

Lesson 2

Folk Music

A. Warm up activity

- In the class, give a talk on what you know about Baul / Bhatiyali / Bhawaia songs of Bangladesh.
- Request someone in the class to sing a few lines of a folk song. Then in groups discuss the theme, lyrics, style and impact of the song on the listeners.

B. Here is an excerpt from an article on Bengali Folk Music written by the late Mridul Kanti Chakravarty published in Banglapedia published by the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh. The excerpt has been slightly edited for this textbook. Read the excerpt and answer the questions that follow.

Folk music consists of songs and music of a community that are not influenced by any sophisticated musical rules or any standard musical styles. Bangladesh has a heritage of rich folk music which includes both religious and secular songs.

Folk music may be described as the music of the ancient times that sprang from the heart of a community, based on their natural style of expression uninfluenced by the rules of classical music or modern popular songs. Any arrangement of sound created by the combination of tune, voice and instrument/dance may be described as music. Folk music is the combination of song, tune and dance that originate from the traditional culture of ordinary people (the folk). For example, Baul songs are a combination of tune, music and dance that are associated with the Baul tradition in Bengal.

Folk music has the following characteristics: (i) It is composed by rural folk on the basis of ancient rules transmitted orally; (ii) these ancient rules of music have not been influenced by classical or modern music; (iii) folk songs may be sung in groups or individually; (iv) no regular practice is required for folk music; (v) it is composed and performed by illiterate or semi-literate people; (vi) it is a spontaneous expression of feelings and thoughts in easy language, local dialect, and simple tune; (vii) both words and tune are appealing; (viii) despite its universal appeal it uses local dialect; (ix) it depends upon nature and the rural environment; (x) it is an explicit manifestation of the joys and sorrows of daily life; (xi) it uses simple and natural rhythms; and (xii) it contains a strong emotive expression of human love and separation.



In Bangladesh folk music has great variety, with songs composed on culture, festivals, views of life, natural beauty, rivers and rural and riverine life. These songs are also about social inequality and poverty, about the material world and the supernatural. Mystical songs have been composed using the metaphors of rivers and boats. Since the country is basically riverine, the Bhatiyali forms an important genre of folk music. Nature plays a role in providing the content and rhythm of folk music. The folk music of Bangladesh varies from region to region, reflecting changes in the natural environment and the dialects people use. Thus there are the northern Bhawaiya, the eastern Bhatiyali and the southwestern Baul songs.

The culture and the lifestyle of the different ethnic minorities, such as the Chakmas, Manipuris, Santals or Tripuris, have also influenced folk music. Their interaction with Bengali culture and lifestyle over the years has been clearly reflected in the richness of our folk music.

Folk songs may be sung individually or in chorus. Folk songs sung individually include *Baul*, *Bhatiyali*, *Murshidi*, and *Marfati*, while songs sung in chorus include *kabigan*, *Leto*, *Alkap*, and *Gambhira*. Some songs are regional in character, but others are common to both Bangladesh and West Bengal. Similarly, some songs belong distinctively to one religious community, the Hindus or the Muslims; others cross religious boundaries. Some songs belong exclusively to men, others to women, while some are sung by both men and women. Thus only women compose and sing *Bratagan*, and *Meyeli Git*, but both men and women participate in the old practice of 'roof-beating' songs that are sung while beating down and firming rooftops.

Different folk songs belonging to different regions of Bangladesh are listed below:

Baul and spiritual songs : *Kushtia, Birbhum and West Bengal*

Jarigan : *Dhaka, Mymensingh, Sylhet, Faridpur, Murshidabad.*

Bhawaiya : *Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Pabna, Cooch Bihar.*

Gambhira : *Rajshahi, Malda.*

Wedding songs : all regions.

Roof-beating songs : the northern regions of Bangladesh.

Sari : the lower marshy regions of Sylhet and Mymensingh.

Bhatiyali : nearly all regions of Bangladesh.

Pastoral songs : Dhaka, Mymensingh, Faridpur, Sylhet, Habiganj.

C. Answer the following questions:

- a. How is folk music defined in the excerpt? Can you add some thoughts of your own to the definition provided?
- b. What are the characteristics of folk music?
- c. According to the excerpt, folk music has great variety in Bangladesh. Do you know about any other variety of folk music in our country? Which aspects of our folk music do you like?
- d. The excerpt mentions several types or classes of folk songs from different regions of Bangladesh. How many of these are you familiar with? Give a brief assessment of them.

D. Look up the meanings of the following words and terms in the dictionary and write sentences using them:

- a. classical
- b. mystical
- c. note
- d. tempo
- e. rhythm

E. You have a friend in the social media who lives in Afghanistan, who is very keen to know about your culture, especially folk music. Write an email to your friend, describing the various types of folk music in Bangladesh. You should write between 150-200 words in the main body of your email.



F. Read the text below and answer the questions that follow.

Lalon Shah

Lalon Shah (1774-1890) is best known as an icon of the Baul tradition in Bengal, although he was also a philosopher, thinker and social reformer. He preached religious tolerance and rejected social differences based on class, caste and creed. He also believed that a search for truth should begin with the body, which reflects the mystery of creation.



Although Lalon's songs are admired for the profound philosophical and mystical insights they offer, he did not receive any formal education. Not much is known about his early life. A popular story about him – which many believe to be true -- is that while on a pilgrimage to a holy place, Lalon, who was born a Hindu, contracted smallpox and was abandoned by his companions. A Muslim fakir, Siraj Sain, picked him up and took him to his own house where he nursed him back to health. When Lalon returned home, his family refused to take him in as he had lived in a Muslim household. So Lalon returned to Siraj Sain and took up a life of devotion and asceticism under his guidance. After the death of Sainji, Lalon set up an *akhras* or monastery in Chheuriya near Kushtia. It soon attracted admirers and mystics in search of salvation who became initiated into Baul asceticism and became his disciples. As Lalon began writing and composing songs, which his disciples sang with the accompaniment of *ektara* or *dotara*, his fame spread to faraway places. Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam were among those who admired him and were influenced by his *shahajiya* philosophy (the attainment of the self through the simple truths that reside in one's own body and soul—not outside -- which can be reached through *sadhana* or meditation). Many of his disciples also became famous for their songs. They included Kangal Harinath Majumder, Pagla Kanai and Dudu Shah.

G. Answer the following questions:

1. Have you heard any Baul song composed by Lalon? If yes, what is it about?
2. Why are Baul songs popular even today?

3. What is the essence of *sahajiya* philosophy of Lalon?
4. Who are some of the prominent people who admired Lalon?

H. Think of the following questions

1. Do you know a friend or relative whom you had met years ago and with whom you have lost contact?
2. How do you reconnect with a friend when you see him/her after many days or years?
3. Do you find a gap of communication with that friend, or do you feel the same closeness with him/her?
4. Do you cherish a special place or neighbourhood from your childhood where you used to play with your friends freely?

I. Read the following song by Robert Burns. This is sung all over the world on 31st December, bidding goodbye to the old and welcoming in the New year. Try to guess the meaning of the text.

Auld Lang Syne

(Times gone by)

Robert Burns

(Based on folk song from Scotland)

Should old acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to mind?
Should old acquaintance be forgot,
And old lang syne?

(Chorus)

For auld lang syne, my dear,
For auld lang syne,
We'll take a cup of kindness yet,
For auld lang syne.



And surely you'll buy your pint cup!
And surely I'll buy mine!
And we'll take a cup o' kindness yet,
For auld lang syne.

We two have run about the slopes,
And picked the daisies fine;
But we've wandered many a weary
foot,
Since auld lang syne.

We two have paddled in the stream,
From morning sun till dine;
But seas between us broad have
roared
Since auld lang syne.

And there's a hand my trusty friend!
And give me a hand o' thine!
And we'll take a right good-will
draught,
For auld lang syne.

Audio track for listening to the original Scottish song:

<https://youtu.be/1edtLulXImo>



J. Rabindranath Tagore has written a Bangla version of this song. Can you guess the lines of this very popular song?

K. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

1. What does the title of the poem mean in English?
2. What series of imagery is being used by the poet in the text? What emotion does it create among readers?
3. What do you understand from the quoted stanzas of the poem given below.

a) “And surely you’ll buy your pint cup!
And surely I’ll buy mine!
And we’ll take a cup o’ kindness yet,
For auld lang syne.”

b) “And there’s a hand my trusty friend!
And give me a hand o’ thine!”

And we’ll take a right good-will draught,
For auld lang syne.

Find out the use of future tense from the poem. Make sentences in the future tense using the following words

Acquaintance	Forget	Run about	Wander	Weary
--------------	--------	-----------	--------	-------

L. Write an email to your old friend or relative whom you have not seen for many days and inform them about your current whereabouts (200 words).



1. Make sentences with the following words:
ancient, glorious, landmark, antiquity, prosperous, splendid, amazed
2. Describe the fastest way to reach Sonargaon from your city/town/village.
3. A travel agent has prepared a brief description of Sonargaon under different headings. Fill up the blanks with information from the text.

Sonargaon

Location

- Not too far from the capital city, Dhaka, only (1) kilometers away

Attractions

- Folk Arts and Crafts Museum set up in (2) by famous artist Zainul Abedin.
- A number of old buildings of (3) and cultural importance.

History

- The capital of the independent Sultanate of Bengal in the early (4) century
- The capital of (5) Vanga under Raja Danauja Rai

Famous admirers

- Mentioned and admired by Greek and (6) writers and travellers.
- Drew the attention of (7) who travelled to this area in 1346.

C. Read the text below and do the activities that follow.

One of the historical landmarks of Sonargaon is the ancient city of Panam (also known as Painam) or Panam Nagar, which was developed to the south of the old city to provide residential quarters to the governors after the Moghuls conquered Sonargaon in 1611. But some historians believe the city's history is



much older and that the Moghuls developed Panam Nagar and built highways and bridges to connect it with Sonargaon. Three such bridges still exist. There are also three artificial canals that were dug up for easy communication and protection of the city. Panam Nagar became a prosperous trading post under the British rule. The East India Company made it a centre of *muslin* trade. At the peak of the trade about 1400 families of weavers lived in and around the city.

If you visit Panam Nagar today, you will see old buildings lining both sides of a 600 meter road, ending at Panam Bazar. The brick buildings were built by Hindu traders in the early 19th to early 20th century. No one lives in these buildings now as the place is considered a heritage site.

1. One of your social media friends living in Australia is interested in visiting some of the old architectural sites in Bangladesh. Write an email inviting him/her to visit Panam Nagar. Based on the information given in the above text, explain in your email why Panam Nagar is worth visiting.
2. Project: Plan a visit to Panam Nagar. Prepare and give an oral presentation on what you expect to see there.