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Weaver's Music: Folk Songs and Creative Industries in Bangladesh

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Abstract: Traditional folk industries in Bangladesh, from handloom weaving and embroidery to pottery, metal crafts, and vernacular arts, contribute to cultural heritage and to a broad understanding of the creative economy. This article examines how these folk industries support creative economic development and national identity in Bangladesh. Drawing on creative-industry approaches, including Hesmondhalgh's cultural industries, Florida's creative class, and Caves's economic properties, I analyze twelve craft-associated folk songs presented only in English translation. The songs are treated as social texts that encode themes of cultural labour, place-based identity, intangible heritage, gendered economies, and the transformation of cottage industries within commercial value chains. Using qualitative textual analysis, I interpret each song's symbolism in dialogue with creative-economy scholarship. The analysis reveals a layered narrative: artisans demonstrate strong intrinsic commitment to craft and place-rooted creativity, yet face structural problems such as intermediary extraction, marginalization within policy, and the disruptive effects of mechanization. The discussion argues that centering grassroots cultural workers expands the creative economy concept beyond Western, urban frameworks and strengthens development debates by foregrounding equity and cultural rights.

Keywords: Creative economy, cultural industries, folk crafts, Bangladesh, Jamdani, Nakshi Kantha, creative labour, intangible heritage, rural artisans, Global South.

INTRODUCTION

In Bangladesh's villages and small towns, artisans sing at the loom, women hum over embroidery hoops, potters chant while turning their wheels, and rickshaw painters whistle folk tunes. These creative labours, weaving Jamdani muslin, stitching Nakshi Kantha quilts, shaping clay and metal, and painting vernacular street art, are more than cottage industries. They are carriers of culture and engines of creativity.

This article explores how Bangladesh's traditional folk industries contribute to the creative economy and national development by bringing a cultural-studies lens to a field often dominated by urban, Western-centred narratives. The creative economy, as framed in global policy discourse, is associated with income generation, job creation, and export growth through cultural and creative sectors [18]. At the same time, critical scholarship warns that celebratory policy talk can conceal labour precarity and unequal value capture [9]. Bangladesh's craft sectors make those contradictions visible.

Bangladesh offers a strong case because creativity has long flourished in rural workshops and domestic courtyards. Heritage crafts such as Jamdani weaving, Shital Pati mat weaving, Nakshi Kantha quilt-making, and Dhamrai brass casting have sustained livelihoods and cultural identity for generations [1, 19]. Historically, these industries

operated as familial cottage enterprises, rooted in local knowledge transmitted orally across generations. In recent decades, however, craft production has been reshaped by tourism, export markets, NGO and foundation interventions, and competition with mass-produced goods.

Despite their cultural and economic value, artisans often remain peripheral in mainstream creative-industry discourse. Florida's [8] creative class thesis prioritizes urban professionals and creative-city dynamics, which can eclipse rural cultural workers. Hesmondhalgh [9] cautions that creative-industry enthusiasm can divert attention from labour inequities and the ambivalent realities of cultural production. In Bangladesh, artisans frequently express pride in skill and place while confronting low incomes, health risks, and vulnerability to brokers, conditions that resonate with Caves's [5] account of demand uncertainty and creators' willingness to accept modest returns for the sake of cultural value.

This study centres artisans' voices through an unconventional lens: folk songs. In Bangladesh, folk songs serve as repositories of collective experience and social commentary. Weavers' "loom songs" can encode patterns and calculations, while craft ballads lament injustice or celebrate mastery. By analyzing twelve songs associated with different crafts and districts, and presenting only English translations here, the article examines how cultural texts reflect and shape understandings of cultural labour, identity, and creative economic change.

The article is guided by two questions. First, how do traditional folk industries in Bangladesh function as part of the creative economy and contribute to national development? Second, what do folk songs reveal about experiences of cultural labour, including identity, struggle, and agency, in relation to creative-industry theory? By addressing these questions, this study recentres Global South intangible heritage and artisan realities in creative-economy debates, treating culture not merely as a commodity but as lived social practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW: CREATIVE INDUSTRIES, CULTURAL LABOUR, AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Creative Industries and Cultural Labour

"Creative industries" refers to economic sectors in which creativity, skill, and symbolic value generate wealth. Caves [5] argues that creative work carries distinctive economic properties, including demand uncertainty ("nobody knows") and creators' tendency to prioritize cultural value ("art for art's sake"). These ideas help explain why artisans persist in labour-intensive craft production despite unstable demand and limited margins, and why quality, reputation, and authenticity become critical forms of value.

Hesmondhalgh's cultural industries framework foregrounds power, labour conditions, commodification, and inequality. He cautions that celebratory narratives can mask exploitation and precarious work, and that cultural production is often shaped by unequal bargaining power [9]. This caution is directly relevant to craft sectors where high-value products circulate through boutiques and export chains while producers remain underpaid and poorly protected.

Florida's [8] creative class thesis emphasizes urban growth driven by creative professionals and "creative cities" competing for talent. Although influential, the model has been criticized for metropolitan bias and for overlooking rural and informal creatives. In Bangladesh, rural weavers, craftswomen, and street artists are clearly creative workers, yet their work is rarely captured by the urban professional profile assumed in much creative economy policy.

Pratt [14] calls for a situated understanding of creative economies that resists policy transfer without contextual adaptation. What counts as a creative or cultural industry varies by region, history, and social organization. Bangladesh's craft traditions foreground place-based practice, community-embedded labour, and collective knowledge transmission, often in contexts far removed from the urban imaginaries that underpin many creative-city policies.

Intangible Heritage, Development, and Global South Critiques

UNESCO's intangible heritage discourse frames practices, expressions, knowledge, and skills recognized by communities, including traditional craftsmanship. Heritage framing positions folk industries as carriers of identity and social value, not only as economic activities [19]. The UNDP–UNESCO Creative Economy Report argues that cultural and creative sectors can widen development pathways by linking economic and cultural domains [18]. Yet critiques warn that dominant creative economy models can marginalize informal, rural, and subaltern cultural workers when policy attention centers on urban clusters and export branding.

Bangladesh has shown growing interest in integrating cultural sectors into development through craft foundations, heritage initiatives, tourism circuits, and market networks. Reports highlight growth potential contingent on investment, skills development, and marketing support [4]. However, structural challenges persist, including informal labour conditions, aging artisan populations, succession gaps, price volatility, and pressures from mechanization and mass production. Public discussion also questions whether heritage recognition translates into equitable benefits for producers [3].

This article builds on these debates by using folk songs to bring artisans' perspectives into conversation with creative economy theory. The songs function as social texts that encode labour experience, moral critique, and community values, making visible dimensions of creative labour that macroeconomic framing often overlooks.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in cultural studies and textual analysis. The primary data consists of twelve folk songs linked to craft industries and localities in Bangladesh. The selection represents diverse folk industries, including textile weaving, embroidery, mat weaving, pottery, metal casting, and vernacular painting, and captures thematic variation such as pride, hardship, gendered labour, and adaptation to change. The use of folk songs as data follows scholarship that treats vernacular expression as socially embedded narrative evidence [7]. Songs are analyzed as central texts rather than decorative illustrations. I use close reading to identify themes related to cultural labour, creativity, identity, exploitation, and modernization. The analysis attends to metaphor,

affect, repetition, and the social relations implied by the lyrics, including references to brokers, apprenticeships, domestic pedagogy, and displacement.

To connect song analysis with creative economy discourse, the study engages scholarship on creative work's economic properties [5], cultural labour and inequality [9, 10], place-based creative geographies [14], and Global South critiques of development-oriented creative economy agendas [13]. Ethical considerations were observed in handling folk materials. The songs are presented only in English translation to foreground thematic analysis and to meet publication requirements for English-language venues.

ANALYSIS

Cultural Labour: Pride, Exploitation, and Resilience in Artisan Songs

The folk songs of Bangladeshi artisans portray cultural labour as skilled and meaningful yet economically precarious. A recurring motif is the coexistence of pride and suffering. This dual reality resonates with Hesmondhalgh's emphasis on the ambivalence of cultural production and with Caves's accounts of intrinsic motivation amid demand uncertainty [5, 9].

Song 1: Weaver Narayan Das's Lament (Pabna District)

Beguiled by the loom-house, my life is lost.

I was only ten years old when I started work at the loom;

Now I'm forty, stricken with consumption.

If only death would come for me now.

O friends, listen well,

Beguiled by the loom-house, my life is lost. [11]

The song frames the loom-house as both workplace and fate. By beginning work at ten, the weaver situates craft labour within hereditary apprenticeship systems, where children enter skilled production early. The text explicitly ties labour to bodily decline, and "consumption" evokes long-term illness shaped by poverty and harsh working conditions.

The repeated refrain functions as both lament and testimony. It does not only describe personal misfortune; it marks the loom-house as a social institution that absorbs life. This is crucial for creative economy analysis because it resists romanticizing craft as pure heritage. Instead, it insists that heritage is produced through a demanding labour regime that can be physically destructive.

In theoretical terms, the song illustrates the costs that are often hidden when cultural products enter higher-value markets. Hesmondhalgh's warning about "hype" masking labour realities is directly relevant here [9]. The weaver's voice also complicates "art for art's sake" narratives because devotion to craft does not cancel suffering; it coexists with it [5].

The song also constructs the loom-house as an architectural metaphor for enclosure. Even when it does not describe walls directly, the implied spatial confinement produces a distinctive social geography of labour: the weaver's world is narrowed to a single site where time, bodily rhythm, and economic necessity converge. Read this way, the loom-house functions as a micro-institution that disciplines attention and movement. It is not simply a location of production. It is an environment that reorganizes everyday life around continuous output, thereby making creativity inseparable from constrained mobility and limited social horizons.

A second layer of meaning emerges through the song's use of direct address, which shifts the lyric from private grief to collective pedagogy. The appeal to "friends" positions the singer as a witness speaking on behalf of a larger group, and it frames the lyric as a warning transmitted across generations of workers. This communicative stance matters because it suggests a community of listeners who already understand the loom's demands, but who still need public affirmation of what is otherwise normalized. The song therefore operates as a vernacular form of documentation that preserves labour memory, especially in contexts where formal archival or policy records rarely capture artisans' interior lives.

The lyric also implies an "economy of time" that is central to handloom craft but is often absent from creative economy discourse. Handloom weaving depends on extended, repetitive, and carefully synchronized cycles of work. A song that circles back to the same refrain performs that temporality. It mimics recurrence, routine, and the return of tasks that cannot be rushed without risking quality. In this sense, the musical structure itself becomes an analytic clue: repetition is not merely aesthetic. It is the sound of a production system where time is experienced as circular and unrelenting, and where craft excellence is purchased through endurance.

Additionally, the song invites a reading through the politics of voice and audibility. The weaver is not requesting charity or praising patrons. The weaver is asserting interpretive authority over the meaning of labour. That stance challenges the typical representational hierarchy in which elites, marketers, or heritage institutions narrate craft from the outside. Here, the artisan narrates the craft's moral economy from within. This is especially relevant for heritage and creative economy frameworks that frequently showcase products while muting producer perspectives. The song becomes an instrument of counter-narration that re-centres the worker as the primary interpreter of craft life.

Finally, the song can be understood as a critique of the unequal distribution of risk in cultural production. Handloom craft is exposed to fluctuating demand, price volatility, and credit dependence. While those structural conditions may not be spelled out, the lyric's tone of irrevocability signals that the weaver bears the full burden of uncertainty without meaningful buffers. In creative economy terms, the song points to the need to track not only symbolic value and market circulation, but also how risk is allocated across the value chain, and how that allocation shapes the sustainability of artisan livelihoods over time.

Song 2: Class Solidarity Verse (Rural Bengal Context)

Some sleep in beds of ease,

Others toil in the bazaar day and night.

O brother, the blacksmith, the potter, the weaver, the peasant, all are destitute.

Everyone among them,

They are all one group. [2]

This verse groups craft and agrarian labourers into a shared class of hardship. The contrast between those who "sleep in beds of ease" and those who labour day and night establishes a moral economy, dividing society into beneficiaries and producers. It recognizes that artisans and peasants create material life while remaining impoverished.

The verse functions as vernacular social theory. It does not require formal political ideology to name inequality; it emerges from lived experience. For creative economy debates, this matters because it anticipates critiques that cultural value chains reward owners and intermediaries more than creators.

The verse also compresses a complex social structure into a sharp nocturnal contrast: sleep becomes a sign of security, while night-long labour becomes a sign of exposure. This is not simply about working more hours. It is about the unequal capacity to rest, recover, and plan. Read as a labour politics of fatigue, the lyric points to a structural privilege that is often invisible in economic narratives. In creative economy terms, it suggests that inequality is not only measured through wages, but also through time sovereignty, bodily recovery, and the ability to step away from work without immediate survival risk.

The mention of the bazaar is equally significant because it identifies the marketplace as a central node of exploitation and dependency. The bazaar is where goods are priced, where credit circulates, and where intermediaries mediate access to buyers. By placing toil "in the bazaar day and night," the song implicitly marks the market as an arena of constant negotiation and vulnerability rather than a neutral space of exchange. This is a useful analytic move because it aligns craft and agrarian labour within the same distributive regime, where the terms of trade are set by actors who do not perform the underlying work.

The occupational list functions as a rhetorical inventory of "foundational" labour, emphasizing that these workers collectively sustain everyday life. Tools, pots, cloth, and food are not luxuries. They are infrastructures of survival and social reproduction. By assembling these occupations into one line, the verse underscores their interdependence and suggests that deprivation is systemic rather than accidental. That is a meaningful contribution to creative economy discussions, because it repositions craft from a boutique heritage narrative to a core component of material provisioning and community maintenance.

The lyric's address to "O brother" also performs a politics of recognition. It refuses to treat artisans as isolated entrepreneurs competing for scarce market share. Instead, it frames them as members of a shared moral community. This framing complicates individualistic models of creative success that dominate many policy environments. It implies that meaningful improvement requires collective mechanisms, such as cooperatives, mutual aid, shared bargaining, and federated representation, rather than solely skills training or branding initiatives.

Lastly, The concluding statement, “they are all one group,” highlights solidarity across occupations. In policy terms, it suggests that interventions should not isolate crafts as heritage-only sectors but integrate them into broader labour rights, welfare, and rural development frameworks, linking creative economy aims to equity and dignity [18, 9]. The line can be read as an argument about shared exposure to structural shocks. When harvests fail, when demand drops, when input prices rise, or when conflict disrupts trade routes, these groups are typically the first to absorb the shock and the last to receive support. The lyric therefore anticipates a resilience argument: social protection, decent-work standards, and fair procurement are not peripheral to cultural development. They are preconditions for sustaining craft and agrarian livelihoods that underwrite a broader creative economy in the first place.

Song 3: Middlemen and the “Mahajan” (Narsingdi District Weaving Context)

> *Weavers know cloth, barbers know the blade’s edge.*
>
> *The phoria mahajans know only how to suck the weaver’s blood.*
>
> *They are brokers and leeches. O brother, let me sing their praise (sarcastically). [15]*

This song satirizes the mahajan, a financier or buyer who controls raw materials and pricing. The structure is comparative: each profession “knows” its craft, but the mahajan’s expertise is framed as extraction rather than skill, hence the metaphor of blood-sucking.

The sarcasm signals a critical public voice. Folk songs often operate as community critique, allowing artisans to express grievances in a shareable form. Such cultural expression can function as an oppositional “hidden transcript,” preserving critique even when direct confrontation is risky [17].

Analytically, the song maps onto creative-industry concerns about intermediaries capturing disproportionate value. Across cultural industries, agents, platforms, and distributors may earn more than creators, especially when creators lack bargaining power [10]. The song provides a localized vocabulary for that structural problem.

The song also foregrounds a politics of knowledge that goes beyond the simple contrast of “skill” versus “extraction.” By framing craft knowledge as tactile, situated expertise (“knowing cloth,” “knowing the blade’s edge”), the verse implies that legitimate knowledge is earned through embodied practice and responsibility for outcomes. In contrast, the mahajan’s “knowing” is depicted as knowledge of leverage: how to position oneself where value passes through and can be skimmed. This implicitly critiques a social order in which power is detached from making and attached instead to control over access, liquidity, and circulation.

A second implication concerns informational asymmetry. Cloth quality, thread counts, shrinkage, and finishing are domains where makers hold technical expertise, but pricing and market intelligence often sit elsewhere. The lyric suggests that intermediaries profit not only by “taking a cut,” but by controlling what makers can know about downstream demand, prevailing rates, and alternative buyers. This is a structural critique of opaque markets: when artisans lack timely information and credible price benchmarks,

they are pushed into disadvantageous agreements even when they can clearly assess the product's material quality.

The verse also encodes the logics of dependency that can emerge from informal credit and advance-purchase systems. In many artisan economies, the mahajan's power is tied to the ability to finance inputs and provide cash advances against future production. The "blood" metaphor can be read as a comment on how repayment is extracted from the body's labour time, not from surplus profits. Under such arrangements, the artisan's risk is front-loaded and personal: missed deadlines, illness, or market downturns are absorbed by the maker, while the intermediary retains flexibility to reprice, delay payment, or shift sourcing.

The song's diction further implies moral injury, not merely economic disadvantage. "Leeches" and "blood" frame the relationship as parasitic, which is a stronger claim than "unfair trade." It identifies the intermediary's conduct as violating a shared ethical standard of exchange, reciprocity, and community obligation. That framing matters analytically because it shows artisans evaluating markets through moral criteria, not only through income. In other words, the grievance is about the corruption of social relations around craft, where trust is replaced by predation and where livelihood becomes a site of humiliation. There is also an institutional reading embedded in what the song does not need to say. The verse presumes that artisans lack enforceable protections that would normally constrain predatory brokerage: transparent contracts, standardized weights and measures, grievance mechanisms, and effective dispute resolution. When such governance is absent or inaccessible, cultural expression becomes a substitute arena for accountability. The lyric functions as reputational sanction, circulating a shared judgment that can influence how communities interpret, tolerate, or resist brokerage power.

Finally, the lyric points toward alternatives without naming them directly. If the core problem is control over inputs, pricing, and market access, then solutions need to redistribute those capacities rather than merely improve "skills." That can include collective purchasing of raw materials, shared storage and quality certification, cooperative bargaining, and direct-to-buyer channels that reduce informational dependence. Read this way, the song is not only critique. It is a diagnostic statement about where power sits in the craft economy and what would need to change for artisans' knowledge to translate into fairer returns.

Song 4: Kuber Goshai's Song on Technique and Resilience in Weaving

I turn the spindle of love with utmost care.

If the thread snaps,

I'll lift and rejoin it on the bobbin. Why fear so much?

However, many tangles, I will straighten them all.

I'll cast the shuttle deftly; not a single warp will snag. [15]

This stanza reads as both instruction and philosophy. It contains procedural steps for handling breakage and tangles, common problems in handloom weaving. The voice is confident, framing technical competence as a response to uncertainty and disruption.

The metaphor “spindle of love” elevates technique into affective devotion. It suggests that skill is not only mechanical but relational. Tools are companions, and careful attention is both practical and ethical. This is a key corrective to views that treat craft labour as merely “traditional.” The stanza emphasizes problem-solving and embodied knowledge as central features of creativity [5].

The stanza also illustrates how knowledge circulates in oral and musical forms. As a mnemonic and cultural archive, the song shows how craftsmanship is carried through practice, memory, and community transmission rather than only through formal institutions [19].

Moreover, the stanza functions as a miniature ethics of care that is specific to craft practice. “Utmost care” is not simply a preference for neatness. It signals responsibility toward materials that are scarce, costly, and difficult to replace, as well as toward a process in which small errors can cascade into waste. In handloom economies, waste often translates directly into lost income and delayed delivery. The song’s insistence on calm repair, rather than panic, therefore points to a disciplined emotional posture that is economically consequential. It teaches not only technique, but also composure as a professional virtue.

In addition, the sequence of actions, breakage, rejoining, untangling, and smooth shuttling, articulates an implicit theory of resilience. The weaver does not imagine uninterrupted flow. Disruption is treated as normal and expected. What distinguishes expertise is the capacity to restore continuity without damaging the structure. This is important for creative economy scholarship because it reframes creativity as maintenance and repair, not only invention. The craftsperson’s creativity lies in sustaining a delicate system over time, keeping production viable under conditions where interruption is routine.

At the same time, the stanza’s rhetorical questions and escalating assurances establish an apprenticeship voice. “Why fear so much?” is directed at a novice listener who might interpret breakage as failure. The song counters that interpretation by recoding breakage as an ordinary moment in the workflow. This suggests that craft learning includes psychological training: learners must develop tolerance for error and confidence in correction. The stanza models how communities cultivate expertise through reassurance, repetition, and shared verbal cues, creating a pedagogical infrastructure alongside the physical tools of production.

Equally important, the line about straightening “however many tangles” evokes the accumulated knowledge of variable material conditions. Tangles rarely occur as isolated events. They may reflect humidity, uneven thread quality, hurried winding, or interruptions in concentration. By asserting that every tangle can be resolved, the singer implies a toolkit of adaptive responses grounded in long experience. This highlight craft as situated knowledge responsive to micro-conditions, rather than a fixed heritage script reproduced mechanically.

Finally, the promise that “not a single warp will snag” can be read as a statement about professional reputation and quality assurance. In many craft markets, repeat orders and community standing depend on reliability and defect avoidance. The stanza thus contains an implicit quality standard and a claim to mastery, emphasizing that competence generates trust as a form of social capital that circulates alongside the product itself.

Song 5: Mechanization and Displacement (Stanza 1, Sirajganj District Context)

The Chittaranjan machine has arrived, finishing off the old handlooms.

Those who weave on this machine are flaunting their success.

Goldsmiths, cobblers, blacksmiths, potters, even young Brahmins,

Now all the youngsters rush to spin bobbins; nothing of the weaver's craft remains for us. [11]

This stanza documents the shock of mechanization. The "Chittaranjan machine" stands for powerloom production, which increases speed and output, disrupting handloom livelihoods. The tone frames mechanization as an invasion that "finishes off" older practices.

The song tracks social reshuffling. By listing multiple occupations and castes entering machine-based production, it suggests that the specialized status of hereditary weavers is eroding. The grievance is not only economic but also about recognition, skill distinctiveness, and cultural identity.

From a creative economy standpoint, the stanza highlights that productivity transitions can produce cultural displacement if they are not managed with protections and adaptation pathways. The song insists on accounting for community-level costs, including identity loss and the devaluation of specialized knowledge.

Furthermore, the stanza is a commentary on how "success" becomes publicly legible when technology changes. The line about machine weavers "flaunting" implies a new status economy in which prosperity must be performed through visible markers, not simply earned through mastery. The speaker is therefore critiquing a shift in the social meaning of labour: recognition moves away from craft excellence and toward conspicuous outcomes associated with mechanized throughput. This matters because it shows that modernization is not only a technical retooling. It rewrites the symbolic grammar through which communities interpret dignity, achievement, and social worth.

Conversely, the occupational and caste list signals a reorganization of boundary lines in local economies. The verse does not simply note new entrants. It points to a broader instability of occupational identity, where established divisions of labour are being renegotiated under the pressure of a new production regime. When groups traditionally associated with other crafts enter mechanized weaving, the stanza implies that labour is being re-sorted by access to equipment, capital, and market connections rather than by inherited specialization. The lyric thus captures a transition from a skill-based hierarchy to an access-based hierarchy, where owning or operating the machine becomes the decisive credential.

Meanwhile, the focus on "youngsters" rushing to spin bobbins indicates a generational pivot in aspirations and learning pathways. Bobbin work is presented as the entry point to the new system, suggesting that training is reorganized around machine-adjacent tasks rather than long apprenticeships in handloom technique. This is a subtle critique of deskilling through modular labour: when production is broken into narrower, repeatable roles, novices can participate quickly, but they may never acquire the integrative knowledge that constitutes handloom expertise. The stanza therefore implies a

loss of holistic craft formation, not just of jobs, because the knowledge ecology that once sustained mastery is being replaced by segmented work routines.

Similarly, the lyric hints at changing relations between labour and time. Handloom weaving historically rewards slow calibration, patience, and sustained attention, while powerloom regimes privilege speed, volume, and standardized pace. By portraying the machine's arrival as decisive and sudden, the stanza registers a new temporal discipline entering the community. The effect is not simply faster production. It is a new rhythm of life that pressures workers to align bodies, schedules, and expectations with continuous throughput. In this context, craft identity is threatened not only by competition, but by the imposition of a different time regime that is incompatible with how handloom skill has traditionally been cultivated.

Ultimately, the stanza can be read as a warning about cultural homogenization in the marketplace. When mechanized systems dominate, product differentiation often shifts from subtle variations of handwork to standardized outputs optimized for scale. The speaker's claim that "nothing of the weaver's craft remains" can thus be interpreted as anxiety over the erosion of signature techniques, localized motifs, and tacit practices that make cloth recognizably tied to a community. Under this reading, the stanza is diagnosing a cultural risk: when scale becomes the primary value, the market may stop rewarding the kinds of micro-distinction that sustain artisanal reputations, weakening the incentives to preserve complex, place-rooted craft knowledge.

Song 6: Mechanization and Displacement (Stanza 2, Sirajganj District Context)

Shutting the loom, the weaver sets out on the road.

One sells herbal medicine, another peddles shoes and umbrellas.

Some wear pants and shirts now; some don suits and coats.

We weavers die of shame. [11]

"Shutting the loom" is a decisive action that carries the weight of an ending, not simply a pause in production. The loom is a technology, but it is also a domestic anchor, a daily rhythm, and a site of intergenerational pedagogy. When the weaver closes it and leaves, the song marks a rupture in the infrastructure of craft life: the soundscape of work, the localized routines of collaboration, and the intimate relation between body and tool. The road becomes a new workplace, but it is also a symbol of dispossession because it replaces a stable, socially recognized site of making with an exposed, uncertain public space where the worker must constantly negotiate attention, permission, and safety.

The inventory of alternative livelihoods is not random. Herbal medicine, shoes, and umbrellas are all commodities tied to immediate need, bodily vulnerability, and everyday risk management. The weaver moves from producing culturally distinctive goods whose value is grounded in skill, time, and reputation to circulating items that are easier to obtain and easier to imitate. That shift implies a collapse of comparative advantage at the household level: when specialized mastery no longer guarantees a viable market position, the economic logic pushes workers toward low-entry commerce. The song therefore captures an economic downgrading that is also epistemic, because the weaver's

accumulated knowledge becomes less convertible into exchange value in the new occupational landscape.

The clothing sequence works as a condensed sociology of respectability. Pants and shirts, then suits and coats, index entry into a different regime of public legitimacy, one more closely aligned with urban professionalism, bureaucratic employment, and middle-class appearance norms. Yet the lyric suggests that these garments are not simply chosen. They are demanded by the new economy as a credential for selling, moving, and being taken seriously in unfamiliar markets. Clothing here becomes a technology of social translation: displaced workers attempt to reduce stigma and increase trust by adopting the visual codes of groups with higher status. At the same time, the rapid escalation from casual to formal attire signals a pressure to "perform" upward mobility even when material security is not actually improving, which deepens the gap between appearance and lived reality.

The line "we weavers" matters because the speaker refuses an individual story and insists on collective identity. The shame is not framed as private embarrassment but as a group condition produced through public comparison. It functions like a social verdict: the community's signature occupation loses its taken-for-granted legitimacy, and the weaver's name no longer reliably signals a respected skill. In craft-based communities, occupational identity often underwrites social relationships, marriage negotiations, local authority, and everyday recognition. The song's intensity suggests that displacement damages these relational economies, not only earnings. It can fracture community cohesion by turning shared craft identity into a stigmatized marker, thereby discouraging younger generations from affiliating with the craft even when they still carry the knowledge.

Read as a critique of development narratives, the stanza also exposes how "efficiency" reorganizes responsibility. When production shifts toward systems that reward scale and speed, displaced artisans are effectively instructed to self-rehabilitate through whatever livelihood improvisations are available. The song refuses that normalization by recording the reputational and social costs of being made "flexible." From a cultural labour perspective, it implies that a credible transition policy must treat skill communities as social institutions rather than as replaceable labour inputs. The relevant question is not only how many jobs a sector creates, but how transitions preserve or dissolve the social ecosystems that sustain training, quality norms, mutual support, and collective identity, themes that resonate with scholarship on creative labour, inequality, and development in cultural sectors [10, 13].

Song 7: Potter's Paradox (Northern Bangladesh Context)

With clay I shape pots and jars; clay is my life.

I spin the wheel to form vessels, honoring the earth.

Every morning I knead the mud.

I turn earth into gold, yet my stomach still burns with hunger. [15]

The opening claim, "clay is my life," establishes an ontology of work in which material and identity are inseparable. Clay is not presented as a neutral input. It is a medium that ties

the potter to place, seasonality, and local ecology, because clay quality, moisture, and availability vary by region and weather. The line therefore signals a lived dependence on environmental conditions that are rarely acknowledged in creative economy frameworks. The craft is grounded in land relations that shape both production possibilities and vulnerability, especially when floods, droughts, or land-use changes disrupt access to suitable clay.

The description of spinning the wheel and forming vessels emphasizes process over product. The potter highlights the rhythm of making, suggesting that the craft is constituted through repeated bodily coordination, hand pressure, and calibrated motion. This foregrounding of process is analytically useful because it frames creativity as skilled transformation through routine rather than through novelty. The potter's pride comes from mastery of a sequence that must be repeated with precision to avoid collapse, cracking, or uneven firing. In this sense, the song directs attention to the labour intensity embedded in everyday objects that are often treated as low-value because they are common.

"Every morning I knead the mud" situates production within a daily cycle that begins before any visible product exists. Kneading is preparatory labour, often invisible in market narratives that focus on finished goods. It involves conditioning the material to remove air pockets and achieve workable consistency, and it can be physically demanding. By naming this step, the song implicitly contests the idea that value begins at the moment of sale or at the moment of aesthetic completion. It frames value as accumulated through a chain of preparatory tasks that are necessary, repetitive, and bodily taxing, which has implications for how labour is recognized and compensated.

The "earth into gold" claim can be read as an argument about social utility and symbolic valuation at the same time. Earthen vessels hold water, store grain, cook food, and support household hygiene. They are infrastructures of everyday life, especially in rural economies. Yet their low market price often reflects social hierarchies of taste, where handmade utilitarian goods are undervalued relative to branded or industrial substitutes. The lyric therefore implies a gap between usefulness and reward, suggesting that the market fails to price the craft's contribution to social reproduction. In that light, the potter is not simply lamenting hunger. The potter is exposing a misrecognition of what counts as valuable work. The closing image of hunger also signals how risk and volatility are absorbed at the household level. Pottery production is sensitive to fuel costs, kiln access, breakage rates, and seasonal demand. When inputs rise or sales fall, the potter's body becomes the balancing mechanism, bearing the deficit through reduced consumption. This transforms hunger into an index of structural fragility, not personal failure. For creative economy policy, the song's logic points toward interventions that stabilize the conditions of production, such as reliable access to affordable fuel, shared kilns and storage, collective bargaining for inputs, and procurement channels that guarantee minimum orders. It also supports broader arguments that cultural development must include social protection and decent work to prevent craft livelihoods from being sustained through bodily deprivation [5, 18].

Gendered Creativity and Intangible Heritage: Women's Voices in Folk Craft

Creativity in Bangladesh's folk industries is gendered. Certain crafts, particularly embroidery and mat weaving, have been associated with women's domestic labour and

intergenerational teaching. Folk songs highlight women as bearers of intangible heritage, while also reminding us that cultural value can coexist with under-recognition and unequal compensation.

Song 8: Nakshi Kantha, Story and Memory (Jamalpur District Context)

In every home a Nakshi Kantha is sewn,

Telling the joyful tales of mothers and daughters.

With each stitch, a memory is threaded.

In every tiny puncture, a story of life is embedded. [11]

This song treats embroidery as narrative practice. The opening line, "in every home," establishes Nakshi Kantha as a distributed cultural infrastructure rather than a niche craft. It frames the practice as ordinary and ubiquitous, which is precisely why it can be overlooked in formal cultural economy mapping. When creativity is embedded in domestic routine, it becomes difficult to classify as "industry," yet it sustains a wide ecology of skill, aesthetic preference, and informal learning. The lyric therefore positions the household as a key site of cultural production, challenging models that locate creativity primarily in markets, studios, or institutions.

The mother–daughter linkage also signals that kantha-making is a pedagogy of intimacy. Learning does not occur through abstract instruction alone. It unfolds through shared time, observation, correction, and conversation. The song implies that the craft transmits values as well as techniques, including patience, care, and attentiveness to detail. This matters analytically because it reframes heritage as a mode of social reproduction: the craft reproduces not only patterns and stitches, but also forms of relational competence that shape how knowledge is carried across generations.

The line about "joyful tales" indicates that kantha is not only a repository of hardship or necessity. It also records pleasure, affection, humor, and everyday celebration. This widens how we interpret women's domestic creativity. Rather than treating it as a compensatory activity inside constrained lives, the song emphasizes expressive agency. It suggests that women curate what is worth remembering and how it should be remembered, selecting motifs and scenes that encode their own priorities. In this way, the kantha becomes a narrative choice, not simply a utilitarian object.

"Each stitch" as a unit of memory points to the craft's micro-temporality. A kantha is assembled through thousands of small acts that accumulate over long periods, often interrupted by household responsibilities. The lyric highlights the granular scale at which narrative is built, which is also the scale at which labour is often undervalued. Markets may treat the quilt as a single item, but the song insists that it is a composite of time, attention, and repeated decisions. This is a crucial insight for cultural labour analysis because it identifies an economy of "small work" that is not easily captured by standard productivity measures.

The "tiny puncture" image also carries an embodied dimension that complicates purely celebratory readings. Needlework can strain eyesight, posture, and hands, and it

frequently occurs in conditions where women's labour is expected to remain quiet, uninterrupted, and secondary to other duties. By focusing on punctures, the lyric implicitly connects storytelling to bodily effort, suggesting that narrative is produced through disciplined physical endurance. That link helps explain why recognition is not only a matter of paying more for products. It is also a matter of acknowledging the embodied cost of producing culturally meaningful objects within uneven domestic labour regimes.

Finally, the stanza gestures toward questions of authorship and ownership that become sharper when kantha enters commercial circuits. If the quilt holds "stories of life," then its circulation raises ethical issues about who has the right to narrate, translate, brand, and profit from those stories. Commercial success can expand visibility and income, but it can also flatten the quilt's situated meanings into standardized motifs that sell well. The song's emphasis on embedded life stories therefore functions as a claim for interpretive sovereignty: the maker is not merely a producer of decorative goods but an author of lived archives. Any equitable creative economy approach must protect that authorship through fair contracts, attribution norms, and producer control over design choices, aligning with broader debates about cultural labour, dignity, and value extraction [10, 19].

Song 9: Shital Pati Weaving, Teaching and Well-being (Sylhet District Context)

We cut the murta reeds and weave a cool mat,

Bringing a gentle breeze into the house on hot days.

Grandmother teaches granddaughter, golden craft in hand.

We spread the Shital Pati, and the household fills with happiness. [6]

The opening action, cutting murta reeds, places the craft within an ecological and seasonal economy. The rhyme begins before weaving starts, emphasizing that Shital Pati (a kind of mat) production depends on knowing where reeds grow, when they are ready, and how they should be harvested without damaging future supply. This positions craft knowledge as environmental literacy. It also suggests a relationship between household wellbeing and local resource stewardship, where sustainability is not a policy slogan but a practical condition for keeping the craft alive.

The "cool mat" and the "gentle breeze" imagery frames the object as an everyday climate technology. Rather than treating creativity as primarily symbolic, the rhyme emphasizes sensory relief, thermal comfort, and domestic health during hot seasons. The craft therefore operates as a form of vernacular design that responds to local conditions more effectively than many mass-produced substitutes. This is an important analytic point because it shows how creative labour can be valued through its contribution to lived comfort and resilience, especially in contexts where heat and humidity shape daily life.

The teaching scene between grandmother and granddaughter describes a specific transmission model: apprenticeship through proximity. The pedagogy is embedded in shared domestic time rather than separated into formal instruction. The rhyme implies that learning includes observing hand pressure, reed alignment, and finishing techniques that are difficult to codify in writing. This supports the idea that intangible heritage persists through embodied demonstration, and it also clarifies why disruptions to domestic time,

migration, school schedules, or wage labour participation can quickly weaken transmission. The craft's continuity is therefore sensitive to broader shifts in household organization.

Calling the craft "golden" functions as a claim about dignity and worth, but it also reflects an internal valuation system that may not align with external pricing. The rhyme suggests that community recognition and pride exist even when market remuneration is modest. This tension helps explain why crafts may persist under economic pressure: symbolic value and household meaning can motivate continuation. At the same time, when external actors commodify the craft for heritage markets, the "golden" label can be appropriated as branding while producers remain undercompensated. The rhyme thus implicitly supports the need for valuation mechanisms that translate cultural esteem into fair returns.

The household "fills with happiness" is not simply emotional decoration. It indicates that the craft is woven into social relations and domestic order. A Shital Pati is used, shared, gifted, and displayed, which means it participates in kinship economies and everyday hospitality practices. The object helps structure how guests are welcomed and how family members gather, rest, and sleep. In this way, the mat is both a material good and a social facilitator. Creative production here sustains community life by enabling forms of togetherness that rely on comfort and care.

Finally, the rhyme's focus on women's teaching and household use raises questions of recognition when the craft moves into commercial channels. If the mat's value is rooted in domestic welfare and relational labour, market pricing that treats it as a decorative commodity will miss much of what makes it meaningful. Moreover, commercialization can shift control over design decisions, production pace, and quality standards, potentially increasing unpaid preparatory work and intensifying time pressure. A serious equity lens therefore requires not only payment for finished mats but also acknowledgement of the full labour chain, including harvesting, processing, sorting, drying, and finishing. It also requires strengthening women's decision-making power in cooperatives, procurement systems, and branding narratives so that heritage recognition does not translate into new forms of extraction [19].

Place-Based Identity and the Global Reach of Local Crafts

A hallmark of the creative economy is its capacity to express and project place identity. In Bangladesh, certain localities are strongly associated with specific crafts. These associations function as cultural branding, but they also reflect histories of skill transmission, community reputation, and regional pride. Folk songs articulate this place-based creativity while also revealing the conditions under which it is produced.

Song 10: Jamdani Pride and Pattern-Song (Dhaka and Surrounding Weaving Villages)

Our Dhakai Jamdani is filled with exquisite artistry.

The weaver sings out the design in counted rhythms.

In flowers and vines dance enchanting motifs.

A mine of songs is woven in the colourful threads. [15]

To begin with, the opening declaration positions “Dhakai Jamdani” as a collective signature rather than an anonymous product category. By naming the craft in geographic terms, the lyric asserts that the textile’s legitimacy is anchored in a specific ecology of practice: local lineages of skill, shared standards of fineness, and community-based judgments about what counts as “exquisite.” This is not simply pride in origin. It is an implicit claim to authority over definitions, suggesting that the community itself is the primary arbiter of authenticity, quality, and stylistic integrity.

Next, the line about singing designs in counted rhythms points to an epistemology of pattern-making that treats sound as a cognitive tool. Counting, humming, and rhythmic recitation can function as a method for maintaining concentration, pacing complex sequences, and coordinating steps that must align precisely across warp and weft. The lyric therefore reveals that Jamdani’s complexity is sustained through multi-sensory intelligence, where hearing, memory, and touch operate together. This is analytically important because it reframes the craft as a knowledge system with its own techniques of calculation and control, not merely a visual tradition that can be fully captured through diagrams or external documentation.

In a similar vein, the “flowers and vines” imagery does more than describe motif content. It situates Jamdani aesthetics within a broader Bengali language of ornamentation that is legible as both nature-inspired and culturally codified. The lyric suggests that motifs carry social meaning and recognizable style conventions that circulate within local taste communities, which is why they can be immediately tied to place identity. In that sense, the song offers a reminder that design is not only individual creativity. It is also shared vocabulary, maintained through communal recognition, critique, and imitation, which becomes a key resource when the craft enters competitive markets that reward distinctive branding.

By contrast, the line “a mine of songs” frames the textile as a reservoir of cultural labour that exceeds what the finished cloth can display. A mine is something that must be worked, and its value is extracted through sustained effort. This metaphor therefore highlights the depth of skill, repetition, and time embedded in Jamdani production, while also implying that creativity is layered and abundant, not scarce. It subtly contests market narratives that treat Jamdani value as if it naturally resides in the object. Instead, the lyric insists that value is produced through a dense cultural field of performance, knowledge exchange, and disciplined attention that is carried by the community. Ultimately, the internal branding performed by the song implies a governance question: who gets to represent Jamdani in public culture and who captures the premium associated with its name. When “Dhakai Jamdani” becomes a market asset through heritage recognition or geographical indications, the community’s narrative can be transformed into a commercial label that others deploy more effectively than the makers themselves. The song’s emphasis on place and people therefore supports the policy case for community-led branding structures, transparent attribution practices, and enforceable benefit-sharing mechanisms so that the cultural capital embedded in the name translates into material advantage for artisans rather than merely enhancing downstream retailers and exporters [1, 20].

Song 11: Rickshaw Art and Urban Folk Creativity (Dhaka Context)

With red and blue paintbrush, I paint my dreams.

On the rickshaw's body I draw the city's form.

Let the wheels roll far away; the images remain close by.

In the rickshaw art is mingled the love from my heart. [11]

To begin, the song positions the rickshaw painter as an author of urban meaning, not simply a service worker decorating a vehicle. "I paint my dreams" asserts interiority and imagination as legitimate sources of public culture. In a city where many workers are rendered anonymous, the lyric claims visibility for the maker's creative self.

Additionally, the "red and blue paintbrush" detail signals a material grammar of vernacular aesthetics. Colour choice in rickshaw art is rarely accidental. It is tied to visibility in traffic, local taste, and a competitive economy of attraction, where images must catch the eye quickly. The song implies that the artist works within constraints while still making expressive decisions.

In another respect, drawing "the city's form" suggests that rickshaw art functions as an informal archive of urban life. The painter does not merely depict personal fantasies. The painter depicts recognizable city scenes, icons, or aspirations that allow riders and passers-by to see themselves reflected in public space. The rickshaw becomes a site where collective urban identity is continuously remade.

Moreover, the rickshaw's body as a canvas highlights the politics of surfaces in the informal city. Walls and galleries are not equally accessible. Mobile surfaces allow art to circulate without requiring institutional permission. The song therefore points to a democratized, street-level cultural economy where visibility is earned through circulation rather than curated by gatekeepers. At the same time, "let the wheels roll far away" expresses how mobility distributes aesthetic experience. The artwork travels through neighbourhood boundaries and social strata, reaching audiences who may never enter formal cultural venues. This mobility also creates reputational routes for artists, as styles become recognizable across districts through repeated sightings.

Equally important, the notion that images "remain close by" implies affective attachment and memory. Even as the vehicle leaves, the artwork persists in the viewer's mind and in the city's visual memory. The song suggests that informal art contributes to a shared sensory environment, shaping how the city is felt and remembered.

Finally, "love from my heart" frames rickshaw art as care work directed toward an unknown public. The painter offers beauty, humour, and symbolism to everyday commuters, turning routine travel into an encounter with creativity. For cultural policy, the stanza implies that informal creatives are not peripheral to the city's cultural vitality. They are key producers of public imagination, and their working conditions, recognition, and rights matter to any serious account of the creative economy.

Song 12: Dhamrai Metal Craft and Craft Ritual (Dhamrai Area Context)

I cast the treasure of brass with a wax mold.

Dhamrai's craft awakens in my two hands.

I melt the metal deity in fire and give it form.

There is such magic in my hands that the idol appears alive. [15]

The opening image, "treasure of brass," establishes value as something already present in the material, but only accessible through skilled mediation. Brass is not treated as inert metal. It is treated as a potential that requires knowledge to be released. The mention of a wax mold signals a sophisticated production ecology, one that depends on sequential stages, specialized tools, and controlled conditions. The song therefore frames craft not as improvisation but as a disciplined system where risk is managed through procedure: temperature control, timing, mold integrity, and finishing all determine whether the cast succeeds. In this sense, the artisan's pride is also pride in governance, the ability to bring order to a volatile process.

"Dhamrai's craft awakens in my two hands" shifts the focus from product to embodiment. The locality is personified as a living tradition that comes to life through the maker's bodily competence. This formulation implies that place-based identity is not merely a label attached after production. It is enacted through the maker's gestures, muscle memory, and judgment under pressure. What "awakens" is a practiced intelligence that has been accumulated through apprenticeship, repetition, and correction. The line therefore positions the artisan as an infrastructure of continuity: without hands trained in the local method, "Dhamrai" as a cultural reputation would become a hollow signifier.

The invocation of "metal deity" and the claim that the idol appears alive illustrates how craft value can be simultaneously aesthetic, social, and ritual. The song suggests that casting is not only a technical achievement but also a contribution to communal life, where objects mediate relationships between households, temples, and collective ceremonies. The artisan's labour becomes a bridge between raw material and lived spirituality, and the transformative power of fire is framed as both physical and symbolic. The "life" of the idol is therefore not a literal animation. It is a statement about presence, aura, and the capacity of skilled workmanship to produce objects that communities treat with reverence and emotional investment. The closing emphasis on "magic in my hands" operates as a direct argument about differentiated value under conditions of market competition. Mass production can replicate shape, but it struggles to replicate the reputational and relational dimensions that make a handcrafted object trustworthy, meaningful, and locally authoritative. The song implies that authenticity rests on traceability to skilled hands and recognized lineages, which are social systems as much as production techniques. That implication has practical consequences: safeguarding cannot rely on symbolic celebration alone. It must protect the conditions that make the hands possible, including apprenticeships, access to inputs and safe workshops, and market arrangements that reward quality rather than only low price, aligning with broader development arguments that cultural sustainability depends on fair and enabling economic structures [14, 18].

DISCUSSION

The analysis suggests several implications for creative economy theory and policy in a Global South context.

First, the findings expand the definition of the creative worker. Bangladesh's weavers, embroiderers, potters, metal workers, and vernacular artists generate symbolic and aesthetic value, innovate in process, and transmit specialized knowledge. Their marginal position in many creative economy narratives reflects the metropolitan bias of creative class and creative city frameworks [8, 14]. Recognizing artisans as creative workers implies that they should be central to creative sector mapping, education, and investment, including funding for apprenticeship systems and community-based production infrastructure.

Second, the songs demonstrate that intangible heritage is a form of creative capital, but heritage recognition alone is insufficient. Pride and branding can increase visibility, yet without mechanisms that return value to producers, heritage can become symbolic celebration without material change [9, 18]. Policy should therefore connect safeguarding with fair compensation, health protections, and collective bargaining power.

Third, intermediary extraction appears as a persistent theme. The "mahajan" song offers a vernacular critique of unequal value chains, aligning with scholarship on precarity and inequality in cultural industries [10]. Practical interventions include cooperative production, transparent pricing, direct-to-market platforms, and accessible credit systems that reduce dependence on exploitative brokers.

Fourth, gender is central. Women's songs highlight intergenerational teaching and domestic creativity, but cultural narratives of "heritage" can coexist with under-recognized labour. An inclusive creative economy must support women's control over earnings, visibility of labour, and leadership in craft governance, especially as products move into commercial chains.

Fifth, modernization must be managed with attention to identity and wellbeing. Mechanization songs show that technological change can cause not only income loss but also shame and cultural rupture. Policies that support "innovation within tradition," including design adaptation, premium market segmentation, apprenticeships, and social protection, can help prevent displacement while enabling sustainable transitions.

CONCLUSION

Bangladesh's traditional folk industries, embodied in the work of weavers, embroiderers, potters, metal casters, and vernacular artists, demonstrate that the creative economy is not a new import but an outgrowth of longstanding cultural labour. Reading craft economies through folk songs brings artisan voices into creative economy discourse, revealing pride, identity, exploitation, and adaptation in ways that standard policy framings often miss. The songs show that artisans must be recognized as creative workers and cultural rights holders, not simply as suppliers of "heritage products." They also show that cultural value is generated through embodied knowledge, intergenerational pedagogy, moral critique, and public memory, all of which sit uneasily inside development models that privilege entrepreneurship, scalability, and urban creative clusters.

A further lesson of the article is methodological as well as conceptual. Treating songs as analytical evidence shifts the unit of analysis from the commodity to the cultural life of production. The songs record how artisans understand work, risk, respectability, belonging, and loss. They reveal that heritage is not only what survives from the past, but what is

continually negotiated in the present through labour, narrative, and community judgement. This approach also helps identify where creative-economy language can become extractive: when policy celebrates aesthetics while ignoring the conditions under which aesthetics are produced, recognition can operate as visibility without benefit. In this respect, folk songs operate as a diagnostic archive for evaluating whether creative economy interventions are actually improving livelihoods, sustaining knowledge ecologies, and protecting dignity.

The central policy implication remains that inclusive creative development must be built from the ground up. This means integrating folk industries into national creative economy planning, strengthening fair value chains, supporting apprenticeships and innovation within tradition, and ensuring welfare protections that address the physical and emotional costs articulated in artisan songs. It also calls for governance reforms that reduce opacity and rebalance bargaining power, including enforceable standards on contracting, pricing transparency, and accessible dispute resolution. In practice, the most durable interventions are likely to be those that treat artisans as co-designers of policy and market systems, not as beneficiaries of ad hoc support. Producer-led cooperatives, community-controlled certification and branding, and public procurement strategies that prioritize artisan-made goods can translate cultural capital into predictable demand, while safeguarding local authority over meanings and designs.

Looking forward, the article points to several new directions for scholarship and practice. One direction concerns measurement: research should develop creative-economy indicators that track not only output and export value but also wellbeing, time sovereignty, health burdens, and the stability of knowledge transmission. Another direction concerns governance of cultural rights: future work can examine how heritage recognition, geographical indications, and platform commerce can be structured to ensure benefit-sharing, attribution, and community control over representation. A third direction concerns digital transformation. As crafts circulate through social media, e-commerce, and tourism branding, songs and other vernacular texts may also circulate, be remixed, or be repurposed for marketing. Studying these dynamics can clarify when digital visibility empowers artisans and when it accelerates appropriation and price pressure.

Finally, the article suggests a broader rethinking of what “innovation” should mean in craft-led development. Innovation is not limited to new products or new markets. It can include innovations in labour governance, cooperative infrastructure, environmental sustainability, and intergenerational teaching models that make it viable for younger artisans to remain within craft communities without accepting chronic insecurity. The folk songs analyzed here insist that the creative economy must be evaluated as a moral and social project as much as an economic one. A credible creative economy for Bangladesh is one in which craft communities can remain authors of their own cultural futures, with livelihoods that are secure enough to sustain both artistry and life.

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