

A Study on Material Culture in Dhaka | **Rickshaw, A Motion Craft**

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I wish to express my respect & admiration for all the rickshaw making artisans of Dhaka

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Abstract

Rickshaw is the most common and popular means of transport in Dhaka. It's a human powered passenger carrying tricycle. The rickshaw of Dhaka has already been secured a worldwide appreciation, and it is not only for its environmental responsive green features but also for its artistic expression and splendid decorations. It's not an object, rather a pure form of art that is celebrated in shapes and forms, colors and patterns, designs and arts. Rickshaw decoration represents the local folk arts, which is certainly true in expression and rich in experience. The colorful eccentricity of the highly crafted rickshaws is entirely a unique feature of Dhaka's cultural landscape (Dutt & Williams, 2010). Over the years, a number of skill mechanics and rickshaw artists have been working with heart in their informal workspaces to produce this handmade vehicle as a symbol of local craft. Currently, a battery powered passenger carrying tricycle has been occupied some places of Dhaka by replacing rickshaws, due to its high efficiency and convenient operation. Not only that, the most popular rickshaw art has already been started to replace by printed images. However, considering the significance of rickshaws in Dhaka and the probable disappearance of the industry in near future, this research work has been initiated to document the traditional rickshaw making process, and it's the very local technology. More precisely, it has been illustrated the rickshaw workshops and the rickshaw artist's studio spaces, as well as the artifacts and the artisans' contributions.

Reference

Dutt, K. L., & Williams, D. J. (2010). *Moving Pictures: Rickshaw Art of Bangladesh*. Ocean, NJ: Grantha Corporation.

Résumé

Rickshaw est le moyen le plus commun et populaire de transport à Dhaka. Il est un passager à propulsion humaine portant tricycle. Le pousse-pousse de Dhaka a déjà assuré une appréciation dans le monde entier, et il est non seulement pour ses caractéristiques écologiques sensibles de l'environnement mais aussi pour son expression artistique et décors magnifiques. Il n'est pas un objet, mais plutôt une forme pure de l'art qui est célébré dans les formes, couleurs et motifs, dessins et arts. La décoration d'un Rickshaw représente les arts folkloriques locaux, ce qui est certainement vrai dans l'expression et riche en expérience. L'excentricité colorée des Rickshaws très artisanales est entièrement une caractéristique unique du paysage culturel de Dhaka (Dutt & Williams, 2010). Au fil des ans, un certain nombre de mécaniciens de compétences et des artistes de Rickshaw ont travaillé de tout cœur dans leurs espaces de travail informels pour produire ce véhicule à la main comme un symbole de l'artisanat local. Actuellement, un passager tricycle portant alimenté par batterie est occupé certains endroits de Dhaka en remplaçant les Rickshaws, en raison de sa grande efficacité et une utilisation commode. Non seulement cela, l'art le plus populaire rickshaw a déjà commencé à remplacer par des images imprimées. Cependant, compte tenu de l'importance de Rickshaw à Dhaka et de la disparition probable de l'industrie dans un avenir proche, ce travail de recherche a été lancé pour documenter le processus de fabrication de Rickshaw traditionnel, et il est la technologie beaucoup plus localisée. Plus précisément, les ateliers de Rickshaw et les espaces de studio de l'artiste de Rickshaw ont été illustrés, ainsi que les artefacts et les contributions des artisans.

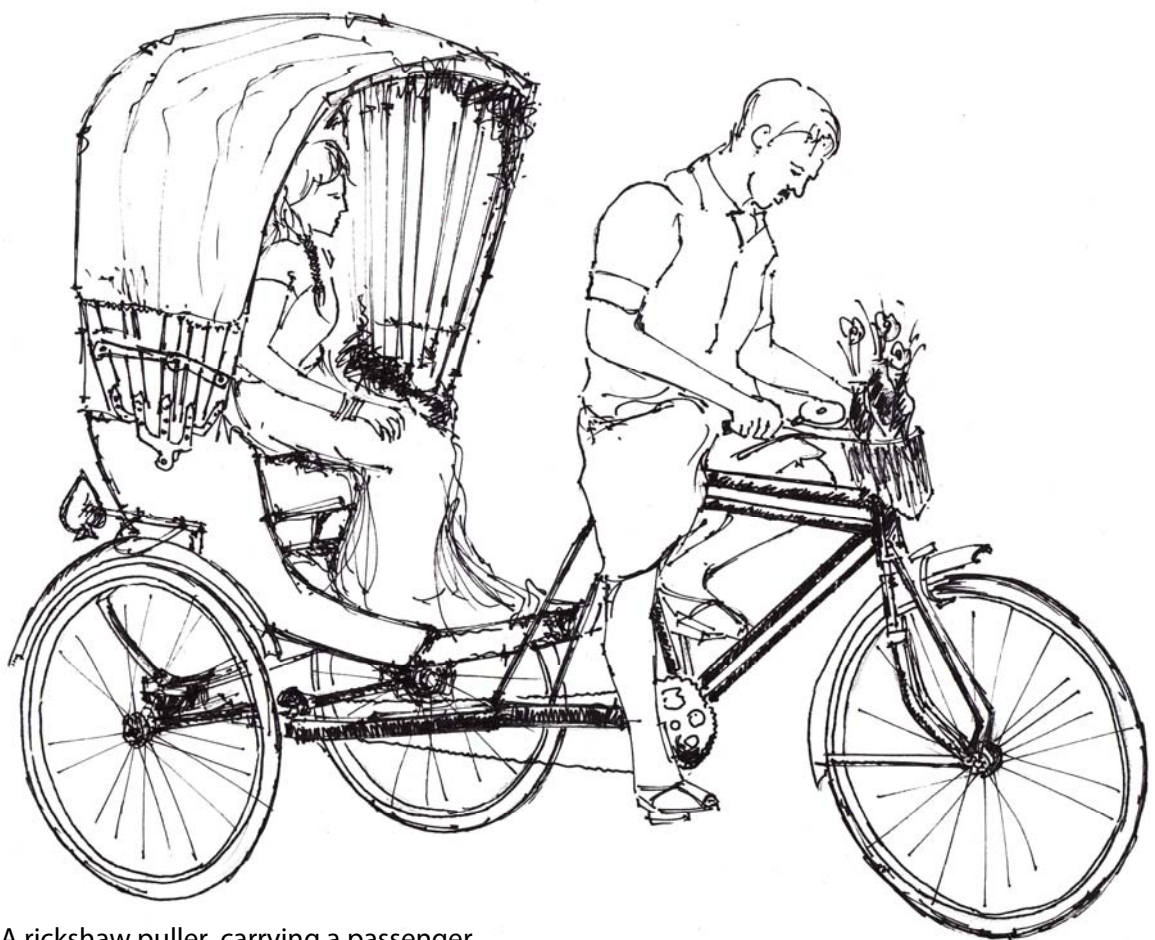


A decorative rickshaw body

Preface

Rickshaw, the most available and popular means of public conveyance in Dhaka. Rickshaw is a human powered and pedal driven three wheeler cycle, used for carrying passengers. This vehicle has been achieved a greater recognition in the world, not only for its nature friendly sustainable features but also for its unique artistic expression. "Swarms of bright rickshaws add interest to the city's slow motion, and they have frequently excited the curiosity of foreign visitors, for collectively they comprise a quantitatively astounding public exhibition of art" (Glassie, 1997). Over the years, a number of skill mechanics and rickshaw artists have been working with heart in their informal workspaces to produce this handmade vehicle as a symbol of local craft. Its extraordinary artwork represents one of the most distinctive folk cultures of the region. This research has been attempted to document the traditional rickshaw making process, the very local technology, its workshop settings, expertise, as well as the rickshaw artworks and the artists.

Rickshaw is an imperative part for the city of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. According to the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP) of Dhaka and the Strategic Transport Plan (STP) 2005, there are approximately six hundred thousand rickshaws in the streets of Dhaka, and over a million people are directly involved for their livelihood in this gigantic industry (RAJUK, 2005). But currently, a battery powered passenger carrying tricycle has been occupied some places of Dhaka by replacing rickshaws, due to its convenient operation, more passenger carrying capacity, better speed and higher efficiency. In coming days, this new technology can be a threat for substituting the existing traditional rickshaws. Again, in recent times, a machine printed design element has been replacing the traditional art of the rickshaw panels, due to the cheaper cost and availability. However, considering the significance of rickshaws in the environmental, socio-cultural and economic aspects of Dhaka city, its appreciating craft value, and the probable disappearance of the industry in near future, this research work has been initiated to create an archive on the conventional process of rickshaw making.



A rickshaw puller, carrying a passenger

Primarily a literature review has been done to provide the theoretical frame of material culture and folklore, which has helped to shape this research work within a methodical approach. The objective of this study is to document the traditional methods of rickshaw making. More precisely, it has been illustrated the rickshaw workshops, and the rickshaw artist's studio spaces, as well as the artifacts and the artisans' activities. This research is a qualitative case study of observation. A photographic survey has been done to get a clear picture of the workshops and studios, and a series of sketches have been produced to visualize the real life experiences of the working spaces to understand the rational notion of spatial configuration. As a part of field work, a range of oral interviews of the rickshaw mechanics, artists, factory workers, shopkeepers and pullers have been taken to learn about their work spaces, used technology, experiences and their involvements. Finally, the overall observations have been syndetize to animate the complete rickshaw making process, the configuration patterns of the workspaces and the contributions of the artisans.

Reference

- Glassie, H. (1997). *Art and Life in Bangladesh*. Dhaka, Bangladesh: Indiana University Press.
- RAJUK. (2005). *Strategic Transport Plan (STP) 2005 for Dhaka*. Dhaka: RAJUK.



Hand paint on rickshaw seat

Chapter I | Literature Review and Methodology

Material Culture

Material culture, a study of physical objects to learn about a culture at a certain time. It's a disciplinary process of scholarship to clarify a cultural identity. For defining this subject matter, Jules D Prown say, "Material culture is the study through artifacts of the beliefs – values. Ideas, attitudes, and assumptions – of a particular community or society at a given time" (Prown, 1982). He also identifies the material culture as a 'mode of cultural investigation' where objects are used as primary data. Henry Glassie also provides a similar idea for defining material culture with a more precise objective of the study, which is 'human interaction'. He says, "material culture is culture made material; it is the inner wit at work in the world. Beginning necessarily with things, but not ending with them, the study of material culture uses object to approach human thought and action" (Glassie, 1999). Meanwhile, Ian Woodward attempts to address the both issue of culture and human interaction to define material culture, "the study of objects – as the representation of culture – provides researchers with a better understanding of "social structure" and even different social patterns such as "inequality" as well as "human action, emotion and meaning" (Woodward, 2007). So it is clear from the scholars' writing that, the study of material culture is not the study of objects only, rather the use objects attempt to understand the culture and social being. Simply, material culture is the object based study of culture.

To explain the discipline title 'material culture', Prown says, "the term material culture thus refers quite directly and efficiently, if not elegantly, both to the subject matter of the study, *material*, and to its purpose, the understanding of *culture*" (Prown, 1982). Whereas Glassie argues by saying, "material culture is the conventional name for the tangible yield of human conduct. It is an odd term, material culture, for culture is immaterial" (Glassie, 1999). He adds, "culture is intellectual, rational, and abstract; it cannot be material, but material can be culture and material culture embraces those segments of human learning which provide a person with plans, methods, and reasons for producing things which can be seen and touched" (Glassie, 1999). However, scholars

identify the material culture as a discipline, where the material is tangible and culture is intangible. It includes all the manmade and modified objects of the universe. The object can be natural or artificial, tangible or intangible. Material culture studies tangible elements to understand the intangible phenomena of a society. The tangible elements are the objects, include art and craft, commonly artifacts; and the intangible phenomena embrace societal history and heritage, knowledge and power, skills and expertise. Prown compares the object with words, where this object communicates a specific sense beyond its original meaning. Glassie mentions about Ralph Waldo Emerson's definition of art as a blending of nature and will, the unity in things of mind and matter. Glassie defines the art as a special realm within material culture. He also believes, art is the center and peak of material culture (Glassie, 1999). Again, material culture discusses the daily objects of life, the crafts, which shaped in beliefs and values. Glassie, Prown, Woodward, Robert Mellin, Steven Harries and Berke Deborah, Firoz Mahmud and other recognized scholar in the field of material culture have already been provided a number of classical writings on the study of everyday objects; namely - Glassie's "Art and Life in Bangladesh", crafted on the Bangladeshi material culture, Mellin's "Tilting", illustrated on the everyday experiences of a fishing village in Newfoundland, Mahmud's "Metalwork of Bangladesh: A Study in Material Folk-culture", scripted about the traditional local metal craft - are some great contributions. Prown mentions that, all tangible artworks are part of material culture, but not all the material of material cultures are art (Prown, 1982). In this regard, the contemporary studies of material culture use the terminology 'artifact' for both art and craft. Prown even uses the term 'artifact' to define material culture. He says that, the term material culture mostly refers to the artifacts (Prown, 1982). Artifacts are the most essential element in material culture discipline to study culture and human interaction. "Artifacts, like other historical events, do not just happen; they are results of causes. There are reasons why an object comes into existence in a particular configuration, is decorated with particular motifs, is made of a particular materials, and has a particular color and texture" (Prown, 1993).

Material culture is a combined study of history and ethnology. Glassie mentions about the importance of ethnology and history for studying material culture. According to his understanding, ethnology is the spatial configuration of material culture, whereas, history is the temporal dimension (Glassie, 1999). He adds, "History and art connect in the study of material culture. Material culture records human intrusion in the environment. It is the way we imagine a distinction between nature and culture, and then rebuild nature to our desire, shaping, reshaping, and arranging things during life. We live in material culture, depend upon it, take it for granted, and realize through it our grandest aspirations" (Glassie, 1999). He adds, "history is not the past. History is a story about the past, told in the present, and designed to be useful in constructing the future. The past is vast and it is gone. Almost all of its gone utterly, leaving no trace in the mind or archive. We know the past only through things that chance to exist in the present: old books, broken pots, disturbed memories" (Glassie, 1999). Material culture also includes geographical and archeological evidences to experience artifacts. Both of these studies, respectively discuss the contextual matters of natural and artificial environment, which emphasize the cause and effect.

Glassie defines material culture as a transdisciplinary movement, introduced to integrate the study of art in a wider approach. Whereas, Prown explains that, in human history, abstract, intellectual and spiritual elements are superior then material and physical things. He initiates to clarify the historical higher value of artworks rather than utilitarian craft objects (Prown, 1982). But Glassie's argument, the method of historical study has been changed currently, which focuses on the art and craft of general people to make it more democratic. According to Glassie, culture is no longer elite's choice, rather it is the conceptual order that all people develop in society. He also mentions about the importance of general individuals and their contributions to develop social history. He says, "without the challenge of folk history or ethnohistory – or black history or women's history or the alternative of memory – history will fail to reach its potential. Without the challenge of folk art, the study of art will collapse again into prejudices of

class and gender and race” (Glassie, 1999). Glassie shares about V.S. Naipaul’s autobiography, ‘Hindu community in Trinidad’, where Naipaul spoke about two histories; one was carefully organized with dates and names, taught in school; the other history was of darkness and unspoken, reflected local people. It initiates to signify the importance of people’s life to learn about a society. However, material culture attempts to represent general people and their everyday history. Philosophically it studies the genetic right of human being. Glassie says, “it upholds a meaningful relationship between the conceptual and the physical, the personal and the social, the cultural and the historical. ... Politically, the study of material culture confront prejudice and seeks justice, resisting forces that deny art or history – excellence or significance – to human beings on the basis of gender, say, or race or class or culture” (Glassie, 1999).

Objective of Material Culture Studies

Material culture is a scholarly approach towards culture. Culture is the collective form of human behavior and interactions within a social structure. It provides social identity. Glassie says, “culture is a mental construct, built by individuals in shifting experiences. ... Cultures, like histories, are created by people to serve them during their ordeal. ... Culture is a pattern in mind, inward, in visible, and shifting” (Glassie, 1999). The term ‘material culture’ refers quite directly both to the subject matter of the discipline - ‘material’, the study object, and its purpose, the understanding of ‘culture’ (Glassie, 1999). Prown also emphasizes on the study of culture as a core subject matter for material culture. “The fundamental purposes of the study of material culture is the quest for cultural belief system, the patterns of belief of a particular group of people in a certain time and place” (Prown, 1982). Prown provides five specific reasons to study material culture. Firstly, the ‘internal and attached value’, which describes the rarity of the object as well as its utilitarian value, aesthetic value and spiritual value. Secondly, the ‘surviving historical value’, which clears the object’s significance as evidence in history. Thirdly, the ‘more representative’, it provides more detail information of an object, its time and context. Fourthly, the ‘veracity’, which ensures the authenticity of a

subject matter. Finally, the 'cultural perspective', it ensures more specific and trustworthy identity of a society.

Glassie's philosophical explanation provides a more clear reason for studying material culture. He says, "material culture is as true in mind. As dear to the heart, as language, and what is more, it reports thoughts and action that resist verbal formulation. Like a story, an artifact is a text, a display of form and a vehicle for meaning. Both stories and artifacts arise out of concentration, both are created in time and shaped to cultural pattern, but they differ in apprehension. The story belongs to temporal experience. It moves in one direction, accumulation associations sequentially. The artifact belongs to spatial experiences. It unfolds in all directions at once, embracing contradictions in simultaneity, and opening multiple routes to significance" (Glassie, 1999). He also includes architecture as an object to study material culture. In his language, "architecture works in space as history works in time. History interrupts time's ceaseless flow, segmenting and recording it on behalf of the human need for meaning. Architecture intrudes in the limitless expanse of space, dividing it into useful, comprehensible pieces. Converting space into places through disruption, architecture brings meaning to the spatial dimension. ...Architecture gives physical form to claims and names, to memories and hopes. As a conceptual activity, architecture is a matter of forming ideas into plans, plans into things that other people can see. Architecture shapes relations between people. It is a kind of communication. The mode of its thinking connects architecture to all of culture, but its mode of realization distinguish it from other varieties of communication. To be architecture, it must be realized in materials" (Glassie, 1999). Peter Zumthor defines architecture as an applied art, to hold human activities, and memories. He says, "architecture, after all, is made for our use. It is not a free art in that sense. I think architecture attains its highest quality as an applied art. And it is at its most beautiful when things have come into their own, when they are coherent. That is when everything refers to everything else and it is impossible to

remove a single thing without destroying the whole. Place, use and form. The form reflects the place, the place is just so, and the use reflects this and that" (Zumthor, 2006).

Study of material culture, in a collective form, provides an opportunity to learn about cultural landscape. Paul Groth defines cultural landscape as a study of 'everyday spaces', like rooms, yards, buildings, streets, fields etc., to establish socio-cultural identity, relationship and meaning. Whereas material culture studies everyday objects, including contexts (Groth, 1997). According to Brown, cultural landscape provides a much better arena for appreciating the value of material culture studies (Brown, 1993). He shares, the careful observation of material culture study can directly contribute in the field of cultural landscape. Groth mentions about six frameworks to discuss cultural landscapes, which directly refer material culture studies, namely, 'ordinary' experiences of life, discussion of 'urban and rural' context for 'production and consumption', 'contrast of diversity and uniformity' in culture, both 'popular and academic' studies to influence more participation, 'interdisciplinary nature', and 'visual and spatial information' (Groth, 1997).

Material culture investigation explores the domain of human acts and beliefs. It helps to characterize human interaction and behavioral patterns. According to Glassie, "artifact recall the technology by which nature was made culture, and they incarnate the creator's mind, holding in form and ornament the plans that preceded them and the decisions committed in their making (Glassie, 1999). He experienced very similar philosophy while interviewing Haripad Pal, a potter, works in Dhaka; "sometimes I become part of God. Sometimes God becomes part of me. I feel God in myself when I concentrate – Haripad Pal" (Glassie, 1999). Material culture studies not only the artisans but also about the users of the artifacts. In the book 'Tilting', Mellin introduces numbers of local people from Tilting and attempts to animate their life stories, their attachments with the nature and locality, response to the contextual environment, their livelihood,

craftsmanship, skills, experiences, adaptability and performances. In this book, Mellin illustrates the versatile events of Dan Greene's life in the small fishing village of Tilting; where Greene contributed not only as a local fisherman, rather like an experienced artisan in making house and out buildings, crafting the fishing stage and efficient root cellar. According to Jon Lang, three psychological process – perception, cognition, and spatial behavior – are particularly important in understanding man's behavior in a context. Perception is the process of obtaining or receiving input, cognition is the throughput function involving the process of thinking, remembering and feeling, and spatial behavior denotes the output manifested in an organism's actions and responses. Lang believes, the cultural environment is not only a container of human activity but also a complex system of behavioral pattern (Lang, 1974). Ralph Linton defined culture as the configuration of learned behavior of particular society. Again, according to Lang, culture influences behavior through the process of socialization, by which language, traditions, norms, values, expectations and sanctions are taught (Lang, 1974). "Everything man does is associated with the experience of space. Nothing occurs, real or imagined, without a spatial context, because space (along with time) is one of the principles of organizing systems for living organisms. Proxemics deals with man's use and structuring of space, particularly the unconscious patterns that deeply influence life" (Hall, 1971). However, researches clarify that, the study of culture requires the knowledge of human behavioral pattern, and the human behavior can be experienced through the study of material culture. Simply, material culture studies human actions to learn culture.

One of the crucial reason for doing the material culture study is to document the existing or hardly surviving artifacts, their artisans and contextual aspects. Over times, maybe it would not be possible to document on some lost features as well as lost people. Glassie says, "what has changed can change again; the moment in which I write will pass" (Glassie, 1999). According to Glassie, history is not the past, rather a story about the past, which is told in the present to construct the useful future (Glassie, 1999).

Material culture provides the scope for studying affordances and performances of an object, where the object can be a piece of art, craft, artifact, and maybe even an architecture. The opportunities for supporting a range of uses of any object can be defined as its affordance. And in performance, an object shows its reaction to the context of both natural and artificial environment. Glassie describes the relation between the object and the context, and their interdependence to observe the object's performative act. He named it artifactual system. He says, "in performance, an idea of context, of a thing's fit in the world, its uses and meanings and functions, precedes and sparks the enactment of compositional competence" (Glassie, 1999). (Glassie, 1993) David Leatherbarrow shares the similar idea of performance in his book 'Architecture Oriented Otherwise', where he emphasizes on the observational study of an architecture's independent performance to identify its contributions to the context in a greater extent (Leatherbarrow, 2009). Thus, material culture can help to study what an object does, not only what it is.

Methods for Material Culture Studies

Scholars, like Henry Glassie, Ian Woodward, Robert Mellin, Steven Harries, Berke Deborah, Firoz Mahmud and other experts of material culture study have already been introduced and successfully implemented a series of efficient methodology for studying material culture. The mostly used method is to collect the information through the qualitative study of observation and syndetize (Castro, Mellin, & Plata, 2014) for documentation. [According to my understanding, syndetizing is a contemporary approach towards observational studies, refers to animate some significant findings and experiences. The terminology 'syndetic' may be comparable with 'synthesis, but its application is more critical for appropriating a situation, rather than organizing the found data.] Taking photographs, preparing drawings, making illustrations, interviewing artisans and users, collecting and providing texts are some very common techniques to approach for a material culture documentation. According to Glassie, there are two challenges in the process of material culture documentation – the first

one is to describe the complexity so well to avoid unassociated information, and the second one is to correctly relate the subject matter with the context. He says, "we may not know what the object means, but it can be described. ... The artifact is described, analyzed in a compositional move, made meaningful in an associational move, and the final step is to comprehend the unity of creation by looping composition and association – text and context, form and meaning, structure and function – together"(Glassie, 1999). Prown provides a method of three stages to analyze any object. The analysis initiates from 'description', an introduction to the object; 'deduction', interaction between the object and the observer; 'speculation', raising question and forming hypothesis for resolution. By inspiring the pattern language of Christopher Alexander, Glassie focuses on finding and organizing the patterns in the artifacts. "We seek pattern. Patterns imply intentions and carry toward meaning" (Glassie, 1999). Glassie explains the way to find the significance of artifact through the study of its contexts, which he defines through a series of occasion, both in the form of tangible and intangible expressions. He mentions about three master classes which cumulatively recapitulate the life history of the artifact, and these are creation, communications and consumption. So according to Glassie, the domain of material culture can be confined from creation to consumption, through communication. Context of creation defines the overall process of creation. It includes not only the creator and creation but also addresses the context of concentration, learning, teaching, cooperation, technology, formal expression, memory and hope. For explaining contexts, Glassie writes on Aysel Ozturk, a carpet designer as well as a weaver from Turkey. The first master context is the context of creation, where Aysel is the creator. Aysel's concentration is her devotion for profession, creation of art pieces, decorative carpets and prayer mats. She learned this carpet making from her mother, then she has transferred this knowledge to her sister, and this is how she has been trying to preserve this craft alive for over the years. She helps her cousins and friends, to cooperate in their works. She collects the natural materials to weave the carpets, using the very much local technology. She uses her creative mind to produce focus, symmetry, rhythm and continuity in her designs; she uses shapes and colors for various formal patterns. This

carpet making story makes her memory for every single day of her life, her events, her known and unknown faces. Everything she does for a prosperous life, to make her dreams true. Then the second master context comes in discussion, the context of communication. Glassie compares this communication with storytelling, its transferring nature from person to person and gets a cultural identity. Aysel's carpet comes in market, market to mosque, mosque to exhibition, finally in gallery as a true piece of art. The carpet becomes a model for weavers, and an identity for a culture. Glassie also mentions about three aspects of communication - performance, the acceptance of Aysel's work by the artisans; donation, promoting her creativity among friends and community; commercial exchange, utilize her skill for making money. Again, the context of communication explains the physical acceptance of the object. According to Glassie, in consumption, the object goes from its creator to its consumer. He also provides categories of consumption. The context of use, where the consumer's reaction overlaps with Aysel's intention. The context of preservation, which ensure the recognition of the object's deepest meaning, through care and conservation. The context of assimilation, here the object completes its experiences through a range of communities over the times, and at the end, raises the question of its origin and its creator. Glassie says, "context of creation teach about creators. Context of consumption teach about consumers. Context of communication connect the two, balancing creation against consumption, enfolding their similarities and differences" (Glassie, 1999). He also mentions about two more basic contexts - conceptual context, deals with intangible notions which reflects the abstract mindset of the creators as well as the users, and physical context, discusses all available tangible parameters, sensory experiences. From the greater experiences of material culture study, Glassie recommended this list as a productive program for fieldwork. He also suggests to do historical study to learn about complexity and bring our limits into awareness. Peter Zumthor uses the terminology 'atmosphere' in the place of context, for similar understanding. "We perceive atmosphere through our emotional sensibility – a form of perception that works incredibly quickly, and which we humans evidently need to help us survive. Not every situation grant us time to make up our minds on whether or not

we like something or whether indeed we might be better heading off in the opposite direction. Something inside us tells us an enormous amount straight away. We are capable of immediate appreciation, of a spontaneous emotional response, of rejecting things in flash" (Zumthor, 2006).

Glassie provides the investigation experiences of historian Hugh Nolan in Ballymenone, where Nalon interviewed the old people of the locality to learn about the place, their true stories. While talking, Nalon also came to know about the time, changes of life style, and many more about their unwritten history. Glassie demonstrates an excellent example of material culture study while writing on Tapati Rani Dey, a rickshaw painter from Bangladesh. In the book 'Art and Life of Bangladesh', he provides an elaborate narration of Tapati's studio space, from greater perspective to very specific details, with informative photographs to support the narration. Tapati's house, neighboring fabric of old Dhaka, her working space, painting tools, sources of raw materials, helping hands – her husband, sister and daughter, her artworks and the overall trading process in the market get the real life exposure through his presentation. Scholars of material culture offers a great appreciation for non-textual documentations, like photography, drawings and illustrations. To support this idea, Glassie says, "material, a part of the world, the record of bodily action in nature, the artifact perpetually displays the process of its design, the pattern in the mind of its creator. It incorporate intention. Intentions need not so register in consciousness that they can be brought forth in orderly commentary. Their reality does not depend on word.... Visions come first, of cypress and pine and oak, of the roughness of bark and the blackness of limbs in winter, then I must work to recover the idea that gathers all of that and confines it in a word. I cannot be alone when I think in images, quicker and larger than words.... I worry that studies focused on words, whether written or spoken, omit whole spheres of experience that are clumsily framed in language but gracefully shaped into artifacts" (Glassie, 1999) Glassie illustrates Peter Flanagan's House in Ballymenone with photographs and rendered cross sections to provide a clear image of the local scenario. Mellin shares his

powerful observation and excellent drawing ability to illustrate the material culture and cultural landscape features of Tilting, a fishing village in Fogo Island, Newfoundland. His drawings attempt to 'provide opportunities for comparison' rather representing a 'descriptive substitute for real artifacts'. In the book titled 'Winter in Tilting', Mellin illustrates a series of sequential watercolor painting for showing his experiences of a slide hauling trip from Tilting to the south coast of Fogo island. His argument, for using paintings instead of photographs, is about more careful and slow observational opportunities, which made him really thoughtful about all the natural and artificial details on his way. Again, oral histories have been used for material culture studies as a powerful tool. Mellin demonstrates that, material culture studies could be enriched with the formal and informal oral histories in conveying the hidden meanings and cultural layers attached to the daily lives of folk societies. In his book, 'Winter in Tilting', he shares a range of interviews of the local people to animate the context and its history in a more participatory manner.

Typological study and typomorphology, both are effective tools for clarifying any subject matter in material culture and cultural landscape. In a similar manner, it is used in urban design studies for describing the objects and the contexts, as well as the human interactions or behavioral patterns. Anne V Moudon defines typomorphology as a typological study approach to urban form and context, that includes the study of form, scale and chronology (Moudon, 1994). He mentions about various reaction patterns of the users in response to the different typomorphology. In the similar discussion, Karen A Franck says, "types are us because use types support reinforce our patterns of activities, relationships, and beliefs" (Franck, 1994). Material culture scholars always share their interests in typological studies both for tangible and intangible issues. To write about historian Hugh Nolan's process of material culture documentation, Glassie mentions the use of typological study, he says, "thinking spatially, not temporarily, lifting his stories from places on the land, rather than locations in chronology, relating them typologically, rather than setting them into sequences of

cause and effect, Hugh Nolan at once tells the history of his small, dark place, and makes history into a description of the human condition" (Glassie, 1999). In the book 'Vernacular Architecture', Glassie provided a detail typological study on the building of Ballymenone to get a clear picture of the traditional house types of that area. Mellin implemented the same idea of typological studies to illustrate the various outbuildings of Tilting with commendable sketches and paintings.

Folklore

One of the most significant aspects of material culture is folklore. In a current context, society can recognize three distinct levels of culture – folk culture, popular culture and elite culture; and material culture immediately refers to the folk culture (Mahmud, 2003). Folklore is the unique heritage of any tribe or nation. It is the identical expression of many aspects of different social communities, that includes the geographical entity of a region, identity of a society, its belief and rituals, customs and ceremonies, its thoughts, aspirations and values, its spiritual and material conceptions, its endless effort to get rid of iniquity, its aesthetic concepts, its traditional arts and craftsmanship, and its experiences and creativity (Mahmud & Khatun, 2013). So the study of material culture can be defined as the study of folklore as well.

The term ‘folk culture’ represents the practice of folklore in a society or in a community. Glassie feels, it is closer to folk life, but not very specifically. The Bengali translation of folklore is ‘Lokasamskriti’, which is very similar to folk culture in meaning.

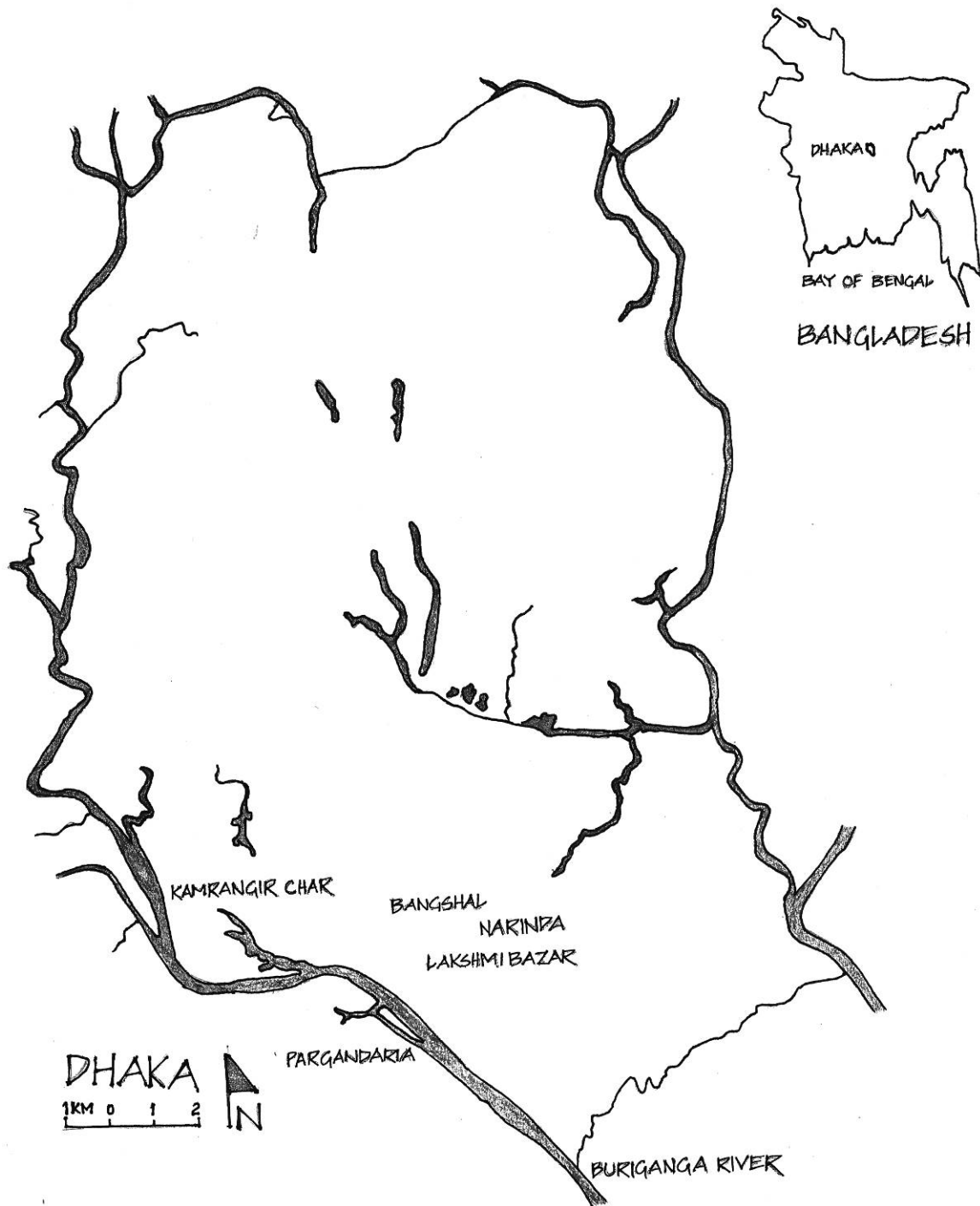
According to Mahmud, “folklore is a living manifestation of human creativity” (Mahmud, 2003). Folklore has been defined by Dan Ben-Amos as “artistic communication in small groups.... A group could be a family, a street corner gang, a roomful of factory workers, a village, or even a tribe”, for identifying the process of folklore, Ben-Amos shares, “changes human noise to music, movement and gesture to dance, and object to sculpture” (Ben-Amos, 1972). He mentions about two essential conditions for happening the folkloric act – people need to confront each other face to face, and relate directly (Ben-Amos, 1972). So the situation is a vital consideration for performing folklore arts, which demands an intimate local context to ensure face to face interaction between the performer and the audience.

Folklore is the reflection of collective thinking of the common people of a society (Mahmud, 2003). Simply, it is the traditional art of general people. It signifies the everyday experiences of art of any particular community. Mahmud and Khatun identify the folklore as a testimony of the past. The creation of folklore is a continuous process, where its elements are ever changing due to the socio-economic movements. Still, its impact is so vital in community life to preserve the socio-cultural identity. The materials and values of folklore are transmitted orally by generations. Glassie mentions that, the study of folklore is even changing to follow the shifting pattern of folklore. For studying folklore, Glassie shares the concept of contextual discussion, very similar to material culture study. He signifies four aspects for recording folklore – creation, context, consumption and creator or performer; creation records the art and craft, context records the setting of creation, consumption records the process of reception, and creator or performer records the life of artist or artisan (Glassie, 2013). Khan emphasizes on the both recognized methods for studying folklore – the diachronic approach, to study historical context, and the synchronic approach, to observe the performance context.

Methodology: Qualitative Research of Observational Study and Documentation

Primarily a literature review has been done to provide the theoretical frame of material culture and folklore to clarify their content and context, objective of studies, relationship with culture and human behavior, which has helped to shape this research work within a methodical approach. The literature part has been developed based on the both international and local study materials as well as research work, including a mix of classic and contemporary texts. As secondary sources, this theoretical frame has been provided a range of established techniques for studying the artifacts.

The primary objective of this study is to document the traditional method of rickshaw making. More precisely, it has been illustrated the rickshaw workshops, and the rickshaw artist's studio spaces, as well as the artifacts and the artisans' activities. This research is a qualitative case study of observations. A four week long comprehensive field survey has been conducted in the southern edge of Dhaka city to gather relevant information and collect adequate materials as primary sources for subsequent studies. The field survey has been done in three distinct layers of observations. Firstly, the survey has been documented the overall context of the study area, the historic old part of Dhaka, along the edge of the river Buriganga. The field work includes the understanding of the morphological setting of the study area and its scale, urban block and street pattern, mode of connections and communication. This study covers the either side of the river Buriganga, including the Island, Kamrangir Char. Secondly, the field work has been concentrated in the architecture of the rickshaw making workshop, its artist's studio spaces, repairing spaces as well as the material collection sources like factories and wholesale shops. This study has been covered two fully operated rickshaw workshops, three studio spaces of rickshaw artists, three supportive equipment production factories, two wholesale material shops and two street side repairing spaces. This observation attempts to clarify all the functional and storage spaces to understand the requirements and operation of the whole work process. Thirdly, this fieldwork has been focused on the details of the artifacts and the other objects related to the required



Map of Dhaka

functional spaces. This field survey has also been figured out the rickshaw structure, its overall making process, including the raw material and equipment collection sources, the operational procedure, the delivery system, the artisans' activities and the artists' experiences.

The fieldwork has been done with photography, videography, sketches, drawings, measurements and oral interviews. A detail photographic survey has been done to get a clear picture of the work process as well as the workspaces. Again, a series of sketches have been produced to visualize the real life experiences of the working places to understand the rational notion of spatial configuration. This paper has been demonstrated a range of illustrations on the study of context - natural and built environment, urban and architectural spaces, typomorphology and typology, functional and temporal dimensions, visual and perceptual experiences. As a part of field work, a range of oral interviews of the rickshaw mechanics, artists, factory workers, shopkeepers and pullers have been taken to learn about their work spaces, used technology, experiences and their involvements. The formal and informal interviews have been done with semi-structured and open-ended questioners. In addition, a series of videography has been done to make a brief documentary on the overall rickshaw making industry. Finally, a number of original rickshaw artworks have been collected from the renowned artists and painters for exhibition, discussion and documentation. Finally, the overall observations have been syndetize to animate the complete rickshaw making process and the configuration patterns of the workspaces, as well as the artisans' contributions to the industry.

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A decorative rickshaw

Chapter II | Rickshaw of Dhaka

Rickshaws of Dhaka

Dhaka is a highly populous mega city of 1.2 million population with a density of 8229 per square kilometer (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2011). For over the decades, this city has been growing so rapidly with large scale commercialization, industrialization and urbanization as a major South Asian business hub. The massive transportation demand of Dhaka and the existing inadequate services have always been provided opportunities for the rickshaws to ply on the city roads. In addition, moderately acceptable service quality within a reasonable cost range, privacy, sense of security, comfortable journey, wider accessibility, noise-free and fuel-free environment friendliness have made the rickshaw more popular to the city dwellers. Again, rickshaws are the preferred travel mode for the incapable, vulnerable and deprived social groups - like women, children, the elderly, physically challenged and the people without driving license - due to their availability, safety, security and comfort perspective (Momotaz, Sharmin, & Rasna, 2009).

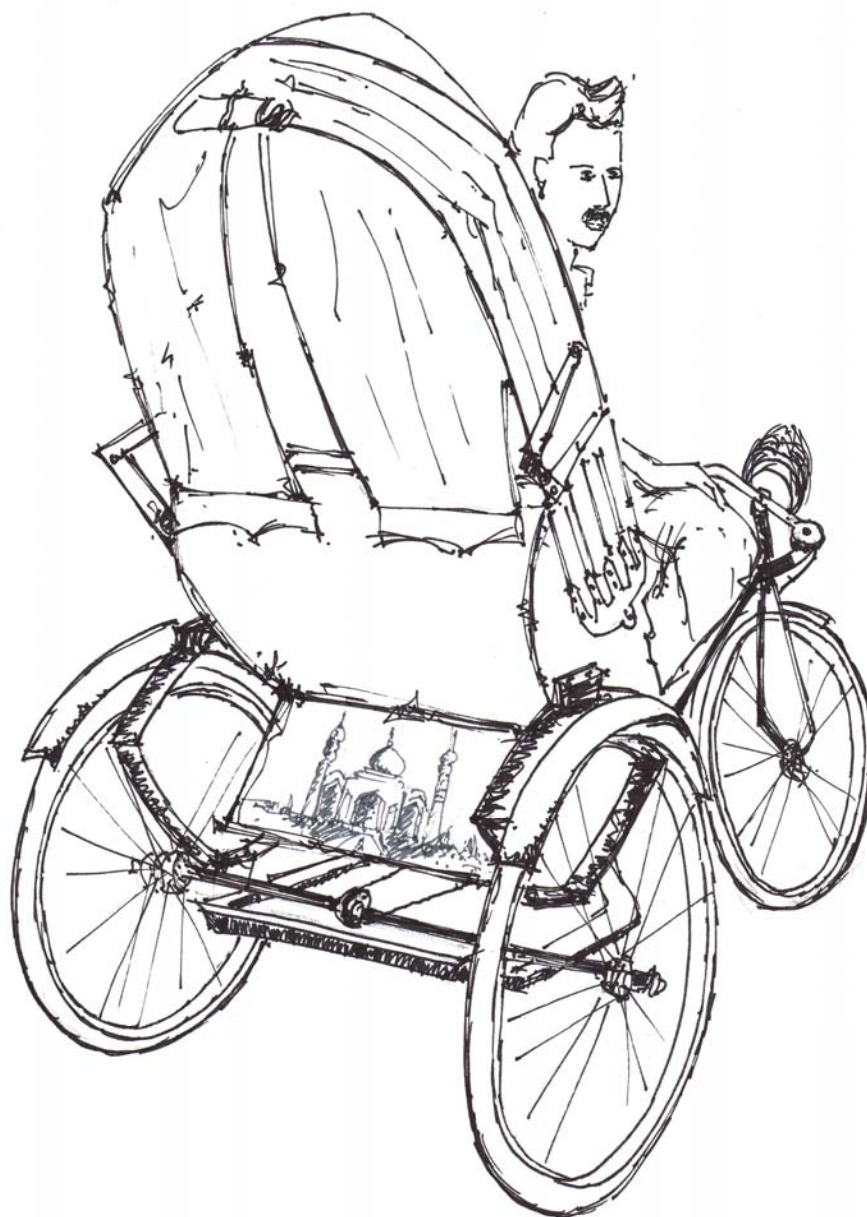
Currently, rickshaw pulling is not permitted on all the roads of Dhaka city during the working hours. It is restricted to pull rickshaws on the main roads, which are similar to the arterial roads of North America, from morning 8 am to evening 8 pm. Some intersections of the main roads allow rickshaws to cross through the controlled signals among different neighborhoods. It is completely prohibited on the highways or freeways. Rickshaws are permitted on the collector and local roads. In some part of the city, especially in the old town, the narrow streets and alleys can allow the rickshaws only for the means of transportation. According to STP 2005, for the 90% of the rickshaw ride, the average range of travel distance is maximum four kilometer. Again, considering its slow speed, some dedicated lanes have already been provided by the authorities to avoid the collision. Notably, in Dhaka Cantonment, the local authority has successfully implemented a completely separate lane system for the rickshaw movement. But unfortunately, for the newly developing urban areas, no initiative has been taken for accommodating the rickshaws in a safer way.

In spite of its greater uses, most of the city dwellers consider the rickshaws as a symbol of under-development (Gallagher, 1992). Both government and private sectors including general people think that, this slow moving vehicle is one the main reason for the severe traffic congestion of Dhaka. According to Gallagher's experience, the traffic police authority even claims the rickshaws for city's traffic cramming, slow speed and accidents. Besides, specialist says, this easy going profession allows uncontrolled migration to the city that hampers the environmental and socio-cultural stability (Gallagher, 1992). After everything, no one cannot deny the necessity of this transportation system in Dhaka, as well as its contribution to the employment sector and national economy.

Background Story

Dhaka is well known as the capital of rickshaws in the world. Still, the rickshaw was originated in Japan. In 1870s, it was first appeared on the streets of Japan as a human pulled passenger carrying transport. Rickshaw was first created to pull with hands. Over the times, a kind of bicycle had been attached with it that allowed to pedal this vehicle. Almost after 60 years of its invention, in 1930s, the cycle rickshaw first came in Bangladesh. In Dhaka, the rickshaw first appeared in 1938. Like its origin, the term 'rickshaw' basically came from the Japanese word 'Jin Riki Sha', means 'man powered vehicle'.

According to Salim rashid, in 1938, a Bengali 'Zamindar' (landlord) of Sutrapur area and a Marwari businessman of Wari purchased six rickshaws each from Calcutta and attempted to introduce those in Dhaka city. Those rickshaws were not like the current models. The much wider seat was of black leather and more comfortable, the hood was of khaki canvas, and the metal frame was painted in green or black . After the liberation of the Indian subcontinent from British Colony, in 1950s, the rickshaws started to get its colorful decoration. By the end of 60s, the current appearance of outlook had emerged.



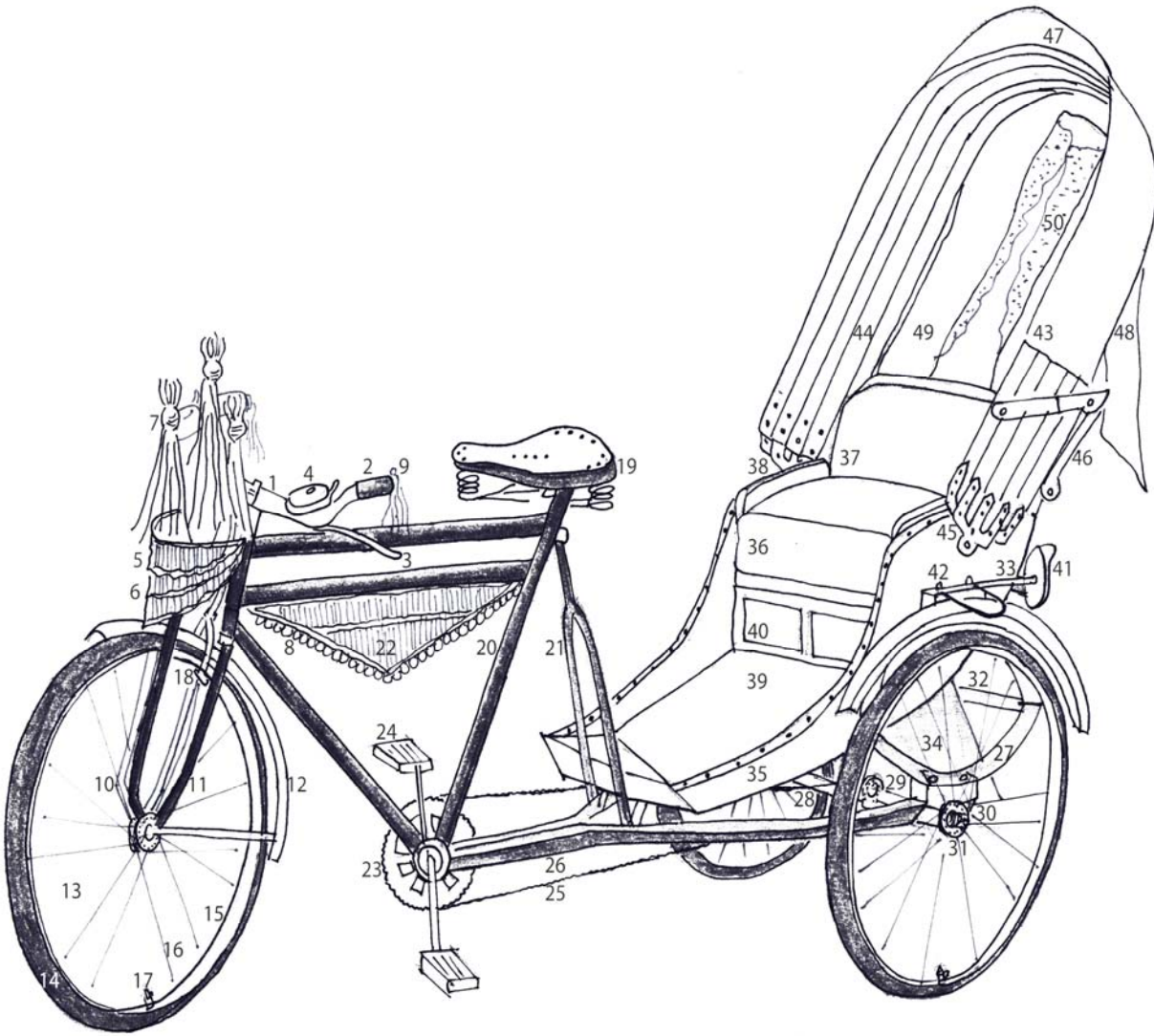
Rickshaw and its puller

In Dhaka, the first rickshaw licenses were issued in 1944 for 100 rickshaws, where the permits instructed the pullers to assure the security and maintain the neatness of the rickshaws (Gallagher, 1992).

The Rickshaw: A Motion Craft

Rickshaw is a pedal driven three wheeler cycle. It is basically used for carrying passengers. The most important feature of the Dhaka's rickshaw is - its highly ornamental appearance. For describing its beauty, Wheeler and l'Anson say, "a fully decorated, shiny new rickshaw will start out with plastic flowers in jars bolted in front of the handlebars. Streamer and colored tape decorate the bars, the seats are brightly painted, the folding top is vividly embroidered, and the rickshaw body is plated with brilliant chrome, studded and painter" (Wheeler & Anson, 1998). Interestingly, every single inch of this vehicle is crafted in local artistic motifs. The design patterns used in the rickshaws of Dhaka provide a real impression of the local art and culture. Simply, this rickshaw is a mobile exhibit of the Bangladeshi folk art.

The rickshaw found in Dhaka, is a modified version from the original imported one. Local makers provided its present appearance after numbers of improvisation through localization. The overall length of the rickshaw is 240cm, width 110cm, and its weight is approximately 90kg. The 60cm wide rickshaw seat is designed for two adult passengers, which is located just behind the puller's seat. Primarily, a rickshaw has two parts; (a) the first one is the chassis, includes metal frame, springs, forks, axle, handlebars, puller's seat, chain wheel, pedal cranks, wheels etc., and (b) the second part is the wooden body with bamboo hood, includes passenger seat and back rest, foot rest, rexine hood on bamboo frame, curtains etc. The body part also includes a range of decorative elements, like cage, cap, flower vase, tassel, lace, applique design, backplate etc. Most of these rickshaw parts and materials are locally made, a few are imported from India and china.



A typical rickshaw of Dhaka

Generally, a rickshaw contains over 850 separate items. The key components of a rickshaw are as follows:

1. Handlebar	26. Sub-frame
2. Grip ('Mutthi')	27. Spring
3. Break Lever	28. Rear Axle
4. Bell	29. Free Wheel
5. Cage ('Khancha')	30. Rear Hub
6. Cap ('Tupi')	31. Bearing
7. Vase ('Phooldani') and Flowers	32. Lower Bracing ('Tana Rod')
8. Lace	33. Upper Bracing
9. Tassel	34. Back Plate ('Noksha Board')
10. Front Fork	35. Body
11. Fork	36. Passenger Seat
12. Mudguard	37. Backrest
13. Wheel	38. Side Rest
14. Tire	39. Footrest
15. Wheel Rim	40. Store
16. Spokes	41. Clamp Board ('Paan/Gol Board')
17. Tube Valve	42. Bent Bar ('Bent Rod', 'Footrest')
18. Break	43. Hood
19. Saddle (Puller's Seat)	44. Hood Frame ('Kamani')
20. Frame	45. Hood Bracket
21. Rear Stays	46. Hood Latches ('Kobja')
22. Frame Curtain ('Frame Jhalor')	47. Hood Cap
23. Chain Wheel or Sprockets	48. Window Curtain ('Khirki Parda')
24. Pedal and Crank	49. Side Curtain ('Side Parda')
25. Chain	50. Screen ('Bou Parda')

Rickshaw making and assembling is a complicated process. Still, it does not need any hi-tech industrial support to produce rickshaws. Local skill mechanics are very much experienced and capable enough in traditional rickshaw making. And, the pullers, as well as the makers are satisfied enough with the current technology and rickshaws. But experts' opinion, the rickshaw of Dhaka is very poorly designed and really hard to ride (Gallagher, 1992). In 1978, Bangladesh Planning Commission's Transport survey Section had employed Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) to improve the efficiency of rickshaws and reduce its risk factors. Gallagher mentions, in 1985/86, a Canadian cycle-engineer named Fred Willkie spent six months in Bangladesh and worked with local makers to build a better rickshaw. Willkie addressed some vital issues regarding design development, and these are – (a) most importantly, to add gear for easy riding with extra load and comfortable pedaling in sloppy roads, (b) improve the steering for easy turning, (c) provide better brakes for ensuring safety, (d) develop the springs for carrying extra load, (e) introduce the high strength wheels for reducing risk factor, (f) strengthen the metal joints for sound chassis, and (g) reducing the weight by redesigning the springs, wooden body and bamboo hood. However, none of these attempts was implemented successfully due to the existing industry's large scale setup and familiarity with the available technology. While studying rickshaws in 1990s, Wheeler and l'Anson even noticed the similar problems of rickshaws in Dhaka. They found, its poor efficiency due to the absence of gears, unstable steering, weaker brakes, overweight, less strength and reliability (Wheeler & Anson, 1998). Interestingly, the pullers are still quite happy with the current efficiency of the rickshaws, which maybe impeded all the attempts for improving this vehicle.

Rickshaw Pullers, Artisans and Others, related to the rickshaw industry

A large number of people are directly and indirectly engaged with the rickshaw industry who are contributing to the national economy of Bangladesh. Rickshaw pulling, manufacturing, making, painting, repairing, the business of owning and renting out are the key contributing fields. There are various skill group involved in the industry, namely

the rickshaw puller, mechanic, equipment maker, equipment supplier, material wholesale shopkeepers and owners. There are also some other groups who are indirectly attached with this, like street side restaurant and small shop owners who provide cheap food to the pullers, transportation worker who deliver the rickshaw products, and the other agencies who maintain the sound operation of the industry. According to the Strategic Transport Plan (STP) 2005 for Dhaka, in the year 2005, the total number of rickshaws in Dhaka was 600,000, where only 89,000 were licensed (RAJUK, 2005). The strategic guideline also states, 36% of the total journeys were operated by rickshaws in the city. It adds, over a million people were directly involved in this industry. But in reality, the numbers are more than the government statistics. Including Gallagher, Glassie and Lasnier, numbers of researchers have shared their doubt about the actual number of the rickshaws in Dhaka. Due to the restriction of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), countless numbers of unregistered rickshaws are plying on the roads without license and permits. But no one is there to look after it, due to its high demand and successful operation. While studying the rickshaw industry in Bangladesh, the urban planner and transport expert Rob Gallagher proposed a rational structure to calculate (a) the number of rickshaw pullers, which is about 1.83 times of the total rickshaw number, and (b) the other dependents to the industry, where 4 ancillary people employed for every 10 rickshaws. So considering the STP 2005 statistics for 600,000 rickshaws in 2005, the approximate number of the pullers was 1,098,000 and the number of the other dependent was 240,000; in total, about 1,338,000 population were directly engaged in this industry. According to United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2006), the population of Dhaka was 12.9 million in 2005, which clears that, about 10.37% of the total city population were dependent on rickshaw industry for their livelihood. Wiperman and Sowula cited in their study 'The Rationalization of Non-Motorized Public Transport in Bangladesh' that, in 2007, around 2.5 million people are directly and indirectly relied on the rickshaw industry of Dhaka. Studies found that, rickshaw industry is one of the largest sources of employment in Dhaka. According to Wheeler and l'Anson, "It has been estimated that one taka (local currency) in every three spent on transport goes to the rickshaw

business, which is twice as big as Bangladesh Biman, the national airline" (Wheeler & Anson, 1998). But very mysteriously, this important sector is completely ignored by the government authorities and private agencies, and that's why, it has been operating in Dhaka for almost 100 years within an informal management system.

There are various skill groups involved in the rickshaw industry of Dhaka. Some of them are directly involved in operating the rickshaw, and some are working from the behind to support this mega transportation system. Generally, these working groups can be classified as four categories, and these are:

- a. Rickshaw Puller
- b. Rickshaw Owner
- c. Artisans
- d. Others, Related to the Rickshaw Industry

Rickshaw pullers are the most common faces in the rickshaw industry, who pull the rickshaws. As the rickshaw is the prime mode of Dhaka's transportation, so most of the city dwellers depend on rickshaws and every moment they need to communicate with the rickshaw pullers. They are found on every single street and alley of the city moving around with their rickshaws.

Beside pullers, there is a giant group in rickshaw industry and this is the owner. They are the actual money maker of this industry, who are capable enough to invest a lot for purchasing new rickshaws.

The rickshaw of Dhaka is not only a vehicle, rather a mobile art gallery full of traditional folk arts. No doubt, it's a pure form of artifact, which is crafted by a number of artisans, namely the rickshaw maker, decorator, painter and artist. These group of expertise have been working since 1950s for generations to continue this heritage of decorative rickshaw making.

There are some other groups of people, who have been supporting to function the rickshaw industry, namely rickshaw repairing mechanic, rickshaw material producers

and suppliers. Each of this group has a great contribution to this giant industry to ensure a sound operation.

Rickshaw Puller

The most prime professional group of this industry is the rickshaw puller, in Bengali 'Rickshaw Wala'. It is a completely male dominating profession. Due to its very much hard labor, female persons never get involved in rickshaw pulling. In spite of the hard labor, this is one of the very attractive professions for the underprivileged and the newly migrated people to the city. Rickshaw pulling is an easy option to get employment. As it doesn't require any special skill, education or literacy, driving license or capital, the rural people smoothly get involved in rickshaw pulling just immediately after their migration to the big cities or even to the small towns. Mostly, people started rickshaw pulling in their middle ages of 30s to 40s, and some started in 20s. But a rare profession for the old aged people, but not completely unseen.



A rickshaw puller is carrying both passenger and goods



Rickshaw pullers in their break

According to Momotaz, Sharmin and Rasna, majority of the pullers are permanent migrants of Dhaka, while one third of them are seasonal migrants from rural areas (Momotaz et al., 2009). The seasonal workers are basically involved in agricultural works, like - farming, fishing, tree falling etc. in their villages. They also work as day laborer for earth excavating, construction sites etc. The agricultural workers and their helpers get free after the harvesting season and use to migrate in the cities for rickshaw pulling. Sometimes they even migrate at the time of Eid, the main religious festival of Muslims. It is because of the greater demand of public transportation at that time, and the chance of getting extra fare as tips.



A rickshaw puller in break

Most of the rickshaw pullers live in the city without their families. They use to keep their family members in the remote villages for cheaper living cost and easier maintenance. Usually, the family includes wife, children and parents, sometimes sisters and brothers as well. The average family size of the rickshaw puller is 5 persons including him, who are directly dependent on the puller's income; and the average monthly income of a rickshaw puller is not more than 100 US dollar (Momotaz et al., 2009).

Mostly, rickshaw pullers rent rickshaws from the owners for a day or half day. Some pullers have their own rickshaws. There are mainly two shift of pulling rickshaw, eight hours each, (1) the morning shift, from 6 am to 2 pm, and (2) the evening shift, from 2 pm to 10 pm. There is one more midnight shift, from 10 pm to 6 am, only a few rickshaws are available at this session. So, on an average, more than one puller is employed per rickshaw. Gallagher found in his study, about 1.8 pullers use to rent per rickshaw per day (Gallagher, 1992). Some young energetic pullers or the rickshaw owners use to take more than one shift per day for riding rickshaws.

The rickshaw pulling is a highly controversial discussion in both general people and critiques, because of its undeniable hard and inhuman labor. Lasnier uses the phrase 'exploitation of one man by another' to share the Western perception about rickshaw pulling (Lasnier, 2002). It is still considered as a painful and orthodox means of transport. Whereas, in 1870s, the Japanese people represented the rickshaw as a technological progress, and considered the rickshaw renting as a symbol of social status (Lasnier, 2002). By arguing the overall opinion against the rickshaw pulling, Gallagher attempts to highlight its positive aspects. He shared an Indonesian research that cited, while pulling rickshaws - the average heart beats of a rickshaw puller is 120 to 150 beats per minute – which is similar to an agricultural worker. He also adds an engineering study that stated, a comfortable power output is around 0.10 hp for a person, where, a rickshaw puller needs to use 0.12 to 0.13 hp to pedal his vehicle with two passengers under a normal wind condition. He said that, it is an easier condition for a puller to carry one passenger in a ride, reasonable for two, but difficult for three or more (Gallagher, 1992). But it is even true that upward slope and sever weather condition, like high temperature and humidity, are really challenging for the rickshaw pullers.



Pullers are waiting for passengers



Loading Goods



Loading leaves for cleaning purpose



Pullers' break



A puller is trying to hide himself from rain



A puller is taking a nap in the break

Rickshaw Puller Hares Ali

Hares Ali is a struggling rickshaw puller of 60. Two years ago he came in Dhaka from Pabna. Now he lives in Kamrangir Char by himself. His wife lives in Pabna with his only son Ratan and his family. Hares was quite settled back in Pabna, where he had seven rickshaws of his own and he used to work as a rickshaw puller as well. But recently, Ratan got a job of a teaching position in a school. And being a father of a school teacher, it doesn't socially look decent for Hares to pull a rickshaw. That's why he left Pabna and started to work here in Dhaka. His daily income is on an average 500 to 600 Tk (6.25 to 7.5 US dollar) after the rickshaw rent of 100 Tk (1.25 US dollar). He tries to send most of his income in Pabna to her wife. According to him, "I love my wife, and I need to take care of her. Actually, there is no one to think about this lady, except me." He is a great fan of Sufism, he likes the songs of Lalon, a great Sufi artist of Bangladesh. He believes, the sun is the source of all power, inspiration and action. Like Lalon he thinks, god has sent him to find his peace in his limitations, and what he really appreciates and celebrates.



Hares Ali

Rickshaw Puller Mohammad Giashuddin

In spite of poverty, rickshaw pullers still love to celebrate their life in their own ways of mental richness. Such a personality Mohammad Giashuddin, a middle aged rickshaw puller from Bikrampur, has spent 1800 Tk (about 22.5 UD dollar) to add a decorative brass feature, includes a pair of bells, few vases, an Islamic word 'Allah', a sawn and a dolphin. And it is just because of his inner peace and happiness.



Proud Giashuddin and his newly added brass decorations

The Rickshaw Owner

The rickshaw owners are locally known as 'Rickshaw Malik'. Some pullers have their own rickshaws, but in most of the cases, the rickshaw owners own more than one rickshaw. Gallagher found in his study that, some wealthy owners have even more than one thousand rickshaws (Gallagher, 1992). The owners give rent their rickshaws to the pullers in different shifts. Usually, they charge 1.25 to 1.50 US dollar per shifts. The rent varies due to the decoration and the condition of the rickshaws. Usually, a good looking new rickshaw's rent is little higher than an old one. The owners' opinion to support the higher rent for a new one is - its better performance and fewer interruptions - as well as its decoration that attracts the passengers very well. The places where the owners store their rickshaws are known as rickshaw garage. That's why, sometimes people call them 'Garage Malik', which means 'garage owner'.



A successful rickshaw owner, Khorshed

Mohammad Khorshed Alam is a seventy years aged rickshaw owner, owned twenty two rickshaws. He used to drive taxi in his early life, later on got involved in rickshaw renting business. His garage is in Sayedabad area, the south-east part of Dhaka. He provides rent both for half day and full day. He charges 60 Tk (0.80 US dollar) for half day and 120 Tk (1.60 US dollar) for full day rent. His son is a mechanic who helps him to fix the problems of his rickshaws. Sometimes he needs to hire repair mechanic for extra work, and it costs 400 Tk (5 US dollar) for per day per labor.

Rickshaw Maker

After rickshaw puller, the second most important contributor of this industry is the rickshaw maker. They are also known as rickshaw mechanic, locally as 'Mystiri'. Basically, the Bengali translation of mechanic is 'mystiri'. Simply, rickshaw mechanics are the maker of the rickshaws. Their responsibilities include rickshaw making order collection, material and equipment purchase from factories and wholesale stores, mechanical parts assembling, body and hood making, rickshaw art collection from artist to put it on the rickshaw, rickshaw decorating with applique and paint work and finally delivering to the owner who order it. Rickshaw mechanics work both individually or in a group in their informal workshops. But the common practice is to work in a group of five or six skill workers for four particular types of work. Their required expertise are - (a) the assembling of mechanical parts and chassis, (b) making rickshaw body and hood, (c) decorating rickshaw with applique works and (d) painting.

A group of mechanic generally works under the supervision of the principal of the workshop, the chief mechanic, locally known as 'Body Mystiri' or body maker. It is clear from title that, his expertise is body making. Mostly, he knows almost every single kind of work, maybe except the painting part. But usually, his main job is to operate the workshop, collect the work orders, material purchase, supervise the whole work process and body making including the mechanical assembling. As the chief mechanic needs to remain busy in some other activities outside the workshop, like order collection and material purchase, that's why he always keeps a second body maker to continue the work without hampering the process. A helper helps the body maker in his work, locally named 'Top Kata Mystiri'. 'Top Kata' is the local name of a special kind of nails that used in a large quantity for body making. As the helper use to do this job of nailing the 'chubi' or 'topkata', that's why he called 'top kata mystiri'. The another very important expertise is the applique designer or decorator, locally called 'Noksha Mystiri'. 'Noksha' is the Bengali translation of the English term 'design'. The applique designer's main skill is cutting and stitching. He uses the swing machine to create different decorative

pattern with rexine and plastic sheets for the rickshaw hood. He also produces various colorful laces to ornament the rickshaws. The last but not the least expertise required for rickshaw making is the painter. Painting work is divided into two sequential steps, the first one is to provide a base or ground color on the different parts of the rickshaws, and the second one is to paint decorative patterns on the wooden body, metal frame, hood frame and on the rexine hood. The most common decorative patterns include floral motif, birds and animals, rural landscape and abstract compositions. The painters also include the name of the owner, owner's contact number, body maker's name, social and religious messages and other information in the decoration. Usually, a helper helps the main painter by doing the base colors who is known as 'Astor Mystiri'. The helper is basically the learner of this painting work, the future painter.

In a standard condition, a group of rickshaw maker takes three to four days maximum to make a rickshaw. It covers all the essential steps from order to delivery, including material collection and making. The makers take the whole contract as a package work at a certain fixed price. The average cost for a decorative rickshaw is 20,000 Tk (250 US dollar), whereas a less decorative one costs 18,000 Tk (225 US dollar). It is surprising to know that, mostly, the owners do not hesitate to spend more than 10% additional cost on the top of the regular price for the decorative rickshawa. And it is only because of their mental happiness. Some owners' and makers' opinion, a nicely decorative rickshaw can easily attract the pullers as well as the passengers. Rickshaw making is a rare industry; only a few workshops are found in Dhaka, which make really good quality of rickshaws with traditional decorations. Interestingly, most of the makers had got the rickshaw making training from their family members, like father or uncle, and came in this profession. Field work found the second and the third generations of rickshaw makers who have been doing this work by tradition.



Rickshaw maker Mohammad Yusuf

Rickshaw Artist

Rickshaw artists, the most recognized expertise in the rickshaw industry. Gallagher introduces them as the aristocrat in the whole process of rickshaw making (Gallagher, 1992). They are basically independent artist, who do a very unique and specialized artwork for the rickshaw's backplate. And this is known as rickshaw paint or rickshaw art. The artists also paint on the rexine seat cover, its backrest and on the side curtains of the rickshaws. This form of rickshaw art is an excellent expression of Bangladeshi folk art.



Rickshaw artists do not have any institutionalize orientation. Most of them have learned this painting work from their family members and from well-known masters. One of the basic reason is to come in this profession is their love for painting and inherent talent. Mostly, these artists work as a helper with their masters and learn to achieve this skill. This profession requires natural artistic quality, skills and of course a passion for artworks.

Like rickshaw makers, the reputed rickshaw artists are very few in numbers, which made them quite busy in delivering mass volume of orders. Mostly, rickshaw artists copy some popular themes and patterns for their paintings. The talented and creative artists mostly rely on their imaginations, as well as on the social issues for coloring their canvases. Some of the themes have been introduced by the pioneers and practiced for so long, like Taj Mahal. Some paintings are copied from cinema posters, calendar, magazine and so on. Hence not many of their ideas are completely original, and if a particular scene becomes very popular, it may be copied and re-copied by many artists, and each time losing a little of its original quality (Gallagher, 1992). Usually, an artist cannot complete more than two or three pieces of artwork per day. And their selling price is maximum 2.5 to 3 US dollar, which is really quite cheap. In this price, they cannot provide very good quality of work due to the time constraints. Because quality works require a lots of time and attention that raise the price quite higher. And in fact, the market demands the cheaper versions to reduce the rickshaw making cost. Very currently, some of the well-known artists have got national and international recognitions. These artists have already been participated in various exhibitions and workshops both in home and abroad, which have provided them a really acceptable platform and helped to value their work. An organization named 'Rickshaw art in Bangladesh', is such an online platform that collects and sells rickshaw arts of recognized artists, and their cost range is not less than 80 to 200 US dollar. Certainly, these works are highly commendable in terms of their subjects, contents and details comparing to the very regular pieces available in the local markets.

Gallagher compares the rickshaw making team as an orchestra, where the body maker is the conductor, decoration workers are the leading violinist, and the rickshaw artist is certainly the soloist (Gallagher, 1992). The study found two generations of recognized artists in the creative field of rickshaw painting; and only a few masters are remained, maybe not even ten! R.K. Das, D.C. Das, P.C. Das, Abdul Latif, Alinoor, Alauddin Ahmed, Golam Nabi, S.M. Samsu, Ahmed Hussain are some of the first generation artists. Mostly,

they were self-taught and had been in this profession for a long time. A few have been practicing in a very limited scale, mostly retired, and many of them have been expired. Some of these artists are pioneer for their distinctive styles and subject matter. Notably, R.K. Das, a living legend, claims to have invented the painting of 'Taj Mahal floating on a water Lily'. Abdul Latif started 'the fables' as a subject matter of rickshaw painting (Gallagher, 1992), D.C. Das introduced the subject of renowned monuments, architecture and urban scape in rickshaw painting. Among the second generation artists, Rafiqul Islam, Tapan das, Yousuf Nabi are some well-known figures for rickshaw painting. Traditionally, the artists use signatures in their paintings; some prefer their full name, some use the initials, and a few of them use pseudonyms or the name of a loving person. In signature, D.C. Das uses his full name as well as a pseudonym, titled 'Old Shetu'. Ahmed Hussian's initial is 'Ahmed Art', whereas, Yousuf Nabi uses his gmail account address for his initial. Alauddin Ahmed, one of the finest artists of Dhaka's rickshaw painting, used to prefer his first name as signature in the beginning of his career. Later on, he used the signature 'Naj', the name of his departed loving daughter.



A rickshaw backplate

Rickshaw Repairing Mechanic

The rickshaw makers use to work as repair mechanics for large scale repairing or renovation of the old and broken rickshaws. But there are also mobile mechanics who can provide various support for fixing most of the problems. In general, repairing mechanics are found on the street side places or even on the sidewalks. Their arrangement is quite informal as well as temporary in settings. These repair mechanics carry a small wooden toolbox, which is full of small repairing tools and bottles of lubricating oil. The tools include different sizes of wrenches, pliers, screwdrivers, sockets, hammer, clamps, hand saws and other essential kits. They also keep a pumper and a metal tripod to raise the frame for repairing the wheels. Sometimes these mechanics work by themselves, but mostly, they just provide their tools to the rickshaw pullers to fix the problems at a cheaper rate.



A rickshaw mechanic fixing the wheel

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A decorative rickshaw body

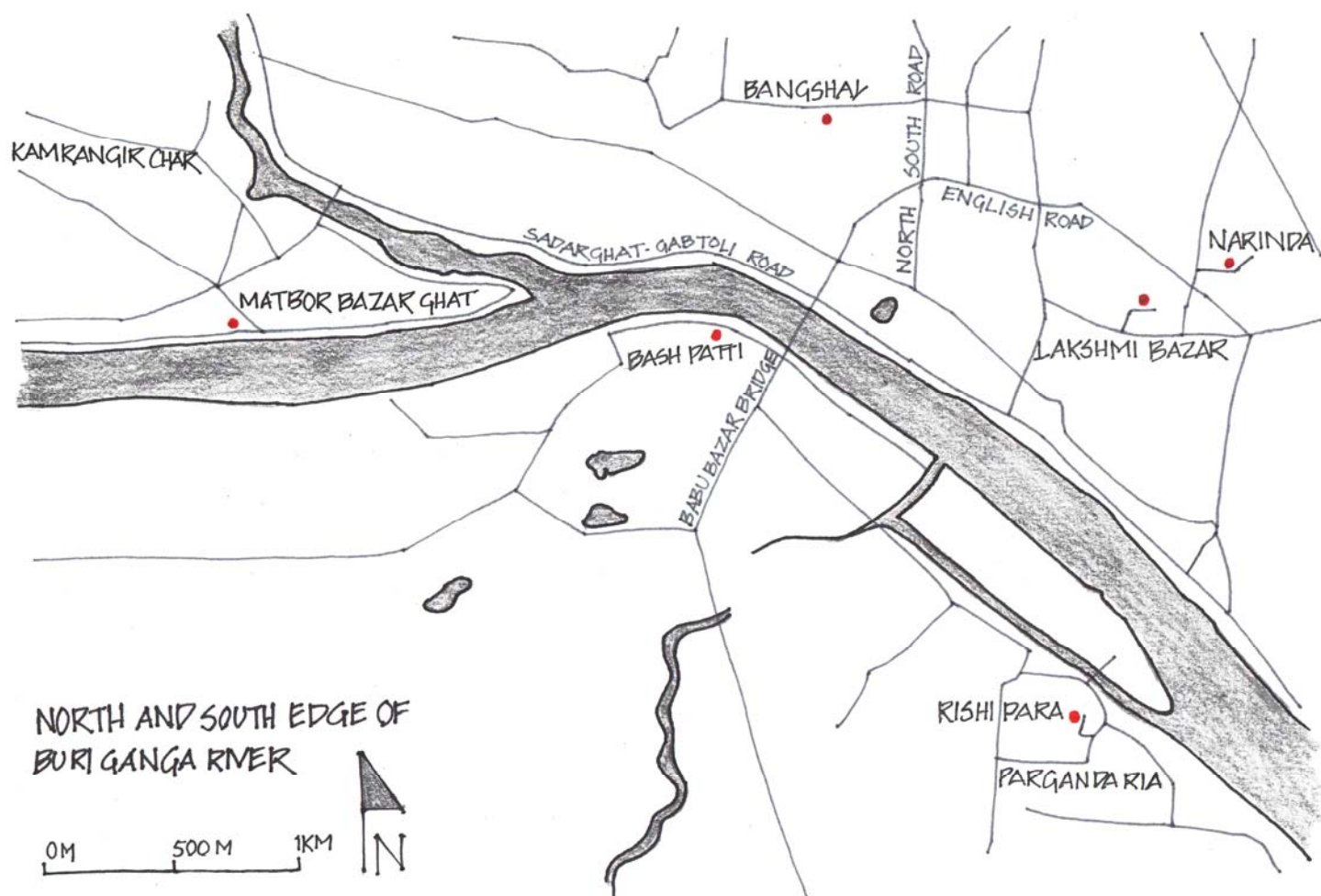
Chapter III | Rickshaw Making and Repairing

Rickshaw Making Workshops and Artisans

Rickshaw making is a complex systematic process, but not a critical science. The study found, the local informal workshop settings can easily support this industry. In Dhaka, most of the well-known and established rickshaw workshops are located on the backstreets of northern old town, along the bank of Buriganga. To support these workshops for providing the raw materials, the necessary parts producing factories have also been developed in old Dhaka. The field study found some specific areas where the rickshaw making workspaces and its equipment production cottage industries are very much available, namely Lakshmi Bazar, Bangshal, Narinda, Kamrangir Char, Bash Patti, Pargandaria etc. Besides, workshops are also found in the new town, which are comparatively novice and less organized. These new workshops are not even specialized in making traditional decorative rickshaws. However, this small workshop spaces are very simple in terms of their architecture. The average size of a workshop is not more than 15 to 20 sqm. Mostly, these rectangular workspaces are temporary or semi-permanent structures, made of concrete and brick masonry, or tin, wood and bamboo. In maximum cases, these spaces contain low height mezzanine levels both for working and storing purposes. Some pretty bigger workshops have secondary store space. Shockingly, due to the lack of required indoor spaces, the makers use the immediate outdoor spaces, like pave, street, court etc., for rickshaw making, especially for painting works. These workshops are not equipped with heavy tools, mostly simple carpentry tools, including one or two man operated sewing machine and an electric drill.

This research work has been studied two workshop spaces of completely two different settings. Both are located at the southern part of Dhaka city and these are:

- a. Mohammad Selim's Workshop
- b. Mohammad Yusuf's Workshop



a. Mohammad Selim's Workshop

Mohammad Selim is a quite renowned rickshaw maker in Dhaka. This workshop is one of the very few, which makes traditional crafty rickshaws of gaudy design. Selim's workshop is at Lakshmi Bazar area, in the busy context of the old town by the historic Bahadur Shah Park. It is located at a backstreet named Kazi Abdur Rouf Road, just behind the Dhaka Mohanogor Mohila College. This part of Lakshmi Bazar is a congested and mixed used area dominated by the wholesale markets and educational institutions. After the main road, the backstreet suddenly loses its chaos and gets a quiet residential appearance. But Selim's workshop mostly keeps the street busy in the daytime with its continuous slow moving noise, interaction and public attention.

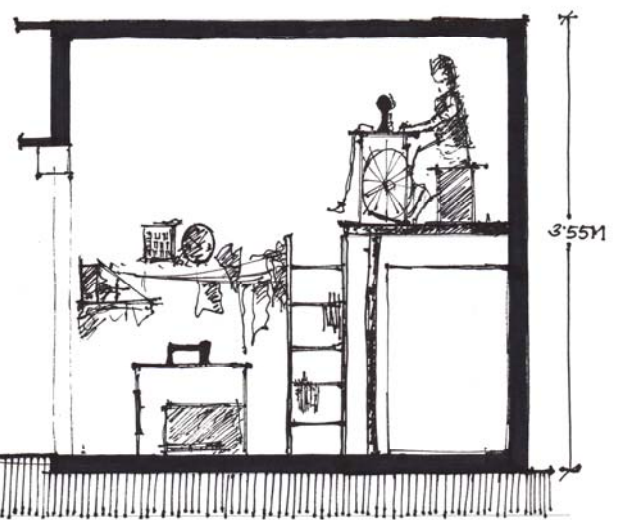
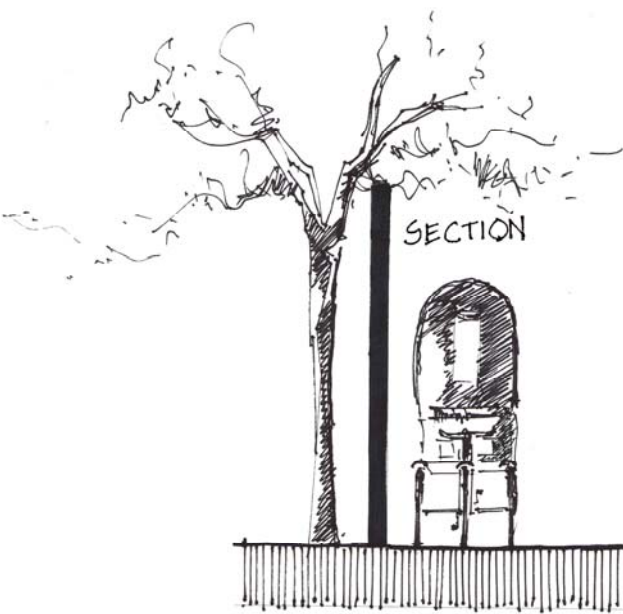
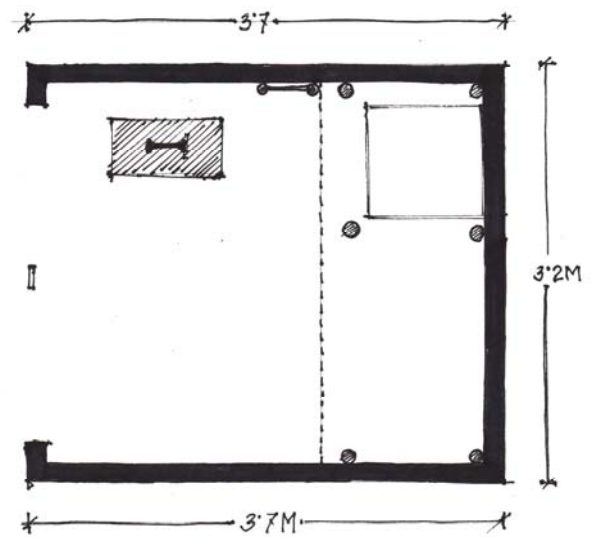
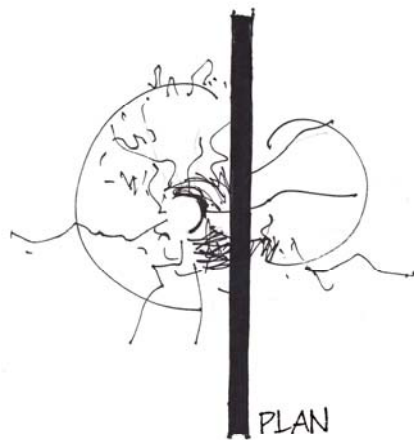


The silent Kazi Abdur Rouf Road, and Selim's workshop in the garage space of the faded yellow building

The workshop is placed at the roadside garage of a typical four storied residential apartment building. It's a reinforce cement concrete structure with brick masonry partition wall. It is rectangular in shape with a size of 11.85 sqm; its width is 3.2 m facing the street, and depth is 3.7 m. The only opening is the full facade steel shutter to the front, like a street side shop; and in fact, it was made as a rentable shop space. The neat cement finished floor is the main working platform of rickshaw assembling. This workshop is facilitated with a storeroom of similar size and pattern, just next to it, like the second shop in the row. This store is used to keep the wooden bodies. Surprisingly, within its 3.55 m height, this workshop space has a wooden mezzanine floor supported by a bamboo frame. The mezzanine space, which is 3.2 m by 1.37 m and is 1.5 m high, is used for stitching the applique decorations by using a sewing machine. As the machine operator needs to work in seating position, that is why, this space doesn't need the standard clear height. And, a person always needs to bend while moving in that mezzanine space. A bamboo ladder is used to climb the mezzanine. Underneath of this wooden floor, the lower part is used for storage purposes both for materials and equipment.

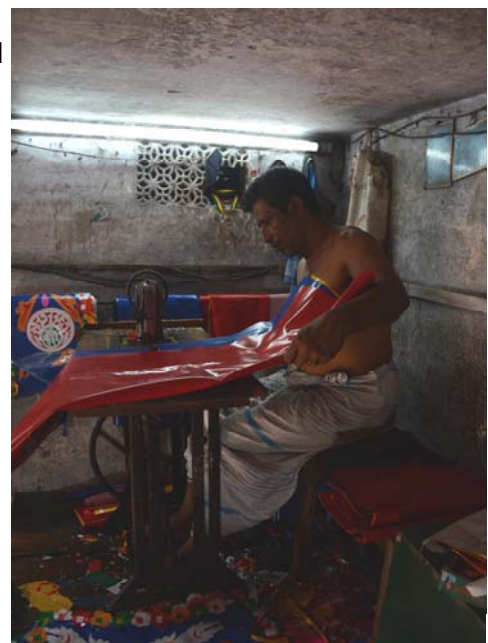
The storage room of Selim's workshop





Selim's workshop

The mezzanine level



As usual, the prime tools of the workshop are two sewing machine and an electric drill. The other tools are cutting saws, hammers, players, scissors, measuring tape etc. The metal cabinet with numbers of locks, underneath the mezzanine, is the most secured part that used to keep all the tools and equipment. So many hanging elements are found on the roof and wall of the workshop, include handmade shelves, a fan, few lights, wall clock, calendar, cutting saw, metal sheets of various shapes, plastic decorations, laces and tassels. One of the most notable aspects of rickshaw workshop, found in the field studies, is the tape recorder or radio. This is a very common and popular means of the makers' recreation while working so long. Mostly, they love to listen the old and new Bengali music so loud. In Selim's workshop, I noticed two of those, one in the ground level and the other on the mezzanine.



The wooden mezzanine platform on bamboo structure and the underneath storage



Cladding metal sheets



Bamboo hood making



Preparing seat



Covering seat with decorative rexine



Applique decoration work



Photo pasting in wooden frame

Selim's workplace is an ideal image of the traditional Bangladeshi rickshaw making workshops. Including Selim, they are seven people work in this workshop, six fulltime and one temporary. Though Selim is the chief mechanic, but he needs to remain busy in some other concerns, like order collection, material purchase, financial transactions etc. This workshop works in four distinct stages of four expertise. Mohammad Selim and Mohammad Shiraz are the main mechanic or 'body mystiri' of this workshop. Mohammad Manik is their helper, the 'topkata mystiri'. Selim assembles the whole chassis including the wheels and all mechanical parts, collected from different frame making factory and wholesale parts store. Sometimes, the rickshaw owners provide the complete chassis just for body making and decoration. Actually, the crafty part of the rickshaw starts from this the body making process. This body making has two parts, seat preparing and hood making. In this step, both the main maker and the helper, mostly Shiraz and Manik, clad the wooden body in shiny aluminium sheets. They decorate it with shiny boat pins arranged in attractive patterns. They also pin in postcards of the popular film stars. Then, the wooden box stuffed with sundried coconut fiber and locally made spring. At this stage, the whole seat including the side and backrest are wrapped with designed and painted rexine cover. In the next step, the body maker prepares the bamboo-hood frame, locally known as 'Kamani'. A bracket is used to tie the bamboo strips and a pair of latches are installed to operate the hood function. Then this frame is wrapped with decorative plastic covers. To provide this designed rexine or plastic covers, the decoration mechanics do stitches and applique work using the paddle operated sewing machine. In this workshop - Jewel, an eighteen years young talent - works for rexine decoration works, where Bahar does the same job but part-time. Most of their decorations are floral patterns including the name of the chief body maker in decorative Bengali fonts, here it is 'Selim'. Jewel usually works in the ground level, where Bahar works in the mezzanine platform.



Metal bars and cloths are hanged on the bamboo ladder

In the following step, the painters color the rickshaw with both base colors as well as with beautiful folk drawing patterns of flowers, birds, nature, rural scape etc. Mohammad Giashuddin is the principle painter with magnificent skill who works for Selim's workshop, and Shumon help him in doing the ground colors. Some cases, they use to paint the back part of the body and the bracings with some -folk proverbs, like 'Mayer Doa' means 'mother's blessing', 'Bholona Amay' means 'don't forget me' - religious messages, like 'Namaz Kayem Koro' means 'do your pray', 'Allah Vorosha' means 'god is helpful' - social messages, like 'Apar Shontanke School e Pathan' means 'send your children to school', 'Shobar Jonno Shiksha' means 'education for all', 'Aides Mukto Shomaj Chai' means 'aides free society' – information, like the owners name and contact etc. As Selim's workshop is not enough spacious to hold all the activities inside the shed, that's why, Giashuddin works on the street right in front of the workshop, beside a boundary wall, under the pleasant shadow of a tree. At the final stage, Selim and Shiraz wrap brightly colored plastic laces around the metal frame and bind tassels in different places, like in handle grips, front cage and other decorated places.



Applique design with the name of Selim in Bengali font



From the left - Shiraz, Giashuddin, Manik, Selim, Shumon and Jewel

Selim's Workers: Words of Rickshaw Makers

Mohammad Selim is a forty eight years aged self-made businessman who learned this rickshaw making from his uncle. He has been doing this for last thirty years with great success and recognition. He has shared, “nowadays, a complete rickshaw costs 20,000 Bangla Tk (around 250 US dollar), and it needs at least 2,000 Bangla Tk (about 25 US dollar) for the decoration purposes”, which is 10% of the total cost. He has added, “generally, it takes four days to complete a rickshaw, and on average we get ten to twelve orders per month”. He is quite happy to be a part of this crafty cottage industry, but at the same time expressed anxiety about the future of the industry, “only a few mechanics are now making decorative and traditional rickshaws. So anytime, this industry may lose its identity and pride.”



Selim is preparing bent metal bars for rickshaws

The fifty five years old Mohammad Shiraz, one of the most experienced rickshaw maker in Dhaka, has been working for more than forty five years. He said, “I learned this rickshaw making from my father and uncles, it’s my family tradition.” Shiraz wishes to

work for rickshaw making until his last breath, "I will continue rickshaw making as long as my bold flows on." He is not only a skill worker rather a nice personality who always cheers all his co-workers to keep life in their working environment. At a point, he is the key maker of his workshop.



Shiraz is cladding the wooden frame with glossy tin

Mohammad Giashuddin, one of the finest rickshaw painter of the time with twenty years of experience. He learned this painting work from his master Mohammad Yakub. Later on, he became a master in this field and taught many people. He said "I taught my brother rickshaw painting, but he could not continue due to the lack of opportunity." He can complete a rickshaw in three and a half hours, and charges 4 to 5 US dollars for his labor. He works both hourly or contractually. He loves to make different patterns in different parts of a rickshaw, "I draw flowers, birds and scenery in rickshaw. I use to draw in 8 to 10 parts of a rickshaw, namely in chassis, hood, latches, spring, axle, mudguard, forks, bracings, footrest and so on."



Giash is painting the rickshaw chassis on the street, just beside the tall boundary wall



Hand paint decoration on bamboo hood frame by Giashuddin



Hand paint on axle and lower bracing by Giashuddin





Hand paint drawings by Giashuddin



Decorative rickshaw handlebar

b. Mohammad Yusuf's Workshop

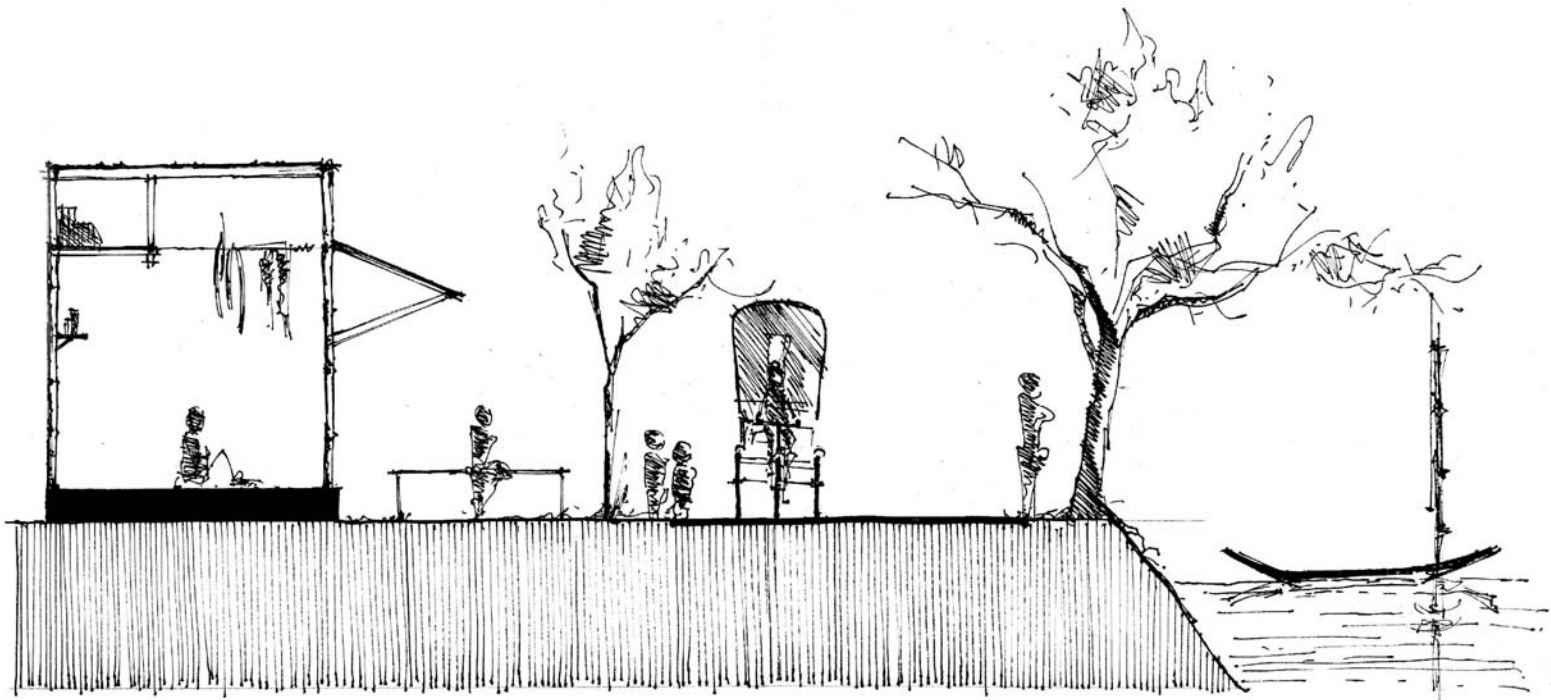
Mohammad Yusuf's workshop is a single person operated rickshaw making place, which is not a regular configuration but not rare at the same time. It is located in a very scenic natural setting of Kamrangir Char, just in front of the river Buriganga. Till today, Kamrangir Char has been considered an island at the southern edge of Dhaka, that is mainly connected with the city by a number of bridges and roads. Due to the unplanned development pattern and poor economy, this area has still lots of temporary structures as well as open and green spaces along the river edge. It is a juxtaposing of an urban setting in a semirural context. Yusuf's workshop is placed just by the 'Matbor Bazar Ghaat', which is a small dock for passenger carrying boats, for daily commute to the either side of the river. The flowing river, slow moving boats, series of green trees, playing shadows, human voices make the context really lively. The pleasing nature, the brick paved front court of the workshop, the metal bench under the green shades appeal the known and unknown faces to come, sit and have some words with Yusuf.



The context of Yusuf's workshop



The context of Yusuf's workshop



Section through Yusuf's workshop

Yusuf's workshop space is a temporary structure, made of bamboo frame, wooden planks, corrugated sheet (tin) panels and raised masonry plinth of neat cement finish. It is a square shaped space of 9 sqm, where the length of the sides is 3 m for all edges. Its front facade is completely open to the river view through a couple of custom made folding panels supported by wooden latches. Its only rear window always remains closed for stuffing extra materials. It has some wall-hang shelves for stuffs, that full of materials, tools and necessary elements. Wall panels are mostly covered with decorative rexines, designed back plates, and other essential kits. The most important tools of Yusuf's workshop are - a more than fifty years old sewing machine, got from his father – an electric welding machine with massive gas cylinders for repairing old and broken rickshaws – electric drill – and other regular kits, like hammer, scissors, pliers, screwdrivers, ranges etc. He uses to keep most of his small tools in a secure wooden cabinet with lock.



Yusuf and his workshop



Yusuf's view through his open folding window... the courtyard, street, greeneries...



... river, floating boats...

Mostly, Yusuf works by himself for making and decorating rickshaws, sometimes takes help from his brother Mohammad Israfil. From order collection to delivery, including material purchase, body making, hood making, applique decoration, basic painting - Yusuf can do everything by himself. He just hires the temporary painters for decorative drawings of his rickshaws. He needs to spend minimum seven days to complete a rickshaw, and cannot produce more than five in a month.



Yusuf's stuffs

Yusuf has been working for rickshaw making since his 12 years of age. He is a maker, mechanic, as well as an artist. He learned it from his father, Mohammad Ismail; and, his father inherited this rickshaw making skill from Yusuf's grandfather Mohammad Jamal. Maybe he is the last in his family who has been practicing this traditional family business. His two sons are educated and have their own different businesses. In his 42 years of experience, he has seen so many events in rickshaw making, "in 1972, after the liberation, my father can complete a rickshaw only for 350 Tk (less than 4.5 US dollar).

At that time, except the wooden body and bamboo hood, most of the parts were imported, especially from China. In 80s, Indian parts started to come in Bangladesh. But now, we use all local parts, and these are very good, sometimes even better than foreign parts, like Bangladeshi tires are more durable than imported tires.”



Yusuf working with decorative wooden panels and sewing applique lace



The old rickshaw... the old parts...



the old metals...



Yusuf's stuffs on tin wall

Rickshaw Equipment Production Factories

Numbers of different parts and equipment of rickshaw are produced in different edges of Dhaka. This research has focused on the very identical elements of the rickshaw and their production process.

a. Metal Frame

Rickshaw frame making is a very simple technology and available industry in Dhaka. Basically, it's a kind of metal cutting and welding workshop. These workshops are available in the old town of Dhaka, Jatrabari and Keraniganj. Mohammad Hasib is a 26 years aged young technician who produces rickshaw frame in a workshop, located in Bangshal area. It's a small workplace of only 5 sqm, the dimension is 2 m in width and 2.5 m in depth. Hasib collects his raw materials, like pipes and metal bars, from Alu Bazar. His tiny workshop is equipped with a metal cutter and a welder. He can produce 15 to 20 frames per day and sell each for 8.5 US dollar.



Hasib (on the right) in his tiny workshop space

b. Wooden Body

Wooden body making factories are very much available in Kamrangir Char, Bash Patti and Shampur area of Dhaka city. It's a complete carpentry work. It requires pretty much bigger spaces for storing both raw materials and produced products. Mostly, rickshaw bodies are made of mango tree wood, locally known as 'Aam Kath', it is also possible to use 'Mehegoni Wood' for the same purposes. Ibrhaim Hossain Mithu is a promising young businessman as well as a student, who is the owner of a rickshaw body making factory located in Bash Patti area, just by the bank of Buriganga. He inherited this business from his father Jahangir Hossain. Mithu prefers the mango tree wood from Jessore for his product due to its better shape and size. He has shared, "the average costing is 500 Tk (6.25 US dollar) per body and the market price is about 800 Tk (8 US dollar). We provide these bodies both to the rickshaw maker and the wholesale businessman. But our main customer is the wholesale businessman." One of his senior carpenter Mohammad Minna has said, "We four people can make 25 pieces of bodies per day."



Mohammad Minna

c. Bamboo Hood Frame

Mostly, bamboo hood frame factories are found just by the side of a river or a water channel. It is due to the easier transportation of bulk amount of raw bamboo from different parts of the country. The study found a hood making factory in Bash Patti, on the edge of Buriganga river. In fact, 'Bash' means bamboo and 'Patti' means area, so 'Bash Patti' is 'Bamboo Area', and this place is quite well-known for bamboo based factories including rickshaw hood.



A bamboo hood frame workshop

Shahidul Islam is a middle aged man of 35, one of the experienced hood maker, who has been working in Bash Patti area for last 12 years. According to him, "we collect bamboo from different places, like Gazipur, Modhupur, Rangpur and so on. I can make 40 to 50 'Kamani' (hood frame) per day". He is not happy with work, because of his very much low wage that makes his life quite challenging.



Shahidul Islam

Saadman Mia, an old fellow of late seventy, works in the same factory just to cut the bamboos in right sizes and shapes. He can prepare 100 to 125 pieces per day. Mirza Anwara Begum use to clean these bamboo strips for final production. She has been working in this factory for last 15 years. She gets 20 Tk for cleaning 5 pieces of bamboo strips. She is from Barishal and quite happy with her earnings. She feels, "Being a woman, I can earn for my family, my kids. It's not that much, still a contribution and support. It reliefs my husband from his excessive pressure."



Saadman Mia



Mirza Anwara Begum



Bash Patti

Rickshaw Equipment Wholesale Stores

Rickshaw equipment and its raw material stores are found all around in Dhaka. Meanwhile, Bangshal and Kazi Alauddin roads are quite prominent for cycle rickshaw parts. Numbers of wholesale and retail stores of rickshaw parts are available on these two roads. There are basically three types of stores that sell three distinct categories of rickshaw parts, and these are mainly (a) Metal Parts Store, (b) Rexine and Painting Store, and (c) Decoration Item Store.

a. Metal Parts Store

These stores sell all metal parts of the chassis including wheels. Their items include rickshaw frame, spring, handle, fork, chain, wheel, axle, bracings, breaks, hubs, bearings, nuts, bolts and so many metal equipment necessary for rickshaws. Mohammad Russel, the manager of 'Jahangir Cycle Store' at Bangshal has informed that, "except the chain, most of the parts are locally made and collected from nearby factories".



Jahangir Cycle Store



Raw materials, metals



b. Rexine and Painting Stores

Rexine and painting stores are the most colorful and attractive one on Bangshal Road. These stores basically sell three important components of rickshaws, namely rexine for seat cover and hood, shiny and light metal sheet for wrapping wooden body, and rickshaw arts. Salahuddin Miaji, a successful businessman and the owner of 'Ateki Traders', has said that, "I have different color of rexines in my store, but the most popular are the red, yellow and blue, some like the green as well." He keeps both hand-drawing and press-printed rickshaw art in his store. He doesn't need to go for collecting these artworks, rather the brokers and the artists use to come to his place for delivering the products. According to him, "there are demands for both hand-drawing and press-printed paintings. But the hand drawings are little more expensive than the printed copies". The average price of this paintings are 200 to 300 Tk (2.5 to 3.75 US dollar) in his store. And, the set of a painted seat covers, includes a seat cover, two side rest and a backrest, costs 500 Tk (6.25 US dollar).



Ateki Traders at Bangshal Road



Rexine and rickshaw backplates

c. Decoration Item Store

Decoration item stores sell not only the rickshaw parts but also the cycle parts as well. The most common items include bells, laces, tassels, vase and flowers, pedals and other necessary parts. These sort of stores are very much available in Dhaka city.



Printed plates and boards

Rickshaw Artist's Studio Spaces

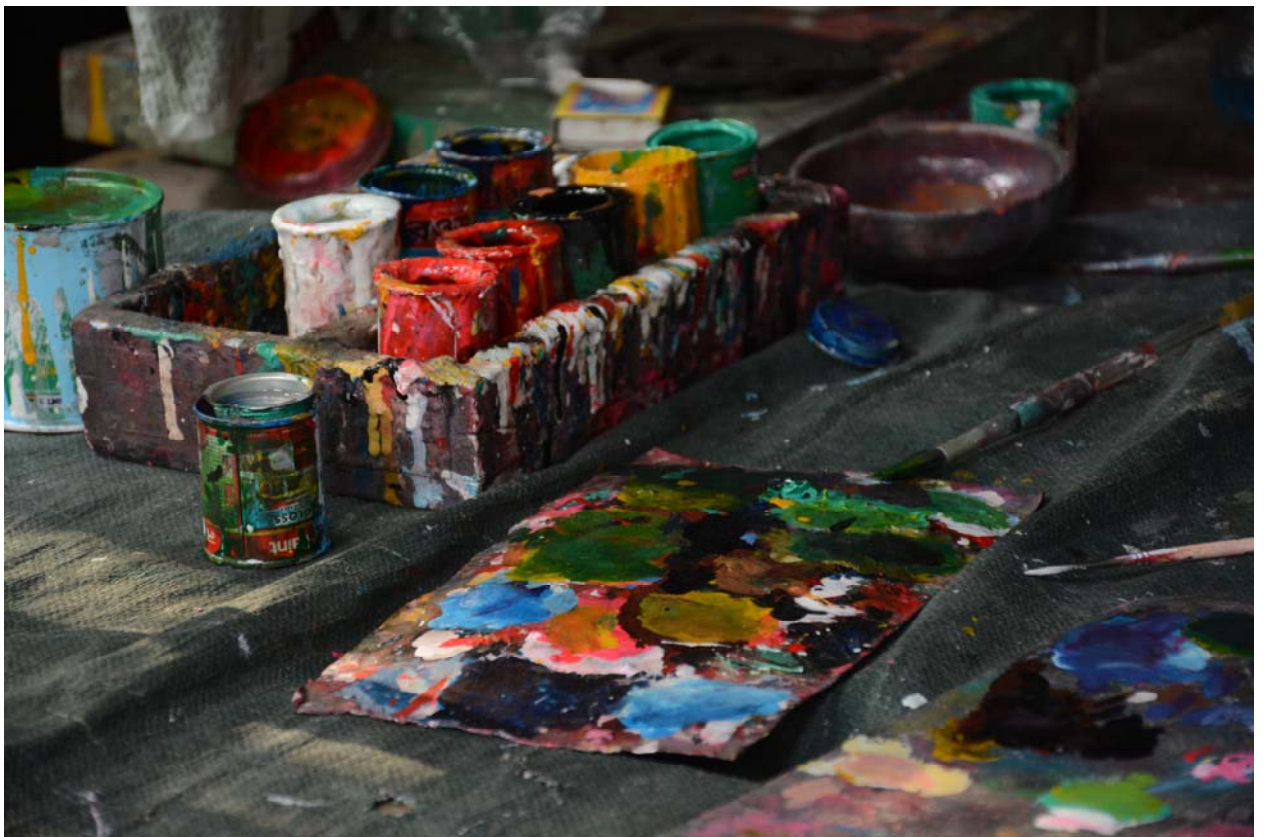
The rickshaw artists do not have any special studio arrangements. Usually, they use the courtyard, outer lobby, rooftop attic, balcony and corridor space of their houses for working. These spaces are quite informal in expression, but highly interactive and social in experience. They use the metal panels and rexine sheets for painting, available in local market. For colors, they use enamel paints, which is usually a hard color coating of glossy finish, and sustainable in various outdoor condition of different temperature, sunshine and rain. Kerosene oil is used as a thinner for the colors. The artists use several grades of soft brushes according to their preference. Mostly, they use a handmade wooden easel, and keep a vertical wooden or bamboo strip to support their hands while doing the details. Some artists prefer to work on the floor surface or on a wooden platform, rather than using easel.

This research has been illustrated three different types of artist's studio settings, their life, and attachments to the rickshaw art, found in the field work.

- a. Open Courtyard Spaces: Studio of Yousuf Nabi
- b. Interior Spaces of Corridor and Balcony: Studio of Rafiqul Islam
- c. Terrace Spaces: Studios of D.C. Das and His Sons



A rickshaw paint by
Yousuf Nabi



Tapan's studio

a. Open Courtyard Spaces: Studio of Yousuf Nabi

Yousuf Nabi is a promising young artist, practices his work at home, located at Shuvash Bose Lane, Lakshmi Bazar. This is an old middle and lower middle class residential area of Dhaka. His studio space is located at the entrance of a narrow courtyard of a small one storied row-housing complex. This place is quite charming and interactive in terms of great natural and social interventions. And it gets appeared just after entering through the main gate of that complex. All the units are directly faced to the courtyard and got approach from it. This narrow but lengthy court provides an open to sky corridor feeling. The bamboo fence over the top of the court, laying herbs on it, the orange fabricated canopy, playing shadows on the cement floor, green guava leaves in the planters, waving breezes on the hanging clothes, women's voices, young curious eyes, faded memories bring a true essence of life in Yousuf's studio place. It reminds him, his early life, his growing up stories, his father's color palette, his shaky first stokes and many more.



Yousuf Nabi with his wife and only daughter Asha



Yousuf Nabi's workspace



Yousuf and his paintings

Yousuf likes to paint both on rexine and back plate of rickshaws. His specialty in birds and animals; he also like to paint rural scape, happy farmer's family in the village home, their courtyard places with golden crops and healthy cows. In his words, "I like to represent my rich village scape in my paintings. I got this inspiration from nature, and I learned this skill from my father." Not only Yousuf Nabi, his six other brothers also learnt rickshaw painting from their father Golam Nabi, one of the famous first generation rickshaw artists. Yousuf is now 28, and has been painting for rickshaws since of his eight years of age. He loves to paint for rickshaws, and that encourages him to teach this artwork to his only loving daughter Afrin Akhter Asha. Young Asha is even so keen to play with colors and brushes, lines and strokes, shades and shadows. Yousuf speaks, "she spends hours after hours, restless, to watch my work – how I used to spend my time around my father."

b. Interior Spaces of Corridor and Balcony: Studio of Rafiqul Islam

Rafiqul Islam lives in Narinda, a highly dense urban fabric of old Dhaka. His home is - followed by a narrow alley, blocked with boundary walls - approached by a small metal gate, stopped at a hand pumped tubewell – led to another corridor, ended with his workplace. The long but really narrow corridor, lofty tinne roof, dark cement floor, damped plaster with faded color, rusted metal gate, and a sudden light well make a dramatic introduction of a rickshaw artist's studio space.



Approach alley for Rafiq's work place



Rafiq's work space

Rafiqul Islam likes to work on the cold cement finished floor, uses a wooden panel as easel, and paints on galvanized tin sheet for reliability. Like his master Alauddin Ahmed, he has excellent skills in drawing human figure and details. For me, he is maybe the best second generation rickshaw artist. He has produced so many good works, namely – Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s Speech, ‘Chaka’ of Zainul Abedin, and the most remarkable ‘Krishna’. He got Bangla Academy Excellence Award for the painting Krishna. Krishna is the Hindu religious god and Radha is his wife, the goddess. Interestingly, in this painting, he didn’t draw Krishna, rather he characterized Radha in a wealthy village context with greater details to represent Krishna’s love and affection. The layers of greeneries of so many shades, village cow, playing deer, colorful peacocks, singing birds, Radha’s appealing pose in pink saree of detail draperies, her long braid with golden jewelries, her decorative pitcher carrying on the waist, pink lotuses in her hand picturize a pure romanticism of traditional Bengali culture.

In 2013, Rafiq has been in Japan for one and half months for participating an exhibition and a workshop to demonstrate the richness of rickshaw painting and Bangladeshi folk art. He is quite happy with his profession as well as with his achievements. He worries, “now, we have only ten to twelve reputed artists in Dhaka, who really effort to do better works. And no one is coming from the new generation. I am trying to teach my youngest daughter, who is little interested, at least to continue our skill and heritage.”



Rafiqul Islam

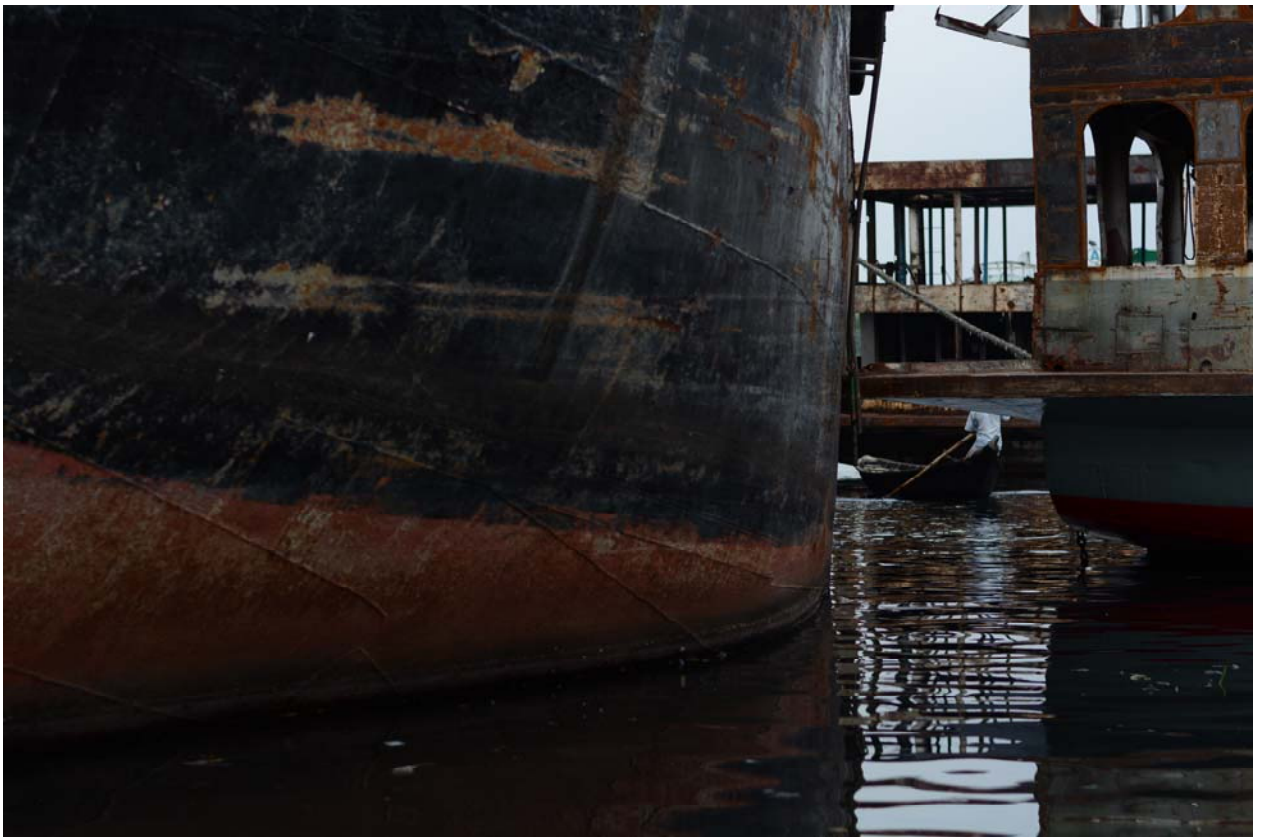
c. Terrace Spaces: Studios of D.C. Das and His Sons

The Das family lives in Rishi Patti, located in Pargandaria, on the southern edge of river Buriganga. Rishi Patti is a recently developed less privileged residential area, where most of the dwellers are Hindu in religion. A boat journey from Farashganj dock to Shagor Dockyard, across the river Buriganga, takes to Pargandaria.

Farashganj Dock



Heading towards a bamboo bridge - the narrow streets, scattered neighborhood, series of green trees, quiet tea stall, walking alleys guide to Das's house. It's a newly built unfinished structure of masonry works. Following the concrete steps, Das's studios are found on the roof top terrace. Concrete floor, bamboo and wooden frame, tinned wall and roof, small windows, and doorways arrange the studio spaces.



Shagor dockyard



Bamboo bridge to Pargandaria



Narrow walking street towards Das residence



Stairway to Das and his sons' studio spaces, Rani Das is making clay stove



From the left - Shwapon Das, D. C. Das and Tapan Das in front of their rooftop studios

D.C. Das and his two sons have organized three studios of different hierarchy. The largest one, straight to the staircase, is about 9 sqm and dedicated for D.C. Das. It is mostly empty, except a wooden easel and a table. The senior Das is 78 years old and hardly do rickshaw painting. In his words, "I have attempted to leave my painting for so many times, but I get bored without work. So I am still working, but very limited." D.C. Das, full name Dharendra Chandra Das, is one of the most influential rickshaw artist of his time, even today. His artworks of city scape, heritage building, and personalized style of replicating the Ta Mahal are some great attempts in the field of rickshaw painting. Like some other artist, Dharendra uses a wooden strip to do the details of his paintings.



D. C. Das

Tapan Das, the younger son of D.C. Das, works just next to senior Das's studio space. It's a smaller room of approximately 6 sqm, mostly occupied with a large wooden bed. Tapan feels comfortable to paint the backplate by putting it horizontally on the wooden bed, rather than using vertical support or easel. He started his career at the age of his 9, and has been doing rickshaw art for more than 30 years. He mostly does cinema posters and human figures. But his excellence is in compositions, includes flowers and patterns, tigers and deer, birds and globe etc. Replicating 'Patachitra' in rickshaw art is one of his great contributions in preserving this Bangladeshi folk culture in a new dimension. In 2010, he conducted a workshop on rickshaw painting in London to introduce this heritage in a global platform.



Tapan Das (on the left image) and Shwapaon Das are working in their studios

Shwapon Das is the elder son of Dhirendra Chandra Das. He works in a small space of only 3.5 sqm, opposite to Tapan's studio, mostly open to the exterior. He likes to work on rexines, especially for the side curtains of the rickshaw hood. Floating Taj Mahal on flower, praying woman, cinema posters are some of his remarkable works.



Tapan's studio



Rickshaw making and repairing tools

Rickshaw Repairing Workshop

Repairing rickshaw is an everyday schedule for the pullers. And this service is available in two layers of different hierarchy, namely:

- a. Permanent Repairing Workshop
- b. Temporary Repairing Workspaces

a. Permanent Repairing Workshop

Permanent repairing workshops are basically the rickshaw making workspaces. Though, most of the well-known workshops cannot manage to provide the repairing services due to their work pressure, still some skill makers allow to repair the broken or old rickshaws. But mostly, the makers do the large scale repairing work, like to change the whole wooden seat or to replace a new hood with detail decoration etc. The rickshaw maker Mohammad Yusuf uses to do lots of repairing works at his place. According to him, "in dull seasons, repairing is a pretty good job. And it is always better to do something, rather spoiling time."

Yusuf's workshop



b. Temporary Repairing Workspaces

Temporary repairing workspaces are the most common and available rickshaw fixing places. This is a tiny arrangement of rickshaw repairing setup, found everywhere in Dhaka. Interestingly, this informal temporary setting is well-equipped to support most of the fixing requirements. Generally, these temporary repairing workspaces are found on the street and on the sidewalk. It is basically an encroached space of a street or sidewalk. There are no legal agencies to monitor them, except local political persons and powerful gangs, in Bengali 'Mastan'. The repairing mechanics need to pay the local gangs to hold their positions and continue the work.



Rickshaw repair mechanic Billal Hosain

Billal Hossain, an energetic 33 years aged man from Chandpur, has his own rickshaw repairing space on the sidewalk of Zahir Raihan Road, just in front of Bangladesh

University of Engineering and Technology. Like other repairing mechanics, he has a wooden tool box, which is full of regular rickshaw repairing small tools and jars of lubricating oil. He can provide all sort of repairing services except the rexine work, due to the inconvenience of keeping a sewing machine in an open public space. Billal works from dawn to dusk, his schedule is 7 am morning to 7 pm evening. He is not very excited about his work, but feeling okay with his income, "my daily income is 500 to 600 Tk (about 6.5 to 7.5 US dollar), it is not a good amount of money, but I can run my family." Billal learned this work from his father at a very young age. He has three brothers and all are involved in the same profession of rickshaw repairing.



Billal's toolbox

Another repairing mechanic Abdul Kader works on the same road like Billal, close to Dhaka Medical College. He is an old fellow of sixty five years of age, from Pabna. Previously he had his own rickshaw, but now, it not possible for him to maintain that because of his age. He has been doing this repairing work for last ten years. Mostly, he doesn't work, just provide his tools and equipment to the pullers who do their work by themselves. That's why, his earning is not that good comparing with Billal's. His average income is less than 400 Tk (less than 5 US dollar). According to Kader, "my income is minimum. It is not that easy to survive, but still sufficient for me and my wife, I am not even feeling regret."



Abdul Kader



A rickshaw art by S. M. Samsu

Chapter IV | Rickshaw Art and Artist

Rickshaw Art

In Dhaka, “New rickshaws are a blaze of color. Every square inch is decorated. Tassels, tinsel and twirly bits hang from all parts. Plastic flowers sprout in the front and sides, and pictures and patterns are painted or pinned all over it. The overall effect is spectacular” (Gallagher, 1992). Joanna Kirkpatrick identifies these rickshaws as the world’s largest moving art gallery (Kirkpatrick, 2003). From the study experiences of rickshaws in fourteen Asian cities, Wheeler and l’Anson cited in their book ‘Chasing Rickshaws’, “Bangladeshi rickshaws are the most colorful and artistic in the world” (Wheeler & Anson, 1998).



A piece of rickshaw art

The centerpiece of the attraction is the metal design panel. In rickshaw making, the regular practice is to put a small metal panel, a piece of tin, at the rear bottom part of the rickshaw to shield the axle and chassis parts from public view. This is called backplate, locally known as 'Noksha Board', in English 'design panel'. The rectangular backplate is 26 inches in width and 11 inches in height. The rickshaw artists do painting on these panels to provide a pleasant artwork for the following people, riders and passengers on the roads. This is one of the most authentic examples of Bangladeshi folk art. The very much identical form of expression, the selection of subject matter, use of local motifs and patterns, bright color schemes, and the reflection of general people's interest have made it an imperative part of Bengali folk culture. Its overwhelming appearance not only appeal the local people but also attract the foreign visitors and tourists. The rickshaw painting first got international recognition in 1970s, when the world reputed Bangladeshi artist Zainul Abedin exhibited a collected piece of rickshaw painting in Tokyo.

Rickshaw painting is quite significant for its extraordinary subject matter, which always reflects the artists' choices as well as public's demand. Over the last sixty five years of journey, the rickshaw art has been experienced a range of interests and changes in the subject due to various socio-cultural situations. Sometimes, it had been challenged by religious and political decision. At the beginning of rickshaw painting in 1950s, the most popular topic was the filmy posters with attractive portraits of famous Indian stars, like Uttam Kumar, Dilip Kuman, Dev Anand, Suchitra Sen, Madhubala, Suraiya, and so on. At the same time, some artists prefer to picturize the Hindu religious stories, popular mythologies and their gods and goddesses, namely Radha, Krishna, Mirabai, Hindu angels and Aladin with his lamp and genie. One of leading artists of this time R.K. Das was a pioneer of Hindu religious painting including gods and goddesses. He was also quite reputed for his filmy paintings. He has shared in his interview about the most popular rickshaw painting of his time that was the portrait of Indian superstar Suchitra Sen, posing with a couple braided hairstyle, wearing saree and holding a book in her

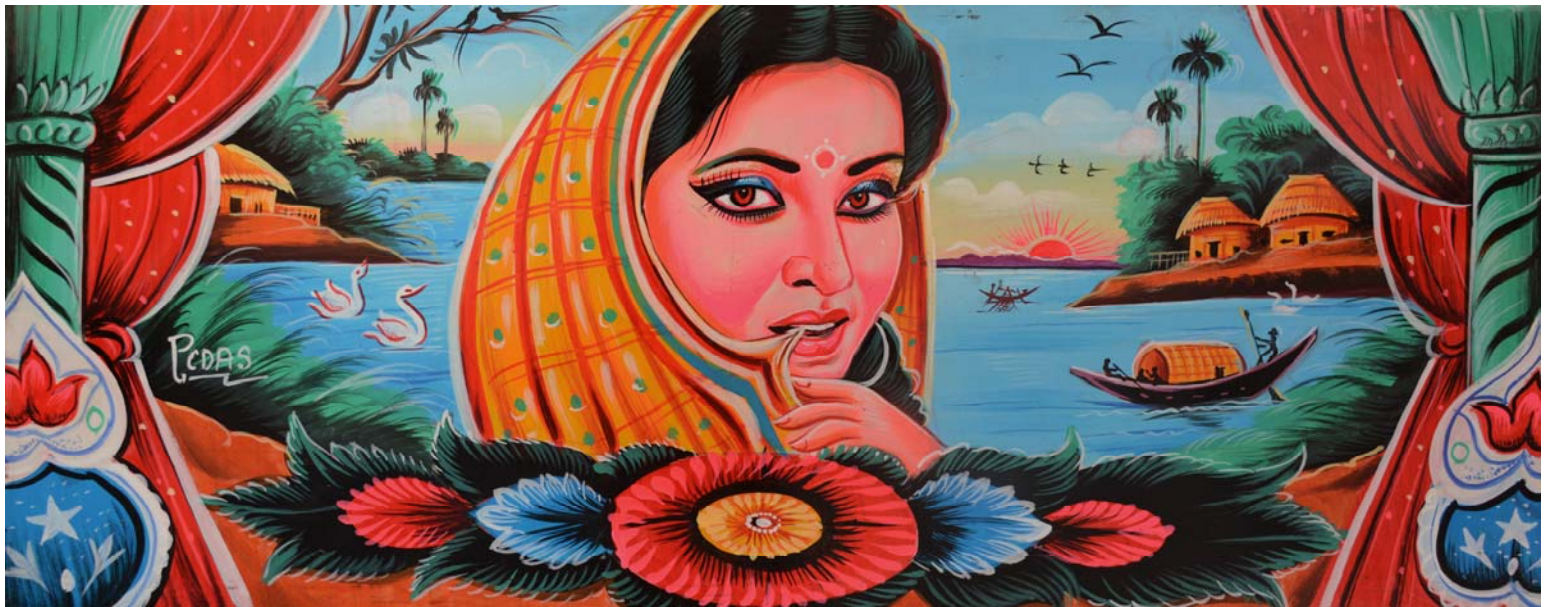
hands. To talk about its acceptability and high demand, Das said, "I even made by myself more than thousands of copies of Suchitra Sen's portrait, inspired from her movie 'Shilpi'." In 1960s, Pakistani film actress, like Neelo, Sabiha, started to get preference in rickshaw painting. However, the rickshaw paintings have always been challenged and crackdowns.



Suchitra Sen (Photo Courtesy: Antara Nanda Mandal, 2015)

In the middle of 60s, the Pakistani Government, considering the Muslim sentiment, restricted on the human figure drawing in the rickshaw backplate. After this instruction, the artists, immediately started painting religious symbols, like the purity of flowers, crafted mosques and the most ever famous subject of rickshaw painting that is Taj Mahal. Though, Taj Mahal is a tomb architecture of great King Shah Jahan and his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal, still its patterns and decorations always provide an impression of Islamic architecture in the subcontinent. At this period, some artists started to draw natural scape including birds and animals, like - the cow, a symbol of healthy Bengali farmer's family – Royal Bengal Tiger, a national pride and asset – the peacock, sign of beauty – hens and snake, presenting local fauna, and many more. In 1971, at the time of liberation war of Bangladesh, the artists started to frame the patriotic images showing people saluting the Bangladeshi flag, or an astronaut planting a Bangladeshi flag on the moon (Kirkpatrick, 2003). At the same period, the painting of the encouraging speech by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding leader of Bangladesh, inspired the nation. Besides, many war atrocity scenes had been picturized in the rickshaw plates, like killing people and raping women by Pakistani militaries, an injured mother saving her child in the severe fighting scene, blasting of Pakistani tanks, fighting and winning the battle field by the Bengali freedom fighters and other stimulating situations. According to R.K. Das, the continuous radio news of 1971 inspired the artists to replicate the war incidents as well as the Bangladeshi success in their works. After the war, in 1972, the foreigners showed interests in the atrocity images, which made the new government aware about the international image of new Bangladesh, and that forced to stop this war paintings. At the same time, the authority of independent Bangladesh enforced a restriction on depictions of unveiled women (Wheeler & Anson, 1998). So the artists started to paint the birds and animals again, including foreign species, like parrot, macaw, giraffe, kangaroo etc. They also introduced a new dimension of animal drawings by adding human figure in different action of fighting and playing, where the inspiration had come from the famous adventurous character Tarzan. Surprisingly, the after war authorities of Dhaka city banned the rearview mirrors on the ground that rickshaw riders were more likely to be using them to eye their female

passengers than the following traffic (Wheeler & Anson, 1998)! At the later period, the Bengali cinema posters, as well as the Bangladeshi film stars got an attention in the rickshaw art. In the middle of 70s, the cinema poster titled 'Nishan' was one of the most common subjects for rickshaw art and it had been sustained for a long period. This poster was basically composed of three figures, including a hero at the center, a heroine at one side and a villain at the other side. Till today, this is the most popular composition for replicating the cinema poster in rickshaw art, where the painting contains either two male persons with a heroine, or two female persons with a hero. In 70s, the rickshaw pullers preferred to have Rajjak, Faruq and Alamgir for heroes, and Shabana, Kobori and Bobita for heroines in their backplate. Notably, a painting of actress Shabana, posing in a yellow saree as a shy village woman, had got extreme popularity. At the same time, numbers of Bengali movies got so widespread in those plates, namely, 'Layli Majnun', 'Kotha Dilam', 'Wada' etc. In 1978, the government authorities of Dhaka city decided to ban all sort of movie star painting due to their exploitation in the rickshaw art. But nothing could stop the artists from doing their work. In this restricted situation, Bangladeshi rickshaw art had got a completely new dimension, and that is fable, where animals and birds were picturized to act like human being. The marriage ceremony of a lion, rickshaw workshop operated by animals, animal school, rural and city life of animals were some of the great innovations of the rickshaw artists. In 1980s, the foreigners started to come and learn about rickshaw painting, which inspired the artists to introduce the visitors with Bangladeshi rural and city scape, as well as with the Bengali socio-cultural aspects. Immediately the rickshaw artists had taken this responsibility, and started to picturize - the peaceful Bangladeshi village and developing city scape, like village life, paddy field with farmers, farmer's house, boats in rivers, bathing woman, water carrying women, pottery works of Bangladesh, transformation of villages to the cities, city traffic and buildings - national monuments, like 'Smriti Shoudha', 'Shaheed Minar' - remarkable architecture, like Louis I Kahn's National Assembly Building, in Bengali 'Shongshad Bhavan', Ahsan Manzil, Star Mosque – cultural events, like rural fair or 'Mela', folk drama or 'Jatra Pala', folk song or 'Baul Gaan', International Mother Language Day, National Victory Day etc.



A rickshaw painting of Shabana by P. C. Das

At the same time, artists used to copy and recopy Zainul Abedin's famous painting 'Chaka'. In the late 80s, the rickshaw art got a more sensational expression in filmy paintings, includes - action heroes with tough look, like Faruq – femme fatal, like Dosshu Phulan Devi with a AK47 machinegun – sexy heroines in vulgar poses. In 1990s, the rickshaw artists were focused in international affairs and foreign sceneries for their new subject matters. It actually happened for showing respect to the ordinary people's growing interest about the world affairs. And it had been materialized by the painting of the Gulf War hero Saddam Hussain - in a prayer pose and surrounded by fighting airplanes, London Bridge, Sydney Opera House, horse riders in Arabian Deserts, the Titanic ship of the Titanic movie and so on. The modern transpiration vehicles, like airplane, ships, trains, were also got placed in the rickshaw art. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, some government agencies and NGOs attempted to put some social important messages in spite of rickshaw arts; study found that, their less decorative appearance and less appeal could not help this initiative to survive for a long. S. M. Samsu, one of the finest first generation rickshaw artist, attempts to do the replica of 'Patachitra' and their stories in rickshaw plate. Traditionally, painting created by placing a special kind of coating on coarse cotton cloth to present narrative accounts are generally called 'Patachitra' (Selim, 2007). This is considered as the highest form of Bengali folk paintings. The Bengali word '*pata*' means cloth, and the person who use to do *patachitra* called '*patua*'. Usually, in *patachitra*, a whole folk story was drawn in a scrolled or folded piece of cloth to publicly exhibit in the local fairs. The drawings elements are generally the nature, human beings, animals and rural scape. This highly colorful painting is basically a two dimensional drawing without considering any perspective. However, the very much popular topics of rickshaw arts - like, filmy artists, Taj Mahal floating on flower, Royal Bengal Tiger - are still alive today in the backplates of rickshaws.



A conceptual replica of Patachitra by S.M. Samsu

According to Joanna Kirkpatrick, these paintings contain many conscious and subconscious messages (Kirkpatrick, 2003). These colorful art pieces reflect – identity, in religious impression – fascination, in filmy images – passion and desire, in sexy and vulgar film stars – rights, in war scenes – democracy, in monuments – satire, in fables – love and nostalgia, in nature and rural scape – pride, in city scape – culture, in events and festivals.



A filmy poster by S.M. Samsu (Photo Courtesy: www.rickshaw-paint.net)

However, after having a greater recognition, impression and contribution, the rickshaw art has been suffering from its beginning, till today. In Bangladesh, it has not yet been commonly accepted as a prestigious category of art, especially in the literate society. Lasnier thinks, it is a conflict between urban elite and lower classes (Lasnier, 2002). Some critiques consider rickshaw painting as a skill, not an art. Their argument is against the copying tendency and limited subject matters of rickshaw art. As a result, the rickshaw artists have also been suffering from identity crisis, as well as from financial solvency. Even today, a beautifully painted rickshaw paint, a genuine expression of Bengali folk art, can be purchased for only 2.5 US dollar! Still, Lasnier believes that, rickshaw arts are not only decorative; these are portraying the ordinary life of general people, preserving collective memory and securing a traditional identity (Lasnier, 2002). In the late 90s, France Lasnier, while serving as the director of Alliance Francaise de Dhaka (1996-200), had done a committed research work on rickshaw painting, and provided 500 pieces of his collected original artwork to the National Museum of Dhaka. The intention was to arrange a permanent exhibition corner for these rare works, in the folklore section. Surprisingly, while I have been doing my research work in 2015, almost after 15 years of Lasnier's contribution, I have found that, those packed art pieces have not yet seen the day light, not even got the right appreciation.

Subject Typology of the Rickshaw Art

The rickshaw art of Dhaka has been experienced many changes in its painting subject. In a very colorful journey of almost 65 years, it has traced a range of natural, cultural and social issues in the rickshaw backplates. This study has attempted to document some rickshaw paintings, found in the field work and in various publications, respecting some categories of subject matter and these are:

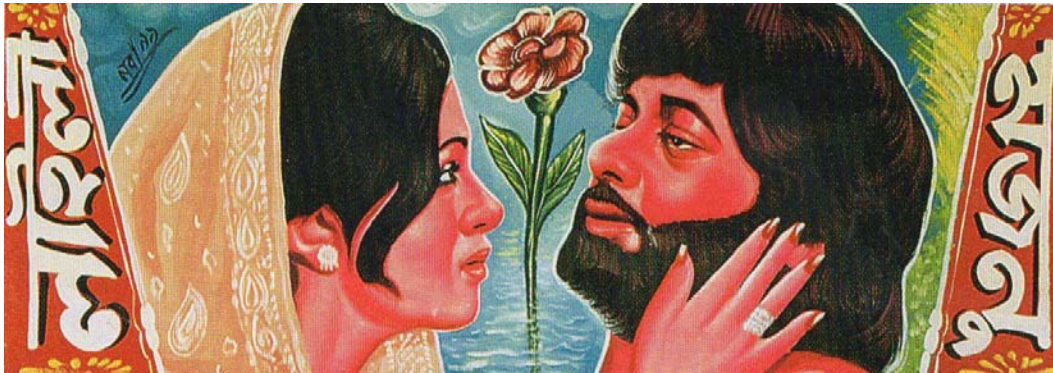
- a. Cinema Poster: Heroes and Heroines
- b. Religious Inspirations: Events, Gods and Goddesses
- c. Important National and International Events: The Liberation War of 1971
- d. Landscape of Bangladeshi Village
- e. Local Cultural Events
- f. Birds, Animals and Animals with Human Being
- g. Fable
- h. Renowned Architectures, Monuments and Urban Scape Compositions
- i. Vehicles: Car, Train, Airplane and Ship
- j. Human Figure: Renowned Persons
- k. Tales
- l. Composition

A rickshaw paint by S.M. Samsu

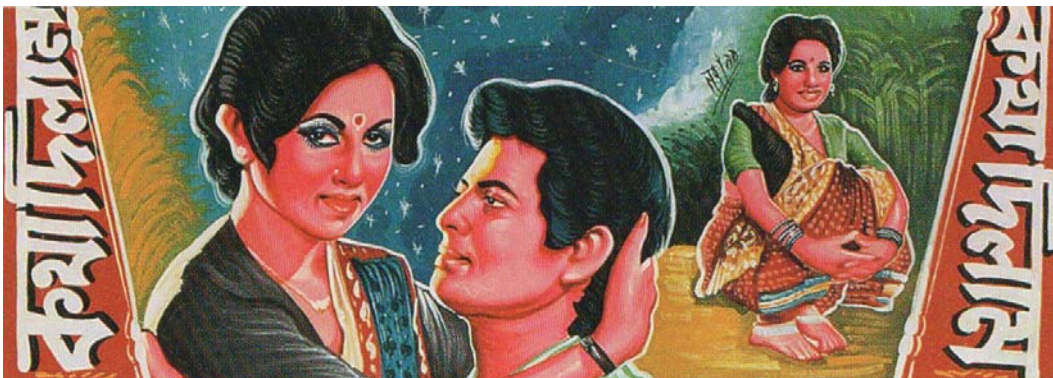




Cinema poster of Uttam Kumar and Shuchitra Sen by Sayed Ahmed Hossain
(Photo Courtesy: Lasnier, 2002)



Cinema poster of Razzak and Bobita, titled 'Layli Majnun'
(Photo Courtesy: Lasnier, 2002)



Cinema poster of Faruq and Shabana, titled 'Kotha Dilam'
(Photo Courtesy: Lasnier, 2002)

Cinema poster of action hero Jashim (Photo Courtesy: Lasnier, 2002)





Filmy poster of Salman Shah and Poppy by Rafiqul Islam
(Photo Courtesy: Lasnier, 2002)



Filmy poster by R.K. Das (Photo Courtesy: Lasnier, 2002)

Filmy poster by Rafiqul Islam (Photo Courtesy: www.rickshaw-paint.net)





Hindu religious story by R.K. Das (Photo Courtesy: Lasnier, 2002)



Radha, Hindu goddess by Rafiqul Islam



Taj Mahal symbolizes Islamic Architecture, by D.C. Das

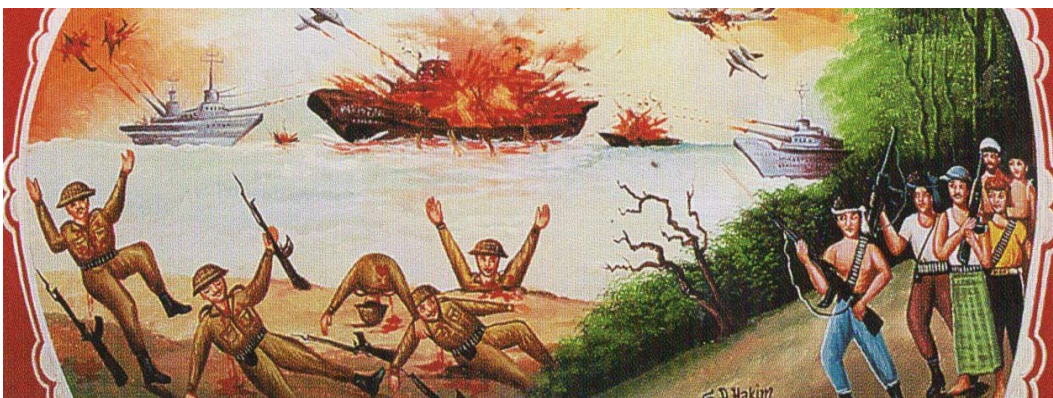


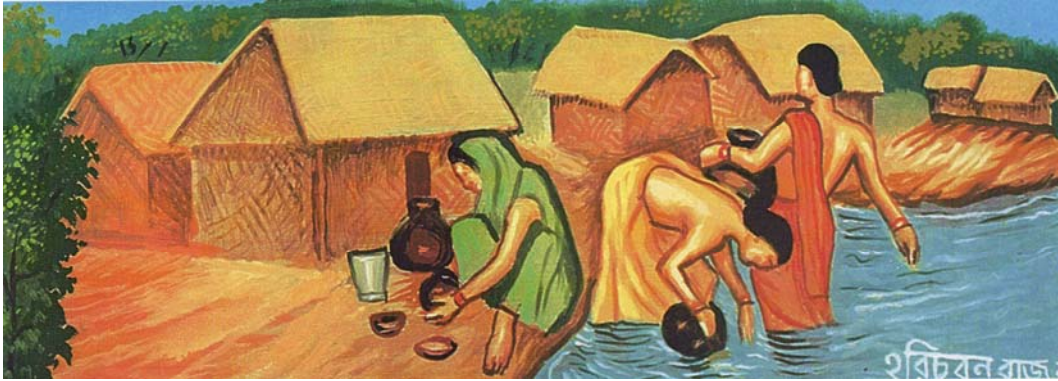
Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's speech for liberation by Rafiqul Islam



Raping women and killing people by Pakistani military, Liberation war 1971 by R.K. Das (Photo Courtesy: Lasnier, 2002)

Success of freedom fighters, Liberation war 1971 (Photo Courtesy: Lasnier, 2002)



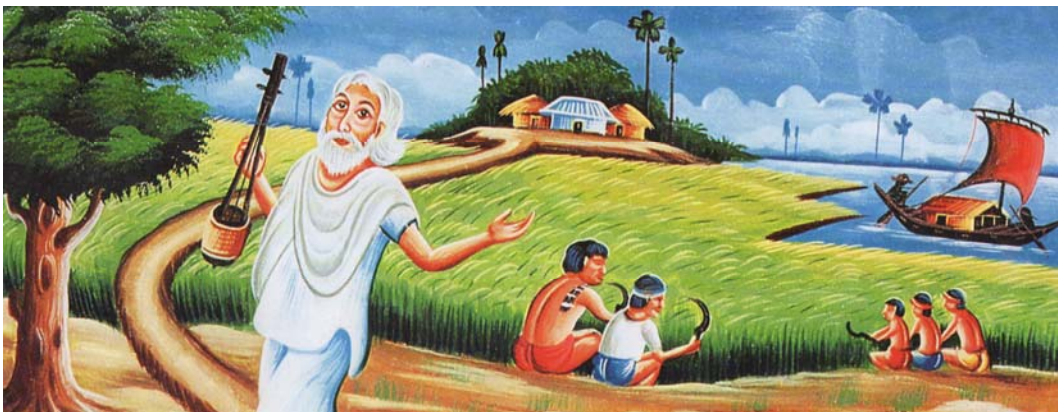


Village women are bathing and taking water by Haricharan Raj
(Photo Courtesy: Lasnier, 2002)



Replica of 'Chaka' by Rafiqul Islam

Baul and village scape (Photo Courtesy: Lasnier, 2002)



Animals by Tapan Das



Birds and Animal by D.C. Das



Fable, animal school by S.M. Samsu (Photo Courtesy: Lasnier, 2002)



Fable, lion's wedding ceremony by P.C. Das (Photo Courtesy: Lasnier, 2002)

Fable, rickshaw workshop by S.M. Samsu





Historic Ahsan Manjil by D.C. Das



National Assembly Building of Bangladesh (Photo Courtesy: Lasnier, 2002)



National Martyr Monument of Bangladesh (Photo Courtesy: Lasnier, 2002)

Bangladesh Biman Airplane by S.M. Samsu



Barak Obama and his family by S.M. Samsu

Mermaid by Rafiqul Islam



Aladin's Genie by S.A. Malek (Photo Courtesy: www.rickshaw-paint.net)



Replica of 'Patachitra' by Tapan Das

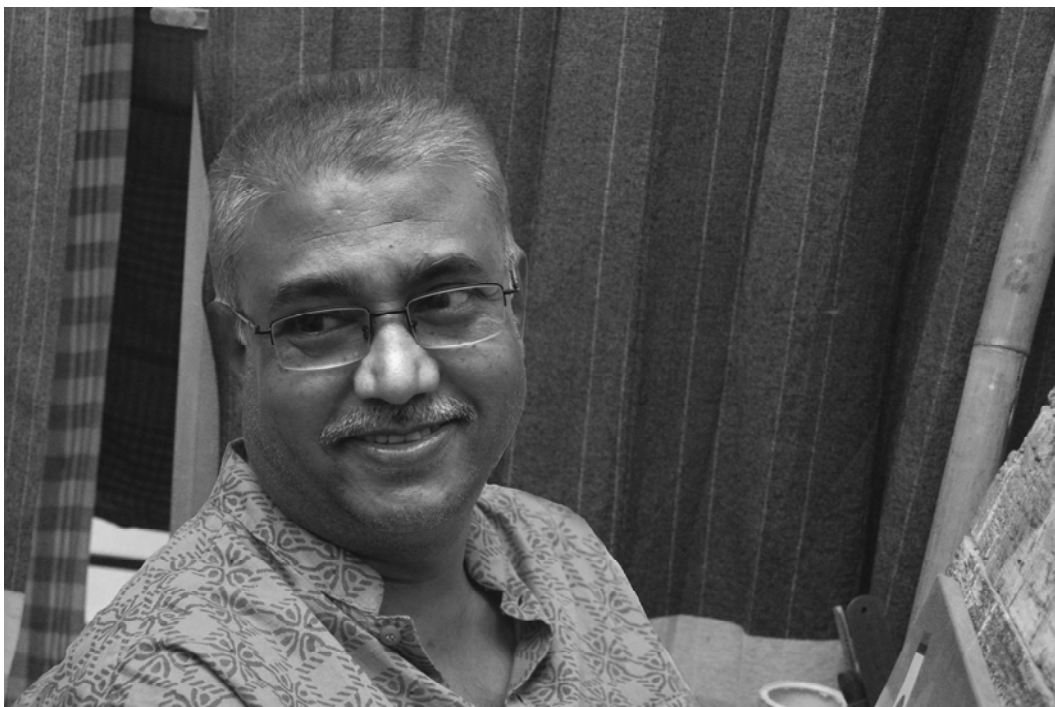


Composition by Tapan Das

Legends in Rickshaw Art

S.M. Samsu: The Most Renowned Artist of The Rime

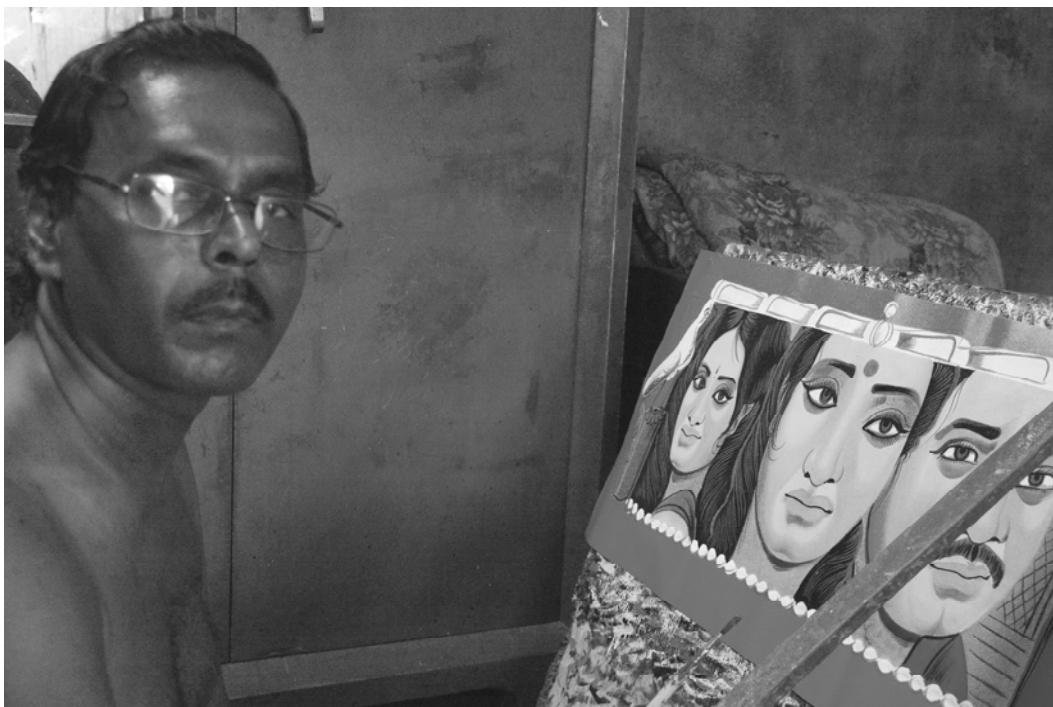
S.M. Samsu, a successful name in the rickshaw art of Bangladesh. Born in 1956, and started his career at the age of 12 years. He has shared his early days' experiences in his interview, "because of my drawing skill, my friends told me to draw the matrix for 'Sholo Gutu' game (a popular local game, played with sixteen stone chips, on a square drawn matrix). At that time, I tried birds, boats, tigers and so on. Started to draw on walls, in my school's exercise books. I used to make blue color from blue laundry powder, red from red amaranth leaf, yellow from turmeric, and green from spinach. I had made my brushes with jute fibers.... I got a lot of inspiration from my teachers, to continue paintings.... Later on, I took this skill for my profession.... I prefer to draw different social issues, like our heritage of pottery, wealthy rural life, working women, education for all, flood affected people, migration to Europe and America by airplane, fables etc.... In 1972, when our new government of Bangladesh banned human figure in rickshaw painting, I started to draw fables - like office going lion - traffic police, transport drivers and passengers all are different animals – a group of animals working in a rickshaw workshop, namely lion, tiger, fox, monkey, cat etc."



He continued, “when I was so young, my grandmother and aunts used to tell me many folk stories, like ‘Bonobashe Rupban’, ‘Dalim Kumar’ etc. and I had tried to shape those tales and their characters in my paintings. I brought up in Shoriatpur, it’s a lowland and had got flooded in the rainy seasons. At that flood time, the women of the villages couldn’t move anywhere without boat, so they spent their times to make ‘Nokshikatha’ (decorating a piece of cloth with folk stories and various design patterns) – and I got inspired by those works, their designs and patterns. I can still remember the cloudy and rainy days of Shoriatpur, the moments, I can still feel.”

P.C. Das

Palash Chandra Das, in short P.C. Das, one of the most reputed rickshaw artist of the first generation. He got trained rickshaw painting from his uncle D.C. Das, another great contributor of this field. He started his career in 1969, and has been still working for rickshaws. He is quite busy in painting both on backplates and rexines. He likes to draw cinema posters and fables. His expertise are details of human figures and portraits. One of his very favorite work is the portrait of Bangladeshi heroine Shabana, posing in a shy expression. He also draws floral patterns, compositions and rural scape in the rexines for seat covers.



R.K. Das: A Living Legend in Rickshaw Painting

Raj Kumar Das, known as R.K. Das, a living legend of Dhaka's Rickshaw art. He started his career in 1950, and had been continued more than 50 years. He is a witness of the various phases of rickshaw painting in Dhaka - he experienced many ups and downs, laws and restrictions, emotions and reactions, love and desires. His film watching hobby made him interested in replicating the film stars' images in his canvases. His admiration for dream stars insisted him to shape them in lines and strokes, shades and colors. The splendid beauty of Madhubala, the appealing face of Hemamalini, the sexy expression of Helen, the pretty and innocent poses of Suchitra Sen had always attracted Raj Kumar to portrait their images in rickshaw backplates. He had also been touched by the divine love of Radha, Krishna and Mirabai for his paintings. In 1971, his patriotism enforced him to picturize the emotional and inspiring events of liberation war. And after achieving the Bangladeshi identity, Raj Kumar had dedicated himself to represent the socio-cultural richness of Bengal to the global platform. In his words, "in 1972, many foreign agencies, their delegates and tourists had got interested to learn about new born Bangladesh, and because of that, I decided to start painting about our wealthy heritage, our national pride."





'Krishna & Mirabai' by R.K. Das in 1960s

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Conclusive Remarks

Material culture offers a scholarly approach that is more than simple awareness. It provides the opportunities of insightful observation of an artifact, facilitates its understanding, develops the study of the subject matter, and signifies the socio-cultural identity. In the similar philosophy, this research work has attempted to document the rickshaw of Dhaka, its histories and traditions, its acceptance as well as ignorance, its pullers and makers, its artists and overall artisans, its making and crafting, its bold presence and hidden contributions. This study is a realistic effort to materialize the idea of material culture. It has initiated to systematically demonstrate the study of an artifact, rickshaw, to learn about a culture - its tradition, its folklore and folk arts, its human events and perceptions, their thoughts and actions.

Rickshaw is an imperious everyday material in Dhaka's cultural landscape. It's more than a vehicle, beyond its utilitarian purpose. It's maybe defined as a craft, a true piece of folk art. Unfortunately, rickshaw has not yet been recognized and well-accepted in Dhaka for its intangible significance, rather considered as city's disturbance. Due to this severe ignorance, the new generation is hardly interested in rickshaw, its making and its painting, as well as in preserving this tradition. In this regard, this research has endeavored to archive this state of the art - the rickshaw of Dhaka.

A month long field work, includes physical presence and direct observation, series of photographs, drawings and illustrations, most importantly formal and informal conversations have successfully shaped the overall scenery of rickshaw, its industry and its contributors. It has picturized not only the visual findings, but also characterized the hidden dimensions of rickshaw industry. This research work have widely discussed the history of rickshaw in Dhaka, its pullers and the owners, its makers and their workshops, repairing spaces and the mechanics, its trade and commerce, its arts and crafts. Following the contextual study of material culture by Henry Glassie, this research has

carefully illustrated – the context of creation, the rickshaw, its artifacts including the creators and the workspace settings– the context of communication, the relationship and interdependence among the various groups related to rickshaw industry, like pullers, owners, artisans, mechanics, equipment producers etc. – the context of consumption, a great demand and utility of rickshaws in Dhaka city. Collectively, this research work has attempted to create an overall ground study of rickshaw industry, and also directed some new visions for further investigations and scholarships.



A decorative rickshaw

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