

A VISITOR'S GUIDE TO THE SONARGAON MUSEUM

EDITOR : RABINDRA GOPE



BANGLADESH FOLK ART & CRAFTS FOUNDATION

SONARGAON, NARAYANGANJ

MINISTRY OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

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Publication
March 2011

Published by
Bangladesh Folk Art & Crafts Foundation
Sonargaon, Narayanganj

Printed by
G. G. Offset Press
31/A Syed Awlad Hossain Lane
Nayabazar Dhaka 1100
Phone : (+8802) 7117515, 01711602442

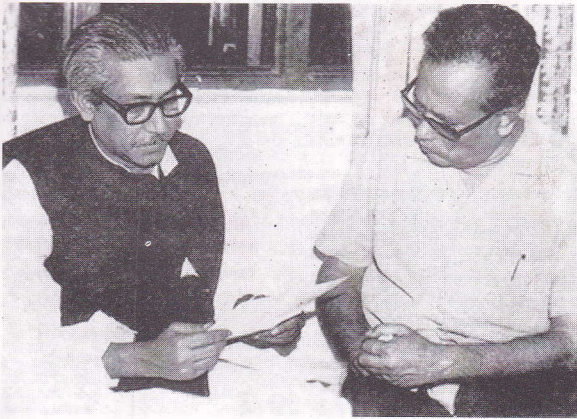
Price : Tk. 75.00
US\$. 2.00

ISBN : 978-984-33-2004-9



Dedication

Dedicated to the visionary of the Bangladesh Folk Art & Crafts Foundation, the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman



The Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman handing over a cheque to Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin for the establishment of Folk Art & Crafts Foundation on the 12th March, 1975



Editorial

Bangladesh Folk Art & Crafts Foundation stands, as a reflection of nationality, in the heart of Sonargaon, the ancient capital of Bangladesh. The Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman envisioned the birth of this foundation. Unanimously Bangabandhu, the greatest son of the nation in thousand years, personally saw off the matter by financially sponsoring the establishment of the renowned Bangladesh Folk Art & Crafts Foundation in charge of the Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin.

The history of Bangladesh is rooted in this Sonargaon—an archaic and classical civilization, vital to the ancient Bengal. Mass people are involved in folk arts and literature, and Sonargaon is the place that showcase or rich folk history. The reason, why the place attracts so many visitors is the lack of documents on the nation's primeval customs and culture of its residents. The objective of this guidebook is just to introduce Sonargaon to curious visitors.

The history of worldwide celebrated muslin is comparable with that of the prolific folk artefacts and crafts found here. In an effort to collect, preserve, restore and display the traditional folk artefacts the government established the foundation on the 12th of March, 1975. It is important not to forget the greatest figure of our land, the father of the nation,



Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, to whom all credits must go. Thousands of visitors from home and abroad throng the arena each day to get acquainted with Bangladesh by learning about her traditions, customs and culture.

Recently, a sculpture of Sheikh Russel, the youngest son of Bangabandhu has been added inside the foundation. The 15th of August in the year 1975 is an inglorious night for the nation. The innocent infant along with his father and family were brutally brush fired by a few bloodthirsty malevolent creatures. A soaring monument made of brass in front of the administrative building of the foundation, basing the historic speech on the 7th of March by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, has been planned and awaiting implementation.

This guide is just to help visitors integrate and relate to the rich folk culture, arts and crafts which portray the real image of Bangladesh. Special thanks goes to the Deputy Director Incharge of the foundation Mr. Md. Rabiul Islam, the Display officer AKM Azad Sarker, the Photographer Mr. Md. Shafiqur Rahman and the Guide Lecturer Mr. AKM Muzzammil Haque, without whom this endeavour wouldn't be a possibility. I believe the guide will be a real help to the inquisitive visitors and wish the tour of the Sonargaon be a pleasant one.

Rabindra Gope

Director

Bangladesh Folk Art & Crafts Foundation
Sonargaon, Narayanganj



The Sonargaon Museum

A land of multifarious cultural traditions and remarkable history is Bangladesh. Almost the whole of the wonderland is bestowed with natural beauty.

A visitor enchanted by the aesthetic beauty, mother nature portrayed here but on the other the magnificent antiquated architecture, reminder of our glorious past, must make him curious. The archaic Sonargaon is such a place that strikes marvel among the numerous tourists coming from all over the world.

Sonargaon

The ancient capital of Bengal is situated 25 kilometres east of today's capital Dhaka. An archaeological site, bounded by the lush greenery where the birds still sing hiding among the bushes, is today's impressive Sonargaon.



*The Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's
visit to the Folk Art Museum*

Opinions vary as to the naming of the historic Sonargaon was previously known as Suvarnagram. The name 'Sonargaon' evolved in the Muslim era. A popular saying has it that in



the reign of Maharaja Joydhaz it rained in gold droplets explaining how the place got the name 'Suvarnagram'.

But some say the chief of Baro Bhuiyan (12 independent rulers) Masnad-e-Ala Isha Khan had a wife Sonabibi after whom Sonargaon was named. Reminiscent of our glorious past, Sonargaon is a legendary term, an ancient civilization equipped with rich cultural heritage and technology. In the middle ages, this was the capital of Muslim Sultans. Today, it is an important subdistrict under Narayanganj. The area covers around 118 sq kilometres and 21 kilometres far from the city centre of Narayanganj, The history of Sonargaon heavily relies on primeval accounts, ancient legends and popular sayings. The town subsisting since the time of middle ages is surrounded by the river Meghna in the east, the river Sitalakhya in the south-west, the river Dhaleshwari in the south and the River Brahmaputra in the north—a fertile land in a safe location that naturally prompted the rulers to assign Sonargaon the capital of Bengal. Assumably, Sonargaon has been in existence since the pre-Muslim era.



Sonargaon Folk Art & Crafts Museum

In historian Shorup Chandra's opinion, Suvarnagram has been a prehistoric but an



important town since the time of Gautam Buddha and was the capital of many regimes like Pala and Deva. In the absence of the right documents the antiquity of Sonargaon could not be determined. Although there was no dependable information found before the thirteenth century, evidences of its being were found in ancient Bengal. Presumably, the year AD1281 was the beginning of the Muslim dynasty. The year 1338 was Fakhruddin Mobarak shah declaring the independence of Bengal and Sonargaon was established as the capital of the eastern region. In Isha Khan's time the capital was at the peak of advancements famous for a strong political government. With the advent of the 16th century, under the authority of the ruler Shershah, a grand trunk road was built connecting Sindhu with Sonargaon. Not only in the administrative sector, the civilization thrived in culture, religion, architecture and technology. The age old tombs, mosques and manifold edifices all indicate why Sonargaon enjoyed such international popularity attracting traders and missionaries at the time.

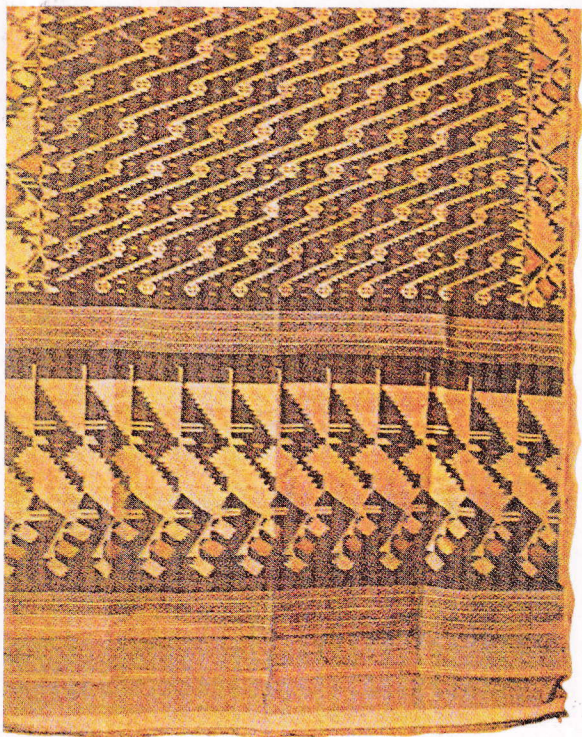


Sculpture – The struggle for life

Through the time Panam city emerged as the trade centre. Since a certain year from then on



the city has prospered in wealth, technology and power perhaps reminiscent of a heavenly past-how is to imagine a palace with a pool beside budding out as a flower through the landscape fringed with lush greenery and with a trading centre just nearby, in Panam city. The city was well guarded by forts with imposing edifices made of burnt dark clay bricks. Later the British came and pioneered the indigo industry with businessman and landlords setting up their quarters here beside the connecting road. Actually the road was 600 metres long and 5 metres wide, the only streamline of the city. Presently, on the north there are 31 structures with 21 of them on the south.



Jamdani Saree—a product of the Crafts Village

They were fabricated in the image of European structures. In the year 1975 an old rest house



under a government requisition, was renovated to temporarily set up a museum for folk art & crafts. To uphold the nation's cultural heritage and to pass on our values, customs and traditions, the invaluable artefacts were collected, preserved, restored and displayed in the folk art & foundation established on the 12th of March in 1975 under the advice and sponsorship of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Internationally renowned sculptor Zainul Abedin supervised the government project.

Sonargaon was not just the capital of Bengal from the thirteenth to the fourteenth century; it was the pedestal of folk art & crafts in the country. Taking note of the glorious times of muslin and Jamdani production originating in Bengal, the city was thought suitable for the folk art & crafts foundation. The folk art & crafts remain a signature representing the nation and our rich cultural heritage. All in all the foundation was born to remind ourselves of our glorious past, to strengthen our present and to look forward to future in the light of our history.

Objectives

The foundation is a national organization for the purpose of collecting, preserving, researching of the folk art & crafts. Besides, to entertain the present and future generations with the exhibition of the mementos, the foundation took birth in Sonargaon.

What comprises the foundation

Today the foundation covers around 56 acres of land including an impressive lake, ponds, sculptures of Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin and of Sheikh Russel, a library, exotic restaurants and shops, a folk stage, a crafts bridge and a crafts village. Further more the guests may go fishing, ride a boat or a round-about with the two museums of folk art & crafts being the main attractions.

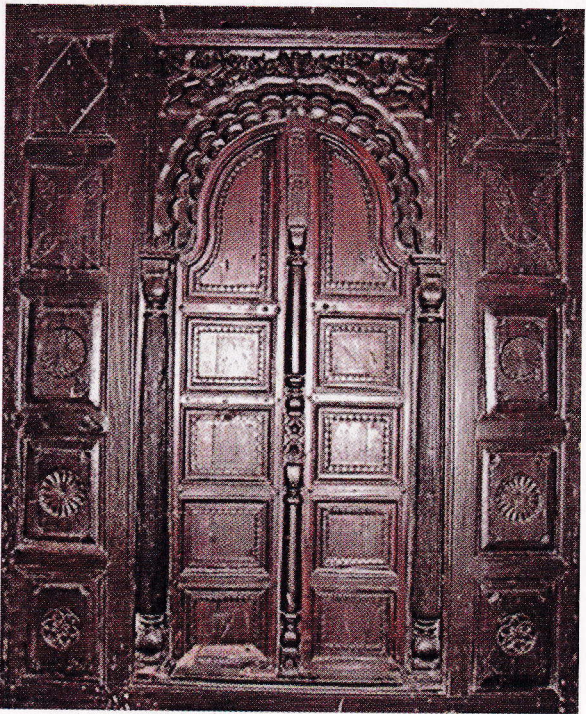


The folk art & crafts museum

A building comprising artistic, cultural, historical and scientific objects that portrays the correct image of a nation is defined as the museum. The museum initiated its journey in Panam city, with an art & crafts display symbolic of the country's folk culture and tradition. The museum currently comprising 10 galleries was reallocated in the new complex of the foundation on the 25th of September in the year 1981.

Gallery for the wooden architecture

The carpenters gained skills and knowledge from their ancestors through generations. Their expertise included making various kinds of furniture and statues of gods and goddesses relying heavily on teak, Shal wood, Jackfruit tree wood and mehogany.



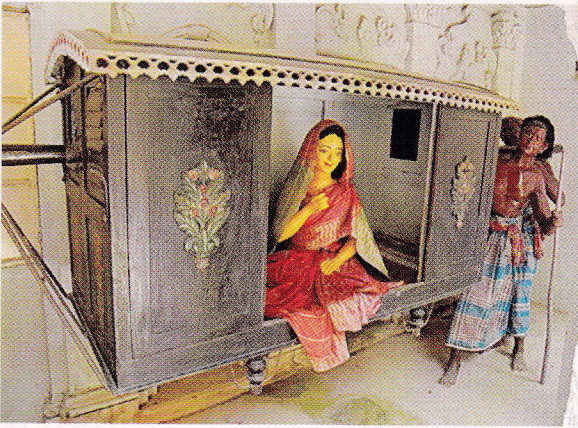
An engraved wooden door

The king of Noubihar, a bride in a palanquin or a landlord for that matter on display are just a few illustrations that indicate the skill level of the carpenters from all around Bengal.



Gallery for Village life

Most of the inhabitants of the country dependant on agriculture live in rural areas. Usually the common rural people have strong family ties and live a simple but pleasant life.



A traditional palanquin

The age old picture of grinding grains, use of plough in irrigation and the bride in a palanquin are some of the instances displayed at the gallery.

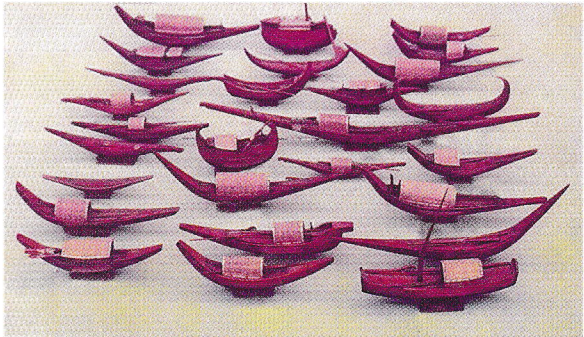
Gallery for Scroll painting and mask

The word 'Pot' comes from the Sangskrit word for cloth 'Potto'. Scroll images are the paintings on the cloth. In ancient times this was the medium of or glorious traditions each pot portraying a clear and materialistic message known as Mural painting. The gallery showcases Pot of Behula and Laksmindar, Pot of Gazi and pot of the king Harishchandra.



Gallery for various types of boat

Bangladesh is a land of rivers. Plain lands, forest hills, rivers and canals, lakes and ponds, and the



Various models of country boats

long beach all make up one country of our hearts—Bangladesh. The boat has been customarily the most popular medium of transport. There are various kinds of boats including Sampan and Bazra.

Gallery for tribal life

People come from multifarious colours and castes, speaking dissimilar languages comprising of many small tribes. They differ in culture and customs. This gallery in an exotic environment is to uphold the culture, tradition and way of living of the indigenous people.

Gallery for folk musical instruments and pottery

Music without the perfect musical instruments is not complete. Our people have been using constituents out of keen musical sense. Instruments like Ektara (single string), Dotara (double string), Sharinda, Shetar, Tan, Shahnai, flute and local drums (dholak) are on display. The availability of silt meant heavy use in pottery attaining sophistication through time.

The art of pottery has distinctly characterized itself as the symbol of our civilization.



Shakher Hari—sweet pot

Among others, on display are the 'Terakota doll', 'Shakher Hari' (sweet pot), 'Nakshi brickbats' (engraved brickbats).

Gallery for products of iron

Since prehistoric times—the later stages of the stone ages, iron has been used in our country. The blacksmiths of our country showed excellent craftsmanship in producing agricultural equipment, scissors, spades, scimitars, 'Sarata' (scissors for cutting betel-nuts), a serrated edge saw, 'Kurni' and 'Kurani'.

Gallery for brass and bell metal crafts

Use of brass and bell metal items in rural societies has been phenomenal. It has been five thousand years since its use evolving to another dimension in our folk culture. Use of bronze, an alloy of tin and copper once became very popular in its application in daily life. Some alloys using copper to name are brass, bronze and bell metals. Melting zinc with copper yields bell metals, tin with copper makes bronze and mixing copper, zinc and lead produces brass. On display are household utensils, flower vases, winnowing fans, sieves and tools made of brass.



Gallery for folk ornaments

A civilization without ornaments is unimaginable. They have been worn for beautification and to express aristocracy. The custom was the product of social, cultural and religious beliefs. The authority displays include bracelets, ivory ornaments, seven string necklace and local waist bands.

Gallery for bamboo, cane and shital paty

Most of Bangladesh is riverine, warm and fertile. The plain land is therefore blessed with bamboos, trees and vegetation. Due to the demand and necessity the folk artists, following the chain of their ancestors, had kept on crafting toys and utensils from the wood and bamboos.



A traditional manual fan

Some of the bamboo and cane products for exhibition are 'Dula' (a basket), winnowing fans, sieves, mat made of bamboo slips, 'Shital Pati' and age old fans.

Shilpacharya Zainul Folk Art & Crafts Museum



Internationally acclaimed Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin was an extraordinarily creative individual. He was born on the 29th of December in 1914. He had a strong creative mind which he applied successfully to restore and turn a new leaf in the world of arts and culture. Professionally a painter he was awarded with the title of 'Shilpacharya'. He took off from the materialistic world on the 28th of May, 1976 in Dhaka. Prime minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the Shilpacharya Zainul Folk Art & Crafts Museum on the 19th of October in the year 1996.

Gallery for wooden crafts

The gallery is decorated with fine wooden handicrafts of ancient times and of today. Wooden fence, mannequin of a mother holding her child and small colourful effigies of horses, elephants and lions are on display.



A painted wooden effigy of an elephant

Furthermore handicrafts of today's patterns and carpenters in Sonargaon are presented for sale in the display.



Gallery for Jamdani Sarees and Nakshi Kantha

In ancient times a super fine cloth called 'muslin' was fabricated using a special type of cotton called karpas. Jamdani is the name given to the embroidery after stitching up meaningful geometric or flowery patterns.



Nakshi Kantha-embroidered quilt

In Tofayel Amed's opinion the Persian word 'Jama' means cloth and 'Dana' implies flowery pattern concluding that 'Jamdani' may mean a cloth with flowery patterns; the word 'Jamdani' finally getting corrupted to give rise to the popular name 'Jamdani'. But another point of view sheds light as 'Jam' implying a kind of



liquor and 'Dani the holding plate or saucer. Perhaps the servant wore a piece of embroidery from Dhaka but called upon as Jamdani. The gallery introduces manifold types of Jamdani and the famous Nakshi Kantha. A model imaging the local way of farming cotton, the situation describing the manufacturing process of cloth from cotton, rural festivals and market place, is on display.

The monument of Zainul Abedin

Zainul Abedin was certainly the person, people miss today; a man of honour. His paintings spoke out to the world portraying the real picture of Bangladesh.



Mr. Abul Kalam Azad MP, The honourable minister for information ministry and the ministry of cultural affairs inaugurating the Shilpacharya Zainul Monument



He was indeed one of the pioneers in his field and someone who will forever be in our memories. It became only more than necessary to put up a sculpture as a token of what he has done for the country and especially for the foundation. The monument is to be founded in front of the administrative building amidst the green arena. Plaudits must go to sculptor Shyamol Chowdhury for doing a great job.

Festivals and Exhibitions

Till now the foundation has organised thirty five folk art & crafts fair and folk festivals at home and four exhibitions abroad.



Advocate Promode Mankin MP, The honourable state minister, the ministry of cultural affairs presenting a folk song with his own vocal in the ending ceremony combinedly arranged with the national victory day and Poush mela, 1416 bangla year

Library

For research purposes on folk art & crafts a library is a must. It contains more than ten thousand research related texts, magazines and recorded compact disks of folk festivals.

Book stall

All publications of the foundation could be found on the ground floor of the Shilpacharya Zainul Folk Art & Crafts Museum.



The monument of Sheikh Russel

The present government was appraised to have fixed the 17th of March, the day the father of the nation was born, as the National Children's day. The 15th of August, 1975, a night to forget, when some inhuman creatures brutally murdered almost the whole family of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Russel, the kid was not even spared.

Bangabandhu was the visionary of the foundation and it is only reasonable to build a monument of the youngest son of the father of our nation.



The honourable member of the parliament from Narayanganj-03 Mr. Abdullah-al-Kaisar inaugurating the Sheikh Russel Monument

You may stumble across the elegant structure under the shade of tree banking around an eye catching lake.

Research-publications

In an attempt to discover and publish all the information hitherto unknown and facts in the dance, cultural and socio-economic sector, the foundation has taken up. An innitiatue has been taken some research & publication programme by the foundation. Since 1975 the number of publications is 57.



Annual Programmes

The programmes include celebrating birthday of Bangabandhu Shiekh Mujibur Rahman, National Children's day, death anniversary of the father of the nation, 'Poush' festival (winter festival),



Mrs. Suraiya Begum, ndc, The honourable secretary of the ministry of cultural affairs delivering her speech on the ending ceremony of the month long folk art & crafts fair & folk festival

Independence day, Bengali new year, International Mother Language day, Victory day and last but not the least birth and death anniversary of Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin. Not to forget that each year in winter a month long crafts fair & folk festival is held.

Folk Restaurant

The administration has sincerely considered the need for food for the beauty loving and travelling minded visitors. Two restaurants in a nice environment have been set up. The one name of the folk restaurant is 'Lokaj Restora' and the other is 'Kalmilata Canteen'.

Fishing

Thousands of tourists throng the foundation arena, but some do sit and enjoy fishing on a quiet bank of the large and beautiful Lake. The fee for fishing is Tk. 1500 and with each ticket comes five pieces of a line and a hook.

Monument of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman



The individual, whose name first comes to one's mind when investigating the history of Bangladesh he is no other but the greatest son of our land, the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Everyday thousands of inquisitive visitors from home and abroad, eager to learn the history and traditions of Bangladesh. The great leader, founder of the nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was visionary of this foundation.

Not to mention he personally supervised and sponsored its establishment. It is essential a monument of the Father of the Nation be constructed immediately. At the 102st board meeting of directors the proposal that a sculpture be built was accepted and hence a committee comprising the president and an artist Qayyum Chowdhury, a member and an artist Hashem Khan, a member and a sculptor Rabiul Hossain and last but not the least the secretary and a poet Rabindra Gope. It has been unanimously agreed that the monument be built inside the rose garden facing the administrative building. The perspective of the sculpture planned to be made of brass, in his historic speech on the 7th of March. The project will cost around 10 million taka.

Sale centre

Taking note of the pleasure the guests take in having a stall and buying things, the souvenir shop has been built up in a spectacular location inside the folk art & crafts museum complex.

Crafts shop

In the stall under the effort and supervision of the craftsmen's sponsors, manifold craftworks including Jamdani Saree are made, put on display and sold at reasonable prices.

Entertainment Spot

Statistically speaking there are around seven lac tourists visiting the only folk arts museum in the country annually. To entertain the guest an entertainment spot has been arranged in a place



owned by the institution. Litchi plants, palm trees planted in rows which now present a green pleasant and peaceful environment bound to touch a traveller's heart. There is a certain fee for the use of the spot.

A boat ride

There are five paddle boats made of fibre glass and six small boats for a ride along the spectacular lake. The small boats are rented hourly to the public.



Guests taking boat ride

Craft village

For the enhancement of our folk arts, folk cultures and restoration of our traditions it is important that a work environment is present for the craftsmen and folk artists.

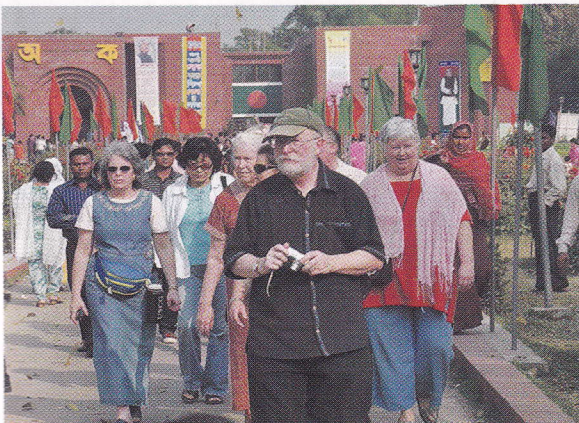


An artist doing embroidery on 'Nakshi Kantha'

This village gives those artists an opportunity to showcase their skills and craftsmanship especially when folk art exhibitions and festivals take place.



Participating dignitaries in the Second Ministerial Meeting of CIRDAP visited the foundation. They were Mr. Shri C.P. Joshi the honourable Minister of Rural Development and Minister of Panchayati Raj, India; Mr. Purna Kumar Sherma Limbu, the honourable minister for local development, Nepal; Mr. Jahangir Kabir Nanak, the honourable state Minister to the Local Government of Peoples Republic of Bangladesh, and the member of the parliament from Narayanganj-03 Mr. Abdullah-al-Kaisar with Poet Rabindra Gope, the great freedom fighter and Director the foundation.



A section of foreign guests



Bangladesh Folk Art & Crafts Foundation at a glimpse

Visionary of the Foundation :

The Father of the Nation Bangabandhu
Sheikh Mujibur Rahaman

Date of establishment : 12th March, 1975

Area : 56.66 acres

Number of galleries : 12

Number of employees : 55

Entrance fee : Tk. 10

Entrance fee for foreign guests : Tk. 100

Time-table : Friday-Tuesday; 9:00 am-5:00 pm

Weekly holiday : Wednesday and Thursday

Thousands of visitors throng the foundation arena each day. The visitors get a chance to know Bangladesh here and are amazed observing the various traditional artifacts. So for pleasure, experience, research and recreation, there is ample opportunity to see the commemorating sign and relics of the past heritage of Suvarnagram that have their scattered entities in Sonargaon, the historical capital of Bengal.

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A part of students while visiting to the Bangladesh folk art & crafts foundation