

**A Folks of Bengal** is an initiative of banglanatak dot com MusiCal for promoting the folk traditions of Bengal through creating opportunities for traditional folk artists/ musicians. The band led by Debalina Bhowmick takes the audience on a journey through the traditional music stream of Bengal, celebrating the diversity and richness of Bengal's folk culture.



**Debalina Bhowmick** : A Classical Music trained Bengali folk singer, has performed at festivals worldwide including at Colours of Ostrava, Urkult in Sweden, Copenhagen World Music Festival, Salfoldi Dalfold Festival in Hungary, Karlsruhe Summer festival in Germany and Essouira Music festival in Morocco. She has 5 music albums. Debalina also has a World Music band, East West Local, the first album of the band had hit the Top 30 list of World Music Chart in 2014. She is also the coordinator at banglanatak dot com MusiCal.

- **Kangal Das Baul** : A young Baul, one of the best in his generation, sings with Dotara (traditional string instrument) and Khamak (traditional percussive string instrument) and has already played at Urkult Festival in Sweden.
- **Mohan Tati** : A self-taught artist of Bankura district in West Bengal, Mohan performs with the Baul-Fakiri and Jhumur genres of music regularly and has travelled to China, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Japan and UK.
- **Khokon Das**: Khokon Das is a young and promising Dhol (traditional percussion) player from Murshidabad district of West Bengal and has already played in Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary and Sweden.

## Baul Music - Soul of Bengal

Baul music is the soul of Bengal and is essentially the music of self searching. Its about 500 years old. Chaitanyadev's Bhakti Cult movement, which is seen as the first social reform movement in Bengal, may be the basis of evolution of Baul music. Chaitanya started his music, called 'Keertan', to mobilize people against the social divide (due to gender, religion, class, caste) and social evils like Sati (where widow was forced to be burnt alive along with dead husband). Then comes, Lalan Fakir, may be called as the father of Baul music. Living the life of an esoteric, denouncing the material world, they urge people to rise above the narrow divides created by caste, creed and religion to find love, peace and harmony. Do not look for God anywhere, look for Him in the human body. Only then will you get Him, feel Him and be able to know your own self too. Baul is a philosophy and Baul is a music. The Bauls and Fakirs believe that *Murshid* or the Guru is the steersman who can lead a devotee to God. The philosophy gets passed on from 'Guru' to his disciples. Bauls are Hindus and Fakirs are Muslims and both the communities practice the same philosophy with little difference in nuances. We can see the impact and influence of Sufism, Vaishnavism, Buddhism and Nath doctrines on the Baul-Fakir philosophy. Rabindranath Tagore, the first non European Noble laureate poet and philosopher from Bengal, who also created the University 'Viswa Bharati' at Santiniketan got highly influenced by Baul music. It may not be wrong to say that Baul music was once a subaltern music, but reached the heart of Bengal including urban educated elites, through the hands of Tagore and has evolved as Soul of Bengal.



### Current status of Baul music in West Bengal:

In 2004, an intervention was taken up by banglanatak dot com with 272 Baul Fakirs in Nadia district of West Bengal, following Art for Life (AFL) methodology. Seeing the success, the same has been expanded in 2016 to cover additional 1200 Baul Fakirs across 5 districts in West Bengal - Birbhum, Bardhaman, Bankura, Murshidabad and Nadia. Now, there are about 2500 Baul Fakirs in West Bengal with an average age of 35-40 years, which was 48-50 earlier. There is also a lot of interactions in recent years between urban folk singers with Bauls and thus Baul music is now an integral part of urban folk singers too, about 300 of them regularly perform the same. There are quite a few popular Baul Fakiri melas, including Joydev Kenduli in Birbhum (the oldest mela), Gorbhanga in Nadia (started in 2010) and Shaktigarh in Kolkata (started in 2006). Now popular TV Channels showcase Baul Music on regular basis & Media coverage has also increased many fold.

## Celebrating Cultural Diversity

West Bengal is located at the Eastern part of India and has the best of Nature and Culture. A 7-14 days tour can take you through the journey of experiencing unique cultural traditions of Bengal including Patachitra (where artists make vegetable colours, paint scrolls using the same and narrate stories through singing while unfurling the Patachitra), Baul songs (500 years old traditional music of humanity and peace), Sunderbans (the largest delta in the world), Purulia (the place of Chau dance, masked dance which was recognized by UNESCO as masterpiece traditional art of humanity) and Darjeeling (the queen of Hills, Himalayan foothills).

**Surjahan** 2019

**WORLD PEACE MUSIC FESTIVAL**  
Kolkata 1-3 Feb, Goa 6-8 Feb

### Village Festivals



**POT Maya**

Pingla, Paschim Medinipur  
Nov 15 - 17, 2019



**Baul Fakiri Utsav**

Gorbhanga, Nadia  
Nov 22 - 24, 2019



**tourEast**

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## ART FOR LIFE : A journey of Culture and Development addressing Social Inclusion

'Art for Life' (AFL) is an initiative of 18 years old social enterprise, banglanatak dot com, working across India with a mission of fostering sustainable and equitable development. The organization is a social business with hybrid structure in nature. Contact Base is in consultative status with the Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee of UNESCO (since 2011) and in Special Consultative Status with UN ECOSOC (2013). Contact Base has partnership with UNESCO New Delhi for replication of AFL model across India. In 2015 and 2017 at ITB Berlin, UNWTO showcased the evolved tourism model as best practice in promotion of responsible cultural tourism led by traditional bearers and practitioners.

Driven by the idea of 'lack of skill causes poverty', banglanatak dot com felt the need to identify 'local skill' rather than just imposing 'skill through the eyes of educated class' from outside. Thus, they initiated AFL in 2004 with 3200 traditional folk artists living in 6 districts in West Bengal and looked at 'traditional art and culture' as possible 'skill' and started working on developing an eco-system for revival and rejuvenation of traditional art skills. AFL has 3 basic steps - Capacity Building, Linking the artists directly to the market and facilitating Exchange Collaboration and the promotional strategy is 'Village, Artist and Art' together. AFL got European Union funding support in 2009-11. UNESCO evaluated it around 2010 and reported remarkable progress both in socio-economic terms and strengthening art forms. In 2011-13, AFL was applied to neighbouring state Bihar with 1500 rural artists, which was supported by World Bank funded Govt project 'JEEViKA' and Indian Planning Commission. In 2013, West Bengal Govt signed a partnership with UNESCO and adopted AFL in developing 10 Rural Craft Hubs (RCH) benefitting 3000 handicraft artists and seeing the success it was expanded to 15 Rural Craft and Cultural Hub (RCCH) covering additional 12000 artists. West Bengal Khadi & Village Industries Board (WBKVIB) also adopted AFL in reaching out to 20000 rural poor engaged with Madur weaving, Sabai grass and Sal leaves, living in Purulia, Bankura, Paschim & Purba Medinipur.

The impact is visible - Socio Economic progress is immense, the happiness factor is high, many art forms have revived, transmission of knowledge to the next generation has happened, 6 handicraft villages got GI, 20 villages have evolved as Cultural Tourism destinations.

It may certainly be claimed that banglanatak dot com has innovated a culture based developmental model and has proven that 'Culture' as a community 'skill' has the potential to generate resources at grass-root resulting in economic gains for the community and bringing 'pride' to the village. This has contributed to the 'land' becoming 'more valuable land', changed 'unskilled labour' to 'skilled artists' and used 'artistic skill' as 'capital', which has resulted in 'no migration from village to city'. In Development framework, this is a remarkable impact. AFL is a scalable, replicable and proven development model using traditional art and culture as vehicle and also contributes to strengthening the art forms and safeguarding the same through transmission to the next generation. AFL is certainly a proven tool for Social Inclusion and has the potential of being applied to other countries including in Europe.

