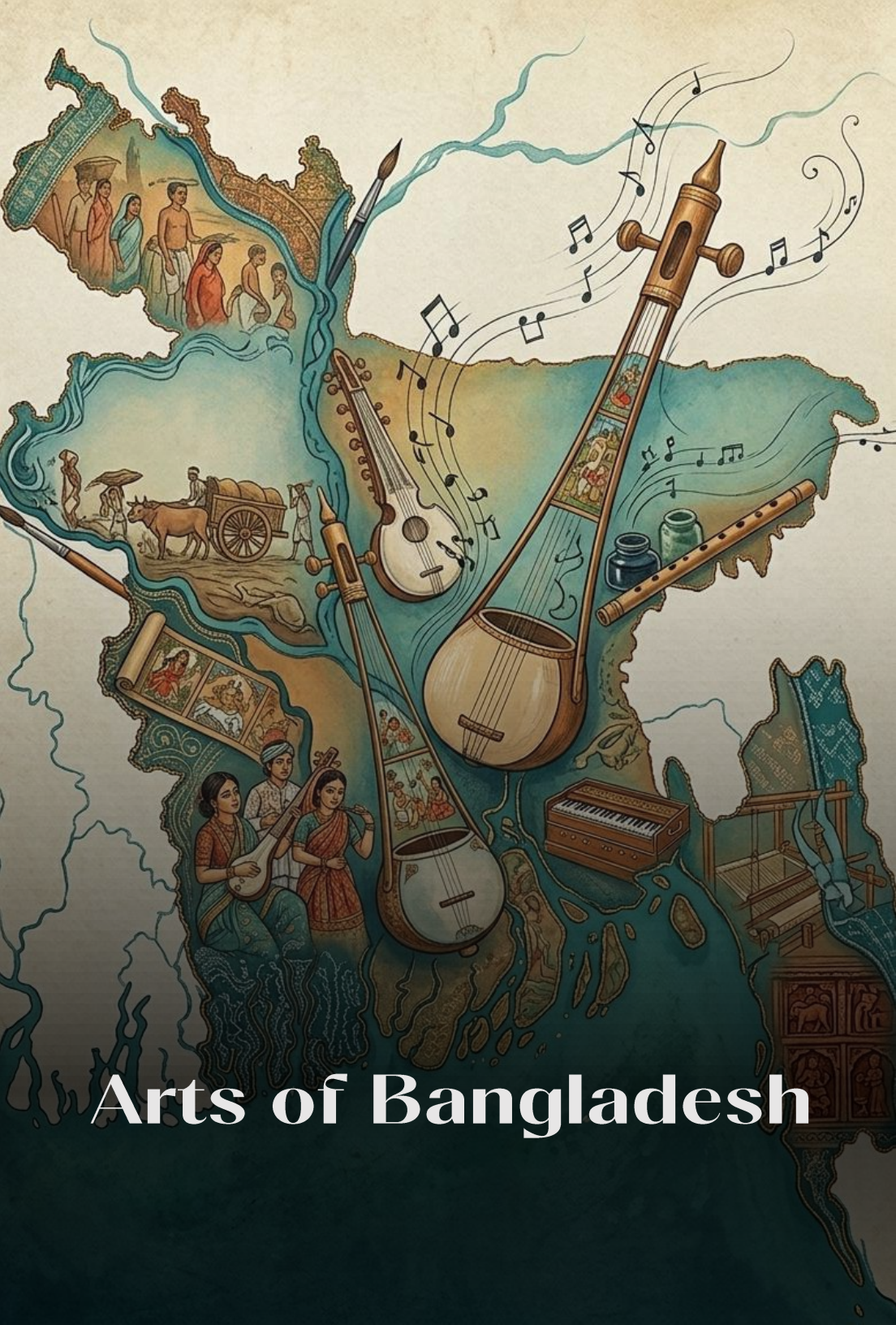


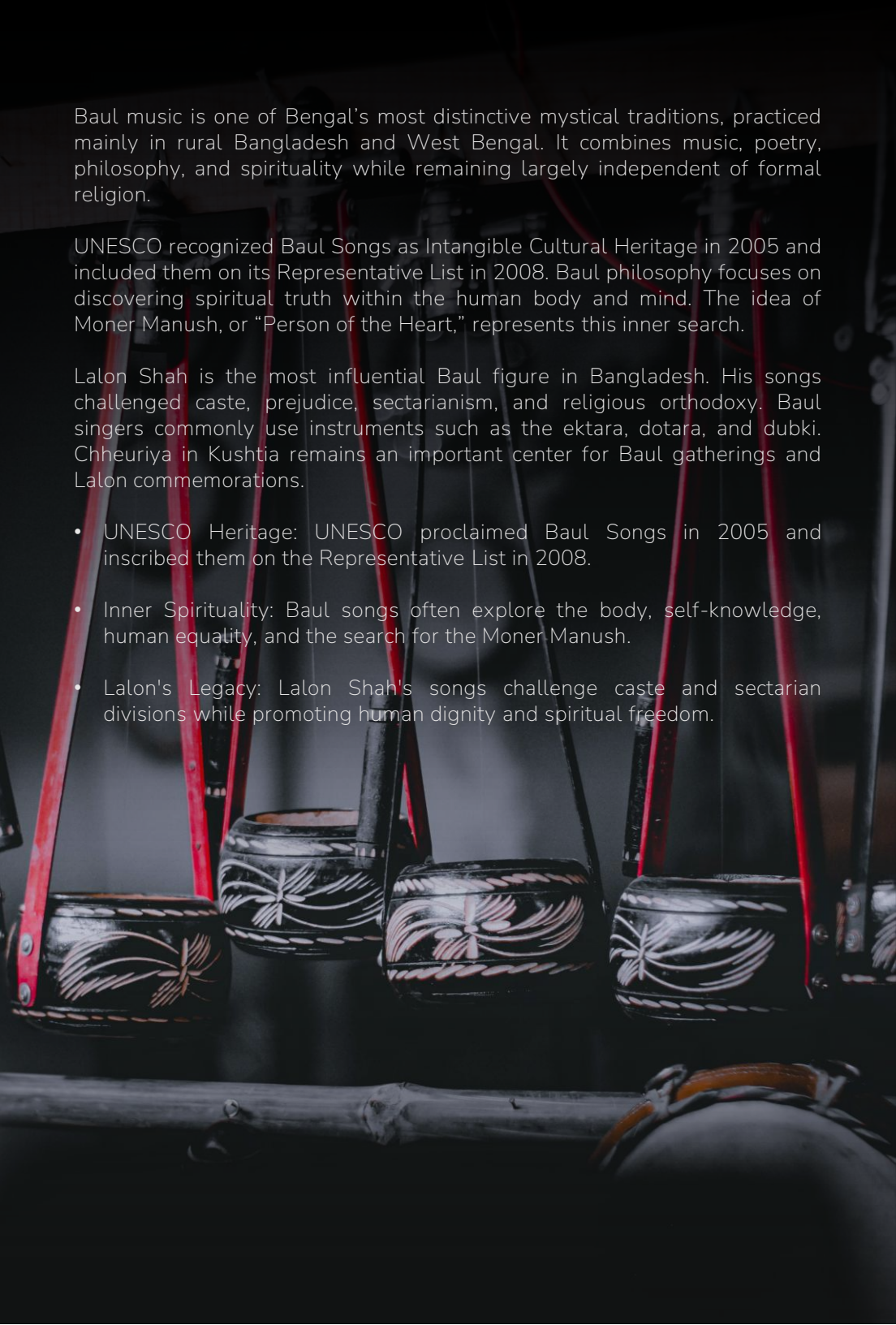


Arts of Bangladesh

A photograph of an elderly Baul musician with a long white beard and glasses, wearing a white robe with a green sash and a white beaded necklace. He is sitting on the ground, playing a stringed instrument (sitar) with his right hand and a small drum (dholak) with his left hand. He is positioned in front of a chain-link fence, with trees and foliage visible in the background. The lighting is warm and golden, suggesting late afternoon or early morning. The text "Baul Music & Mystical Folk Traditions" is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Baul Music & Mystical Folk Traditions

Melodies of the Soul.
Searching for the Person of the Heart.



Baul music is one of Bengal's most distinctive mystical traditions, practiced mainly in rural Bangladesh and West Bengal. It combines music, poetry, philosophy, and spirituality while remaining largely independent of formal religion.

UNESCO recognized Baul Songs as Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2005 and included them on its Representative List in 2008. Baul philosophy focuses on discovering spiritual truth within the human body and mind. The idea of Moner Manush, or "Person of the Heart," represents this inner search.

Lalon Shah is the most influential Baul figure in Bangladesh. His songs challenged caste, prejudice, sectarianism, and religious orthodoxy. Baul singers commonly use instruments such as the ektara, dotara, and dubki. Chheuriya in Kushtia remains an important center for Baul gatherings and Lalon commemorations.

- UNESCO Heritage: UNESCO proclaimed Baul Songs in 2005 and inscribed them on the Representative List in 2008.
- Inner Spirituality: Baul songs often explore the body, self-knowledge, human equality, and the search for the Moner Manush.
- Lalon's Legacy: Lalon Shah's songs challenge caste and sectarian divisions while promoting human dignity and spiritual freedom.



Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin & Modern Art

Master of the Brush.
Art Shaped by Struggle, Humanity, and the Land.



Zainul Abedin was a pioneering artist, teacher, and cultural organizer who played a major role in the development of modern art in Bangladesh. His powerful 1943 Bengal Famine sketches, created with ink and brush on inexpensive paper, portrayed hunger, displacement, and human suffering with striking simplicity.

After Partition, he moved to Dhaka and helped establish the Government Institute of Arts and Crafts in 1948, later becoming part of the University of Dhaka. His major works include the scrolls *Nabanna*, inspired by the 1969 mass movement, and *Manpura*, created after the 1970 cyclone.

Abedin also worked to preserve folk heritage, helping establish institutions in Sonargaon and Mymensingh. His artistic and educational legacy continues to shape Bangladeshi culture.

- **Famine Sketches:** Abedin created his landmark 1943 famine drawings with Chinese ink on inexpensive packing paper.
- **Institutional Pioneer:** He helped establish Dhaka's first major formal art institute in 1948.
- **Art and History:** Works such as Nabanna and Manpura connect rural life with major political and humanitarian moments in Bengali history.

A highly decorated Dhaka Rickshaw, a traditional mode of transport in Bangladesh. The rickshaw is covered in vibrant, hand-painted patterns, including floral motifs, geometric shapes, and religious symbols. The colors are predominantly red, green, yellow, and blue. The rickshaw is shown from a side-on perspective, highlighting its ornate design. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and a building.

UNESCO-Recognized Rickshaw Art

High-Color Heritage.
The Moving Galleries of Dhaka.

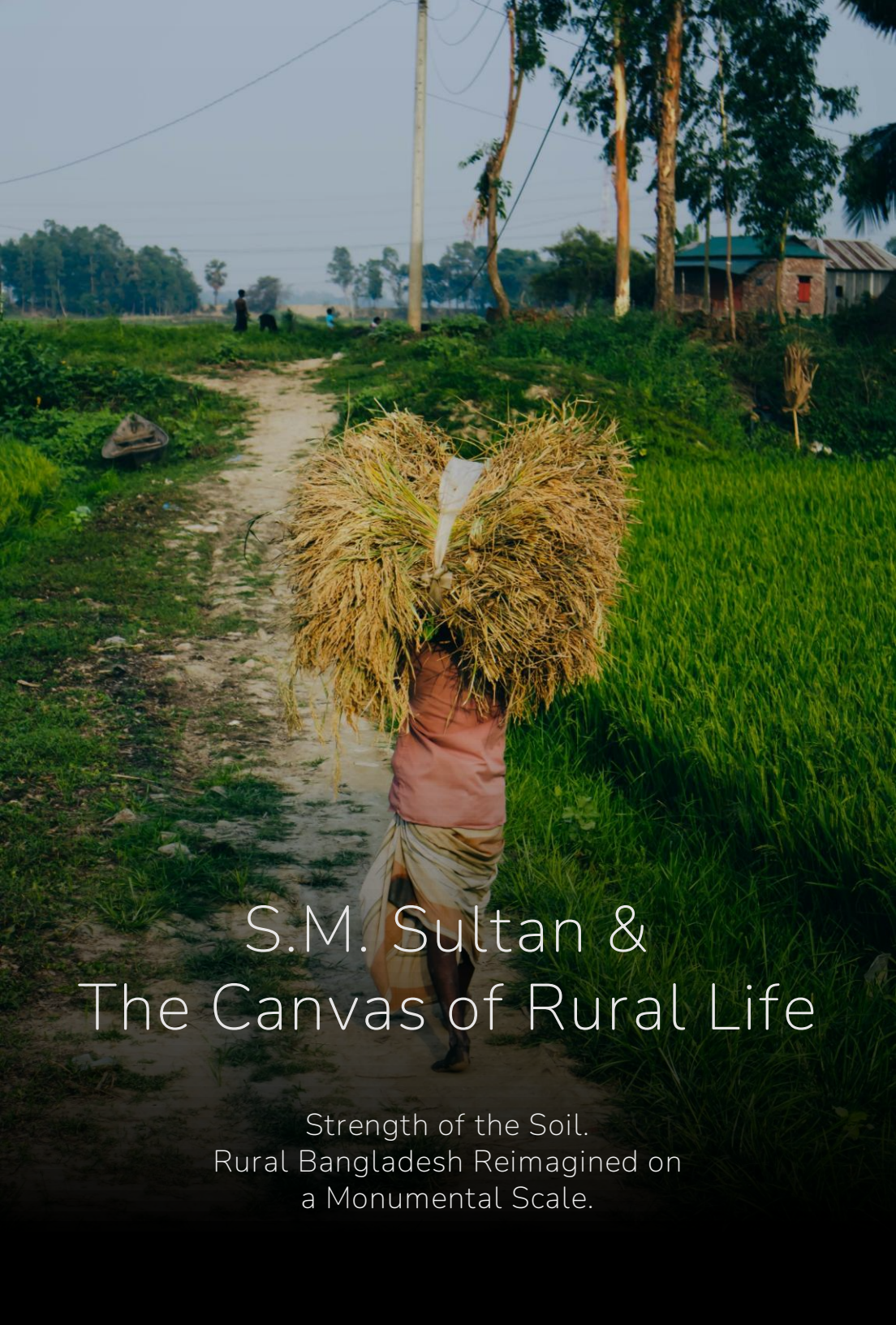
Rickshaw art is one of Bangladesh's most recognizable forms of urban folk expression. Artists decorate cycle rickshaws with flowers, birds, animals, film imagery, rural scenes, historical subjects, lettering, and colorful ornament.

In 2023, UNESCO inscribed "Rickshaws and rickshaw painting in Dhaka" on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, recognizing the tradition as an important part of Dhaka's cultural identity.

The style developed through workshop practice, apprenticeship, and family traditions, with painters often decorating rear panels and other parts of the vehicle. Today, hand-painted rickshaw art faces pressure from digital printing, motorized transport, and declining demand. However, artists continue to adapt the style to furniture, clothing, household objects, and decorative panels.

- UNESCO Inscription: UNESCO inscribed Rickshaws and rickshaw painting in Dhaka in 2023.
- Evolving Imagery: Artists draw from cinema, folk motifs, architecture, nature, history, fantasy, and everyday life.
- Craft Under Pressure: Printed decoration and changes in urban transport have reduced demand for some forms of traditional hand painting.





S.M. Sultan & The Canvas of Rural Life

Strength of the Soil.
Rural Bangladesh Reimagined on
a Monumental Scale.

S.M. Sultan was one of Bangladesh's most distinctive modern artists, best known for his powerful images of rural life. His muscular farmers, fishermen, and laborers symbolize strength, dignity, endurance, and the importance of productive work.

Although he studied art in Kolkata and exhibited internationally, Sultan eventually settled in Narail, where village life became central to his art and lifestyle. He also experimented with unusual materials, including jute, hessian, and organic pigments, creating distinctive but difficult-to-serve works.

Beyond painting, Sultan was deeply interested in children's art education and created spaces for young people to learn through art and nature. His legacy remains closely connected to Narail, the Chitra River, and cultural events such as the annual S.M. Sultan Boat Race.

- **Heroic Rural Figures:** Sultan transformed farmers and laborers into monumental, muscular figures that symbolize strength and dignity.
- **International Career:** He exhibited abroad before settling into the rural life that later defined his public image.
- **Experimental Materials:** Conservation research documents his use of jute, hessian, and pigments made from plant and other organic materials.



Traditional Patachitra Folk Paintings

Visual Ballads.
Stories Unfolded One Painted Panel at a Time.

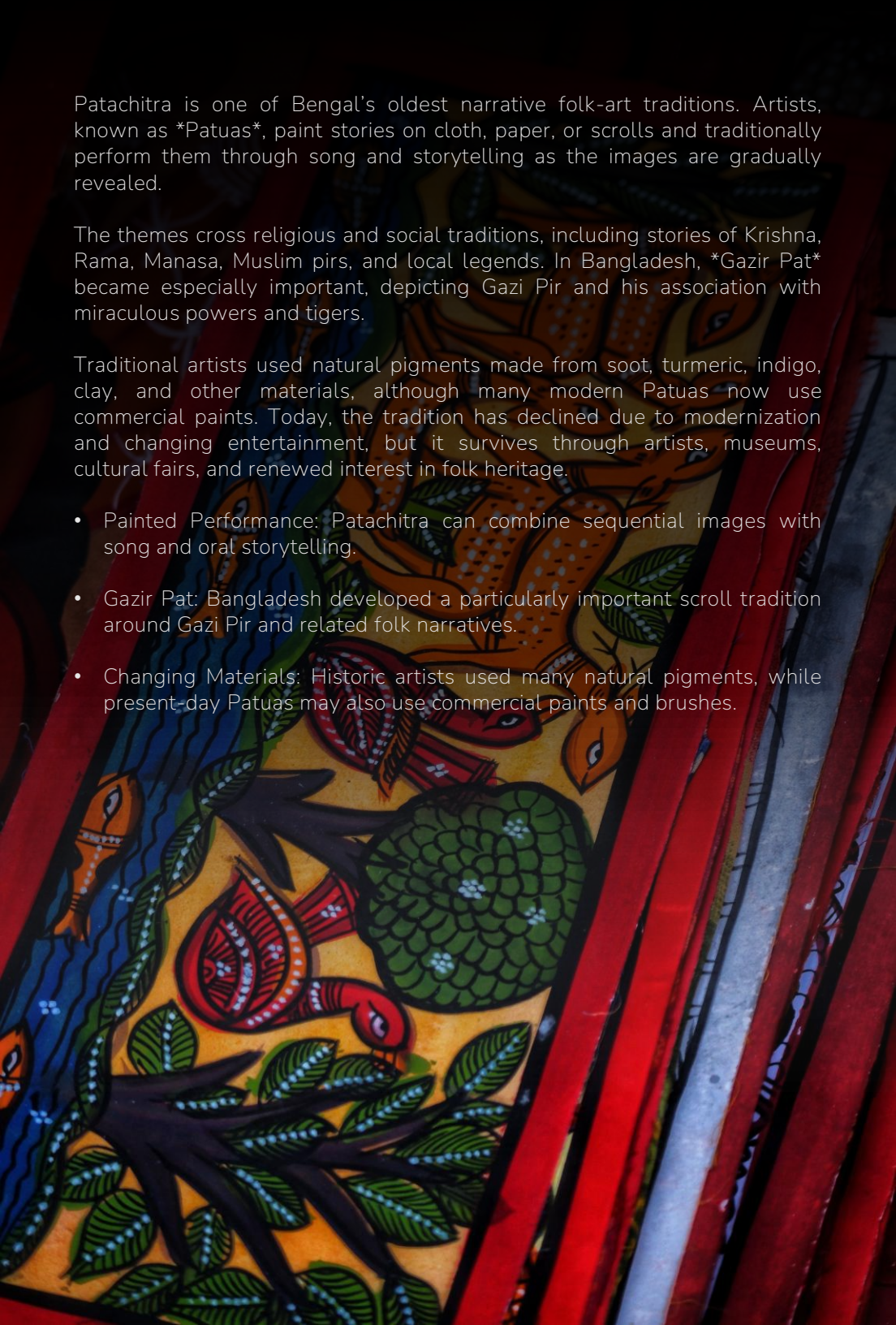


Patachitra is one of Bengal's oldest narrative folk-art traditions. Artists, known as *Patuas*, paint stories on cloth, paper, or scrolls and traditionally perform them through song and storytelling as the images are gradually revealed.

The themes cross religious and social traditions, including stories of Krishna, Rama, Manasa, Muslim pirs, and local legends. In Bangladesh, *Gazir Pat* became especially important, depicting Gazi Pir and his association with miraculous powers and tigers.

Traditional artists used natural pigments made from soot, turmeric, indigo, clay, and other materials, although many modern Patuas now use commercial paints. Today, the tradition has declined due to modernization and changing entertainment, but it survives through artists, museums, cultural fairs, and renewed interest in folk heritage.

- Painted Performance: Patachitra can combine sequential images with song and oral storytelling.
- Gazir Pat: Bangladesh developed a particularly important scroll tradition around Gazi Pir and related folk narratives.
- Changing Materials: Historic artists used many natural pigments, while present-day Patuas may also use commercial paints and brushes.



A photograph of a musician playing an electric guitar on stage. The musician is in the foreground, slightly out of focus, with their hands on the fretboard and strings. The guitar is dark-colored. In the background, another person is visible, also out of focus, wearing a blue shirt. The lighting is dim and moody, with a greenish-blue tint. The text "Modern Bangladeshi Rock & Fusion Music" is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Modern Bangladeshi Rock & Fusion Music

Amplified Bangladesh.
From Early Bands to a New Generation
of Fusion.

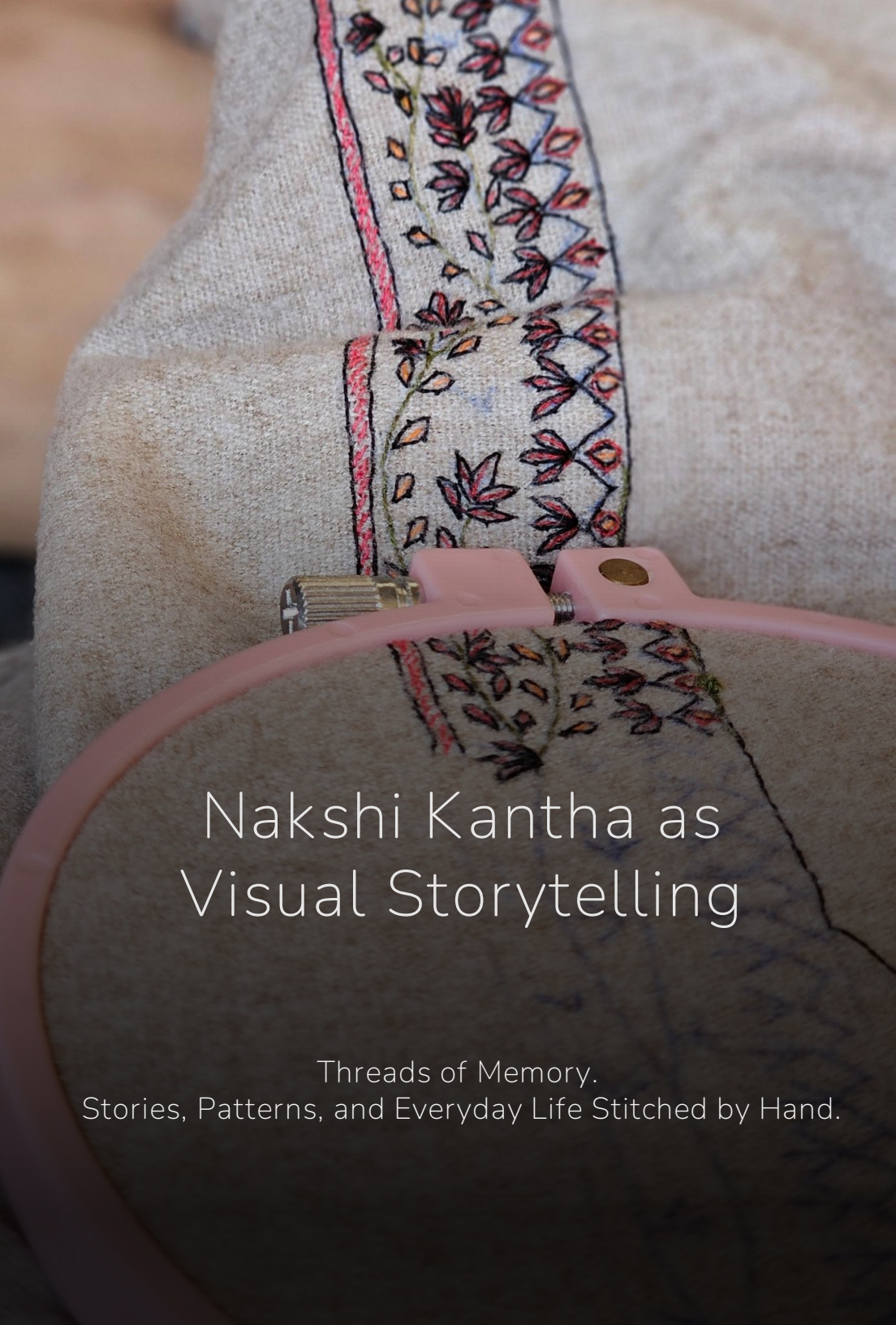
Bangladesh's modern band culture began in the 1960s, when young musicians formed groups influenced by Western rock and pop. After independence, Azam Khan became a major figure in Bangla pop and rock, combining electric instruments with colloquial Bengali lyrics and local social themes.

During the 1980s and 1990s, bands such as Souls, Feedback, Miles, LRB, Warfaze, Nagar Baul, and Ark expanded the scene through concerts, cassettes, and television. Musicians including Ayub Bachchu and James developed distinctive blues, rock, and performance styles.

In the twenty-first century, Bangladeshi musicians increasingly blended rock with folk, electronic, hip-hop, jazz, and regional traditions. Since 2022, Coke Studio Bangla has become a prominent platform for such cross-genre collaboration.

- 1960s Roots: Organized band music existed in East Pakistan before Bangladesh's independence.
- Post-1971 Transformation: Azam Khan helped give modern Bangla pop and rock a powerful local voice after the Liberation War.
- Contemporary Fusion: Today's musicians mix folk, rock, rap, electronic, classical, and international influences in increasingly fluid ways.





Nakshi Kantha as Visual Storytelling

Threads of Memory.
Stories, Patterns, and Everyday Life Stitched by Hand.

Nakshi Kantha is one of Bengal's most expressive textile traditions, traditionally created by rural women from layers of old saris, dhotis, and other cotton cloth. Repeated running stitches produced the soft, rippled surface associated with the craft.

Decorative kanthas feature motifs such as flowers, birds, fish, boats, animals, household objects, and scenes from everyday life. Some also include names, blessings, or captions, giving makers space for personal expression.

The tradition gained wider recognition through Jasimuddin's *Naksi Kanthar Math* in 1929. Today, Nakshi Kantha has developed into a commercial craft, especially in areas such as Jamalpur. Modern products include quilts, clothing, bags, cushions, and wall hangings, creating income opportunities while adapting the tradition to contemporary markets.

- Recycled Origins: Traditional kanthas reuse several layers of old cotton clothing and join them with running stitches.
- Narrative Possibility: Elaborate pieces may contain scenes, symbols, text, or personal imagery, while many kanthas remain primarily functional or decorative.
- Modern Jamalpur Hub: Jamalpur has developed one of Bangladesh's largest contemporary commercial Nakshi Kantha industries.





Rabindra Sangeet & Nazrul Geeti Heritage

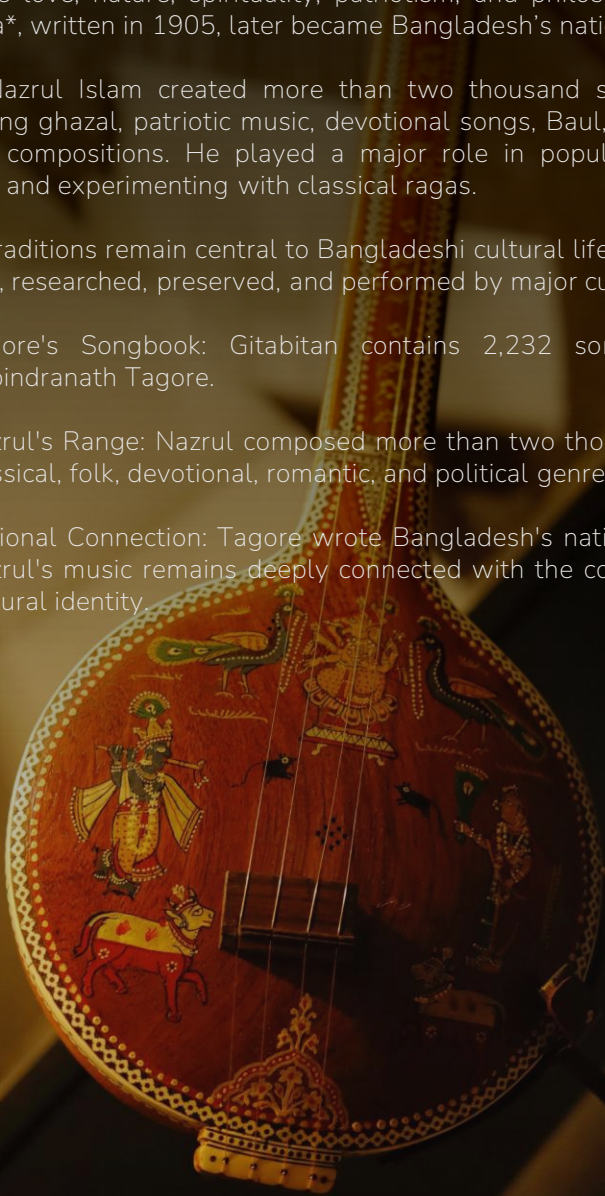
Poetry in Melody.
Two Voices That Reshaped Bengali Song.

Rabindra Sangeet and Nazrul Geeti are two major traditions of Bengali music. Rabindranath Tagore composed 2,232 songs collected in *Gitabitan*, blending classical, folk, devotional, and Western influences. His songs explore love, nature, spirituality, patriotism, and philosophy. *Amar Sonar Bangla*, written in 1905, later became Bangladesh's national anthem.

Kazi Nazrul Islam created more than two thousand songs across forms including ghazal, patriotic music, devotional songs, Baul, Bhatiali, and raga-based compositions. He played a major role in popularizing the Bangla ghazal and experimenting with classical ragas.

Both traditions remain central to Bangladeshi cultural life and continue to be taught, researched, preserved, and performed by major cultural institutions.

- Tagore's Songbook: Gitabitan contains 2,232 songs composed by Rabindranath Tagore.
- Nazrul's Range: Nazrul composed more than two thousand songs across classical, folk, devotional, romantic, and political genres.
- National Connection: Tagore wrote Bangladesh's national anthem, while Nazrul's music remains deeply connected with the country's literary and cultural identity.





Pohela Boishakh Alpana & Street Murals

Colors of a New Year.
From Rice-Paste Designs to City-Scale Art.

Alpana is a traditional Bengali decorative art historically created by women on floors and courtyards for ceremonies, festivals, and religious occasions. Traditional designs used rice paste and natural colors, with motifs such as lotus flowers, fish, rice stems, footprints, and geometric patterns.

Over time, Alpana expanded into public spaces, including streets, campuses, and festival grounds, often using modern commercial paints. Pahela Boishakh has become its largest public platform, with large-scale road paintings created in Dhaka and other districts.

The tradition also connects with the University of Dhaka's New Year procession, inscribed by UNESCO in 2016 as *Mangal Shobhajatra on Pahela Baishakh*. In 2026, the Bangladesh government officially renamed the procession *Baishakhi Shobhajatra*.

- Traditional Roots: Women historically sustained Alpana through rice-paste floor and courtyard designs associated with household and ceremonial life.
- Public Evolution: Modern artists now use Alpana on streets, campuses, memorial routes, and festival spaces with a much wider range of colors and materials.
- UNESCO Connection: The Faculty of Fine Art's New Year procession holds UNESCO recognition under the registered name Mangal Shobhajatra on Pahela Baishakh.





Ektara, Dotara & Flute

Echoes of the Soil.
Simple Materials, Distinctive Sounds,
Living Traditions.

The *ektara*, *dotara*, and bamboo flute are among the most recognizable instruments in Bengali folk music. They are widely used in Baul, Bhawaiya, Murshidi, Marfati, devotional, and regional traditions.

The *ektara* is a single-string instrument made from bamboo and a resonating body of gourd, coconut shell, wood, or metal. The *dotara* has several strings and a wider melodic range, making it especially important in Bhawaiya and other folk forms. The bamboo flute, or *banshi*, appears in many regional varieties, with differences in size and hole placement affecting its sound.

These instruments traditionally use materials such as bamboo, wood, leather, and gourd, often combined with metal strings or fittings.

- One-String Ektara: The ektara usually uses one steel string connected to a resonating body and a wooden tuning knob.
- More Than Two Strings: Despite its name, a dotara may carry four or six strings.
- Ancient Bamboo Flute: The Bengali banshi belongs to a long-established family of bamboo wind instruments with several regional forms.





Bangladesh Tourism Board

Parjatan Bhaban (Level-9),
Plot: E-5, C/1, West Agargaon,
Sher-E Bangla Nagar (Administrative Area),
Dhaka-1207

Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism

Bangladesh Secretariat,
Abdul Gani Road, Dhaka 1000
beautifulbangladesh.gov.bd

