

Case study: Our Baul Heritage Project, Manningham Housing Association

How do you use community created art to bring people together to engage with their heritage?

About the project

Our Baul Heritage Project is run by Sadar Uddin, Community Partnerships and Investment Manager at Manningham Housing Association in conjunction with community members.

Through conversations at the Housing Association, Sadar discovered that there were several tenants who had been writing poems and songs that represented their culture and life in the UK. This writing was around the cultural and musical heritage of the south Asian communities and included Baul Folk Music - Baul songs are included by UNESCO on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and the Baul were originally mystic minstrels sharing oral history through their music, and travelling in Bangladesh and in West Bengal, India²⁷. The residents felt that this heritage needed to be revived, preserved and promoted for the future generation of communities in Bradford and for other interested people from all over United Kingdom.

Some of the writers had published their work and were highly qualified, but others had spent much time writing Baul songs and poetry which had never been published.

The Our Baul Heritage Project aims to translate the songs to sheet music, so the songs can be shared universally in all communities, and also as into Urdu, Bengali or English as required. One tenant, a Syrian refugee, created artwork based on her life story and has 'translated' the songs into artwork, which will also be included in the book, another tenant is contributing their calligraphy. The translations have been compiled into a book called 'Baul and Mystic Songs of South Asian Heritage' (subtitled 'Celebrating UK City of Culture Bradford 2025'). 500 copies of the book are being published - it is free and comprises two volumes, one of around 50 songs and another of 60 or 70, which were selected by a writer's panel. It will be shared with schools, colleges and community venues.

If it wasn't for this project, then all the writers and the artists and the calligraphers, their work would probably would have been hidden away on a shelf somewhere within their own home.

Sadar Uddin

²⁷ UNESCO website [Baul songs - intangible heritage - Culture Sector - UNESCO](#)

Outcomes and experience

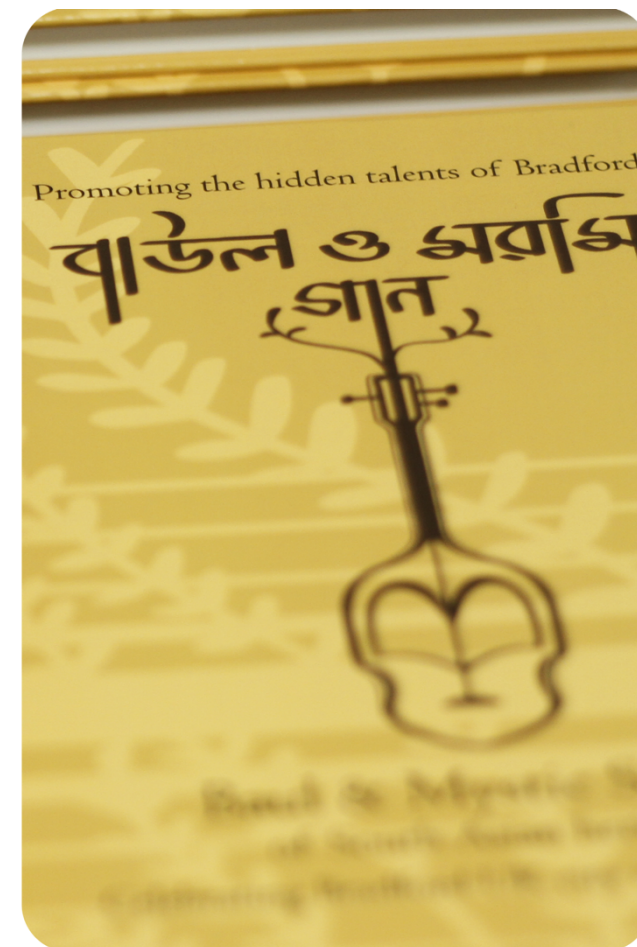
Preservation of hidden, oral histories: The Our Baul Heritage Project has been able to record and preserve a great number of Baul works created by members of the local community.

Community led decision making: Sadar left the group of writers to decide which songs should be included in the project and played at the final event, so that the writers would feel pride in what they had achieved.

Recognition of artistic talent: Sadar says "Baul music writers who live and work in Bradford district class themselves as ordinary people. At Manningham Housing Association, we see them as talented people who deserve recognition."²⁸. Having their work included in this book enables people to recognise and share their own artistic skills, knowledge and experience.

Awareness increased: Promotion of the book to local communities has increased awareness of Baul heritage amongst new audiences – it was featured in several different housing journals, and there was also a radio interview on Bradford Community Broadcasting (BCB) Radio. So far, the project has reached an audience of 200 people (with more who will read the book, and 8 core participants).

Good practice: The Housing Association Charitable Trust (HACT) will be attending the book launch and Sadar hopes the project will serve as an example of good practice so that it can be replicated elsewhere by other Housing Associations.



²⁸ From [Bangladesh folk music project aims to revive Baul music in Bradford | Bradford Telegraph and Argus \(thetelegraphandargus.co.uk\)](https://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/bradford/bangladesh-folk-music-project-aims-to-revive-baul-music-in-bradford)

Learnings

Good application process and payments approach: Sadar says, 'Certainly we'll recommend the Leap because the application process is good; the support from Leap staff is excellent.' He says he was told when the payments would be and found the split award payment very helpful, saying, 'Although we're a Housing Association, slightly bigger than voluntary sector charities, advance payment for smaller organizations with limited financial capacity definitely helps to fix up projects.'

The Leap sharing events: These are a great place for networking, and also help avoid the duplication of work in separate projects in different organisations, potentially leading to complimenting or joint projects instead.

Next steps: Manningham Housing Association hopes to have some of the songs played live to audiences as well as via recordings. 'I think we'll be looking at hiring musicians, artists, singers, putting them all in a studio and getting those songs recorded,' Sadar says. Another aim is to provide a place where young people can come to learn the traditional musical instruments used in Baul music.

If a new generation of people don't learn, or if the songs don't get documented in a book, it will get lost.

Sadar Uddin

