



Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy: The Guardian of ICH in Bangladesh

R.A. Mahmud Selim (Director of Music & Dance, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy)



Snake charmer's dance
(Photo by Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy)

The Ganges Delta that makes up almost 90 percent of present day Bangladesh is one of the most ancient human habitats in the world. The vast alluvial plain of Bangladesh is watered by the great rivers of the Padma, the Meghna and the Jamuna. The land is so fertile that little diligence is required to produce crops and blessed with monsoons from the Bay of Bengal, the climate is very pleasant. In a word, it is a land of 'abundance'. That is why this land has beckoned people from the furthest corners of the world, thus becoming a crucible of diverse cultures. People of different castes and creeds have been living in this part of the world for thousands of years. Numerous heritage sites and colourful lifestyles of its people bear the testimony of the rich and varied culture of this land.

Considering this, Bangladesh has emphasised the utmost importance of safeguarding its

cultural properties from the very beginning of its journey as a sovereign state. The Constitution of Bangladesh itself is the strongest binding instrument for the safeguarding of its own culture. Adopted in 1972 the Constitution explicitly declares that 'the State shall adopt measures to conserve the cultural traditions and heritage of the people, as so to foster and improve the national language, literature and arts so that all sects of people are afforded the opportunity to contribute towards and to participate in the enrichment of the national culture' (Article:23). In compliance with the Constitution, many government institutions are currently working for the protection and promotion of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Bangladesh.

As many as 17 government agencies including 7 exclusive institutions for small indigenous ethnic groups are there to protect and promote cultural heritage in Bangladesh.

Among all these institutions, the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy (Bangladesh Academy of Fine and Performing Arts) is the apex institution in the field of culture. Located in the heart of the capital city Dhaka, and overlooking the historic Ramana Park, an oasis to the bustling city of nearly 15 million people, the academy is a huge complex of three magnificent buildings that bear the hallmarks of modern architectural beauty.

The Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy is a statutory body under the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. It was established in 1974, under the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy Act. With a few amendments, the 'Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy Ordinance in 1989' was accepted by the National Assembly and now runs the Academy. Its main objective is to safeguard and foster national cultures as well as intangible cultural heritage in Bangladesh.

The overall direction for the functioning of the academy is provided by a 29 member Executive Council (Shilpakala Academy

Parishad) headed by the Minister of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. The Director-General of the Academy is responsible for its day to day administration.

The duties and responsibilities of the academy include promotion of arts and national culture as well as the creation of necessary facilities for their development. The activities of the academy also include organising workshops, seminars, discussion meetings, short-term specialised training sessions, providing scholarships and financial grants for talented artists, organising competitions in the various fields of fine and performing arts and it regularly holds the Asian Biennial Art Exhibition. Recently it has completed a project in cooperation with UNESCO Dhaka for the safeguarding of the *Baul* Song, the only intangible cultural heritage element of Bangladesh on the Representative List. The Academy is the premier venue for the expression of traditional and contemporary arts and culture of the people of Bangladesh irrespective of colour or creed, and its planning to extend its collaborative activities internationally, especially through the Asia-Pacific region.

Existing Departments

- Fine Arts
- Drama and Filmography
- Music and Dance
- Research and Publications
- Training
- Production
- Administration and Finance

Branches outside Dhaka: 63

Staff members: 300

Number of publications: more than 200

Journal (semester): 02 (in Bangla & English)

Bulletin (quarterly): 01 (in Bangla)



Artists performing Baul songs
(Photo by Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy)



National Music & Dance Centre
(Photo by Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy)



National Drama Centre
(Photo by Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy)