



#PERSPECTIVE

# ECHOES OF A FADING MELODY

## The story of bansuri artist Kamol Sarker

Amidst the cacophony of the fairground, the sound of the flute came floating in the air. An elderly man was seen immersed in playing the bansuri (flute). He sat on a mat, with his craft — bamboo flutes — in front of him. Clad in a worn-out hoodie and faded pants, he looked no less endearing than a character from a modern-day fairy tale.

Hailing from the district of Jhenaidah, Kamol Sarker, now 80, attends fairs in the city, hoping to sell his handmade bamboo flutes.

"I have been making bansuri or bamboo flutes for more than 50 years," Kamol Sarker reminisces, his voice carrying the weight of a bygone era. His journey with the bansuri began in his youth, fuelled by a passion for the musical instrument and a desire to keep a traditional musical form alive.

During the Liberation War, Kamol Sarker went to Kolkata, and there, he met his teachers — Niranjana Kumar Biswas and Monoranjan Kumar Biswas.

"From Monoranjan da, I learned how to make idols, and Niranja da taught me the art of making flutes," he recounts. These mentors not only imparted skills, but also instilled in him a sense of cultural responsibility — to carry forward the legacy

of the bansuri (flute).

Sarker continued, "After returning to Bangladesh, I earned my living by making idols. But soon, I realised that idol-making does not pay compared to the time and effort we invest in it. So, I decided to continue crafting bansuri to earn my livelihood."

His craft took him beyond the borders of Bangladesh, all the way to Japan, where his skills were not only recognised but revered.

"Our government had sent me to Japan, and I used to make flutes, which were very popular there. The Japanese people valued and respected my craft," he recalls with a hint of pride.

In this modern age, where digitised music streams through every speaker and headphone, traditional musical instruments — with their rich history and cultural significance — seem to be fading into the background.

"Whenever I played my flute in the village, children and adults from every household came and listened to my music.

Many of them purchased flutes, so I was happy with my earnings. But those days are gone now and the melody of songs is now trapped in smartphones or television," recalled Kamol Sarker.

The technological revolution has indeed had a profound impact on traditional art forms.

Sarker observed, "It feels like today's technological advancements have stolen our listeners from us."

The shift from live, organic music to digitised tunes has not just altered listening habits but also the appreciation of the craftsmanship behind these musical instruments.

Despite his mastery and the respect, Kamol Sarker has garnered over the years, his situation underscores the challenges faced by traditional artists in modern times.

"I am 80 years old and have been awarded by numerous organisations, including the Bengal Foundation and the Bangladesh National Museum. But these awards and recognition are not enough for

artists like me to survive. Because at the end of the day, we want to have a roof over our heads and food on our plates."

His words echo a harsh reality — recognition does not always translate into sustenance.

Kamol Sarker's presence at a festival in the capital with his range of bansuris serves as a poignant reminder of the fragile state of traditional arts. He notes, "At folk festivals, we receive invitations, yet the enthusiasm, especially among the youth, to understand or preserve this art form is waning."

In an era where the old and the new are in constant flux, the story of Kamol Sarker is a call for us to recognise and support the artisans who, like Kamol Sarker, have dedicated their lives to their craft.

As the world races towards a digital future, let's pause and listen to the echoes of the bamboo flute — for in them lies the soul of a culture, the essence of a bygone era, and the artistry of a master who still hopes that his melodies will find their way back into the hearts of the people.

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**Photo Courtesy: Imtiaz Zawad**

