

Appreciation for

Prof. Anwarul Karim's book "Water and Culture in Bangladesh"

-Tone Bleie

This new book by one of Bangladesh's most prominent folklorists, cultural historians and educators is a treat for scholars, students, government officials, development practitioners and environmental journalists alike. Karim combines passion with a rigorous analytical mind, creating a multi-layered narrative about one of the world's great riparian civilizations. These intricate pre-historic and historic dynamics are sadly unknown not only internationally, but also among Bangladeshis. In today's flimsy corporately owned media world, portrayals of Bangladesh are strangely incoherent. Narratives of a kind of increasing intolerant forms of Bengali and Muslim nationalism, impending disaster and chronic political instability compete with narratives of development marked progress and improved disaster preparedness. This book seeks to avoid bombastic and purely mythological narratives of who the early natives were - who over decenniums formed this water-abundant and earlier forest-clad civilization. I dearly hope the book will be read by many and help replace ethnocentric myths with new and well-established evidence about the country's rich Pre-Arian past and make us realize that Bangladesh's woes, as a lower riparian country, should be considered an international issue of mega proportions.

Tone Bleie is Professor of Public Policy and Planning at UIT - the Arctic University of Norway. Bleie is the author of books and articles on Bangladesh's multicultural legacy and contemporary development and human rights challenges.



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Water and Culture in Bangladesh

Past and Present

Anwarul Karim



MURDHONNO

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Dedication

*To the memory of Bangabandhu
Sheikh Mujibur Rahman*

*The founding father of Bangladesh who
braved death for the people he loved*

By the same author:

In English

- 1) The Aborigines of Kushtia 1979
- 2) The Bauls of Bangladesh, 1980
- 3) The Myths of Bangladesh, Folklore Research Institute, Kushtia, 1988
- 4) Shamanism in Bangladesh in the book Shamans in Asia, London, 2002
- 5) Folk medicine, Baul practice and their system of birth control, (Monograph), 1989
- 6) Arsenic contamination ground water: A case study, (Monograph), 1998
- 7) Decline of Baul music and its preservation (Monograph), 2010

In Bangla

- 1) Baul Kabi Lalon Shah, 1963 (several reprint)
- 2) Lalon Geeti, 1969
- 3) Bangla Shahitye Muslim Kavi o Sahityik, 1969
- 4) Baul Shahitya o Baul Gan, 1971 (several reprint)
- 5) Fakir Lalon Shah, 1976
- 6) Rabindranather Shelaidah, 1977 (several reprint)
- 7) Laloner Gan, 1984
- 8) Rabindranath o Banglar Baul, 2001 (several reprint)
- 9) Khan Sahib Abdul Wali, 1995 (several reprint)
- 10) Banglaesher Baul, Samaj, Jibon ebong Sahitya, 2002 (several reprint)
- 11) Baul Samaj, 2003
- 12) Folklore: Loke Sanskritir kathokathga, 2004, (several reprint)
- 13) Rabindranather Palli-unnayan, 2004
- 14) Samobaiyce Rabindranath, 2009
- 15) Nazrul: Taar Samokaley, 2014
- 16) Kabi Krishna Chandra Majumdar memorial book, 2014



Secretary
Ministry of Cultural Affairs
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Date: 10 January 2017

Message

Civilization of Bangladesh, a riverine country, has been evolved on the banks of rivers. Water has been the source to touch all aspects of development, livelihood and cultural dimensions. Agriculture, trade, fisheries, communication and transportation have strong nexus with water as well as rivers. We therefore, have to protect our water as well as its sources, the rivers, for survival of our people, their livelihood and culture for the overall development of our country.

The six seasons with particular climatic type in different periods of the year influence the behavior, attitude and culture of Bangladesh. Our literature, poetry, drama, stories, novels, songs, dance and sports as well as socioeconomic and culture activities depict distinct reflections of our varying seasons. People of Bangladesh rejoice numerous festivals round the year which finds its true expression in the native adage "Baro mashe tero parbon."

Culture as the evolving set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of social groups encompassing lifestyle, ways of living, value systems, traditions and beliefs, cultural diversity; stakeholder involvement and intercultural dialogue and education should be instrumental to development in human values. Difficulties we are facing now a days seem to be

due to cultural distortion: emergence of few extremist, fundamentalists and terrorists group activities. I believe promoting cultural bondage among the people is an effective means which can help increase people's interactions and understanding regarding, heritage, culture and their identity.

I appreciate the initiative of Professor Dr. Anwarul Karim for his research work on "Water and culture in Bangladesh". I believe this book will, among other issues, be helpful to know about the cultural heritages of Bangladesh.



Aktari Mamtaz
Secretary
Ministry of Cultural Affairs

Acknowledgments

Most humbly, I seek the mercy and blessings of Allah as I complete the manuscript on "Water and Culture in Bangladesh, Past and Present". And this is now in a book form, much to my heartfelt satisfaction. It took years and at times, I feared, if I would be able to complete it. I had a very tough time in collecting information and also setting these in proper order into my book. A number of times, I revised my manuscript and yet I was not satisfied. And this resulted in the delay of its publication. When any new information was available, I tried to fit in. Knowledge is a process of knowing things. There is no end of it. The work is so vast and impelling that it needs much more expertise and competency to give it a proper shape. I simply introduced the matter and I look forward to seeing a more qualified and capable persons for further unfolding the lost glory of Bangladesh.

I am happy to dedicate the book to the memory of the Father of the Nation Bangobandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who embraced death for the people he loved. He guided the nation to a glorious height.

I am indeed very much grateful to Dr. Masihur Rahman, the Economic Adviser to the Prime Minister, Government of Bangladesh for his kind appreciation and encouragement.

I also convey my deep regards to Professor Gawhor Rizvi, Adviser, and International Affairs to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh for his keen interest in my research.

I express my gratitude to Mr. Asaduzzaman Noor MP Honorable Minister, Cultural Affairs Ministry for his kind support.

My deepest gratitude is to the Secretary, Ministry of Cultural affairs, Ms Aktari Momtaj who extended all her support, providing me with the required amount of fund for undertaking such a strenuous and difficult research work. In fact, it was she who took my work as her personal one and was a source of inspiration to me all through. I also thank my student and nephew, Ihsanul Karim, Press Secretary to the Honorable Prime Minister for his encouragement.

I pay my deep regards to my teacher, Professor Anisuzzaman, Professor Emeritus, University of Dhaka and Chairman, Bangla Academy for his encouragement.

I also express my deep sense of gratitude to my teacher at the University of Dhaka, Prof Sirajul Islam Chowdhury for appreciation of my research.

I remember my mentor and guide Syed Altaf Hussain, formerly MP and Minister in the Cabinet of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

I also remember Shahid Sirajuddin Hossain, my maternal uncle, a close associate of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the founder news editor of Daily Ittefaq for all his support to my literary work, particularly about Lalou Shah and the Bauls.

In this connection, I also pay my regards to Professor Dr. Swapan K. Datta, Vice Chancellor, Visva-Bharati, Professor Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury, Vice Chancellor, Rabindra Bharati University, Professor Asutosh Ghosh, Vice Chancellor, University of Calcutta and Professor Krishna Bose, the daughter in law of Sarat Chandra Bose and formerly Member Parliament (MP), Lok Sabha and Chairperson, Netaji Research Bureau and

her son Professor Sumantra Bose, International & Comparative Politics, London School of Economics, whom, I met recently and discussed matters relating to my research on Water and Culture in Bangladesh, Past and Present and gratefully acknowledge their appreciation and encouragement.

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I also remember with gratitude the valuable suggestions made by my guide and noted scholar of Islamic mysticism Professor Anne Marie Schimmel and Professor Ali Asani at Harvard University for my post doctoral work on oriental studies.

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Harvard and stayed at the Center for the Study of World Religions (CSWR). We became very good friends. She also arranged my visit to Delhi and also to participate at the International Sociological Congress organized by the Harvard University as she enjoyed my lecture on Shamanism in Bangladesh at the department of folklore, Harvard University.

I also thank Professor William Radice, Head Department of Bangla, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London. He is a reputed scholar of Bengali Literature in the West.

I am profoundly grateful to Professor Richard Bales, Dean of the Faculty of Law, Northern Ohio University College, USA for his brief but a very thought provoking comments on my book.

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I express my gratitude to Professor Tone Belie, the noted Norwegian Anthropologist of the University of Troms, Norway for her deep appreciation and encouragement. I recall my meeting with her at the residence of my daughter Sultana Afroz in Rome who was then Economic Councilor, Bangladesh Embassy, Rome in 2012.

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I express my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Khandker Azharul Hague, presently the Chairman, of Bangladesh Water Partnership for his continued support from the beginning of my research. He had deep interest in my work and time and again he urged me to complete it.

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I must thank Sanjoy Majumdar of Mordhonnya Publication for taking keen interest in my work. In fact, it is Sanjoy who virtually re-edited and designed my book. I must appreciate him for all his support.

I express my deep sense of gratitude to Srilanka Water Partnership (SWP) and Nepal Water Partnership (NWP) for their encouragement. In the year 2003, I co-chaired a session at the International Conference on Water and Culture held in Nepal at Katmandu. And there I proposed for publication of books on Water and Culture Heritage in each region of South Asia. Later, it was Srilanka Water Partnership published a book on that and it was followed by Nepal Water Partnership also. Finally I took up

the matter and submitted a research monograph on Water and Culture to the Bangladesh Water Partnership (BWP) in Dhaka. Afterwards The Ministry of Cultural Affairs funded me for further research. And the present book is the outcome of that.

Above all to my family: I must thank my mother who is now 95 for her constant care and encouragement. She takes keen interest in all my research works and also reads my Bengali books. In fact, my life is so made because of her care and kind support. She is a blessing of Allah to me. My father died around 20 years back. He was a senior Government officer in the department of Agriculture. My love for rain and nature was due to him. Last but not the least; I must recall the sweet memories of my wife, Professor Syeda Amena Karim, who died at the age of 68 when we completed 50 years of married life. She was the Head, department of Bangla, Kushtia Government College, and an established poet who extended all her support to me throughout her life. I understand I could never take care of her because of my research and bohemian life with the Bauls. But never was she sad and unhappy. She accommodated all my lapses and failure with smiles.

I appreciate my daughter Sultana Afroz, who is also a Harvard graduate, presently Additional Secretary, Economic Relations Division (ERD), Ministry of Finance, my son in law, Shams al Mujaddid, a senior Bureaucrat, presently working in the Ministry of Land, my daughter in laws Shulata and Tasnia, my sons Iqbal Karim, and Iftekhar Karim, presently working with FAO for their constant encouragement and keen interest in my research work. .

My grandchildren Farhan, Raisa Fizzah, Sara, Zaima and Zunaira 'an embrace for their love and support.

Anwarul Karim, Ph.D
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Chairman, Folklore Research Institute, Dhaka- Kushtia
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Opinion of Experts

**Dr. Phil Parshall, Merrill scholar, 1983, Divinity School
Harvard University, USA.**

Dr. Anwarul Karim is a noted Professor and Administrator. His academic qualifications include Dacca University (PhD) and Visiting Scholar at Harvard University. He is a prolific and highly acclaimed author of significant books relating to Sufism and Folk Muslims, with The Bauls of Bangladesh being his magnum opus.

Dr. Karim has broadened his research into a new area with his book, Water and Culture in Bangladesh. He expertly delves into the history of water usage in the Sub-Continent. Interestingly, he explores the centrality of water in the religious rituals of Hindus, Muslims and other traditions. Particularly insightful is Dr. Karim's exploration of the life and customs of rural Bangladeshis. He has personally spent long periods of time visiting and interacting with this segment of society. Of interest is the centrality of rivers and ponds to their economic well being. Dr. Karim writes of the financial challenges related to river erosion, severe flooding and irrigation. His emphasis on fish breeding along with rice growing and irrigation in the local village context is enlightening and helpful.

Without reservation I commend Dr. Karim's latest contribution to the conversation about water issues in Bangladesh.

Phil Parshall

Prof. Dr. Richard Bales, Dean, Faculty of Law, Ohio Northern University College, Ohio, USA

Prof. Dr. Anwarul Karim documents a unique and rich cultural heritage that is being pushed to the brink of extinction. Much of ancient and modern Bengali culture is tied to water, as befitting the people of a river delta where for centuries the wet-dry cycles of monsoon seasons and a network of river distributary channels have dominated local life. When rivers run dry, bathing and baptismal rituals are disrupted; literature, folklore, and music rooted in a riparian tradition become less relevant to contemporary urban dwellers; and culinary traditions based on freshwater fish and rice become threatened.

Water and Culture in Bangladesh is a critically important book that both describes a unique culture and documents in real time how cultural and environmental destruction can be inextricably intertwined. I enjoyed his book very much.

Professor Dr. Richard Bales

Chris Brown, London School of Economics, London, UK and Visiting Fellow at Oxford University (Harris Manchester College)

"Dr. Anwarul is undoubtedly one of Bangladesh's - and indeed Asia's - finest writers. Water and Culture encapsulates perfectly the importance of water in everyday life in Bangladesh, whether it is coastal or the great rivers that come down from the Himalayas. Bangladeshi culture stems living in close proximity to water where the extremes of floods, typhoons and droughts are more exaggerated than in almost any country. What Dr. Anwarul does so well is to talk to villagers in river and coastal communities to hear their stories and understand their lives. I can highly recommend this fascinating book to anyone who plans to travel this often-neglected country with so many wonders hidden away."

Chris Brown

Dr. Tone Bleie, Professor of public policy and Cultural Understanding at the University of Tromso, Norway

"The well-known folklorist Anwarul Karim has also pinpointed the fact that there are also unmistakable Dravidian affinities in Bengali phonetics, morphology, syntax and vocabulary. Karim suggests that the excavation of an extensive settlement at Farakka in the Ganges delta (showing resemblance to the Harappa civilization in the Indus Valley in the 7th century BC) provides new solid evidence of the antiquity of Dravidian culture in the Bengal delta. Both present day Oraons and Paharias speak North Dravidian languages. Professor Karim is bold enough to suggest that there are genetic elements from Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic and Tibeto-Burman speaking peoples in the present Bengali population. New genetic research would provide the final answer as to whether Karim's proposition is valid.

It is probable that the ancestors of present day Santals, Kurukhs (Oraons) and Mundas had common myths of descent, lived within certain vast, fuzzily defined, partly common and partly neighboring forest-clad territories (unlike well defined homelands), had distinctive languages, maintained clan exogamy, shared knowledge of forest environment and maintained similar but separate religious and political, and chiefly functions and similar mixed modes of economic adaptation. Yet, we do not know for certain whether they had, by assignment of others and by self-ascription, common names and what they were, and whether they shared a joint sense of Pan-Adivasi solidarity.'

Tone Bleie

*(Comments on Dr. Anwarul Karim's noted work, The Aborigines of Kushtia, 1979)

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Preface

The book, *Water and Culture in Bangladesh: Past and Present* is a research work to focus on the water based cultural heritage of the country. It took years to complete this work. Nothing goes without water; the same is true with culture. This way or that, water is related to it. The present book speaks of the importance of water as far as it shapes our culture. Bangladesh as one of the ancient countries represents a kind of culture that is unique in the world. Many of our cultural heritages are getting lost because of urbanization and also for absence of water in our rivers. Again, there has been lack of awareness and interest in these things by those who have either a poor knowledge or they are indifferent to their identity. A nation cannot survive if her citizen is apathetic towards the culture she possesses for generations. Our youth need to be trained to find out their roots and the history of our brave people. Bangladesh is a country where the culture is diversified. Yet never has such diversification affected our culture. Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Christians together with the minor religious groups, such as tribes, maintain their own religious culture living side by side for generations. Bangladesh has become a cosmopolitan country. But never has any country as Bangladesh with such diversity of religion and culture, fought for mother language and also

for liberation against Pakistan who betrayed her cause for 24 years since the country got her independence from the British unitedly.

An interesting part of the book is the discovery of a kingdom, named *Gangaridae* that covered almost the whole of Southwest region of Bangladesh. Kotalipara, presently an Upazila under Gopalganj district of Bangladesh, was the capital of *Gangaridae*. The History of Greece by Megasthenis recorded a story that Alexander, the Great feared to invade Bengal because of *Gangaridae*. The story is given in complete form in the chapters dealing in "Archaeology". What is more interesting that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding father of Bangladesh, was born in Tungipara village under Kotalipara Upazila and the country was liberated from Pakistan under his leadership. It is indeed a strange coincidence.

This book has a detailed description of the people who worked for the foundation of the country. A lot of tribes lived in the southern and eastern part of the subcontinent and finally it was 'Bangal', a tribe who dominated over other tribes and the country was known after them. The Veda recognized the people of the country as Bang/ Bango and finally the Muslim historian Abul Fazal, during the Mughals, named the country as Bangala because of the setting up 'aail' or mound or a sort of embankment along the farm fields for protection against flood or high flood. Many tribes before the arrivals of the Aryans lived in Bang/Bango. However, it was the Dravidians and the Kolarians who ruled the country during the advent of the Aryans. They were the linguistic race. These groups are believed to have ruled the country. There were, however, other tribes or linguistic races like Suhma, (Raad) Rarrh,

Harikel, and Pundra, who exhibited a wide variety of colors and their physical features were also different. In fact, there existed a conglomeration of different racial stocks.

These groups have a number of sub-streams all around Bangladesh and they represent Dravidians and Kolarian blood group. A medical study of the Santal and the Oraon blood group might throw clues to the missing link with the lost non-Aryan races. The Aryans did not rename Bango Bang until the country came under the Muslim rule. These Aryans were German tribes who came from the ancient Scandinavian country and settled in central Asia, now known as Persia or modern Iran. Another few groups went to Great Britain and conquered the country. They were known as Angles, Juts and Saxons. They drove the other tribes and subdued the Britons. The Aryans later invaded India and defeated her inmates, known as Dravidians and Kolarians who lived on the Indus Basin and founded Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. These areas were known as 'Sapta-Sindhu'. The Dravidians and Kolarians belonged to Sumerian race who built Babylon. We have no knowledge about the races which represented the Aryans. Similarly, the races which lived in southern and eastern parts of India, known as Bango, beside the Bay of Bengal, had mixed identities and were known as non Aryans, opposite to Aryans. Recent excavation in the Ganges both in West Bengal, India and also in Bangladesh clearly suggests that Bangladesh is one of the oldest civilized countries in the world. Earthquake or tidal waves might have destroyed the civilizations built along the rivers and the Bay of Bengal in the hoary past and these are laid buried in the vast sea of water. Excavation at Farakka Barrage in early years from 1964 to 1975 speak of an extensive settlement at Farakka in the Ganges delta and the artifacts and other evidences show

resemblance to the Harappa civilization in the Indus valley and all these provide new solid evidence of the antiquity of Dravidian culture in the Bengal delta. There are unmistakable Dravidian affinities in Bengali phonetics, morphology, syntax and vocabulary. The present day Oraons, Paharias speak North Dravidian languages while the Bind or Beans have languages common to South Dravidian languages. Bengali words 'dalok', (rain water); 'shalok', (day light); 'hathne' (verandha); 'dua' (mud-wall); 'sha'wl' (loose) which are occasionally spoken by the rustic people in southern Bangladesh villages have points of similarities with the Dravidians or Kolarians. All these suggest there are genetic elements from Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic and Tibeto-Burman speaking people in the present Bengali population. (Karim, Anwarul, 1979, 1988)

In this book I plan to focus on the water and cultural issues of Bangladesh from a historical perspective. Since the Aryanization of the whole sub-continent, there has been little effort to open up the glorious heritage of the non-Aryans that remained buried under an unfathomable depth of the total and irrecoverable darkness of time. There are scholars who have been working on this aspect but nothing substantial came out so far. This happened because of the fact that a majority group of scholars still hold that the Rig-Veda and its other sections are yet to be deciphered properly. History speaks that a group of Aryans moved out from the Scandinavian countries to the Central Asia (Persia) and now Iran. There they got mixed up with the local religions who were idolaters. Again both the Dravidians and the Kolarians as off-shoots of the Sumerians were also idolaters. The history of religions suggests that there had been two sections of people, one, who however, believed in one God and did not share God's

power with anyone. And the other, although, they believed in one God, they shared power with gods and goddesses. This is questionable if Aryanism continued with non-Aryanism in respect of their faiths. In the sub-continent the concept of one God, although was not absent, the idea of many gods and goddesses was in existence. This study will try to analyze these issues which are related to water and culture and how these helped build our civilization. The study will also include the problems of water issues as these are threatening to the up building of a new nation.

The purpose of writing a book on the above subject came to my mind when I visited Nepal in 2003 as one of the team members of Bangladesh Water Partnership, a national organization under the Global Water Partnership to participate in an international seminar, hosted by Nepal Country Water Partnership. I was a folklorist and studied a little bit of culture and this might have motivated my friends in Bangladesh Water Partnership to send me as one of the delegates to Nepal for my participation in one of the sessions on water and culture issues. The members who had participated in the international seminar at Nepal found the topic interesting. As a result, the Global Water Partnership, in collaboration with the other Country Water Partnerships, included the topic for some other conferences also in the South Asian region. India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh included water and culture in the conferences they organized on water resources. In fact, my participation in these seminars and workshops organized by the respective country water partnerships of different countries enabled me to be in touch with the reputed scholars in this particular field of research. I was inspired to organize an Area Water Partnership in my home district, Kushtia, because the Ganges (the Padma) and its off-shoot, the

Gorai River, passes through Kushtia, a Western district of Bangladesh. The Gorai which originates from the Ganges (the Padma) goes almost out of water during the dry season as the mouth of the river Gorai is almost closed following heavy siltation. As a result, no water from the Ganges could enter into the Gorai. The flow of water thus has been checked and no sweet water could pass through the Gorai to the southern rivers.

Practically it was the Late Engineer Qamrul Islam Siddique, the former Chief Engineer, Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), who founded Bangladesh Water Partnership, and became its Chairman, afterwards, who initially inducted me to Bangladesh Water Partnership and later, with his assistance and cooperation of other BWP members, I founded the Gorai Area Water Partnership in Kushtia in 2003. As stated earlier, the Gorai is an off-shoot of the Ganges (the Padma in Bangladesh) and originates at Talbaria (Kushtia) around 2 km from the Hardinge Railway Bridge, Paksey. It passes by the side of Kushtia town and the two upazila, Kumerkhali and Khoksha and takes the name of Madhumoti, at Kamarkhali, Faridpur and finally joins the Bhairab at Khulna and then falls in the Bay of Bengal. The Gorai and the Bhairab are the two rivers that continued to supply fresh water to the southwest region of Bangladesh. The Gorai has been the largest perennial distributaries of the Ganges, supporting fresh water to the 50 million people of at least twelve districts of the southwest region for hundreds of years. This fresh water flow is crucial to the maintenance of an ecological balance in the region, particularly in the checking of salinity intrusion. The dry season flow of the Ganges has decreased greatly since the commissioning of the Farakka Barrage in India and from 1988 there has been

‘a resultant hastening’ of natural decline of the Gorai river so much so that the mouth of the Gorai is totally cut off from the Ganges during dry season following heavy siltation. The closure of the Gorai off-take during the dry season has resulted in a number of hydro-morphological, environmental, social, economic and cultural impacts. These include a northward penetration of surface water salinity, increase in soil and ground water salinity, sedimentation of rivers, deterioration in the quantity and quality of groundwater, reduction in surface water availability, curtailment of irrigation opportunity, adverse impact on domestic water supply, reduction in crop and fish production, deterioration of occupational and employment opportunities, negative consequences for health and nutrition of the common people, reduction in navigation services, problems of water use by industries, declining bio-diversity in the riparian zone and a very negative impact on the Sunderbans, the biggest mangrove forest of Bangladesh. The impact of this hydro-morphological change of the Ganges and The Gorai river system is quite significant in checking the salt water intrusion in the coastal area around Khulna, Satkhira and Bagerhat districts and the Sunderbans.

The southern region of Bangladesh is bound by the Sunderbans that supports extensive bio-diversity. It is the habitat of the largest contiguous population of the Royal Bengal Tigers and a number of endangered species. The mangrove system that supports aforesaid resources relies heavily upon the freshwater supply from the Distributor Rivers of the Ganges. The condition of the Sunderbans reserve forest has been threatened with the passage of time and this has caused serious negative impact for the relevant life supporting system in the region. Experts are of the

opinion that the stoppage of fresh water supply to the region is having disastrous consequence not only on the total environment and social imbalance in the SWR of Bangladesh but also on the life and living condition of the people belonging to 14 districts.

Similar situation may take place in the northwest and northeast regions of Bangladesh also if the Teesta Barrage Project by India is commissioned. All these would be a great blow to the welfare of a nation that came into being after a nine-month long battle with Pakistan in 1971.

(Source: Environmental and Social Impact Assessment of Gorai River Restoration Project, Ministry of Water Resources, Government of Bangladesh, 2001)

The Bhairab River, which also originates from the Ganges at Jalungi in India and enters into Bangladesh in Meherpur district, is now completely dried up and its mouth has also been closed due to continuous heavy siltation. The Bhairab which ends up with the Shibsha near Paikgacha in Khulna is also unable to supply fresh water to the rivers of the southwestern region like the Gorai. The Kobadak is an offshoot of the river Bhairab and it meets with the Kholpetua in the Sunderbans. But this river has no flow at the moment due to heavy siltation. It should be mentioned here that the epic poet Michael Madhusudan Dutt had his village home, named Sagardari, beside the Kobadak under Keshabpur upazila in Jessore district. This river during the British period was navigable and was also a source for agriculture and fishery. Michael Madhusudan made an enthusiastic and unique tribute to the Kobadak River when he compared the flow of the river to the milk of a mother. Beside Madhusudan Dutt, a number of scholars and writers were also born alongside the river Kobadak, such as Haraprasad

Shustri, the great Sanskrit expert who made discovery of the Carya songs or the Buddhist mystic songs from the museum of the Royal Nepalese Academy, Nepal. Carya songs or the Buddhist Mystic songs were the earliest evidence of Bengali language and literature; the renowned scientist Acharya Profulla Chandra Roy, the linguist and Indologist Khan Shahib Abdul Wali, who contributed to our folklore and literature. Wali lived along the Kobadak was also a famous Persian scholar of his time.

The river Kobadak is now almost dead as no water is available in the dry season. In the absence of water during dry season, the rivers stand as a mute monument of gross human failure. This has caused serious damage to agriculture and fishery beside navigation.

In the wet season, however, flood water from India enters Bangladesh through the Bhairab and the Kobadak and causes high flood in the region causing heavy damage to property and crops. The region also suffers from severe water logging. The suffering of the people knows no bounds. Most of the rivers in the southwest region have the same fate.

My intension, in this book, is to find out the roots of the people of Bangladesh and the culture thereof as there has been controversy regarding the influence of the Dravidians in the Bengali way of life. One American anthropologist, Clarence Maloney of US Aid (1984), clearly stated that there had been no Dravidian influence on our culture and his opinion had its reflection also in the words of Pierre, Bessagnet, UNESCO Adviser and formerly Head, Sociology Department, Dhaka University in one of his articles on Tribesmen of Chittagong Hill Tracts of the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan in 1958.

I also intend to show the various uses of water in the cultural life that the people actually performed in the past and also have been performing the same in the present. The book also presents the water crisis in Bangladesh and in what way the acute shortage of water has been threatening not only to the age old traditions and culture but the life of the common people also, who fought for 9 months against the Pakistani army junta to live with honor and dignity. In a free country after the war of liberation and independence against Pakistan, I made a study about the origin of a section of the aborigines who lived in Kushtia. The name of the book is, 'The Aborigines of Kushtia'. It was published in 1979. While I studied, I traced the Dravidian elements among these proto-tribes such as Bindi and Bansphor and Buna--Bagdi. Later, an international seminar on tribal culture was held at Rajshahi University organized by the Institute of Bangladesh Studies in 1984. I attended the seminar and also presented a paper on the Aborigines of Kushtia. Professor Clarence Maloney, an anthropologist working with USAID while presenting his paper at the seminar made a statement that the Dravidians had left no influence in Bangladesh and if anyone had said anything contradictory to this regard, he had misconstrued the issue. There was uproar in the seminar. Many protested. He, however, changed his approach and admitted his fault. My involvement with the Bangladesh Country Water Partnership (BWP) provided me with an opportunity to study the water and cultural issues in Bangladesh from ancient period to the present. The book, Water and Culture in Bangladesh, Past and Present is an attempt to present Bangladesh with its glory and heritage particularly her culture as related to water. When Bangladesh was a part of the Sub-continent and there was no political division during the Mughals and the British, there had been no problems as

rivers flowed naturally from upper riparian to the lower riparian. Bangladesh was then called the land of rivers because all rivers had their destination in the Bay of Bengal. India, including the people of undivided Bengal, fought against the British who looted the wealth of the country and depleted her wealth long before they left, and what wealth remained had been irreparably harmed by Pakistan, more particularly West Pakistan. In fact, the partition of Bengal on the basis of the two nation theory of Hindu and Muslim and also of the independence of East Pakistan from Pakistan as Bangladesh made the situation very bleak as India blocked the rivers flowing naturally. The Farakka Barrage of India over the Ganges near Maldah a Murshidabad bordering Bangladesh and lately Teesta Barrage caused acute shortage of water during dry season and over affluence of water during wet season. These two barrages by India severely threaten our economy and culture. There is no doubt that Bangladesh is a Muslim majority country and India mostly Hindu. Once Hindu and Muslim lived together and built Golden Bengal which is now a far cry. Yet India is not only our neighbor but she is also a friend who helped us earn our freedom, fighting our enemy Pakistan hand in hand, and sharing pains and death equally with Bangladesh. We now pray India should change her approach as a big country and allow Bangladesh a very small country with 147,570 km.sq.miles but having around 170 millions of people. Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world with over three thousand people per sq.mile on average and was even recently a least developed country with poverty dominating every nook and corner of the country. Of late, despite all hazards, Bangladesh has been trying to fight back poverty and trying desperately towards attaining the status of middle income country. The sharp change in our climate

and environment destroyed our six seasons which once gave rise to our poets like Rabindranath, Kazi Nazrul Islam and Jibananda, musicians like Lalou Shah, Hason Raja and innumerable folk songs and the most fascinating world heritage of Sunderbans. The lush- green country has almost been made not only barren but a pure waste land following scarcity water. The land of six seasons and rivers is no more. No culture with water is available. Most people in the world know Bangladesh as a land of poverty and presently they also know very little of her rich culture. Despite all this, one must admit that the people in Bangladesh, particularly the poor people, both men and women, work very hard for their livelihood. They get poor amount of money for their work. Once Bangladeshi villages were full of people-both rich and poor, and they built these villages as places where communal harmony prevailed and people shared each others problems. But such villages are no more in existence as the rich migrated from villages to cities and the poor are left alone. Although attempts have been made to reconstruct these villages but the fertility of land has decreased greatly. Salinity in the rivers appears to be a most threatening issue following absence of sweet water. India should be liberal to the cause of Bangladesh, in sharing water resources and upholding the water treaty which was signed by both the countries. Let good sense prevail.

Chapter

I

Introduction and Background of Study

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The book, 'Water and Culture in Bangladesh: Past and Present' has been named in view of the fact that Bangladesh is one of the oldest civilized countries in the world and she is best known as the land of rivers in the history of the world. Her culture in the past was mostly shaped by water. Rain as divine showers and the rivers of the country played a vital part in the making of it. But presently, the scenario is different because most of the rivers in Bangladesh are found dried up and without water. Except a few major rivers, like the Ganges and Brahmaputra and Meghna, there is no navigation. These rivers, however, have abundance of water in wet season and the very often cause severe floods in the country. Mankind needs water for life. The activities of human beings in many ways depend on water. Water is a natural resource but when we use it for life in the form of various social, economic and religious activities, these become what we call culture. In fact, water shapes culture from the beginning of human life and also when life comes to an end. In all these, water plays vital part. No religion is without the use of water. It is considered very sacred. Water is the basic element for culture. It has always been a primary need of a human being. The Veda, the Tripitaka, the Bible, and the Qur'an all speak of water as not only sacred but a very basic and useful element in human life. In

all religions, water is divine and primeval. In Islam, the Qur'an that comes as the message of Allah to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), speaks that 'Arsh', the most sacred throne of Allah, was placed upon water when He created the universe and sky in six days (Sura Hud 11: 07). If we take the history of mankind, we find that man preferred to be settled along the streams where his requirements for water were most readily satisfied. In dry season he used to collect water from rivers and streams for his survival in producing food for himself and fodder for animals. With the growth of population, civilization started developing along the rivers and seas. And it was the beginning of culture.

Water is the most abundant element in nature. It covers three-fourths of the world's surface considering all rivers, lakes and streams, seas and oceans. It is generally held that water forms a considerable part of all vegetable productions. The scientists speak that it constitutes about three fourth of the human body and other animal tissues. The blood and the brain are each about the four-fifths water. (Kellogg, J.H., 2004: 09). Water exists in three states such as a solid in the form of ice; as a liquid in its most common form, and as a vapor, and also in the form of a dream. Pure water is not found in nature. Rain water is generally taken as nearer to the pure. The scientists, however, hold that rain water is not absolutely pure. But rain water and mineral water are not harmful. (The dry air enters the lungs by respiration and absorbs it from the moist surface of the earth.) Water is the only substance which quenches one's thirst. Frequent bathing is undoubtedly good for health, it increases blood circulation. Bathing with warm water is also good for health. An individual who takes bath regularly, maintains good health.

The use of water as an agent for treatment of disease is not a modern theory, it has been continuing from time immemorial. Bathing as a preventive or curative of disease, has been recorded in old medical books. The Egyptians and the Persians held bathing in high esteem. The Jews had bathing in their code of laws prepared by the Prophet under divine instruction. History speaks of bathing as part of life by the Greeks and the Romans. The Roman public baths were among the greatest works of architecture (Kellogg, J.H., 2004:09). The Dravidians and the Kolarians had also the same system in their civilization in the Harappa and the Mohenjo-Daro. The Aryans had full knowledge of bathing and introduced bathing in the river as a part of religious practices. In Islam, bathing also has been recommended along with ablution for its followers.

Water is thus considered as the most vital and basic things of life. Life cannot grow without water. Everything on earth needs water. But water cannot make life worth living, if it does not get other accompanying elements in the process. These include air, fire and solid soil (earth). It is next to oxygen. Water, however, has both oxygen and hydrogen. The element of hydrogen is double in water. Plants and trees also provide us with oxygen and hydrogen. Water is thus most vital for life as no created beings would be able to survive even for a few days in absence of water. The scientists speak that water content in human bodies is more than 70%, while, it is more than 90% in human babies. Our blood has 83% water. Bones and muscles also contain water. This is also true in regard to non-human beings. (Kellogg, J. H., 2004). For human beings, in particular, water is a necessity, not only for one's life, but also for other non-human beings as it plays an important part in the making of life worth- living. Herein, human

beings differ with the other created beings, who, although, may occasionally form societies as human beings do, they cannot, however, develop culture. It is the exclusive privilege of the human beings that they enjoy it over the other created beings. Culture is that what one performs as a way of life.

Culture is a total human phenomenon. It is the special and exclusive product of man, which he or she learns as a member of the society either orally, or by any other means for generations together. Culture, thus, includes knowledge or wisdom, belief, art, literature and music, morals, law and customs, and any other capabilities and habits that one acquires as a member of the society. It is a social heritage or heredity (Kroeber, A. L., 1968: 252-253). It may be the whole of social traditions, which are distinctive of men only and not of any other created beings. It is a historically derived system of designs for living that is shared by the members of a group or society. According to Macropaedia (Encyclopedia Britannica), Culture encompasses the group's language, traditions, customs institutions, including the motivating ideas, beliefs, values and their embodiment in material instruments and artifacts. Culture is a measuring rod to understand human progress. Only human beings can build civilization. There is thus, a profound interaction between water and culture since the beginning of life on the earth. Culture relates life and life needs water. Agriculture cannot be without water. In agriculture water has many uses. Our economic, social and religious activities will be totally unworkable without water. The culture of human beings is thus very much influenced by water from one's birth to death. Water and culture thus make human beings quite distinctive from other non-human beings.

In fact, water and culture are correlated. This is especially true in respect to countries which are river based. Culture, as we then understand, is a way of life. We need water the day we are born and to continue life as long as we live, and again we need water when we die. We fulfill certain religious rites and rituals when one is born and dies according to his/her religion which he/she practices. Again for food and drink water is part of life.

Culture thus what man makes and what one learns from the society. It is the way that one pursues throughout the life. Animals have no culture. They have society but they do not enjoy culture as human beings do. It is the exclusive privilege of a man as a rational being. Herskovits holds that through the process of socialization or enculturation, the child acquires the prevailing attitude and beliefs, the forms of behavior appropriate to the social role he occupies, and the behavior patterns and values of the society into which he is born. (Herskovits, M. J., 1948:12) Religion is most dominant element in culture. It reflects the dominant values of the total culture, the beliefs and activities that constitute religion. Foster puts it thus, "Social, economic, and juridical understanding of religion and its various and its various forms which, in turn, are expressed through social speech patterns, social rites, mythology, music and material culture (Foster, G.M., 1962:14). In our study we have noticed the importance of religion in the making of culture. What is pagan to the modern mind, it is associated with animism and magic. Frazer enunciated it in his epic work, 'The Golden Bough'. Rain making is a wonderful pagan culture. Foster adds, "Culture makes possible the reasonably efficient, largely automatic interaction between individuals that is a pre-requisite to social life." (Foster, G. M., 1948:19). Every culture has a value system, be it

Hindu, Buddhism, Christianity, Jewish or Islam. Everyone reacts emotionally to one's culture or heritage. We are not neutral in our attitude toward most of its elements. This is very much true when we talk of a particular community. Here, the community is communal so far as the religion is concerned. The Great Divide was the outcome of a two nation theory, professed both by the Congress and the Muslim League. But we also do not forget those moments when Hindus and Muslims fought hand in hand against the British. Religions did not stand in their way. Such things happened when the Pakistani army junta being Muslim, tortured the majority Muslims along with the Hindus and the Buddhists. It was the language and not the religion which was the cohesive force that made everybody a 'Bangalee' and these people unitedly fought for liberation. And Bangladesh came into being as a nation comprising, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and Tribal. Each religious community has its own culture but all these never have appeared as a dominant figure during a nine-month liberation war.

We understand, things change and it is the go of nature, but culture remains one and the same, when we add value to it. This value addition to our culture then gives stability to it. Kluckhohn puts this in another novel way. He was thinking in these terms when he compared culture to a map. He says, "If a map is accurate and you can read it, you won't get lost; if you know a culture, you will know your way around in the life of a society (Kluckhohn, 1949: 28-29). It is true that society and culture both undergo change but the fact remains that there is always an undercurrent of the parent culture. Race, however, does not change. An American or a British may change religion but he will be known as either American or British. He may accept modern culture if it is

not conflicting with his religion. The Muslim culture does not change because this has been shaped by the Holy Qur'an, but modernity does not stand in his way. He is Muslim and is also a modern man. He says five time prayers and performs other rituals. A Christian performs his religious rites being a modern man. This is true to other religions also. Modernity does not mean one has to change one's religion. Modernity does not make any society Godless. One may become an atheist if he likes. Modernity never conflicts with religion. Changeability is a part of culture. In the course of time, culture changes its pattern but the basic things remain the same. Had it been otherwise, we could not have identified different cultures. In the past, the farming instrument 'plough' was used for the tilling of land but now the tractor has replaced it. The pattern of irrigation is also changed. The food habit now is different. The youth of today prefer 'pizza' or 'burger' to rice and curry as lunch but when he or she comes back home, he takes rice, fish or meat and curry. The pop music has influenced a section of youth, no doubt, but still Lalou Shah, Rabindranath and Nazrul and the folk music of the country are alive. On the first day of Baisakh, Bangladesh dances in joy and merriment upholding her culture not only in the cities and towns but also in every nook and corner of the country.

Agriculture played a significant part in the life of man from the beginning of civilization. Initially it was a peasant society. No food could be grown without water. Human society grew up beside the rivers, streams and lakes. Livestock also needed water. In the early part of life man created villages as a part of civilization. In places where water was not available man created tanks or ponds for their various uses. Huts were clustered to form a village.

These were small wooden houses with thatched roofs. Gradually Man learned how-to make scythes, forks, axes, spades and rakes of iron. Ploughing and harrowing were necessary. Man started tilling of lands for food and also learned how to make clothes for their uses. And water formed the basis of their life and living condition.

But severe drought, if it prolongs and there is acute shortage of food for crop failure and no food could be procured, it might give birth to famine. Water is thus a big factor in famine. The marsh and ponds are without water because of absence of rain. Both human and non-human beings such as animals, and plants might face death for want of water. In British India, in 1176 Bengali year, there appeared a massive famine following a severe drought throughout Bengal, Bihar and Assam. The British did not help to supply food grain to the people. As a result, famine played havoc on lives. At that time, the sub-continent experienced massive crop failure. The Great Bengal famine of '76, known as *Chhiattōrer mo`nnōntōr between 1176 to 1180 Bengali year, corresponding to English calendar years between 1769 and 1773* reportedly claimed ten million lives. The country was then ruled by the East India Company. The whole of Bengal, comprising, East and West Bengal, Assam, Bihar and Orissa was grievously struck by the famine and tens of thousands died from starvation. The Company did not take any measures to combat famine; instead it imposed high rate of taxation. The Company further asked people not to hoard food grains and ordered them to cultivate opium as a substitute of paddy. By the time of the famine, the East India Company had established monopoly in trade of food grain. In British Bengal, the famine was aggravated because of the oppressive rule of the British who looted out wealth and

other resources of Bengal. There had been another famine in Bangla, in 1943. At least three million people died. The famine was caused not by severe drought or absence of rain. The British did not allow farmers to go for cultivation of paddy instead they asked them to cultivate opium. There were revolts against the move. No food grains were supplied to the people. This happened when the Japanese bombed Burma during the Second World War. Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose supported Japan. The famine was known as *panchasher manantar*. The present author was then a school student at Jhenidah, then a subdivision of Jessore where his father was an officer in the Department of Agriculture.

Generally, it has been observed that when there prevails a severe drought for days and months. Rural people also take recourse in religious prayers and also they undertake folk customs such as begging from door to door, collecting alms and singing song for rain. These people also go for rain making. Rain making, in fact, was a part and parcel of the primitive races but such customs are orally transmitted for generations. Frog marriage is also a common practice. The Hindus, particularly those in the low castes, arrange such kind of frog marriage. The rural Muslims also join in such kind of practice, although these are against Islamic tradition. The indigenous people have such kind of knowledge also and they practice these things when situation so demands. In this book, I have given a detailed description of rain making in the primitive and the folk society.

It was a kind of folk wisdom or folklore. The word 'folklore' was first coined by William Thoms, using the name of Ambrose Merton in 1846. He wrote a letter to the Editor, *The Athenaeum* in which he proposed that a 'good

Saxon compound, Folklore' be employed in place of such labels as Popular Antiquities and Popular Literature. (Dundes, Alan, 1965:4). It embraces the total rural folk or peasant life and suggests the oral traditions 'channeled across the centuries through human mouths'. Folklore also includes the physical objects by household artisans. (Dorson, Richard M, 1959:2). It also refers to different kind of barns, bread molds and embroidered quilts or '*nakshi kantha*' in Bangla, orally inherited tales like 'Thakur Maar Jhuli' (Grandmother's tales), ballads, songs, proverbs, beliefs and also the village festivals, household customs and peasant's rituals. These are cultural heritage preserved by the peasant or folk society for generations. These peasants are primarily farmers and are also artisans. These societies or communities represent the folk or 'rural expressions of large class structured, economically complex pre-industrial civilizations'. In the present world of science and technology, these are gradually decaying. The Ojha, Shaman and the Bedey community is also almost disappearing. But the Baul community with their peculiar cult is gaining ground. Sufism and Vaishnavism have influenced the modern mind. Culture thus is not lost but it survives this way or that. Bangladesh stands as a part of ancient Indian civilization. The original inhabitants were tribes. Each tribe was a linguistic race. There were various tribes who lived in India and Bangladesh from time immemorial. They present peasant society or the rural folk have inherited the aforesaid folk beliefs and practices from the past generations either orally or by acts and deeds.

The history of ancient Bengal clearly reveals that once trade and commerce had flourished here so much so that Bengal was known as the Golden Bengal and the country had sea and river route connections with the outside world for its products. Riverside markets also developed.

The country, at that time, was best known as the land of rivers. Agriculture played a vital role in the economic activities of the country. Bangladesh is one of the leading rice-producing countries in the world and next to that is jute, as a cash crop. These had helped Bangladesh attain a unique glory. This had been possible because of the fact that the country was watered by its innumerable rivers that crisscrossed every nook and corner of the country and the markets which were built alongside the rivers helped flourish trade and commerce. Land, river and people, each played its part to make the country earn the coveted title: "Golden Bengal." The history speaks that agriculture is the basis of all civilizations and culture. The Indian Civilization together with West Bengal and Bangladesh (as two of her parts), was founded by the early settlers known as the Dravidians and the Kolarians who came from the East before the arrival of the Aryans. It was they who had built up the Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa civilizations along the Indus or the Sapta-Sindhu. The same race also built up the Rig Vedic 'Bango' civilization, which was contemporaneous with the Mohenjo-Daro-Harappa type civilization along the Gangetic delta, but these were buried under the vast sea of water following natural disaster. The Archaeologists, however, discovered such type of civilization at Bardhaman-Birbhum districts, and at Farakka Barrage near Maldah-Murshidabad in West Bengal, India, and lately they also discovered traces of similar type of civilization in Bangladesh at Wari-Bateshwar in Narsingdi district and in other places.

The present study speaks of Bangladesh as a lower riparian country, but it has been facing an intolerable water crisis following unilateral withdrawal of water from the Ganges and the Brahmaputra which originate in India. Ritual

bathing in certain rivers has been suspended. A number of markets, which grew up along the river belts, have stopped functioning because of the absence of navigation. No cargo boats are in a position to ply on the rivers. In dry season people cannot move by boat. This has caused severe damage to agriculture and fishery on the one hand and our cultural heritage also. Under such circumstances, it is feared that much of our cultural heritage, based on water issues, might face total annihilation.

Once Golando, a river port under Faridpur district, earned name and fame as it had connection with India through railway and river routes. The Padma (the Ganges) was then full of water so much so that it looked like a sea. Many big steamers having such names as 'Ghazi', 'Masud,' etc. made overnight journeys between Dhaka and Goalando most enjoyable and many stories cropped up regarding hotels and restaurants where fresh Hilsha (a kind of delicious fish) was available from the river Ganges (The Padma), and these were cooked and served to the passengers bound mostly for Calcutta, India, telling them that the train would run late, but as soon as the passengers had started eating, up came the warning from the Hotel keepers that the train had signaled for its journey. This and in a number of ways, the customers were cheated in a very tricky and interesting manner -- all these now a foregone issues. Munshiganj, Gajaria, Chandpur and other riverside townships grew up along the Ganges (the Padma) and the Meghna. As the sun rose brilliantly over the lush green rice fields, steamers would make a brief stopover, enabling the passengers to enjoy delicious *parathas* and hot steaming Bangla *cha with full cream milk*. Munshiganj and Chandpur became famous for banana (large Sagar-kola) and homemade curds (*doi*) and *chira* (flattened rice), made the situation all the more

exciting and the steamer journey quite thrilling. Similarly, the nights in the steamer appealed to the romantics, particularly at a time when the moon was up with all her majestic glamour and grandeur. The folk singers begged for money by singing Baul songs, Lalon *geeti*, (songs) *bhatiali* and *murshida*. Young people used to play cards in groups with onlookers around them. Goalando Ghat was famous from the British period. It also earned a bad name due to sex workers. They were abundant in Goalando. People who stayed overnight in local cheap hotels, occasionally lost everything. These are, however, no more. Goalondo-ghat was like 'Uddharanpurer Ghat' a unique novel written by an Indian Novelist 'Avadut', whose real name was never disclosed. After liberation, no passenger train came direct to Goalando Ghat from Shealdah, Kolkata. A friendship train has been introduced between Kolkata and Dhaka but the history which was once made in Goalando a Ghat is a forgotten glory. These are totally unknown to the present generations. They cannot thus visualize the extent of the vast sea of water that once flew past the Goalando Ghat and the Sadarghat in old Dhaka.

Boat races are the most thrilling event when the rivers are full. People from all walks of life gather on the bank of the river and enjoy the race. It is a kind of enjoyment which men, women and even children enjoy. Hindu girls offer puja and perform ritual activities. But as mentioned above, presently, most of the rivers have either become dry or are without sufficient quantity of water.

Water resources management in Bangladesh thus has been facing immense challenges for resolving many diverse problems and issues. The most critical of these include flood, tidal wave, cyclones in the form of 'Aila' or 'Sidr' or the similar other calamities during wet season and also

during continuous drought and acute shortage of water in dry season. Unchecked and continuous rise in population growth made the situation all the more worse. In view of these, there appears a growing need for proper water management. These include the checking of salinity and deterioration of surface and ground water quality and water pollution.



Picture: Boat race

There is also an urgency to satisfy the multi-sector water needs with limited resources. This happens because Bangladesh belongs to lower riparian region and therefore, she has no control over the rivers because all the major rivers have originated from outside of the country's borders--India.

These being the major issues, the rural areas of Bangladesh, suffer from lack of quality drinking water. Surface water supplies are generally polluted and ground water which till now provides, the best source of safe drinking water, is occasionally contaminated with arsenic in many parts of the

country. Heavy withdrawals of ground water for irrigation have faced the water table in many areas below the effective reach of hand tube wells. Seepage of agro-chemicals into shallow aquifers is responsible for pollution of water for both human and animal consumption. Salinity intrusions from sea water also have made ground water unfit for consumption in the southwest region. Cities and urban areas have been facing acute shortage of water following receding of water table due to heavy ground water extraction. Sanitation problem both in the urban and the rural areas have become threatening and endangering public health. Lack of proper sanitation and drainage facilities together with inadequate water supply and absence of health care and health education, are responsible for diseases in the rural areas. Lack of access to the safe water supply in the rural areas, has caused immense suffering to the rural women who have to procure water from a long distance place and this journey in hot summer affects their health also.

In this book, I make an elaborate discussion on water and cultural issues in Bangladesh, taking things from different sources and analyzing them on a broader perspective. India and Bangladesh have a very rich but almost common and similar cultural heritage. Previously, it was one country under the Indian Sub-continent and it had been a meeting place of diversified races and cultures from the bygone days. India, of which Bangladesh is a part, represents one of the ancient civilizations. So much so that Indian people could be taken as the earliest builders of civilization and that too started with water issues.

The whole Sub-continent of India was inhabited among others by the black people known as the Dravidian and the Kolarians before the arrival of the Aryans. The Kolarians

are a Dravidian sect, whose descendant communities can be found also in West Bengal and elsewhere in the eastern belt of the Indian-Subcontinent. Excavations in the Deolpota village of western Bengal seem to suggest that a Paleolithic civilization in the region existed about one hundred thousand years ago.

A recent study speaks, "A 10,000 to 15,000-year-old stone structure in Rangamati is the primary evidence of Paleolithic civilization along with a hand axe found in the mountainous inclines of the Feni district. This neo-stone age began 3,000 B.C. lasting almost 1500 years. Similar tools were found in Sitakunda of the eastern region Chittagong, and near Comilla district. The sparsely forested hills in eastern Bengal strewn with fertile valleys imparted a hospitable location for Neolithic settlements." (*Bangladesh Towards 21st Century*", published by the Ministry of Information, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, ASNIC) The Dravidian and the Kolarians were parts of the Sumerian race and had built the Babylonian civilization. (Hall, H. R., 1920). Hall further speaks that the Sumerians introduced agriculture in Babylonia and also developed irrigation systems from a number of canals, specially constructed for the purpose. These Sumerians also excelled the Semites in artistic spirit and ability. This also helped flourish trade and commerce. These Sumerians were decidedly Indians in type. The face-type of the average Indian of today is no doubt much the same as that of his Dravidian race-ancestors thousands of years ago. He adds that it is to this Dravidian ethnic type of India that the ancient Sumerian bears most resemblance, so far as one can judge from his monuments. He was very like a Southern Hindu of the Deccan (who still speaks Dravidian languages). Hall maintains, it is by no means

improbable that the Sumerians were an Indian race who passed certainly by land, perhaps also by sea, through Persia to the valley of the two rivers. It was in the Indian (perhaps the Indus) valley that we suppose that their culture had developed. Hall concludes, "There is little doubt that India must have been one of the earliest centers of human civilization, and it seems natural to suppose that the strange un-Semitic, un-Aryan people who came from the East to civilize the West were of Indian origin, especially when we see with our eyes how every Indian the Sumerian were in type" (Hall, H.R., 1920). According to Hall, the culture of India is pre-Aryan in origin; as in Greece, the conquered civilized the conquerors. The Aryan Indian owed his civilization and his degeneration to the Dravidians as the Aryan Greek to the Mycenaeans (Das, Abinash Chandra, 1921:216-217). Prior to the Aryan civilization, there thus existed a pre-Aryan civilization in India. The Aryans had all of the pre-Aryan things in them and these they borrowed but used them as if these were their own. The Jewish religion, Christianity and Islam which also flourished in India were, however, not idolaters like the Dravidians and the Aryans and they had a different approach to water and culture issues. These religions believed in one God and the followers were not idolatrous. But generally speaking, the Christians occasionally look as if they were idolaters when they take Jesus as the son of God. I have tried to explore newer avenues in regard to cultural issues.

There are, however, scholars who are of the opinion that Bangladesh did not have traditions beyond the Hindu and the Buddhist periods (Das, Abinash Chandra, 1921:2).

The discoveries made at Harappa in the Punjab and at Mohenjo-Daro in Sindh and the most recent discoveries at Farakka over the Ganges, near Maldaha, West Bengal,

India, where artifacts similar to Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro were found during the excavation of Farakka Barrage Excavation Project and also the discoveries at Pandu-Rajar Dhibi at Birbhum in West Bengal, India, suggest that there appears a definite linkage of Bengal with Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. The discoveries made at Wari Bateshwar, in Narsingdi, Bangladesh over the Brahmaputra in the 80's, disproved all the earlier views regarding Bangladesh. We can now claim that Bangladesh is one of the ancient lands and she has records of having a very glorious past which has so long been remain buried along the river belts due to the wear and tear of time. This attempt of mine may have limitation and lapses which may be addressed in due course. It is primarily confined to our cultural heritage and the use of water as the basis of it. I studied very closely the works relating to civilizations that grew up along the Indus, the Ganges and the Brahmaputra basins. But I admit limitations as I do not have any experience of archaeology. It is my love for the country that prompted me to undertake such kind of work.

Chapter

II

Civilization Begins with Water

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The history of civilization suggests that water has shaped our civilization since the beginning of mankind (Max Muller and Monier Williams). All major religions like Judaism, Christianity, the Vedic and Islam maintain that Allah or God created both earth and water for human beings. Adam, the first man created by Allah, had full knowledge about the creation of earth and the other created beings. He also knew the ways and means as to how he should live on earth. Water has played a significant part in the life of man since the beginning of creation. Evolution led to the early civilization and it speaks of the discovery of agriculture and the making of peasant society. The village was the first and beside it came the small cities. Water was then a necessity. Our ancient ancestors, such as the Egyptians and the Mayans made better use of water in their way of life. Initially their economic structure was dependent on the flooding from springs and rivers as it helped produce the harvest. The Nile was used for irrigation and civilization developed around rivers and seas. Gradually, the ancient peasant society came to know how they should bring water to them instead of moving themselves to water. Ancient Libya, Rome and Greece learned to move the water to their metropolises through the power of gravity in aqueducts and ancient man-made

tunnels. This single innovation changed civilizations forever (Herskovits, M. J., 1949).



River side civilization

The great civilization and cultures thus had been built along the seas and riverbanks (Thomson, G. 1949). The Indus Valley Civilization in our sub-continent flourished much ahead of the advent of the Aryans (Marshall, J., 1931; Karim, Anwarul 1979).

There have appeared two types of water; one is the surface water which is available in rivers, tanks, streams and canals. Next to it is the ground water. In all these cases, rain is the source for the supply of water. Mountains too, have water, when snow starts melting. Sea water is not good for drinking. It is harmful for agriculture also. But the sea provides various types of fish as food. It also provides precious things such as pearls and other minerals etc.

In the course of time, water is contaminated, particularly ground water. The majority of tubewells in rural areas of Bangladesh are now arsenic contaminated. People have suffered and many have also died because of ignorance and

the wrong use of medicine as the doctors in rural areas could not identify the causes of the disease. But necessity is the mother of invention. Rain water harvesting is now a very useful means to survive. Culture is thus a human product and it is transmitted from one generation to the other. Rain water harvesting and rain making were in vogue in ancient time (Frazer, James, 1963). Culture never dies, it only changes or transforms. Water provides food for poets and writers. No one is an exception. If someone lives in the city, he needs moments to visit the sea, river, and lakes for one's survival. Rabindranath Tagore, Nazrul, Madhusudan Dutt, Lalou Shah the mystic, all lived by the side of rivers. Shakespeare too was born in a city, named Stratford-on-Avon. Avon was the name of the river. The Thames of London has also nurtured many renowned poets and scholars. Music, too, is born out of water. Games and sports have also been part of water resources. This practice was also in vogue since by gone days. Spirits live in water. The ancient literature, particularly the Greek literature has enough stories of it. Our folklore that includes riddles, proverbs, tales, music and games, have various uses of water. Rural people survive because of folkloric knowledge which they use in agriculture, fishery, livestock, health, house-building and disaster management. Our development philosophers have, of late, taken interest in indigenous knowledge. They consider indigenous knowledge as the most useful of its activities in life. The main strength of folkloric and indigenous knowledge lies in the fact that it is deeply rooted in our social, economic, religious and cultural activities (Crooke. W., 1926). In many cases the indigenous or folkloric knowledge has also problem-solving focus. In many countries these are also used as a part of legal aid. Folklore or indigenous knowledge is a sort

of a skill that one learns across generations through oral transmission, experience and practice. It is a tradition, a heritage or culture that is a part of everyone in the society.

Historical Backdrop: Indus Basin Civilization

The present book studies the impact of water and culture in a historical perspective. The history of civilizations shows that water has shaped the civilization of the world. In fact, civilization begins with water. The Indian sub-continent is also very old and ancient. The great civilizations of the world is quite contemporary with India and Bangladesh.

These civilizations were built along the vast rivers of those regions. The Egyptian civilization was a gift of the Nile. The Iraqi and the Babylonian civilizations were also built along the river belts. Similarly, the Greek and many other world civilizations were also established beside the rivers or seas (Wheeler, M., 1953).



The history of India, as recorded by the Aryans in their religious books-the Vedas, speaks of rivers and seas. The



Aryans found the local people as 'black skinned' when they conquered the land and they termed them as Dasyus or (robbers) Rakkhasyas (demons) as they claimed to be of superior blood and not as of pagans as they carried with them the Vedic religion. For several thousand years, the Aryans ruled India before the birth of Christ (BC) and they claimed themselves the most ancient civilized people in the world. It is true that the non-Aryans were black because they belonged to Negroid race and they had roots in Africa. Later Austroloid people got mixed with the Negroid. The Aryans used to term the Dravidians and the Kolarians as 'dasyus' or 'asuras' and 'rakkhasas'. The non-Aryans, after being expelled from their home, used to attack the Aryan society and their villages. They looted and plundered and thus disturbed them time and again. These Aryans condemned them as 'Rakkhyasha' or demons because they took them as evil and they looked for protection against them. The word 'asura' means 'powerful'. The demons or the monsters as the Aryans called the non-Aryans or black-skinned people, looked quite powerful over them and the

Aryans sought protection of the gods. In fact, the Aryans considered themselves as 'godly' or 'deva' against the non-Aryans who were 'Asura' or monsters. The Aryans when they organized society, made the down-trodden and untouchable a hierarchy. The Brahmins or the priests; Kshatriyas or the warriors; Vasyas or the trading community; and finally the 'Sudra' the non-Aryan made into slaves and such was the caste system. Initially, the distinction was not rigid but gradually it was made rigid. The discovery of Mohenjo-Daro in Sindh and Harappa in the Punjab clearly suggest that the culture of India is pre-Aryan in origin. As the Indus or the Sindhu that passed through Sindh and the Punjab, it produced a civilization and culture which were in no way inferior to the other historic civilizations in Europe; rather, it was in many ways, far superior to those of contemporary civilizations.

The name Sindhu appeared a number of times in the Rig-Veda. The Sindhu was the biggest river among others in the region and the natives, particularly the Dravidians and the Kolarians used to address 'Sindhu' as a big river also. 'Sindhu' was considered by the Aryans as an ocean. Abinash Chandra Das writes: "Indeed the word Sindhu (river) in several passages of the Rig-Veda practically bears the sense of the 'sea.' All references to navigation point only to the crossing of rivers in the boats, impelled by oars, the main object being to reach the other bank of the river. This action suggested a favorite figure which remained familiar throughout Sanskrit literature. Thus one of the poets of the Rigveda invoked Agni with the words 'Take us across all worse and dangers as across the river (Sindhu) in a boat' (Das, Abinash Chandra, 1921:33). This speaks clearly that the Aryans were afraid of the mighty Sindhu. Das writes, "There were undoubtedly sea-going vessels and

merchant ships in Sapta-Sindhu; but navigation was most difficult and dangerous, and ship-wrecks were probably a very common occurrence. We may therefore safely surmise that the multitude generally avoided the sea-route for going to any foreign country." (Das, Abinash Chandra, 1921:34) The pre-Aryans, who lived along the river belt before the advent of the Aryans, built a big dam to save themselves from flooding and also from massive irrigation to agricultural crops that helped build Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro civilizations. They had contact with Ceylon, and Australia in the south, Burma and South China in the east and South Africa in the west. The Dravidians and the Kolarians had close affinities with Ceylon and the aforesaid countries. H. F. Blanford, in one of his articles published in the Quarterly Journal of the Geological Society, London, VolXXXI, 1875, comments, "India, South Africa and Australia were connected by an Indo-Oceanic Continent in the Permian epoch; and the two former countries remained connected up to the end of the Miocene period", (Blanford, H.F., 1875:534-540) Das writes, "The stage of the civilization of the original human inhabitants of the vast continent may well be judged by that of their descendants who are the present remnants of the race in Africa, South India, Australia, the islands of the Indian Archipelago, and the islands scattered in the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. Most of them are in the same primitive condition of life as their progenitors were hundreds of thousands of years ago. The Kolarians and the Dravidian races of the Indian Peninsula are allied to the Negroid races of Africa, with such modifications in their physical features and characteristics as climate and different environments have imposed upon them; and there can be no doubt those they were original inhabitants of the

lost continent. (Das, Abinash Chandra, 1921:104). Alfred Russel Wallace writes, "It is evident that during much of the Tertiary period, Ceylon and South India were bounded on the north by a considerable extent of sea, and probably formed part of an extensive Southern Continent or the great island. The very numerous and remarkable cases of affinity with Malaya, require, however, some closer approximation with these islands, which probably occurred at later period." (Russel, Geological Distribution of Animals, etc. 1870, Vol.I, See Abinash Chandra Das, 1921:98). South India thus formed part of these regions through trade and commerce by sea. Africa, Central Asia and the other middle-eastern countries were also connected with the Kolarians through sea-routes. History speaks that the pre-Aryans belonging to the Dravidian and the Kolarians roamed in the hills and forests of Southern India. After they lost to the ancient Aryans, they were completely cut off from them by seas like the Rajputana Sea, on the south, stretching as far as the Aravalli Range, and connected with the Arabian Sea on the west through the Gulfs of Kutch and Sindh, and with the Eastern Sea occupying the Gangetic trough on the northeast, developed a high state of civilization in these areas. The Ganga and the Jamuna have been mentioned in the Rig-veda (Das, Abinash Chandra, 1921:5, &75) with Sindhu and its tributaries. It is possible that Bengali or Bango was developed as a civilized nation in the same way. The Aryans could not enter into Bango for long years.

Sapta-Sindhu as the term goes; the Indus basin was very fertile because of rivers all around. It produced a variety of crops like rice, barley, millet. It also provided sufficient pastures to the cattle. Agriculture was the basis of its culture. The lower basin of Sapta-Sindhu also was watered

by the river. The Sindhu was the biggest and the best of all rivers. The Rigveda praised the Sindhu in the following verses; The Sindhu is the best of all rivers. "O Sindhu, when thou first didst rush, towards the region that supplies food, Varuna cut various paths for thee. Thou lowest through elevated region and hold the highest place over all running streams. The roar of the Sindhu rises up from the earth and fills the heaven. She is flowing with great speed and the appearance is refulgent. O Sindhu, as milch-cows run to their calves with udders full of milk, so the other rivers are coming to thee with lowing sounds, carrying waters from all sides. The Sindhu has perpetual youth and is beautiful. She has... vast sources of food and very large quantity of wool. Her banks are covered with silama grass and sweet smelling flowers, full of honey".

"The unconquerable Sindhu is running straight. Her color is white and bright and she is great. Her water is flowing with great velocity and flooding all the four directions. She is an object of admiration like a mare, and her shape is symmetrical like that of a robust woman. The sound of her water gives one the impression of rain falling in thundering torrents. Here comes the Sindhu like a bellowing bull". (Das, Abinash Chandra, 1921:72-73). Among the domestic animals, we find the largest mention of cattle (cows) made in the Rig-Veda. The cow was the most useful animal. She supplied milk and butter and her dried dung was used for fuel. The bull was the emblem of power and generation, and was used for drawing the plough and the cart. There is, however, word of the bulls having been killed in sacrifices and its cooked flesh offered to the Gods. There is also evidence of beef having been eaten by the ancient Aryans (Das, Abinash Chandra, 1921:79).

The cow hide were tanned and made into many articles for everyday use. Cow-hides were used for storing water, wine, honey, oil and clarified butter. Cow-dung was also used as manure for fertilizing agricultural lands. The horse was the next most useful animal. Professor MacDonnell has said that the horse was never used by the ancient Aryans for riding but only for drawing cars or carts, chariots (Macdonnel, 1898:150). The ass has also been mentioned in the Rig-Veda and it was employed to draw carts. Horses, decked with pearl, gold and silver ornaments, were used in festive processions. The buffalo was also a domestic animal and the goat was domesticated for food and milk. Its hide and wool were also used for other purposes. The sheep was also largely domesticated for its flesh and wool and sacrificed in honor of Gods. The camel was a familiar beast of burden. The dog was also a pet domestic animal (Das, Abinash Chandra, 1921: 80-83). Of minerals, mention has been made of gold, silver, copper, iron and precious stones in the Rig-Veda. Coins were made of both gold and silver. Iron was largely used for making weapons of war and agricultural implements. All these appear that they were very much in use when the land was conquered by the Aryans. (Das, Abinash Chandra, 1921: Chap.) The Aryans, in fact, inherited them from the pre-Aryans who were known to be the Dravidians and the Kolarians. Das in the footnote of his book, Rig Vedic India, mentions that the Sumerian civilization in Babylonia was planted there by a people like the Dravidians of Southern India (Das, Abinash Chandra, Chap. XII) H. R. Hall in his Ancient History of the Near East (Hall, H.R, 1920; Chap.V.pp.173-4) speaks about the Sumerian in following words. "We have no knowledge of the time when the Sumerians were savages: when we first meet with them in the fourth millennium

B.C., they are already a civilized, metal-using people living in great and populous cities, possessing a complicated system of writing, and living under the government of firmly established civil and religious dynasties and hierarchies. They had imposed their higher culture on the more primitive inhabitants of the river in which they had settled, and had assimilated the civilization of the conquered, whatever it may have been, as their own. The earliest scenes of their own culture—development had perhaps not been played upon the Babylonian stage at all, but in a different country, away across the Persian mountains eastward. The land of Elam, the later Susiana, where till the end a non-Semitic nationality of Sumerian culture maintained itself in usual independence of the dominant Mesopotamian power, was no doubt a stage in their progress. There they left the abiding impress of their civilization, although the Elamites developed their art on a distinct line of their own. Whether the Elamites, whom they probably civilized, were racially related to them we do not know; the language of both Elamite and Sumerian were agglutinative but otherwise are not alike. The ethnic type of the Sumerians, so strongly marked in their statues, was as different from those of the races which surrounded them, as was their language from those of the Semites, Aryans or others; they were decidedly Indian in type. The face type of the average Indian of today is no doubt much the same as that of his Dravidian ancestors thousands of years ago. Among the modern Indians, as amongst the modern Greeks or Italians, the ancient pre-Aryan type of the land has (as the primitive type of the land always does) survived while that of the Aryan conqueror died out long ago. And it is to this Dravidian ethnic type of India that the ancient Sumerian bears most resemblance, so far as we can judge

from his monuments. He was very like a Southern Hindu of the Deccan (who still speaks Dravidian languages). And it is by no means improbable that the Sumerians were an Indian race which passed, certainly by land, perhaps also by sea, through Persia to the valley of the Two Rivers. It was the Indian home (perhaps the Indus valley) that we suppose for them that their culture developed. Their writing may have been invented, and progressed from a purely pictorial to a simplified and abbreviated form, which afterwards in Babylonia took on its peculiar cuneiform appearance owing to its being written with a square-ended stylus on soft clay. On the way they left the seeds of their culture in Elam. This seems a plausible theory of Sumerian origin, and it must be clearly understood that it is offered by the present writer merely as theory, which has little direct evidence to back it, but seems most in accordance with the probabilities of the case. There is little doubt that India must have been one of the earliest centers of human civilization, and it seems natural to suppose that the strange un-Semitic, un-Aryan people who came from the East to civilize the West were of Indian origin, especially when we see with our eyes how very Indian the Sumerians were in type" (Das, Abinash Chandra, 1921:216-17).

This has thus been proved, beyond doubt, by a number of historians and archaeologists, that prior to the arrival of the Aryans to the Indus or the Sapta-Sindhu, known as Sindh and the Punjab, there lived a civilized race, known in history as the Dravidians and the Kolarians, and it was they who had built the Mohenjo-Daro in Sindh and the Harappa in Punjab along the Indus. This civilization dates far as back as to the third or the fourth millennium B.C. according to Sir John Marshall, Director General of Archaeology in India. The discovery of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa relics

has completely changed the ancient Indian history. Prior to this discovery, the historians were of the opinion that the Aryans who came from Central Asia or Iran were the only civilized race who built Indus Basin Civilization in the hoary past. The archaeologists, after the discovery of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, came to a conclusion that these were built by the Dravidians and these had similarities with those of Sumerian civilization in Babylonia. After a careful study of the Vedic culture and the Pre-Aryan culture in India, they arrived at the conclusion that the civilization which was built along the Indus basin was the product of the Dravidians and the Kolarians. The Dravidians and the Kolarians were believed to have been the original inhabitants of the Punjab whom the Aryans are said to have ousted from its occupation and drove them to the southernmost part of India (Das, Abinash Chandra, 1921:129). These people also lived in Southern India (The Deccan) and Bango (Bengal). The Southern people of the Deccan resemble the Dravidian.

Abinash Chandra Das in his book, *The Rigvedic India*, finally concludes, "There can thus be no doubt that the Kolarian and the Dravidian races were the original inhabitants of Southern India and the theory of their having been immigrants from Central Asia, first to the Punjab, and then, through the pressure of the invading Aryans, to the Southern Peninsula, is more fanciful than real. It is also certain that when the Indo-Oceanic Continent or Lemuria was submerged, it was inhabited by human beings in very low stages of development, and this is proved by the existence of aboriginal savages in South Africa, Australia, South India and the islands in the Indian Ocean and of the Indian Archipelago, who, though belonging to the same human family, became isolated and separated from one

another, and developed distinguishing characteristics harmoniously with the changes of their environments and climate (Das, Abinash Chandra, 1921:110). Das further said that along with them lived savage tribes inhabiting the hills of Upper Burma, Assam, Tippera and the North-East frontier of India who belong to the Mongolian family. These are the Abors, the Akas, the Mishmis, the Nagas, the Chakmas and others, who, in some pre-historic time, had probably lived side by side with the forefathers of the present Mongolians and the Chinese, and crossed over into India through the north-eastern passes. Encyclopedia Britannica (Ninth Edition, Vol. XII, p777) writes, "Some of the hill languages in Eastern Bengal preserve Chinese terms, others contain Mongolian", (Das, Abinash Chandra, 1921:110-111). Encyclopedia further points out that the Deccans of Southern India had direct connections with the hill tracts of Assam and Sylhet (p.111). The Dravidians and the Kolarians occupied the western and the southern borders of the peninsula where their descendants are still found in very large numbers. It seems that they made rapid progress towards building a civilization in the region. The Aryan colonization of the Deccan (Das, Abinash Chandra, 1921:112-113) must, therefore, have occurred thousands of years after the composition of the most ancient hymns of the Rig-Veda. There can be no doubt that the Dravidians and the Kolarians were the original inhabitants not only of the Sindhu valley in the west, it was, however, true that they lived in Bengal and the Deccan before the Aryanization of India also.

Such a country as that of India was thus not built in a day. But one must not forget that the black skinned people initially helped build the civilization. The Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal together with the Indus, consisting of the

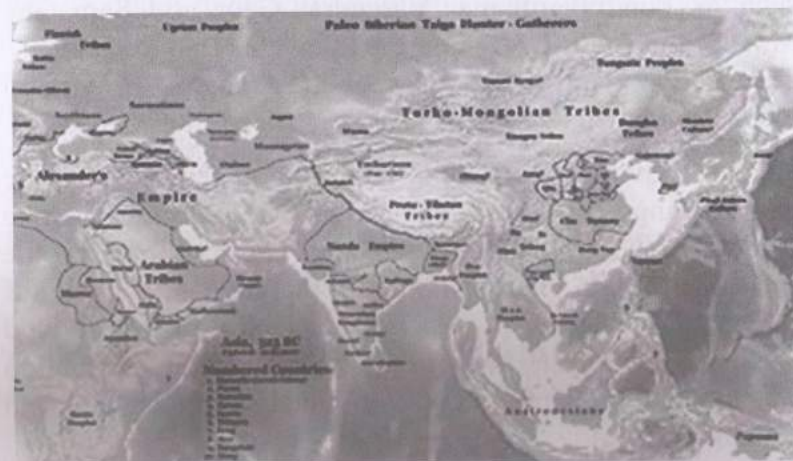
Sapta-Sindhu and Ganges, the Yamuna, the Brahmaputra and their innumerable tributaries made the land all together great and glorious. The history of civilization suggests that water has shaped our civilization since the beginning of mankind. The Quran and other religious books maintain that Allah or God created the Earth for human beings. Adam, the first man created by Allah, had full knowledge, how to live on the earth. Gradually his children as they grew, understood the importance of water and its various uses, and produced civilization with the help of it. Evolution leading to early civilizations speaks of the discovery of agriculture and gradually made small cities with the help of water. Our ancient ancestors, such as the Egyptians and the Mayans developed culture with water. Initially their economic structure was dependent on the flooding from springs and rivers and it helped produce the harvest. The Nile was used for irrigation and civilization developed around rivers and seas. Over time, ancient civilizations learned to bring water to them instead of moving themselves to water. Ancient Libya, Rome and Greece learned to move the water to their metropolises through the power of gravity in aqueducts and ancient man-made tunnels. This single innovation changed civilizations forever. The great civilizations and cultures thus had been built along the seas and riverbanks. (Thomson, G., 1949) The Indus Valley Civilization in our sub-continent flourished much ahead of the advent of the Aryans. (Marshall, 1931)"

But the discoveries made at Harappa in the Panjab and at Mohenjo-Daro in Sindh take Indian civilization back to the third or the fourth millennium BC according to Sir John Marshall, Director General of Archaeology in India. It is also believed that Sumerian civilization in Babylonia was

planted there by a people like the Dravidians of Indian origin (Krishnasvami, Aiyangar, and Historians of History of the World, Vol.I, and p59), (Also see Abinash Chandra Das, 1921: Chap.XII). Until the discoveries at Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, it was held that the past or the ancient history of the country started with the Hindu period when the Aryans from Central Asia or Persia (present Iran) conquered the northwest part of India initially and finally the whole of India including Bengal, from the locals. At that time the present Bangladesh was known as Bango or Bangala in the Vedic literature. The Hindu domination in Bango or Bangala continued until the advent of the Turkish Muslim who conquered the land and the occupation period was known as Turkish or the Sultani period. Later, the country came under the Mughals when it was known as Subah Bangala. After the Mughals, the British occupied the land for two hundred years. The whole of India was liberated in 1947 and was also divided into the Indian dominion and Pakistan of which East Pakistan became the eastern province of Pakistan. The present Bangladesh became independent under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The three great leaders, Hussain Shahid Suhrawardi, Sher-e-Bangla Fazlul Haque and, finally, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani played unique and great roles in the making of Bangabandhu as the national leader. Bangladesh, thus, has a history as old as the civilization that dawned in the hoary past. The subsequent pages will unfold the history of the land as well as the people.

Bangladesh: A Brief Historical Background

The Ganges Basin Civilization



Ptolemy's map in the Greek history

Human Settlement: Archaeology

The Ganges basin civilization comprises three rivers, the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna. All these rivers have innumerable distributaries. The alluvia of these rivers formed the land surface of Bengal into existence. The country belongs to the lower Gangetic regions having a plain land and three main rivers, the Ganges (the Padma) the Brahmaputra and the Meghna with innumerable distributaries and stretching from the Himalaya to the Bay of Bengal. The Ganges and the Brahmaputra originate in the Himalayas and enter into Bangladesh from the northwest and northeast respectively while the Meghna originates in the Assam hills and enters into Bangladesh from the east. These three rivers then join in Bangladesh before falling

into the Bay of Bengal. Bengal (east and west Bengal) is a completely alluvial plain with marginal hills in the east and south-east. These rivers have made a number of sections such as Pundravardhana, Varendra, Gaur and Samatata. Most of the south-eastern part is known as Bango (Bangal). The section lying to the west of the Hoogly—Bhagirathi River's is known as Rarr (Radh) (Ali, M. Mohor, 1985:3-5)

Human settlement in Bengal is an antiquated history. The name Bango appeared in the Vedic scriptures. The evidence of early human occupation dates far back to the Pleistocene Age. There is no doubt that the land was full of rivers and a sea, the Bay of Bengal nearby of it. The land consisted of forests and marshes and human occupation was quite slow. (Dutta, RC (1906) and (Majumdar, Ramesh Chandra (1922).

The archaeological and anthropogeographic evidence in Bangladesh and the adjacent areas in India indicate the validity of this supposition. The evidence of the existence of human habitation in the lower and upper Palaeolithic age has been discovered in the Chhotanagpur plateau, Rajmahal Hills and the Himalayan-Shillong system. These places are adjacent to Bengal. The evidence of early human occupation in Bangladesh dating back to the Pleistocene Age has been discovered in Comilla and the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The Lalmai hills of Comilla are part of Pleistocene Terrace and the Chittagong Hill Districts are of Tertiary Age.

In the second phase, with the development of agriculture in the area, the river system, the most characteristic physical feature of Bengal played a dominating role in the development and expansion of settlement. Major pockets of human settlement existed along the fertile valleys of

agricultural value. There is evidence of some sporadic settlement in the Gangetic plain in a number of river valleys throughout the ancient period. In the past, rivers were the main modes of communication. Some renowned commercial and port cities like Gangaridae and Tamraliti were located on the bank of the river Ganges and the Bhagirathi respectively. The sudden shift of the course of rivers and drying up of river channels caused the death or decline of many settlements.

The movement of the Palaeolithic people from northern India towards the east took place over the Bengal delta to Burma, Indo-China, the Malay Peninsula, Indonesia, the Pacific Islands and even to northern Australia. This happened with the lowering of temperature all over the world following the southward advancement of the ice sheet during the Pleistocene period. During this southward movement some might have settled on the elevated areas of Bengal since the wooded low-lying hills of the north would probably have been much easier to clear than the marshy jungles of the plains. Similarity of archaeological findings of the upper Palaeolithic culture of Kalimpong with those of China and southeast Asia suggest that some people may have moved into this part from Tibet and the adjoining areas of China.

Available evidence indicates that during the Pleistocene period Palaeolithic culture was present in the older and the low mountainous areas in and around the region now forming Bangladesh. It also seems that the Barind Terrace may have been one of the few places where settlements first developed. The south was either marshy or estuarine and deeply forested and unfit for human habitation for long. Other areas of ancient settlements were in southwestern Chittagong and the Lalmai Hills.

Settlements have been most unstable as a result of channel shifting of the Ganges-Brahmaputra systems. However, it is assumed that fairly old and built-up settlements developed in ancient times in areas now known as the Moribund Delta, due mainly to their agricultural potential and related economic reasons. But the actual period of the development of human settlements in this part of the country is very difficult to ascertain.

The dated history of Bengal began only from 326 BC with the mention of warriors of the Gangaridae who were ready to resist a possible onslaught by Alexander. There was probably some kind of organised social and political life in Bengal for many centuries before this notable event. The first reference to the country is in early Vedic literature. Before the entry of the Aryans into the northwestern part of this subcontinent (about 1000 BC), a number of population groups were living in the Bengal Basin, including the areas now forming Bangladesh. The Aryans occupying the upper Ganges Basin came in contact with a population group whom they called the 'Nishadas', meaning wild people. They presumably were the aborigines of the area now forming Bangladesh. A dominant part of this group belonged to the so-called Proto-Australoid group known as the 'Veddoid'. There were sub-groups or part of the population living in the South Asian subcontinent. Some belonged to the Baric division of the Sino-Tibetan and the Tibeto-Burman, mostly having settlements along the hilly regions of Bengal.

As far as records are concerned, initially Bengal was an isolated and sparsely settled landmass. The western highland and the forest cover the tidal forest in the south, and the innumerable rivers discouraged mass human migration into this area for a long time. Even the Aryans

who had a dryland nomadic culture were initially least interested in entering this area of tropical wetland. Further, the Himalayan range in the north and northeast protected this part of the subcontinent from mass migration.

Bengal was divided into a number of natural divisions caused by numerous rivers and levels of land. As such, the broad river interfluvium perpetuated many independent kingdoms and settlements. These were isolated for quite a long time, even in the historical past, because of the presence of natural barriers including the existence of dense forests.

The Ganges was the dividing line between the north and south Bengal delta. The Brahmaputra, likewise, used to flow along its older course, east of the present channel (until the late 18th century), and the Barind was linked with the Madhupur tract. The Karotoya was a big river flowing directly into the Bay of Bengal. Periplus (68 A.D.), noted that Karotoya was a mighty river with busy marine traffic. The Ganges, Brahmaputra and the Karotoya served as the routes for the silk and muslin trade between Bengal and China. In the southern deltaic part of the country, the lower Ganges and its distributaries played a significant role in the development of human occupancy in subsequent periods.

With the emergence of the Padma the main course of the Ganges, the agricultural and accessibility potentials of this part of the country increased and encouraged people to settle there. But this river was also noted for its devastating effect, causing flood and river erosion that also led to the decline of many settlements. However, most of Jessore, Kushtia and part of Khulna were above flood level and were habitable. It is known that the Sunderbans tidal forest extended up to these areas and later shifted southward

because of the rising level of land due to southern expansion of the delta building activities by the Ganges as well as the impact of human interference. A group of pre-Aryan people used to live here; later they came to be known as the buna-bagdi. Northern and northeastern Bengal was covered with a dense forest but a good part of it was populated by the primitive hill tribes of lower Assam.

Expansion of human settlement and its distribution pattern in Bengal followed the navigable river channels. The rivers also offered fertile soil for farming and were the main means of communication, facilitating trade and commerce. The major rivers and their sub-basins separated different population groups, and thereby the human settlement units from each other. In ancient times, a number of population groups were living in Bengal, the most notable being the Pundra, the Vanga and the Suhma. The Pundra and the Vanga were the earliest ancestors of the people settling in Bengal. The earliest reference to the Pundra and the Vanga in postRig-Vedic literature clearly indicated population-settlement units rather than country, but later these units gave their names to the respective territories under their control. From the name of the tribe Vanga or Banga the name of the whole region has been derived.

There were 16 Mahajanapadas (mega-settlements) in the whole of India from the 6th to the 4th centuries BC. Banga and Pundravardhana (along with Anga, Kalinga and Sumba) were the two areas that had their locations in the Bengal area. During the reign of Asoka (273-232 BC) and in subsequent Hindu periods, Pundra (the region between Kosi and Karatoa) and Vanga (south and middle Bengal), and the region of south central and east Bengal in the Gupta period (240-570 AD) known as Samatata were flourishing populated areas. By the 4th century AD most of the

forested plain land of the country was cleared off and by the 5th to 6th century's settlement expanded in the fertile lowlands of the Sundarbans, Khulna and Bakerganj. But these were abandoned during the 12th-13th centuries because of the shifting of the river channels and also epidemics. In later periods, however, reoccupation of abandoned lands took place. The Muslim emperors, particularly Akbar, were keen on the extension of cultivated lands and settlement development on the wastelands. During the reign of Akbar, some parts of Jessore, Noakhali and Faridpur were densely forested areas. From the end of the 15th century to the beginning of the 16th century, the Muslim rulers started agricultural practices in these areas. Pratapadityamat the end of the 16th century established his kingdom in the Sundarbans area and Jessore. A number of ruins of built-up settlements of this period in the Sundarbans region testify to human occupation in this region.

Expansion of agriculture and extension of new lands created new settlements in the flooded fertile land of east and south Bengal. In subsequent times, settlements in these areas became increasingly dense, and Dhaka and Sonargaon developed as the political and economic centres of the whole region. At the beginning of the British rule, about 40% to 50% of the total area of Bangladesh was settled, the rest was mainly under forest cover and marshes. The economic and political interests of the colonial power have had a significant impact on interregional population transfer and settlement expansion. (Dutt, RC: 1906, Roychoudhury, HC: 1963),

Bengal was civilized much ahead of the Aryan rule in India. There were many kingdoms and states in ancient Bengal. Bangal, Gangaridai, Pundra, Gaur and Rarrh ruled

in various parts of Bengal. The powerful Maurya kings took years to bring the whole of Bengal under their rule, Lower Ganga–Brahmaputra valley, comprising present West Bengal, Bangladesh and parts of Assam had human settlements along with the Middle Ganga plains. The period therefore coincides rather with the rise of the Maurya rule, which probably extended to this region. Mahasthan, Chandraketugarh, and Tamralipti all suggest pre-urban to urban settlements in the early history of Bengal. Farming in rural settlements had flourished in the 3rd and the 1st centuries BC.

Urban centres of Mahasthan and the other sites like Chandraketugarh, Tamralipti, and Bangarh indicate pre-urban to urban settlements in early historic Bengal.

Chandraketugarh in North 24 Parganas, Tamralipti and Natshal in Medinipur, identified as nodal settlements in the deltaic region, attest to the rise of commerce and a rich material culture from the Sunga–Kushan times onwards, many of which sprang in the Gupta period. Clusters of sites in this sub-region comprising of the explored sites like Harinarayanpur, Boral, Atghara-Baishhata, Mahinagar, Hariharpur and others in South 24 Parganas and Panna in Medinipur, may actually indicate a proliferation of settlements with rising demographic and economic trends, associated with cultural and commercial growth with possible links to the genesis of administrative and commercial centres in the Lower Ganga plains in the early historical times. Wari Bateshwar in the Narsingdi district of Bangladesh could be taken to be an extension of this chain of pattern. Rural settlements had flourished in these regions during the 3rd and 1st centuries BC. Both Maurya and Gupta periods witnessed the gradual change from the Chalcolithic village culture to urban culture of early

historic period of Bengal. This followed the possible transition of life from the simple village farming to trade orientation and urbanity in some regions of ancient Bengal during 6th century BC.

Archaeological excavations at Farakka, near Maldaha in West Bengal by the Farakka Barrage Excavation Project Authority in West Bengal, India, sometime in 1968-74, however, discovered relics of a lost civilization as old as Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa in the Gangetic belt of West Bengal. The discovery records that the civilization contemporaneous with the Harappa lies buried at Farakka, West Bengal in the Ganges. The Directorate of Archaeology, West Bengal, during intermittent explorations in 1975 noticed a succession of occupations intervened by breaks of unconformity within an average depth of about ten meters. They also found relics of habitation about 8 meters below surface and above the natural level representing the present water level.

The archaeologists after a yearlong analysis of the antiquities ranging between ochreous pottery and fascinating terracotta ascribed the entire occupational strata to several periods beginning from the earliest phase of habitation to the Mughal period. They also ascribed some pottery including a globular vase with reed impressions and a number of jars having a convex lower part with or without carination and a steep shoulder to the ochre colored ware (ocw) civilization.

The archaeologists feel that the ochre colored ware (ocw) of the upper regions of the Gangetic valley and the Ganges-Yamuna Doab is, in all probability, associated with the copper hoard culture of the Indus valley. (Civilization as old as Harappa were found buried at Farakka. The

Bangladesh Observer, Dhaka, June 18, 1976. Also see Karim. A., 1979, 1980).

We have already discussed that the discovery of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro along the Indus or Sapta-Sindhu speaks of pre-Aryan culture in India, shaped by the Dravidians and the Kolarians. These two races of the Indian peninsula are allied to the Sumerian races who built the world's first cities in a fertile land between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers more than 5,000 years ago before the birth of Jesus Christ or Hazrat Isa of Islam. The same two rivers also helped build Mesopotamia around 3,000 BC (Dras, Abinash Chandra, 1921). The world's ancient civilizations, Iraq, Iran and Egypt, all were built along rivers. The River Nile contributed much to the growth and development of ancient civilization in Asia and Africa. Negroid races of Africa also were the original inhabitants of the lost civilization on the Indus.

Thanks to the geologists and the archaeologists of the country and also those of Jahangirnagar and Kolkata universities for their painstaking effort for discovering of several lost cities of the ancient Bengal. Bengal was formed 1 to 6.5 million years ago and the first known human habitation goes back to 100, 000 years in the past. Paleolithic tools and implements from a hundred thousand years ago have been found in Deolpota in West Bangla and 15, 000 year old implements have been found in southeast Bangladesh.

Gangaridae: An ancient Southern State of Bengal and Kotalipara (Gopalganj) as its capital

The history of the world suggests that the present Bangladesh is as old as the ancient Mohenjo-Daro and

Harappa type civilization. There had been tribes who became powerful during the Vedic periods. These tribes also founded kingdoms. One such tribe was known as the Gangaridae. The name of 'Gangaridae (Gangaridai)' came to the notice of Greek, Roman and Egyptian historians also. Gangaridae was an ancient state of Bengal or Bango and it was located by the side of the Ganges. Gangaridae existed before 300 BC in the Bengal region. The Greek historian and traveler Megasthenes (4th century BC) recorded of the existence Gangaridae in his work 'Indica'. Gangaridae was, in fact, a big state and it covered the whole of southeast regions of Bengal. The capital of Gangaridae was believed to have been situated at Kotalipara under the present Gopalganj district of Bangladesh. Recent excavations made by the archaeologists of Jahangirnagar University and Calcutta University discovered ruins of cities and a huge mud-forts along the Ganges basin. One such was Kotalipara under present Gopalganj district. Archaeologists found the names of the three kings, namely, 1) Gopa Chandra 2) Samachar Dev and 3) Dharmaditya. According to information available from Ptolemy's 'Geographia', it was found that the Gangaridai was extended to the southwest and southeast region of Bengal overlooking the Bay of Bengal. The entire region had five mouths of the Ganges. The five mouths were:

The Kambyson

The Mega

The Kamberikhon

The Pseudostomon

The Antibole

Strabo, Pliny, Arrian et al compiled a map of India as known to the early Greeks. It was based on Indica of Megasthenes (4th century BC), where the Gangaridai state has been shown in the lower Ganges and its tributaries. However it is held in all the Greek, Latin and Egyptian accounts that the Gangaridai was located in the deltaic region of southern Bengal. This information clearly speaks of Bengal as one of the most ancient civilizations and the country had several river ports along the Ganges. Taking records of Megasthenes from his work, Indica. Diodorus Siculus observes of Alexander's battle in India in the following terms:

"When he (Alexander) moved forward with his forces certain men came to inform him that Porus, the king of the country, who was the nephew of that Porus whom he had defeated, had left his kingdom and fled to the nation of Gangaridai... He had obtained from Phegeus description of the country beyond the Indus: First came a desert which it would take twelve days to traverse; beyond this was the river called the Ganges which had a width of thirty two stadia, and a greater depth than any other Indian river; beyond this again were situated the dominions of the nation of the Prasioi and the Gangaridai, whose king, Xandrammes, had an army of 20,000 horse 200,000 infantry, 2,000 chariots and 4,000 elephants trained and equipped for war".... "Now this (Ganges) river, which is 30 stadia broad, flows from north to south, and empties its water into the ocean forming the eastern boundary of the Gandaridai, a nation which possesses the greatest number of elephants and the largest in size." –Diodorus Siculus (c.90 BC – c.30 BC). (Quoted from The Classical Accounts of India, Dr. R.C. Majumder, and p. 170-72/234).

Diodorus Siculus further describes "Gangaridae":

"Among the southern countries the first under the Kaukasos is India, a kingdom remarkable for its vast extent and the largeness of its population, for it is inhabited by very many nations, among which the greatest of all is that of the Gangaridae, against whom Alexander did not undertake an expedition, being deterred by the multitude of their elephants. This region is separated from farther India by the greatest river in those parts (for it has a breadth of thirty stadia), but it adjoins the rest of India which Alexander had conquered, and which was well watered by rivers and highly renowned for its prosperous and happy condition." – Diodorus Siculus (1st century AD). [Quoted from the Epitome of Megasthenes, Indica.(Diodorus Siculus II.35-42). Ancient India as described by Megasthenes and Arrian. Translated and edited by John W. Mc Crindle, Ancient India as described in Classical Literature, p.201. Also see The Classical Accounts of India by Dr. Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, p.170-72/234]

Gradually a New Stone Age civilization flourished and traces of such kind of civilization were available in Bihar, Orissa and Assam and also in Bengal around 3000 to 1500 BC. Archaeologists wonder as they recognized a sudden change-over from stone tools to the metallic use of tools after they discovered a number of ruins in the whole of Bengal. They could not connect the missing links. They apprehend that there might be influx of a new people into the region. But it remained a mystery. The historians agree that the Indus civilization ended around 1800 BC with the advent of the Aryans from Central Asia. But the Aryans could not conquer Bengal and southern part of India for many years. But in course of time, the whole of India came under Aryanization. Hall argues that the whole of India was

under various non-Aryan tribes. As such their culture was non-Aryan in nature. He said, "The Culture of India is pre-Aryan in origin. As in Greece, the conquered countries civilized the conquerors. The Aryan Indian owed his civilization and his degeneration to the Dravidians as the Aryan Greek to the Mycaeneans." – Hall, H.R.: Ancient History of the Near East from Early Times to the Salamis. 1913, Methuen & Co. London. Dance forms seem to have originated in Dravidian India. South Indians have given us several unique dance forms and Gaur of Bengal has also given us unique dance forms. From the ruins of ancient Indus civilization we find dancing girl figurines which indicate the origin of the dances of India. That Bangladesh and West Bengal had been the seats of many lost cities and kingdoms could now be verifiable following archaeological excavations in these regions. The southeast and southwest regions experienced domination of the Dravidians and the Kolarians in the name of Bangal (bango-aal). Rarrh, Pundra, Suhma and Harikel also dominated in other parts of Bengal.

Pandu Rajar Dhibi in West Bengal, India

The settlement unearthed in Pandu Rajar Dhibi, beside the Ajoy river presents the dawn of the historical period in Bengal. The inhabitants are believed to have first used copper and bronze along with stone to make weapons and implements

The inhabitants of Pandu Rajar Dhibi also had knowledge of using iron as metal for making weapons and other implements from around 700 to 600 BC. A seal of Minoan type has been discovered in this stratum which indicates that people of this place had trade contacts with the

Mediterranean region. The date of the beginning of the period of Pandu Rajar Dhibi culture appears to be 1250/1200 BC.

Pandu Rajar Dhibi situated at Panduk (Burdwan District) on the Ajay, was the first chalcolithic site discovered in West Bengal, India. It is situated about 40 kilometers to the northwest of Birbampur, a microlithic site, which was excavated by BB Lal in 1954-57. The excavations at Pandu Rajar Dhibi, carried out in several phases in 1962-1965 and in 1985 the West Bengal Department of Archaeology have brought to light the chalcolithic phase of the ancient Bengal.



Photo: Collected prehistoric artifacts of Pandu Rajar Dhibi Bengal.

Subsequently, the number of chalcolithic sites rose to 76. They are now spread over the districts of Birbhum, Burdwan, Bankura and Midnapur, and interspersed by rivers like Mayurakshi (north), Kopai, Ajay, Kunur, Brahmani, Damodar, Dvarakesvar, Silavati, and Rupnarayan (south). From a perusal of the distribution pattern of chalcolithic sites in West Bengal, it appears that there was an extensive rice-producing riparian culture in

the area lying to the west of the Bhagirathi. Though the chalcolithic people were essentially agriculturists, they did not cease to hunt animals or to fish. They lived in modest circular to square huts with mud-plastered walls. There were hearths and garbage-places in the huts. They ate rice, as well as meat, fish, fruits etc.

Of the chalcolithic sites that have been found, Pandu Rajar Dhibi is by far the most interesting. The main mound of Pandu Rajar Dhibi is associated with King Pandu of the Mahabharata. The mound (200m-170m) has been excavated five times from 1962-85. In all 53 trenches of different sizes, varying from 4m' 4m to 10m' 5m, were excavated. The height of the central portion of the mound is 5m from the road-level.

The 1985 excavation has clearly shown that there were, in all, six periods of occupation at the site. Some of the trenches were dug down to natural soil (compact mottled sandy silt overlying decomposed sandstone). Like most chalcolithic sites in West Bengal, there were two main periods: (a) Chalcolithic and (b) Iron Age. The chalcolithic period may be divided into two phases - one pre-metallic and the other pure chalcolithic. The span of the Chalcolithic period in West Bengal is 1600 BC-750 BC. Of the six periods noticed at the site, the first two were chalcolithic (the first one was pre-metallic in as much as no metal was found in it); the third was transitional (overlapping of chalcolithic age & Iron age equipments); the fourth represented the Iron age; the fifth belonged to early historic and the sixth to Pala or early medieval times.

At the lower level of Period I, handmade grey and pale red ware pottery-fragments with husk- impressions in the core and a fractional human burial were encountered, while at

the upper level the ceramics consisted of plain black-and-red, grey, and matt-red wares. A few microlithic flakes have been found, but no copper object has been recovered from this level. It is, thus, pre-metallic in nature.

Period II represents a full-blooded chalcolithic culture, having diagnostic ceramics of red, black-painted red, white-painted red, black-and-red (plain and painted in white or cream inside), cream-slipped and grey wares. The color of the red slip varied from pale or matt to deep red, chocolate, and orange. The shapes and types in red ware consisted of bowls (straight sided, convex and concave-convex etc.), channel-spouted bowls with long and narrow cut-spouts and splayed ends, dishes-on-stand, bowls-on-stand (often painted in black or white pigment), flower pots (some having the shape of a 'tulip' and some of an 'inverted helmet'), tumblers, dishes, vases, 'lota', (a kind of small Bengali and Hindi water pots) and storage jars; bowls, channel-spouted bowls and dishes (often painted on the inside in white or cream). Storage jars in grey ware were also found.

The painting motif in red ware consisted of dots and dashes, bands (parallel, vertical and horizontal), solid triangles, chevrons, ladders, sigma, cheque-patterns etc. A starfish design has also been found. Painting motifs in black and red ware pottery consisted of dots and dashes, parallel bands-vertical and horizontal. Graffiti marks were also noticed on some red ware pots. In addition to pottery, the assemblage consisted of antiquities like microliths (few having crested-medial ridge), copper objects like beads, rings, bangles, fish-hooks, kohl-sticks and a leaf-shaped tangled arrowhead; bone tools like points, arrowheads, awls and harpoons; beads in stone and terracotta; terracotta figures of Mother Goddess (one) and gymnast (one), lapis

lazuli and a broken stone pestle. Impressions of silk-cotton fabric were found on clay lumps. An iron dish was also found from the upper level.

The material culture of Period III retained some of the ceramics of the earlier period and introduced a new ware, black-slipped (some bearing painting motifs of black-and red ware). Dishes-on-stand and bowls-on-stand, as well as bowls, and dishes were also made in this ware. A tiny broken gold coin with fish symbol was also found. Iron was apparently introduced in this period, and implements like swords, arrowheads and sickles were made from it. Bone tools, copper objects, beads in stone and terracotta, terracotta figurines and few neolithic implements were also found in this period. Period III thus represented a transitional phase.

In Period IV, antiquities like black-slipped ware (some painted and some incised with motifs like peacock holding a snake, a row of fish, fishing net), red and grey wares, bone and iron tools, beads in stone and terracotta, a steatite seal (Cretan?), a terracotta Mother Goddess, a pair of hollow terracotta heads having a foreign affinity and a few neolithic implements were found.

The site was deserted soon after, and remained thus, for a few centuries. The site was probably rehabilitated in the early medieval period. Several stone sculptures in the Pala idiom, some pottery fragments in grey and red wares in addition to terracotta cups, and a ring-well belonged to period VI, or the last period of Pandu Rajar Dhibi habitation. The site was abandoned afterwards. It seems that the floors of houses were different in different periods and varied from beaten moorum to lime plastered surkhi, or ordinary mud-floor, plastered with cow dung.

As to the artists of the chalcolithic culture of Bengal, we are in the dark. They might have been proto-Australoids or Vedroids. From an examination of skeletal remains (14-male, female & children) it appears that they were long-headed and medium to tall in height, resembling the Santals or the Sabaras.

There was perhaps a brisk maritime trade in chalcolithic Bengal, but unfortunately sufficient evidence is not available. Certainly, the Ajay and her tributaries meeting the Bhagirathi were navigable at that time. The excavation at Pandu Rajar Dhibi has provided evidence for the gradual growth of a chalcolithic culture and its displacement by iron-using people. There is evidence of a great conflagration in period III, which may be considered as the transitional period. The transition perhaps led to the exit of the chalcolithic culture and entrance of the Iron Age.

[Shyam Chand Mukherjee] (Source: Banglapedia, Archaeology, Shyam Chand Mukherjee, Pandu Rajar Dhili, Chief Editor, Prof. Sirajul Islam, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka)

Mahishdal and Baneswar Danga

It is further learnt that similar material remains have been unearthed in Mahishdal located on the bank of the Kopai River adjacent to Bolpur. Another site where such material remains have also been unearthed is Baneswar Danga, situated at Bolpur, Birbhum. The relics of this place are quite similar to that of Pandu Rajar Dhibi. It includes another site at Mongolkot on the right bank of the river Kumar. In fact, these people who once lived here (Bardhoman and Birbhum) had knowledge regarding the use of iron, copper and bronze along with stone. The terracotta art of Bengal is a very important part of the

cultural heritage of ancient Bengal. Pandu Rajar Dhibi in Bardhaman district is famous for terracotta art. Chandraketu gar, West Bengal, India also had terracotta in the temple.

The people who lived along the Pandu Rajar Dhibi or Baneshwar danga, too, were agriculturists and knew the method of cultivation. Its history started in the chalcolithic period and continued till the Aryanization of Bengal. The ruins of these cities are similar to those of Mahasthang gar of Bogra. All these clearly suggest that Bengal had a very rich cultural heritage, the background of which could be traced far as back as the chalcolithic period. The advent of the Aryans during the Gupta and the Mauryan dynasty further enriched the civilization. All these cities were built along the rivers. In ancient Bengal Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism existed side by side. Scholars are of the opinion that the ruins of some ancient cities and towns such as Bangar-Kotivarsha and Chandraketugarrh in West Bengal and Mahasthan garrh, Mainamoti, Paharpur in Bangladesh present excellent plans of township and the life of the people who lived there.

The Archaeologists agree that the Varendra region is particularly rich in early historic evidence, both in the form of sites with structural features as well as other historical information in the nature of inscriptions and literary references. Recent explorations works in the Bogra and Maldaha districts throw some light on the settlement pattern in the Varendra region. The ancient city of Pundranagara known from literature was located here and later the region evidently formed the core of the ancient administrative unit of Pundravardhana. Thanks to the geologists and the archaeologists that after discovery of several lost cities, they could come to a conclusion that

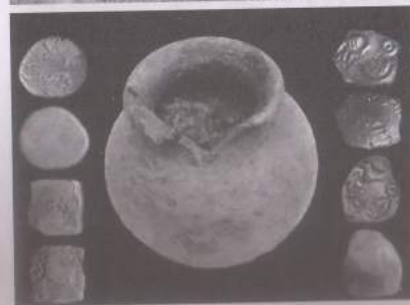
Bengal was one of the oldest civilization in the world. It existed around 1 to 6.5 million years ago. Paleolithic tools and implements from a hundred thousand years ago have been found in Deolpota.

(Notes: Chandraketugarh: A Treasure House of Bengal Terracottas - Enamul Haque. Dhaka, The International Centre for Study of Bengal Art, 2001, 416 p., 678 illustrations including 400 in colour, figures, plates, maps. Also see, Chandraketugarh: A Lost Civilization - Gourishankar De and Shubhradip De. Kolkata, Sagnik Books, 2004, 109 p., 34 photos)

Wari- Bateshwar

The recent Wari- Bateshwar excavation at Belabo Upazila under Narsingdi district made a unique discovery regarding the antiquity of Bangladesh. According to archaeologists there had been an ancient port city during 450 BC. The 2500-year-old ruins being unearthed near the old course of the Brahmaputra are a major archaeological discovery in South Asia. It challenges the earlier notions of early urban civilization in Bengal. The site was first discovered by a school teacher, Hanif Pathan in 1933. However, formal excavation started recently in 2000 by a group of teachers of Jahangirnagar University led by Professor Sufi Mustafizur Rahman. In fact, it was a great discovery for Bangladesh.

According to Professor Sufi Mustafizur Rahman, the archaeologist understands that, the traces of the civilization which were discovered at Wari-Bateshwar are astonishingly advanced. Instead of living in stone caves, here the people invented a system, which is known as "pit-



dwelling" -- an important discovery of the excavation. The system indicates to the chalcolithic era. Instead of tools made of stones, a kind of fossil wood was used. Artifacts, beads and household items made of clay and ceramic further ensure the authenticity of the excavation. Sufi Mustafizur Rahman disclosed all these before a very distinguished gathering at Shipakala in 2008.

According to him, Wari-Bateshwar is a well planned and well structured, ancient commercial city.

It is being speculated that Wari-Bateshwar is indeed "Sounagura", a center of trade described by Ptolemy, a Greek geographer, astronomer, mathematician in his book 'Geographia'.

The artifacts found at Wari-Bateshwar bear similarity with those found in the other emporia sites. Excavation also unearthed the presence of pit-dwelling. The discovery of a pit-dwelling is the first of its kind in Bangladesh. People used to live in these small ditches. The pit-dwelling is a Copper Age or chalcolithic artifact. Similar pit-dwellings have been found in India and Pakistan which are believed to be 4,000 years old. The unearthing of a 180-meter long,

six-meter wide and 21–35 cm thick road with a by-lane points to very early urbanization in this area. Before the discovery of this, the widely held view was that urbanization occurred later than the Wari-Bateshwar ruins indicate. Archaeologists further discovered what might be a river port on the bank of an old course of the Brahmaputra. It could be a maritime port and was integrated in the Bay of Bengal as a regional off-shore trade network between 3rd century BC and 3rd century A.D.

Mahasthan Garrh in Bogra:

Mahasthan, the oldest archaeological site of Bangladesh, is believed to be a work of the Dravidians. It is located on the western bank of river Karatoa, 18 km north of Bogra town beside Bogra-Rangpur Road. The spectacular site is an imposing landmark in the area. This 8th century archaeological site is still held to be of great sanctity by the Hindus. Every year (mid-April) and once in every 12 years (December) thousands of Hindu devotees join ritualistic ceremony on the bank of river Karatoa.





Excavation of Mahasthangarh

Mahasthan was first mentioned in a Sanskrit text of the 13th century entitled Vallalcharita. It is also mentioned in an anonymous text Karatoya Mahatmya, circumstantially placed in 12th-13th century. The same text also mentions two more names to mean the same place –

Pundrakshetra, land of

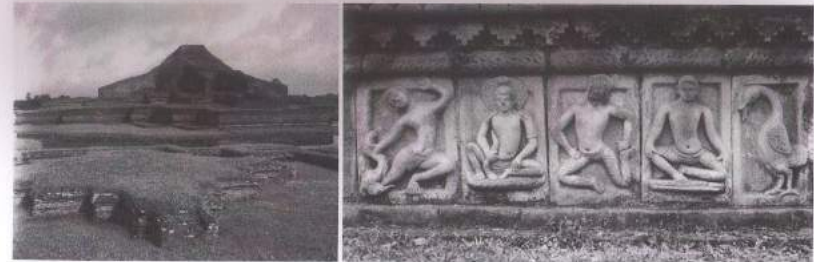
the Pundras, and Pundranagara, city of the Pundras. In 1685, an administrative decree mentioned the place as Mastangarh, a mixture of Sanskrit and Persian meaning fortified place of an auspicious personage. Subsequent discoveries have confirmed that the earlier name was Pundranagara or Pundravardhanapura, and that the present name of Mahasthangarh is of later origin. But there is no doubt that these were all of non-Aryan origin.

Buddhist Relics

When Bengal came under the domination of the Aryan rule, many new cities were either built or remodeled by the Aryans. These cities include, Paharpur and Mainamoti. These are archaeological relics of Buddhist culture. These stupas were round, square, octagonal and rectangular in shape. These were usually built within the area of monastic establishment.

Paharpur

Near Jaipurhat in Bogra, lies a small village named Paharpur where the remains of the largest known monastery south of the Himalayas were exposed. It covers an area of about 27 acres, and consists of many structures enclosed by a continuous line of walling. Archaeological evidence testifies to its existence as far back as the 3rd century BC, and it continued to flourish until the 15th/16th century AD. Pundranagar used to be the regional capital of the Mauryans, the Guptas, the Palas and minor unknown Hindu dynasties. The extensive fortified mound on the western bank of Karatoa therefore represents about 18 centuries years of human habitation on the site.



Birds eye view and terracotta of Paharpur

The central structure is so big that it is locally known as pahar (hill). The present name is entirely due to the presence of the ruins of the ancient temple, which must have dominated the landscape, although it lies in the midst of the flat alluvial plain of northern Bengal. This monument was built between the middle of the 7th century and the third part of the 8th century AD, when Bengal was under the influence of king Sasanka, who made some attempt to assert its individuality in the sphere of art.

Somapura Mahavihara: A UNESCO World Heritage site in Paharpur, Naogaon. There are 177 cells and a stupa in the

middle. Encompassing 27 acres, artifacts, inscriptions and sculptures have been unearthed at the site. There are also other temples in the complex. The ruins of ancient Pundranagar are now buried deep in Mahasthan only a few kilometers away from Bogra town. It represents the earliest city site in Bangladesh. Pundranagar was built by the non-Aryans. These non-Aryans were Dravidian and that is why it is held that their culture was looked down upon as impure and condemned by the Aryans.

Mainamati



Birds eye view and terracotta of Mainamati

Mainamati is situated in the district of Comilla. Famous as an important centre of Buddhist culture from the 7th to 12th centuries, the buildings excavated here were made wholly of baked bricks. There are more than 50 scattered Buddhist sites, but the three most important are Salban Vihara, Kotila Mura and Charpatra Mura.

Salban Vihara, almost in the middle of the Mainamati-Lalmai hill range, consists of 115 cells. Built around a spacious courtyard with cruciform temple in the centre faces its only gateway complex to the north resembling that of the Paharpur Monastery. The Mainamati site museum has a rich and varied collection of copper plates, gold and

silver coins and 86 bronze objects. Over 150 bronze statues have been recovered mostly from the monastic cells, bronze stupas, stone sculptures and hundreds of terra-cotta plaques each measuring on an average of 9" high and 8" to 12" wide.

The Early Settlers

The early settlers of Bangladesh as recorded primarily in the history were 1) The Austro-Asian. 2) The Dravidians 3) the Tibeto-Burman and 4) the Indo- Aryans. They were linguistic groups.

The Austro-Asiatic who included the Nishada or the jungle tribes were known as Sabara, Pulinda, Hadi, Dome, Bindi, Buna-Bagdi, and Banshphor. The Kol or the Kolarians included the Santals, and the Oraons.

The Dravidians followed the Austro-Asiatic group. It is they who once dominated the ancient Bangladesh and also built civilizations with the help of other existing tribes. But the Dravidians, however, lost their power to a few other existing non-Aryan linguistic groups such as the Pundra, the Banga, the Rarrh and the Suhma. These groups figured prominently at the time of the advancement of the Aryans. All the pre-Aryan tribes were mostly settlers along the Ganges and the Brahmaputra basin. They were part of a coastal belt. The Bay of Bengal was adjacent to it. Each tribe had its own language and culture.

Possibly they also developed a common language by which they would communicate with each other. The scholars (Mohshin, KM and Ahmed, Sharifuddin; 2007) held that it was prakrita, the meaning of which is, the voice of the common people, developed naturally. The Aryans brought

with them the Sanskrit. Gautama Buddha, however, rearranged the Sanskrit with the locals and developed another common language known as Palifor preaching his religion (Chattreji, SK., 1960).

These early settlers were by and large agriculturists. In those days, the country had innumerable rivers. Rainfall was also sufficient. The country was called 'The Golden Bengal' because of the fact that Bangladesh was known for surplus production in the field of agriculture. Jute was regarded as the golden fiber. It earned money for the country.

But things gradually changed with the passage of time. Water is a pre-requisite of life and there is no substitute for water. The early settlers realized the value of water when they faced prolonged drought and heavy flood causing colossal crop failure. In order to protect themselves from flood and tidal bore they used to set up embankments. These embankments were also used as reservoir of water for irrigation. These people, over the centuries, also evolved a number of techniques to conserve every possible form of water from rain to ground water, from perennial source to shallow streams and canals.

The fragments of a lost civilization, which were discovered at Farakka along the Ganges, suggest that the non-Aryans formed a vast mass in the area and contributed to the making of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa type of civilization in this region. The people who built it were undoubtedly agriculturists. Handloom and weaving industries seem to have flourished from the earliest days in Bengal. These non-Aryans were mostly dark-skinned in comparison with the fair complexioned Aryans.

There are many theories about the origin of the name Banga or Bangla. Some linguists believe that the name originates from the Tibetan word "Bans" which means wet or moist and Banga (Bengal) is a wet country criss-crossed by a thousand rivers and washed by monsoons and floods from the Himalayas. Some others believe that the name originated from the Bodo (original Assamese in North Eastern India) "Bang La" which means wide plains. Another school suggests the name comes from the name of a Prince named Banga. According to legend, Prince Banga, the son of King Bali and Queen Sudeshna of the lunar dynasty, was the first to colonise Bangla. What is probably the real root is from the name of the original people of Bangla. This also is taken from the legend. One of the tribes, who, according to a claim, emerged from the Indus Civilization after its demise, had entered the plains of Bengal while others went elsewhere. They were called the Bong tribe and spoke Dravidian. We know from many ancient Aryan texts of a tribe called Banga that existed in that region.

Archaeologists have stumbled upon traces of an ancient civilization in Bengal dating back to nearly 20,000 years. About 200 small stone tools, knives and needle-like 'microliths' among others were excavated at a small village in West Bengal's Murshidabad district at Haatpara mouza in Sagardighi block. According to the State Archaeology Department's Superintendent Amal Roy...."The discovery indicates that an ancient civilization existed in this part of Bengal and the stone tools, besides agate, quartz, chert and chalcedony were found to be used by a hunting tool-producing community in the pre-historic period" "Cultural History" (edited by KM Mohsin and Sharifuddin Ahmed and published by Asiatic Society of Bangladesh in

December 2007) makes the following observation. "It is very difficult to say with certainty when human settlement in Bengal started. There is also controversy over the origin of the people of Bengal. Ghulam Husain Salem mentioned clearly in his *Riyadh-al-Saladin* that nearly seven thousand and five hundred years ago bang' tribe set up their residence in Bengal. He further mentioned that they made their inhabited land extremely habitable and beautiful. They also ruled over their land. But how long they ruled over their land is not known. According to him, in the ancient period several other races came to Bengal and of them Negrota tribe came first. Next to Negrota, came the Austroloid or the Austro-Asiatic or Austric. They were also known as Nishada.

They are believed to have migrated from their original homeland of the south-eastern Asia. Next to them came the Dravidians and the Kolarians. Then came the Tibeto-Burmese and lastly the Indo-Aryans.

The original settlers used to speak non-Aryan languages—they might have spoken Austric or Austro-Asiatic languages like the languages of the present-day Kola, Bhil, Santal, Shabara, and Pulinda peoples. Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyaya has argued in favor of distinct Austric and Dravidian influence in the anthropo-cultural assimilation in Bengal. The words Dravida and Austric are being found in the geographical nomenclature of Bangladesh. The Austrics and the Dravidians named the rivers, mountains, hills, and villages of the region according to their own. As for instance from Distang to Tista in the non-Aryan vot-Brahma language, from Kabadak to Kapotaksha, from Damudakto Damodar in Kola language etc (Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyaya, 'Bangla Jati, Bangla Shanskriti o Bangla Sahitya' *Bangasree* 3rd year, Vol.1, No., 1314 BS, 7).

At a subsequent age, people speaking languages from two other language families— Dravidian and Tibeto-Burman— seem to have settled in Bengal. The Cultural history of Bangladesh (2006) maintains that Mongolians, Homo Alpinas (People of Alpine and Pamirs) and Pundras also settled in ancient Bengal. It is believed that the Aryans came to Bengal quite late from the northern India which they conquered from the Dravidians and the Kolarians. It is said that from about 5th century B.C. the Aryans pushed into Bengal from the west and it took at least 1000 years to aryanize the whole of Bengal. They subdued the non-Aryans through fights for years. They introduced their language, religion and other elements of culture. But the non-Aryans who lived as slaves in the country retained their culture somehow. Caste system was introduced. The Vedic and Puranic religions were introduced. Buddhism flourished along with Hinduism.

Many think that the concepts of karma and transmigration of the soul, the practice of yoga, the worship of Shib, Debi and Vishnu, and other rituals are not originally Vedic, these came from the pre-Aryan culture. These existed in Bangal before the Aryanization. This is also supported by the fact that today at least Yoga and Shiva are associated with the Indus civilization before the coming of the Aryans. The cultivation of rice and other crops such as the betel leaf, coconut, tamarind and nut; the Hindu dress of dhuti, marriage rituals with vermilion and turmeric, and many other customs came from pre-Aryan ancestors.

The name Bango / Bang is first mentioned in the Vedic literature. Rig-Veda used the name Bango' on several occasions. Aiterya Aranyaka, a Hindu scripture, also mentions Bango as a non-Aryan (Dravidian) nation. In the Aitareya Brahma, the people of Pundra tribe (along with

Andhra, Shabara, Mulinda and Mutiba tribes) are called dasyu, clearly non-Aryan or Drabir.

Bangla is also mentioned in the Mahabharat, one of the four great epics. The ancient texts, Ramayana and Mahabharata, however, reveal the greatness of Bango. In Bhishma-parban, the Bangali kings heroically faced attacks from the Pandus or conquerors of Upper India. There is a description of the encounters between the Pandus and the mighty ruler of the Bangals. Some of the Bangalee kings fought on elephants, others rode on ocean-bred steeds of the hue of the moon or ships. In the very ancient times, Pundra, Gaur (Gaud or Garh), Rarrh (Radha, Ladha), Suhma, Bajra (Brahma), Tamralipti, Samatata, Banga and Anga comprised Bangla. At one time Gaur was used as the name for Bangla region but the name Bango was popular. The name of Bango has been mentioned in the Vedas, both in the Rg Veda and Aitereya Aranyaka. These books mentioned Banga as a non-Aryan (Drabir) nation. In the Aitareya Brahma, the people of Pundra tribe (along with Andhra, Shabara, Mulinda and Mutiba tribes) were called dasyu (robbers), rakkhashya (demons) as they were non-Aryans or Dravidians.

These were the coastal tribes of Bengal who were called Mlechchha/ Yabana. All the tribes in Ango, Bango, Kalinga, and Magadh belong to the southeast Indian empire and these were considered as non-Aryan. Ango, Banga and Kalinga were Dravidian and during Mahabir's time and Aryanization which began with Ashok were parts of the Mauryan Empire. As Aryanization penetrated, Manu classified Bangla (Pundra), Shaka and Drabira as fallen Kshatriyas (Kshatriyas were the warrior or ruling caste). They were gradually incorporated into the Aryan caste system.

The Aryans always faced challenges from the Dravidians and other non-Aryans before their final victory and they termed these black-skinned people as Dasas and Dasyus (Das Abinash 1921.1130). These people were also called Asuras and Rakkhasyas or demons because they always tormented the Aryans. The word, Asura literally means 'powerful'. (Das Abinash 1921, Ch.VII, pp.128-129). The Dravidians were famous in ancient time for their astronomical knowledge and the Aryans learnt this from them (Rig-Vedic India, Ch.XII).

The average Indian and Bengali profile are more close to the Dravidian and Kolarians than those of the Aryans so far as one's skin and body structure are concerned. There is thus no doubt that India must have been one of the earliest centers of civilization. Hall concludes, 'It seems natural to suppose that the strange UnSemitic, UnAryan people who came from the East to civilize the West were of Indian origin, especially when we see with our own eyes how every Indian the Sumerian were in type' (Ch.V).

It was only during the Gupta rule around the 4th century period that Aryanization fully penetrated Bengla. The caste structure was introduced and the Brahmans stood as the highest caste in the society. Kshatriya came next to the Brahmana. Vaishya was the third Batsyan in his Kamsutra (the bible of sex) mentions Brahmans in Bengal. Vatsayana talks about handsome Bangalees who painted their nails to attract girls. Ancient Bangalee men painted their nails to attract girls. This is the earliest mention of coloring nails. In the ancient Indus, girls used lipstick which is also another first use. The Mauryan, the Gupta, the Pala and finally the Sena dynasties confirmed Aryanization of the country until the advent of the Muslims.

It is difficult to say when Aryanization began in Bengal. It is, however, held that from 800 BC or a little later, the Aryans started to come to Bengal. This was the first migration of outsiders into Bengal. During the Gupta period, Hinduism flourished in India.

The Hindu dynasty preached Sanskrit as the official language and none was allowed to speak in prakrita Bangla as they considered it to be heathen. The Sena kings openly declared that anybody found speaking in Bangla would face condemnation and be thrown into the hell named *rauraba*.

The Bangals of the Vedic Bango who also built cities along the Ganges and the Brahmaputra belonged to the Dravidian and the Kolarian race and it is they who moved to Southern India following aggression of the Aryans and started a similar culture there. Later in Bango, some other tribes such as Pundra, Suhma, Rarrh and Harikel also lived along the Ganges and the Brahmaputra. Next came the Mongolians and Chinese tribes who crossed over into Assam and Trippera and settled in hilly tracts in the eastern part of India. They used to speak Chinese and Mongolian along with the hilly languages of Assam, Sylhet; afterwards the Chittagong Hill Tracts. They probably drove out the Kolarians who moved to the plain lands of the Deccan. J. F. Hewett writes, "That they (the Kolarian tribes) came from the east is shown by the following facts: firstly, they themselves always say that they did so; secondly, the most powerful Kolarian tribes are found in the east; thirdly, their languages are allied to those used on the Brahmaputra...." (Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1888 and 1889). These tribes could not advance directly westward, as their progress was barred by the existence of sea over the Ganges trough, Hewett concludes. History speaks that the Dravidians occupied the western and the southern borders

of the peninsula where their descendants are still found in very large numbers. The whole Gangetic plains were then quite flourishing and made rapid progress towards building Ganges basin civilization. Later, the whole Indian peninsula was colonized by the Aryans. The whole of Indian culture then got mixed with the pre-Aryan culture and together formed the Indo-Aryan culture in India. The big rivers, the Ganges and the Brahmaputra like the Indus in the Sapta-Sindhu, watered the alluvial plains and made the soil fertile and produced bumper crops like rice, barley and millet which formed the staple food of the pre-Aryan races and the Aryans. These fertile plains also afforded rich pastures to the cattle. Agriculture, thus greatly shaped the culture of the pre-Aryans and the Aryans. (Memoirs of the Geological Survey of India, Vol. XLV, pp. 1,103)

The Religions in Bengal

Hinduism

Bangladesh was once the land of the Hindus. Buddhism also flourished in Bangladesh. Both Hinduism and Buddhism were of Indian origin. The Dravidians and the Kolarians lived in the Indus basin area. They believed in gods and goddesses. They were Hindu because they developed a civilization beside the Indus or the Sindhu. The word Hindu came from the word Sindhu. The Aryans who conquered the land also were known as Hindu. It is why the Hindu religion is considered the 'Sanatan'dharma or ancient form of religion. The Dravir (Dravidian) and the Kolarians were the original settlers of this region. They belonged to the Sumerian race who came from the east and built Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. Shiva was the leading

god. Both the pre-Aryans and the Aryans considered the mighty rivers as sacred and holy.

We have no knowledge of what the pre-Aryans had believed. The concept of one God was not absent. No temple was discovered in Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. There is no mention of any temple in the beginning of Aryanization. It is quite difficult to trace out the exact beginning of Aryanization in Bengal. The temple as a place of worship was a later development. We may presume that Hinduism began to flourish at a much later date. Hinduism was also called Brahmanism and Sanatan (Vedic) religion (Bose, P. M., 1894) which originated in the Indus basin or the Sindh valley in greater India. It is held that the Aryans came with the concept of one God but later it was amalgamated with local thoughts and beliefs. We came to know of the Vedas, the Smruti and the Puranas and this formed part of the life of the people for several thousands of years (Wilkins, W. J., 1979). Wilkins writes, "Before speaking of the Vedic Deities, it is necessary that something should be said concerning the Vedas themselves, the source of our information concerning them. The root of the word is vid, "to know"; hence this term Veda signifies 'knowledge' and as these books were not written for centuries after they were originally composed, it signifies knowledge that was heard, or orally communicated. The Vedas are not the work of a single person but, according to popular belief, were communicated to a number of Rishis or saints who in their turn transmitted them to their disciples. The seer Vyasa is styled the arranger or, as we should now say, the editor, of these works. The instruction contained in these writings is said to have been breathed forth by God Himself. Other writers teach that it issued from God like smoke from fire. The accounts of their

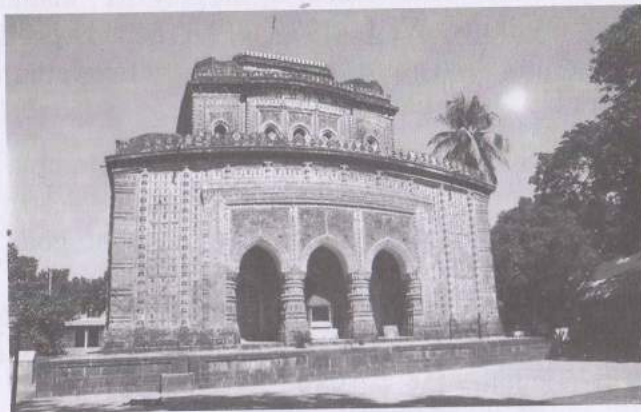
origin, though differing in form, agree in teaching that they were the direct gift of God to man; and hence they are regarded with the greatest veneration. They are the special property of the Brahmans. As early as Manu, the nominal author or compiler of a law book, probably not more than two or three centuries later than the Vedas, though some suppose it to have been no earlier than A.D. 500, it was regarded as a grave offence for a single word of these divinely given books to be heard by men of lower caste. The Vedas are four in number; of these the Rig-Veda is the oldest, next in order was the Yajur-Veda, then the Sama-Veda and last of all the Atharva-Veda. Each of these Vedas consists of two main parts: a Sanhita or collection of matters or hymns; and a Brahmana, containing ritualistic precept and illustration, which stands in somewhat the same relation to the Sanhita as the Talmud to the law," (Wilkins, W. J. 1979:3-4). According to Wilkins there had been disputes and controversies regarding the authenticity of the Vedas. He writes, "As to the date of the Vedas, there is nothing certainly known. There is no doubt that they are amongst the oldest literary productions of the world. But when they were composed is largely a matter of conjecture" (Wilkins, W. J., 1979:6-7). There is no doubt that the Aryans borrowed many things from the pre-Aryans, namely Dravidians and Kolarians.

The Hindus believed in the Trinity of God: Brahma (the Creator), Vishnu (the nourisher) and Shiva (the destroyer). They were idolaters and worshipped different gods and goddesses. The Vedic gods were later transformed into Puranic gods such as Vishnu, Krishna, Ganesha, Siva, Indra, Varuna, Laksmi, Hari etc. Hinduism also introduced Tantricism (Bagchi, P.C., 1939; Avalon, A., 1914) and Vaishnavism. (Dasgupta.S.B., 1922, 1927).



Sculpture of God

Kantajee's Temple in Dinajpur



Birds eye view of Kantajee's Temple

Near Birganj, in Dinajpur district, there exists a terracotta temple called Kantajee's Temples, which is considered among the most spectacular monument in Bangladesh. A 15 square meter, three-storied edifice was originally crowned with nine, two storied ornamental towers, giving it a more temple-like appearance. These towers collapsed during the great earthquake of 1897 and were never replaced.

Hinduism became the state religion during the Gupta and the Sena dynasty. Maurya dynasty was also Hindu. King Asoka however accepted Buddhism and became a champion of Buddhism during his reign.

Buddhism

Buddhism originated in India in the sixth century BC (Rhys Davids, T.W., 1896). The founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha was a Hindu by birth but later he evolved a new religion and it was known as Buddhism after he attained perfection as a man and was known as Gautama Buddha. Buddha also introduced a new kind of language known as Pali. The religion of Buddha did not



recognize any God or gods. He preached non-violence among all. Buddhism flourished both in India and outside India. The Pala dynasty in Bengal took initiative in preaching Buddhism. During the Pala period (750AD 1150 AD) the Brahmins had honor and authority. They were in a very dominant position in all aspects of society. Several

Brahmans held the post of ministers hereditarily. Royal patronage made them wealthy and powerful. During the Hindu Sena period, the natives who were non-Aryans, were not allowed to speak their mother tongue publicly.

Last Hindu King

The Sena dynasty came later to Bangladesh and was the last Hindu dynasty before the arrival of the Muslim sultanate.

The Sena dynasty was against the Pala dynasty and the followers of Buddhism suffered at the hands of the Hindu Kings. Sanskrit was the State language. It was compulsory for every body to speak sanskrit. No other languages other than Sanskrit and Pali were allowed. Lakshman Sena was the last Hindu King.

The Arrival of the Muslims: The Invasion of the Turks

The Muslims conquered these lands in the year 1203 A.D, through the advent of Ikhtiaruddin Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khilji. The establishment of Muslim rule in Bengal was a part of the history of Muhammad Ghoris conquests of India. The capital of Bengal was then known as Lakshnawati (Gaur) after the name of the last Hindu King, Lakshman Sena. It was on both sides of the Ganges. The areas that came under the Muslim rule was known as Bang or Bango consisting Varendra and Rarh. (Ali, M. Mohor, 1985: 44, 66-61). The Muslims adopted the newly conquered land as their home and peacefully settled there. The Sultans with the help of the local people patronized learning and culture, (Ali, M. Mohor, 1985:64) It

is hearsay that the Buddhists invited the Muslims to conquer the land in order to get rid of the Hindu kings who let loose a reign of terror against them.

It should be noted here that Muslims came to India much ahead of the Turkish invasion.

Many Arabs, Persians and Afghans came to India and Bangladesh following their contact with the country in matters of tourism, religion, commerce and trade. Sea and rivers were the only routes for travel (Rahim, M.A., 1963).

The Muslim preachers and also the Sufis came to the country much early and settled in India.

Discovery of Bengali Language:

Non-Aryan Language: Prakrita and Apabhraṅsha Bangla

During the Sena dynasty Sanskrit was the state language. And no other language was allowed to practice any languages other than the Sanskrit. Non-Aryan languages were prohibited.

The common people, more particularly, the low castes who were treated as untouchables or Sudra were not allowed to use their mother tongue which the scholars identified as Prakrita or Maghadhi Prakrita. It was also known as Gaurya Apabhraṅsha, (Chatterji, and Suniti. Kumar, 1314BS and Sen, Sukumar, 1948).

Possibly the non Aryans also developed a common language by which they would communicate with each other. The scholars (Chatterji, S.K., 1314 BS, Sen. S, 1948) held it as prakrita, and the population as Prakrita-punja and that developed naturally.

These people suffered at the hands of the Hindu rulers of the Sena dynasty. They upheld Brahmanism. Many of the non-Aryans who accepted Buddhism for their safety were Bengali by birth. They were treated as untouchables (sudra). And they were not allowed to talk in their own language – the Prakrita which were pre-cursors of Bengali language. Actually it was Bangla in its earliest form.

Towards the end of Palarule, The Brahmins were in full control of the administration. It was firmly established during the Sena rule. Caste system was very rigid. It was declared that any body who would not speak Sanskrit would certainly find his place in Hell named Rauraba.

Charyapada, the Earliest Evidence of Bengali Literature:

Literary activities in Bengali started with the Muslim period. The language was evolved not out of Sanskrit but out of a spoken dialect called Magadhi Prakrit or the Gauriya Apabhraṅṣha. It is generally classed with the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European languages. No written specimen of early Bengali was available prior to the 10th/12th century. In 1907 the late Haraprasad Shastri discovered in the Nepalese museum in Katmandu, a collection of 47 Buddhist mystical and diadectic poems composed by 24 persons and entitled Charya-Charya-Biniscchaya now referred as the Charyapadas. The term Charya means what is permissible, Acharya means being its antonym, meaning “not permissible. These poems were a code of “dos and do-nots,” for a Tantrik Buddhist devotee. (Ali, M.Mohor, 1985:854). These poems or songs were published under the name and style as “Hajar Bacharer Purana Bangla Bhasar Gaan o Doha (Buddhist songs in a thousand years’ old Bengali). No other writing in

old Bengali has come to light till the 15th century. Ali speaks, “No vernacular language could have found a scope for free literary expression under the Brahmanical system which preceded the coming of the Muslims and which interdicted the study of any but the Sanskrit language. A well-known Sanskrit sloka (couplet) stated that if a person hears “the stories of eighteen Puranas or of the Ramayana recited in Bengali he will be thrown into the hell called Raurava” (Sen, D.C., 1911:7). The establishment of Muslim rules “was the break-up of this Brahmanical monopoly of knowledge and literary activities and a general freeing of the Hindu intellect from the bondage of caste system” (Ali, M.Mohor, 1985:855).

The Charya songs, the earliest evidence or example of Bengali poetry, written in apabhraṅṣha Bangla script, has many things in it that suggests that the Aryans had ill-treated the locals who were converted into Buddhism instead of Hindu or Brahmanism. The composers of the Charya songs or charyapada were Buddhist mystics and were known as Sahajiya Buddhist mystics or Siddhacharya (Karim.A.1980). They were all non-Aryans and were converted into Buddhism. The late Mahamahopadhyaya Haraprasad Shastri discovered these songs from a unique manuscript kept at the museum in Nepal and edited the original text with Sanskrit commentary in 1907. Later Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah worked on his thesis, *La Chants Mystique*, in Paris and edited the *Dohakosa of Kanha and Dohakosa of Saraha*, the two Buddhist Siddhacharya with French translation. These songs speak of Deha-vada and used symbols and imagery relating to water and human body and also other related themes. In one Charya, the boat represents the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha (Bose, M.M.1969).

The Buddhist mystics who flourished during the Buddhist Pala dynasty were the non-Aryans who were converted to Buddhism. They, however, deviated from Buddhism and formed obscure religious cults such as the Sahajiyas (Karim, A.980; Ali.M.M. Vol.II, 1985:854-55). The carya songs were written in proto Bangla or Apobhrangsha mixed Bangla (Dasgupta, SB, 1969; Shahidullah, Dr.M. 1974). It was the earliest specimen of Bangla language. The Sena dynasty that represented the Aryan hierarchy and formed the government after the Palas used Sanskrit as the official Aryan language. They condemned 'Bangla' as heathen language, forbidding its use in the society (Sen, D.C. 1911, Karim, A. 1980). The Senas preached Hinduism. The carya songs of the 10th century referred to the Ganges and the Padma as big rivers. The Carya songs are referred to this study because of the fact that many charyas have used water as a symbol to denote an object or thing for proper understanding of the philosophy that the caryas contain. The river 'Ganga' or the 'Yamuna' also has been used as symbols to supplement the body mystery.

'Ganga Yamuna madhey re bohey nauka
 Ta hatey Cara chandali doba lôkekey abolilacromey paar koori
 Bah Tui Domni! Bah Tui lo Domni! Pathey hailo Baikal.
 Sad-guru paad proshadey jaibo puno jinpur
 Paach daar poritey naukar galuye, pitthey kanchi bandhiya
 Gagon –seunti daara secco paani, (jeno) naa pocce sandhiya
 Chand-Surjo dui ccaka, srishti sanghar maasul.
 Baam-Daahiney dui maargo naa bodh hoi, baa tui saccendey.
 Kori naa loi, buri (paisa-- coins) naa loi, amni paar korey
 Jey raathey ccarilo (path baa nauka) jawa naa janiaa kuley kuley berai.

Translation -

Oh! The boat ferries between the Ganges and the Yamuna. Ascending on its board, the Chandala woman takes the drowned easily to the opposite shore.

O dom woman, steer thou, O dom woman steer thou. It became afternoon on the way. By the grace of the feet of the good guru I shall again go to the city of the Buddha. While five oars at the bow of the boat strike, and the towing rope is bound on the back, bail out water with the pall of the sky. It will not enter into the holes.

The moon and the sun are the two wheels. Creation and destruction are masts. The two ways, right and left, are not perceived. Steer thou freely.

She does not accept or budi (small coins worth 20 cowries). She ferries men across gratis. He who mounts the chariot wanders along the shore, not known how to steer (boat). In one Carya song, it is written thus:

The deep and profound big river flows fast
 The two banks are muddy
 The middle is unfathomable.

Or

The body is the boat. The mind is the oar
 Hold the sail high towards the Guru
 Concentrate your mind.

(Shahidullah, Dr. Muhammad, *The Buddhist Mystic Songs*: 1960:48)

The Charya songs were written in proto-Bangla or apabhrangsha Bangla. A group of Buddhist Mystics, who were non-Aryan, accepted Buddhism and composed songs in apabhrangsha Bangla. These songs have criticism of the Aryan caste system and had representation of phallic worship, deha-vada, a common worship of the pre-Aryans

who belonged to a fertility cult. It had references to the Ganges and the Padma khal. The Carya songs have many references to pre-Aryan people such as doma, domni, candela, sabara, pulinda and kapalika. The Brahmans regarded them as untouchables. The Sabaras lived in the hills, Domnis lived in the outskirts of the cities and also outside human habitation. The Kapalikas moved or roamed about as nomads wearing garlands of human bones and many were half naked.

Turkish Sultan's Patronization of Bengali Language and Literature:

The arrival of the Muslims heralded a glorious period as the Sultans patronized Bangla. During this period the official Sanskrit language was changed. Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Sanskrit and Bangla were practiced. The first Muslim contribution was the translation of Hindu Sanskrit Literature Amritakunda into Persian and Arabic. It suggests that the Muslim scholars had knowledge of Sanskrit before they came to Bengal. This created doubts whether Persian and Sanskrit have any points of similarities.

The contribution of the Muslim scholars during the Turkish Sultanate translating Sanskrit work Amritkunda and other works into Persian and Arabic after the country was conquered by Ithtiaruddin Muhammad Balehrar Khilji in 1201/1203 was praiseworthy. The foreign scholars in those days had full knowledge of Sanskrit. Mohor Ali writes, "The work was presented to Qadi Rukn al Din Samarqandi, the Qadi of Lakhnawti during Ali Mardan Khilji's rule (607-610/1210—1213) by one Bhojar Brahman of Kamrup (Assam). The Brahman embraced Islam after an intense religious discussion with the Qadi, while the latter had the

book translated into Persian and Arabic. (Journal of Pakistan Historical Society, Vol. 1, 1953, part 1, 46-55)

"...The work (Amritkunda) appears to have aroused much interest among the Muslim academic circles, for besides, Qadi Rukn al Din, other scholars subsequently translated it into Arabic and Persian, and though the original Sanskrit work has not yet come to light, several manuscripts of its Arabic and Persian translations exist in a number of libraries in India, Europe and north Africa (Cairo). (One of the Persian versions entitled Bahr al Hayat has been ascribed to Shaikh Muhammad Ghauthi of Gwalior, India who died in 1562) and an Arabic version has been ascribed to the famous Damascus scholar Ibn al Arabi. The Arabic work was variously entitled as as Hawd al Hayat. The full Arabic version is published in Journal Asiatique, Tome, ccXIII, 292-344)" (Ali, M. Mohor, 1985, Vol.1B, p.844).

If any other Sanskrit work was taken up for translation is not known and we have no knowledge about it. There were, however, scholars such as Shaikh Sharaf al Din Abu Tawwama, founder of the Sonargaon Academy and many others who contributed to art and literature during their stay in India. Tawwama's memorable work was, Maqamat. It dealt with metaphysical subjects and these gained popularity in those days.

The first notable literary production in Bengali was a translation of the Ramayana by poet Krittivas during the first quarter of the 15th century during the reign of Jalal al Din Muhammad Shah (1415-1431). The next notable work was done by poet Maladhar Vasu on 'Sri Krishna Vijaya' on the basis of the Bhagwat Geeta during Sultan Barbak Shah (1459—1474). (Ali, M. Mohor, 1985-854-857)

Persia (Central Asia) or Iran as the foster mother of Vedic Sanskrit:

Meanwhile it is held that the language that evolved into the Indo-European and Indo-Iranian languages originated in the vicinity of the Caspian Sea. It is apprehended there might be an amalgamation of three tribes; one, pastoral/militaristic, the other agricultural and another metal working. Some of these tribes migrated into the Oxus River Valley and the Iranian Plateau as Indo-European and Indo-Iranian. Others migrated to the north and west where their languages were evolved as the languages of Europe. Some went north where their languages were evolved as Tocharian. It is further held that from Iran there were migrations into north India to the east and west into the Tigris-Euphrates River Valleys where they established the Mitanni Empire. Later there were migrations that accounted for the Scythians and Sarmations of Central Asia. The Aryans who migrated into north India were, of course, from Central Asia or Iran. The languages of Iran and the Aryans might have undergone evolution and the Vedic Sanskrit was not unknown throughout Mesopotamia, Afghanistan and Iran. The religious tracts of Ancient Iran are known as the Avesta. Some of these are believed to have been composed by Zoroaster.

The Zoroastrians of India who represent the largest surviving Zoroastrian communities world-wide also transcribe Avestan in based script. As far as the Grammar of the languages are concerned there is little difference between the languages of the Avesta and the Vedas. Both languages underwent systematic phonetic change. However, according to Thomas-Burrow, in his book, *The Sanskrit Language* It is quite possible to find verses in the oldest portion of the Avesta, which simply by phonetic

substitutions according to established laws can be turned into intelligible Sanskrit. The languages of the Avesta and the Vedas shared some vocabulary that is not shared with the other Indo-European languages.

Some examples are shown below -

Word	Sanskrit	Avesta
Gold	hiranya	zaranya
Army	sena	haena
Lord	ahura	Sacrificing
drink	soma	haoma
God	deva	daeva

Thomas Burrow, an Indologist (1909 –1986) in his book ‘*The Sanskrit language*’ (1965) suggests, it is quite possible to find verses in the oldest portion of the Avesta, which simply by phonetic substitution can be turned into intelligible Sanskrit. The language of the Vedas and the Avesta shared some vocabulary that is not shared with the other Indo-European language. The Vedic Sanskrit has its linguistic ancestry back to proto Indo-Iranian (Aryan) and proto Indo-European. Indo-Aryan language groups constitute the easternmost major branch of the Indo Aryan family of languages. Tocharan languages are found further east. Scholars held that the Indo-Iranian Languages include the Iranian and the Indo-Aryan (Indic) language groups. Talageri’s work ‘*RigVeda – A Historical Analysis* (2000) says that there is evidence of a Kentum language in India in the form of Bangani language found Gharwal region. Some suggest Nurishani and Bangani languages belong to the Indo-Iranian groups as well. Does it have any relationship with Bangalee as linguistic race?

The word Sanskrit may be originated from the word ‘samskar’ which means re-arrange’ or ‘put together’,

'refined' or 'adorned'. According to Paninni, Sanskrit was evolved out of the early Vedic form. The present Vedic form can be traced back to as early as the second millennium BC (Rig-Vedic). Vedic Sanskrit is quite clear to Classical Paninni.

It may be mentioned here that the non-Aryan languages such as 'prakriti' 'Pali' or 'maggadi', 'sauraseni' etc have not descended or these are not derived from the Vedic Sanskrit. They were sister languages which existed in the Rig-Vedic era in India. They share many features with other European languages and these are not found in the Vedic Sanskrit. The works of KL Norman, Dharmapada (The Word of the Doctrine, Oxford, London 1997)) the present Bangla is now mixed and it has maximum reflection of Sanskrit language, yet the local dialects or the words used by the peasant society or folk occasionally speak non-Aryan languages.

Judaism and Christianity

The Jewish and the Christians came to India when the country was under the East and India Company. The British ruled the country for over 200 years and during these periods, the Jewish and the Christians came to India and settled for trade and commerce and also for preaching Judaism and Christianity.



Tribal and Folk Religions



In Bangladesh, there are a good number of tribal or indigenous people who live mostly in Chittagong Hill Tracts(CHT), Sylhet and Rajshahi Divisions, Besides these, they also live in various other parts of the country. They are diverse ethnic communities and include: 1) Australoid, 2) Tibeto-Burman 3) Sino-Tibetian race. There are almost 35 small communities also. The major groups include: Chakma, Garo, Marma, Mros or Mroongs, Santals, Oraons, Rajbangshis, Rakhayns. The minor groups among others include: Bind or Bin, Bansphor, Sardar, Buna-Baghdī. Each has its own religion. These are: Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Animism. There are at present around 2million tribal or Indigenous people in Bangladesh. The major parts of these Tribals are not the indigenous settlers of the country. They are migrants from neighboring countries. The folks who are common and ordinary people are mostly non-literate. They have, however developed a kind of syncretistic religion which is known as folk religion. Sufi, Baul, Vaishna are all among such folk religions.

All Big Cities in Bengal are on a River Bank

If we take the history of cities, we notice that in each country cities had been built beside the rivers. In Bangladesh also, big cities and kingdoms were built on the banks of rivers. Many foreign travelers and merchants recorded their comments after they visited the country. Ibn Battuta's description of 'Sadkawn' is identical with Chittagong. He visited Bengal in 1345-46 A.D. Ibn Battuta writes, "The first town of Bengal which we entered, 'Sadkawan' situated on the shore of a vast ocean. The river Ganga, to which the Hindus go in pilgrimage, and the river Jaun united near it before falling into the sea." (H.A. R. Gibb- Ibn Battuta, p.267. Also see, Rahim.A. Social and Cultural History of Bengal, Dhaka). The Arabs who visited Chittagong earlier gave its name as Shat al Ganga which in the time of Ibn Battuta became corrupted into Sadkawan and then into Chittagong which corresponds to Sadgaon. The term Shat Al Ganga (delta of the Ganges) indicates that in the time when the Arab merchants visited the place, Chittagong was situated in the delta of the Ganges. It must be noted here that in the ancient days rivers changed courses. Padma had a different course in those days and she passed by the city of Dhaka. Rahim writes, "Leaving Rampur Boalia (Rajshahi town) by her side, she passed through the Chalan Bil and followed the course of the present day Dhaleswari and Buriganga rivers. She then ran by the side of Dacca and fell into the Meghna near Feringibazar. The name Burriganga reminds that the Ganges had once her course through this river. Sripur was situated on the bank of the Ganges. It was eighteen miles away from Sonargaon. (Rahim, M.A. opcit.p.14).



From the very beginning of the Muslim rule, Sonargaon was made to be a great and prosperous city and a river port by the Ganges where foreign merchant ships used to come for their commodities. Ibn Battuta writes, "On our arrival at Sonargaon, we found a Chinese junk, which intended to go to Java which was 40 days' journey. In fact, Sonargaon was a flourishing city, port and a manufacturing centre. It produced the best and finest cotton cloth. While giving an account of his journey from Sylhet to Sonargaon by river in 134-146 A.D. Ibn Battuta writes, "By the river were water wheels, gardens and villages on the right as well as on the left, as in Egypt by the Nile.... We sailed on this river for fifteen days by villages and gardens, as if we were going through a market place." (Gibb- Ibn Battuta, p.271; N. K. Bhattasali – Coins and Chronology, p.142). The prosperity of Sonargaon gradually waned as the river decayed and receded and it ceased to be a port of consequence. Gaur and Pandua were both flourishing capital cities, situated on the Ganges and as the river course shifted their importance diminished and afterwards they were completely abandoned.

The ruins found in Pandu Rajar Dhibi are in the Bardhaman district of West Bengal. Archaeologists uncovered four strata of culture in this site which bear testimony to this truth. The discovery of Pandu Rajar Dhibi is a great achievement of the archaeologists and it has ushered in a new era in the history of Bengal. Once again, it is proved beyond doubt that Bengal is also one of the earliest civilized nations in the world.

In the previous chapter we talked about Farakka Barrage excavation over the Ganges. The findings suggest that Bangladesh is as old as Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. The excavation at Wari- Bateshwar in Narsingdi clearly speaks that Bangladesh is a country considerably rich in archaeological wealth, especially of the medieval period, both during the pre-Muslim period that includes the pre-Aryan and Aryan period or the Hindu and the Buddhist period and the Muslim, Sultani and the Mughals. During its more than two thousand years of eventful history, many illustrious kings and sultans have ruled and disappeared and have left their marks in the shape of magnificent cities as well as monuments throughout the country. The country's historical legacy is composed of various stands, including Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist and British. These historical places, archaeological sites, monuments, and similar other objects are available throughout the country to symbolize and present our traditions and civilization. Bangladesh boasts three UNESCO World Heritage Sites. One of these is the Mosque City of Bagerhat. Situated in the southwest region of Bangladesh, it was declared a World Heritage Site in 1983. Paharpur is another World Heritage Site. Designated such in 1985, this is an ancient city inhabited by Mahayana Buddhists between 800 AD and 1300 AD. Distinctive Buddhist architecture is seen in the buildings.

The third World Heritage site is the Sundarbans delta. This is the world's biggest mangrove forest extending through Bangladesh and India.

Geology and archaeology tell us that Bangla was formed 1 to 6.5 million years ago and the first known human habitation goes back to 100,000 years in the past. Paleolithic tools and implements from a hundred thousand years ago have been found in Deolpota in West Bangla and 15,000 year old implements have been found in South East Bangladesh. New Stone Age civilization, showing connection with that of Bihar, Orissa and Assam existed in Bangla around 3000 to 1500 BC.

Then suddenly a metal processing civilization appears. Archaeology has not been able to find the missing link from stone tools to metal tools use. This might suggest the influx of a new people into the region and maybe this goes hand in hand with the legends. The Indus civilization ended around 1800 BC and there is a marked change in Bengal around this time. Recently an ancient city has been discovered in West Bangla at Chandraketugar near Berachampa, in North 24 Pargana. The city is presumed to be of King Chandraketu from the Gupta era (4th to 6th century AD). Statues of Goddess Yakshi have been discovered here. At Berachampa there is another location of interest. Here the 'khana-mihir's dhibi was found, a site with Gupta temples. Archaeologists are of the opinion that cities might have existed in ancient Bangla, dating back to or before the first millennium BC. Certainly some cities like Pundra are referred to in the ancient Aryan texts before there was much contact between the Aryans and the Bangalees. In the ancient Aryan texts, Pura were mentioned describing forts or cities of the Dravidians of the Indus Civilization. The interesting thing is names of places in the

Indus region often end with -Pur and likewise in Bangla, place names commonly end in -Pur. This suggests that there might be points of similarities between the Dravidian culture in the northwest and Bengal culture in the southeast. Words like 'Daha' 'Ganj' such as Shelaidaha, Katadaha, Shibganj, Neelmaniganj, 'Danga' such as Chuadanga, Naldanga also suggest Dravidian influence.

Port Cities in Chittagaon and Sonargaon under Muslim rule:

As the country was a landfull of rivers which ultimately end up with the sea, there developed a number of sea and river ports. The Chinese records suggest that in the 15th century the Ganges and the Brahmaputra fell into the sea near the Chittagong port (Bhatshali, N.K., 1922: P136). Mauhan writes, "The kingdom of Pang-ko-la (Bangalah) is reached by the ship from the kingdom of Su-men-tala (Sumatra)... the vessel arrives first at Cheh-ti-gan (Chittagong) where she anchors. Small boats are then used to ascend the river, up which at a distance of 500 league or more, one arrives at a place called Sona-urh-Kong (Sonargaon), where one land (Bhatshali, N.K., 1922: 142, Rahim, M.A., 1967: 14-17). Chittagong was a big port in the medieval period. Visitors used various names for Chittagong port such as Sadkawan or Jadjkawan in Arabic by Ibn Battuta (Bhatshali, N.K., 1922: 142). It may be pointed out here that Chittagong received the name from the Arab travelers, who called it Shat al Ganga, which in the time of Ibn Battuta became corrupted into Sadkawan and then into Chatgaon and Chittagong. The English traveler, Ralph Fitch, who visited Bengal in 1586 A.D., wrote that he went from Sripur to Pegu, passing down the

Ganges and the island of Sandvip and the Porto Grande (Chittagong) (Rahim, M.A., 1963: 16-17). Here the river Ganga is mentioned as a big river that falls to the sea at the end.

Cities built on the banks of Rivers and River Ports

About Sonargaon port, Ibn Battuta says, "On our arrival at Sonargaon, we find a Chinese junk, which intended to go to Java, which was 40 days journey" (Rahim, M.A., and 967: 17-19).

Sonargaon was then a flourishing city, port and a manufacturing center. Ralph Fitch writes, "Great store of cotton cloth goeth from hence, and much rice, wherewith they serve all India, Ceilon, Pegu, Malacca, Sumatra and many other places" (Rahim.M.A. Ibid).

Sripur, the capital of Chand Roy a noted merchant of his time, was a flourishing town when Ralph Fitch visited it in the later years of the 16th century (Rahim.M.A. Ibid).

History records that the country had many cities, which flourished during ancient Hindu and Muslim periods. Many foreign travelers mentioned about them in their writings. Tanya (Dasgupta, S.N., 120-121) was, in the early 16th century a great city and was situated on the bank of the Ganges. It was the capital of Sulaiman Karrani and the Mughal viceroy, Khan Khanan Munim Khan.

Cities Buried Under Rivers

Ancient cities were also destroyed because of tidal waves and tidal bore or by earthquakes. There had been no traces of these cities any more. These were buried or eroded to the

river bed. Tourists or merchants who came from outside to Bengal recorded such happenings in their writings. Gaur and Pandua might have faced the same fate along with other cities. These two cities were quite flourishing and were capitals (Dasgupta: Ibid). They were situated on the bank of the Ganges. When the river changes its course as it happened with Tanda, the cities were left abandoned. It has now become difficult to trace even its existence. Gaur was also abandoned because of the outbreak of plague. Another great city and port called Bengala (Dasgupta, S.N., 118) also met the same fate following a change in the course of the river. A number of foreign traders and merchants like Lewis Varthema, Dasgupta, S.N. Ibid) an Italian merchant who came to Bangladesh and visited 'Banghella' between 1503 –1508; according to him it was one of the finest cities he had ever visited. It had great export trade in cotton and silk-stuffs (Dasgupta, J.N., 117).

The Portuguese merchant Barbosa (Dasgupta, .N.) who visited Bangladesh around 1518 AD referred to the city of Bengala as a great seaport with a very good harbor. According to him, mostly the Muslims, many of whom were great merchants and owned large ships, inhabited the city. The city of Bengala manufactured in large quantities of various kinds of fine cotton- stuffs. This along with sugar and other commodities were exported to Coromondol, Malabar, Cambay, Pegu, Tenasserim, Sumatra, Ceylon and Malacca. According to the above-mentioned merchants, the city Bengala was located at the head of the gulf known in those days as the Gulf of Bengal (Rahim, M.A., 1967: 56-57).

This city has remained unknown for many generations. For centuries, the rivers destroyed and engulfed cities. City

after city was eroded to the riverbed and none can locate their existence. These are the forgotten part of our culture.

Sonargaon- The Ancient Capital City of Bangladesh:

Sonargaon is one of the ancient places and tourist attractions of Bangladesh. This city was built along the river and also worked as a river port. It so happened because the country did not have any other means of communication other than river for outside contact. Presently Sonargaon is located in the Narayanganj district and the "golden village" (literal meaning) is now a rural community about 27 kilometers to the south-east of Dhaka. It was the capital of famous warrior of Bengal, Isha Khan. A Folk Art Museum was established here in 1975.



Sonargaon

It is a foremost attraction in the city as well as the whole area of the country. The museum is to be found on a charming fifty hectares of land that consists of amazing

scenery, artificial lakes and ponds with a stairway in to the water.

At present there are several sites in Bangladesh where you can still see some of those ancient relics.

Samander: the Port City

The Arab travelers in those days also speak of a very flourishing port city known as 'Samandar'. The description of these Arab travelers and Geographers later identified "Samander" as a port in southeastern Bengal (Ali.M.M, 1985, Vol.I, p.-30-34; Rahim.M.A, 1963:38-39). They also identified another region 'Kamrup' which they termed as 'Kamrun', 'Kamrul' and 'Karmut' (Rahim.M.A., 1963: 38-39). It was part of Assam which was situated on the northeast of Bengal. And was 'land-locked' and had its only outlet to the sea through the rivers Brahmaputra and Meghna. "Samandar" the port of rice and aloe wood was believed to have been located near 'Sondip' in the inlet formed by the joint stream of the Ganges -Brahmaputra-Meghna (Ali, M.M., 1985: 33). There is, however, no doubt, that the Arabs were familiar with the coastal region of the then 'Bang' or 'Bengal.' During the time of the Muslim Sultans between the 13th and 14th centuries, the eastern and southern Bengal were called "Bangalah"(Rahim, M.A., 1985: 4-6) and the people of this region were given the name of Bangali. Later on, the whole of northern and western Bengal were brought under one name "Bangalah" during the time of Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah (Rahim, M.A., 1963: 4-6). He also united 'Lakhnawti' and 'Bangalah' under his authority and laid down the foundation of an Independent Sultanate in Bangala.

The Muslim Sultans who came from outside, took the initiative to help develop the country in the economic and also in the cultural field. They patronized the Hindu and the Buddhist communities and married their daughters. Almost all historians agree that the Muslim conquest of Bengal (Bangalah) made a great contribution to the over-all development of the people (Rahim, M.A., 1963: 34-35). It integrated the people into one political forum and stimulated them to their progress and prosperity in socio-economic and cultural life. The medieval Bengali literature speaks enough of it (Rahim, M.A., 1963: 384-385). With plenty of rich alluvial soil and a hard working population, together with assistance from the ruling Sultanate, the economy of the country was transformed into a proverbially rich one in the world.

Chapter

III

Water and Culture and Its Various Uses

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Primitive Culture: Animism

Water and Magic

Water, as the basic element of life, has been related to man's cultural heritage since the bygone days. But the supply of water, in most countries, depends on rain and showers. Without rain, drought continues; vegetation withers; animals and men suffer and die. In primitive societies, where formal religion is absent, Animism steps in and magic controls everything. In such a situation when drought persists, agriculture suffers and life is threatened, the magician in the form of a rainmaker helps arrange water for the people. In fact, when the magician intends to make rain, he simulates it by sprinkling or mimicking clouds. And when he wishes to stop rain and that causes drought, he avoids water and resorts to warmth and fire for the sake of drying up the over-abundant moisture. The idea of animism was first developed by Edward Tylor in his *Primitive Culture* (1871). Here he defined animism as an idea of pervading life and will in nature. This includes beliefs in all natural objects other than human beings, which have souls or spirits. Animism takes into consideration matters relating to human affairs and as such it is capable of helping or harming human interest. Tylor considers animism as the earliest form of religion with

magic part of it. According to him, animism became a part of pagan or savage life following a kind of visions and dreams. He holds that religion was evolved out of an evolutionary process. Animism is close to Shamanism. A shaman is a person regarded as having access to, and influence in, the world of both benevolent and malevolent. Shamans are intermediaries or messengers and they work between the human and the spiritual world. These shamans also acquired power to have access to supernatural realms in order to secure solutions to problems afflicting the community.

Shamans have control over the weather and rain through magical powers. And for this he enjoys special position power in the savage community.

Culture, which includes religion thus clearly leaves an impact on the people, and how they perceive and manage a resource such as water. Each country or region has its own culture. There is also sub-culture or local culture. It is also influenced by animistic culture (Crooke. W. 1896). Culture is thus considered as the activities of man that one acquires as a member of the society during the whole life cycle. It is also manifest in the branch of a tree if deliberately shaped, in the rubbing of sticks to fire; the decorative paintings of one's body, the transmission of past experience to the new generation; (Frazer, J., 1963); (Klemm, G., 1854-55, Vol. I Tr. Lowie, Robert, H., 1937:12).

Rain Making: A Primitive Approach to Water and Culture

Rain making ceremonies are old-for thousands of years these were practiced all around the world. A man or woman

works as shaman and they are particularly trained for this and it is orally transmitted to them from generations to generations. These shamans with their magical power have control over weather and rain.

The art of rain making is still in vogue in a number of countries including Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Asia and the Indian sub-continent.

Of late, archaeologists in South Africa discovered an ancient site atop a 1,000 foot tall hill at Ratho Kroonkop, Zimbabwe. It is held that the Rain makers or the shamans would have climbed to the top of Ratho Kroonkop and when they reached the peak of the hill, they would lit to burn animal remains as part of their rain making rituals.

Rain making is thus a primitive effort and the early rainmakers may be taken as the most intelligent of the primitive men. If we take the history of primitive people and particularly the food gathering stage, we can very well understand the importance of water. During this period there could be no production without rain or showers. 'Without rain, vegetation withers, animals and men languish and die'. But rainfall was never adequate and it is unpredictable. This has possibly given birth to the saying, 'Agriculture is a gamble on monsoon'. Rainfall has, therefore, always been a major worry of the people who belonged to the peasant society for generations. Frazer writes, "Hence in savage communities the rain maker is a very important personage; and often a special class of magicians exists for the purpose of regulating the heavenly water supply" (Frazer, J.1963: 72). The pioneer rainmakers in the past were undoubtedly the magicians. Magic played a key role in rainmaking. These magicians on occasions made strange ceremonies, like invocation of spirits of the

dead. Mock ploughing was also in vogue among the peasant society, particularly by the farmers. These magicians used imitation, appeal, supplication and intimidation. They sprinkled water on the soil, hoping the heavens would do the same. They used to imitate thunder, arranged beating of drums and firebrands symbolizing thunder to simulate lightening and also blew mouthfuls of water into the air like rain. Women poured water on soil, thinking that heavens would do the same.

James Frazer in his historic book, *The Golden Bough*, gave a series of such activities of the magician who made rain or controlled it. According to Frazer, "In a society where uniformity of occupation is a rule and the distribution of the community into various classes of workers has hardly begun, every man is more or less his own magician, he practices charms and incantation for his own good and injury of his enemies. But... (when society becomes more advanced) a number of men ... (are) set a part for the express purpose of benefiting the whole community by their skill, whether that be directed to the healing diseases, forecasting the future, the regulation of the weather or any other object of general utility (Frazer, James, 1942:06).

There are two types of magicians, the private and the public. In primitive society rainmaking rituals are secret or occult in nature. These are under the control of an individual or an elite group of rainmakers. The rainmakers then try to identify causes of drought or excessive rain to reverse the situation for the benefit of all in the society. Frazer considers them as public magicians.

It may be presumed that occult rainmakers may be found among politically centralized systems of organization, such as, chiefdom or kingdom. In these societies, chiefs or kings

were divine and were expected to be chief magicians and rainmakers in the land. Otherwise, they had a group of such experts at their courts all the time for any natural calamity such as drought, famine and flood or epidemic. These calamities may occasionally happen due to personal shortcomings. In some cases, ordinary rainmakers may occupy a very influential positions in the society, from which, if one is prudent and a capable man, one may advance gradually to the rank of a chief or king (Frazer, James, Ibid).

Frazer writes, "Women are sometimes supposed to be able to make rain by ploughing, or pretending to plough" (Frazer, J., 1963:81). Frazer cited a number of examples of primitive society. He mentioned about groups such as the Pashas and Chasers of the Caucasus who have a ceremony called 'ploughing the rain', this they observe in time of drought. Girls yoke themselves to a plough and drag it into a river, wading in the water up to their girdles. In the same circumstances, Armenian girls and women do the same. The oldest woman, the priests' wife, wears the priest's dress, while the others, dressed as men, drag the plough through the water against the stream." If we study the history of the ancient time, it would appear that women had close relationship with rain and water. Frazer writes, "In a district of Sumatra, in order to procure rain, all women of the village, scantily clad, go to the river, wade into it, and splash each other with the water. A black cat is thrown into the stream and made to swim for a while, then allowed to escape to the bank, pursued by the splashing of the women." Frazer further writes, "The intimate association of frogs and toads with water has earned for these creatures a widespread reputation as the custodians of rain; and hence they often play a part in charms designed to draw needed

showers from the sky. Some of the Indians of the Orinoco, held the toad to be the god or lord of the waters, and for that reason, feared to kill the creature. They have been known to keep frogs under a pot and to beat them with rods when there was a drought (Frazer, J., 1963: 81-84). Frazer has given almost hundred and one example regarding usefulness of rainmaking among the primitive people. While giving further his observation he says, "In a village near Dorpat in Russia when rain was very much needed, three men used to climb up the fir-trees of an old sacred grove. One of them drummed with a hammer on a kettle or small cask to imitate thunder; the second knocked two fire brands together and made the sparks fly, to imitate lightning, and the third, who was called the 'rain maker' had a bunch of twigs with which he sprinkled water from a vessel on all sides. To put an end to drought and bring down rain, women and girls of the village of Ploska go naked by night to the boundaries of the village, and there they pour water on the ground. Frazer further says that in New Guinea, a wizard makes rain by dipping a branch of a particular kind of tree in water and then scattering the moisture from the dipping bough over the ground. In New Britain, the rain maker wraps some leaves of a red and green striped creeper in a banana leaf, moistures the bundle with water and buries it in the ground; then he imitates with his mouth the splashing of rain. In the Mara tribe of northern Australia the rainmaker goes to a pool and sings over it a magic song. Then he takes some of the water in his hand, drinks it, and spits it out in various directions. After that he throws water all over himself, scatters it about, and returns quietly to the camp. Rain is supposed to follow", (Frazer, j., 1963: 73-74). In all primitive tribes various actions are taken either to make rain or to stop it. Frazer

says that the tribes living in southeastern Africa bestow the name of "Tilo" that is, the sky on a woman who has given birth to twins and the infants themselves are called children of the sky. Now when the storms which generally burst in the months of September and October, have been looked for in vain, when a drought with its prospect of famine is threatening, and all nature, scorched and burnt up by a sun that has shown for six months from a cloudless sky, is panting for the beneficent showers of the South African spring, the women perform ceremonies to bring down the longed for rain on the parched earth. Stripping them of all their garments, they assume in their stead girdles and head dresses of grass, short petticoats made of the leaves of a particular sort of creeper. Thus attired, uttering peculiar cries, and singing ribald songs, they go about from well to well, cleansing them of the mud and impurities, which have accumulated in them. The wells, it may be said, are merely holes in the sand where a little turbid unwholesome water stagnates. Further the women must repair to the house of one of their gossips that has given birth to twins, and must drench her with water, which they carry in little pitchers. Having done so they go on their way, shrieking out their loose songs and dancing immodest dances. No man may see these leaf-clad women going their rounds. If they meet any man they may maul him and thrust him aside. When they have cleansed the wells, they must go and pour water on the graves of their ancestors in the sacred grove. It often happens, too, that at the bidding of the wizard they go and pour water on the graves of twins. For they think that the grave of a twin ought to always be moist, for which reason twins are regularly buried near a lake. If all their efforts to procure rain prove abortive, they will remember that such and such twin was buried in a dry place on the side of a

hill. "No wonder!" says the wizard in such a case, "that the sky is fiery. Take up his body and dig him a grave on the shore of the lake." His orders are at once obeyed, for this is supposed to be the only way of bringing down the rains" (Frazer, J., 1963: 73-74).

Here we give a few examples of rain making in primitive societies who used to live by food gathering or cultivating crops and vegetables or otherwise. These stories were collected by James Frazer, the author of the Golden Bough. According to him, in the Maria tribe of Northern Australia, the rainmaker goes to a pool and sings over it his magic songs, then he takes some of the water in his hands, drinks it and spits it out in various directions. After that he throws water all over himself, scatters it about and returns quietly to the camp. And rain is supposed to follow. (Frazer, J., 1963: 73-74)

The Arab historian Makrizi describes a method of stopping rain which is said to have been resorted to by a tribe of nomads called Alqamar in Hadramaut. They cut a branch from a certain tree in the desert, set it on fire, and then sprinkled the burning brand with water. After that the vehemence of the rain abated, just as the water vanished when it fell on the glowing brand (Frazer, J., 1963: 74). In Manipur, India somewhat similar performances are made for opposite purposes in order to produce rain. The head of the village puts a burning brand on the grave of a man who has died of burns and quenches the brand with water, and he prays that rain may fall. Here the putting out the fire with water, which is an imitation of rain, is reinforced by the influence of the dead man, who having been burnt to death, will naturally be anxious for the descent of rain to cool his scorched body and assuage his pangs (Frazer, J., 1963: 73-74).

In central Australia, the Dieri, a primitive tribe has a number of ceremonies, which they observe for rainmaking. The Dieri imagine that the foreskins taken from lads at circumcision have a great power of producing rain. Hence the Great Council of the Tribe always keeps a small stock of foreskins ready for use. They are carefully concealed, being wrapped up in feathers with the fat of the wild dog and of the carpet snake. A woman may not see such a parcel opened on any account. When the ceremony is over, the foreskin is buried, its virtue being exhausted. After the rains have fallen, some of the tribe always undergoes a surgical operation, which consists in cutting the skin of their chest and arms with a sharp flint. The wound is then tapped with a flat stick to increase the flow of blood and red ochre is rubbed into it. Raised scars are thus produced. The tribes believe that the practice has a connection with rain and the scars (Frazer, J., 1963:75).

The prophets of Baal, (Frazer, J., 1963:76) the fertility God in primitive societies, who sought to procure rain by cutting themselves with knives till the blood gushed out, may have acted on the same principle.

Rain Making, a Source of Power and Authority:

Now these magicians who make rains or have been able to control forces of nature, become gradually either chiefs or kings of the tribe as people hold them in high esteem as they can communicate with the unseen spirits. In Africa such type of chieftains or kings who are originally rainmakers, are quite plentiful. Frazer mentions that among the Wagogo tribe of East Africa the main power of the chiefs is derived from their art of making rain. If a chief cannot make rain himself, he must procure it from someone

that can do it. Among the tribes of the Upper Nile the medicine – men are generally the chiefs. Their authority rests above all upon their supposed power of making rain, for rain is the one thing that matters most to the people in those areas and if it does not come down at the right time, it means untold hardship and sufferings for the community. Hence most of the chiefs of these tribes are rainmakers and enjoy popularity in proportion to their powers to give rain to the people at the proper season. It may be pointed out here that the rain making chiefs always build their villages on the slopes of a fairly high hill, as they know it full well that the hills attract the clouds and they are therefore fairly safe in their efforts in the making of rain. The rainmaker thus exerts tremendous influence over his tribes and is sure to become a rich man. Rainmaking was thus a fundamental glory of ancient chiefs and heroes and it seems probable that it may have been the origin of chieftainship. But if these people failed to bring rains, they were either killed or replaced. Generally, the chiefs do not keep any rival in the tribe. Chaka, the famous Zulu despot used to declare that he was the only diviner in the country, for if he allowed rivals his life would be insecured (Frazer 1963:99).

Rain -making in the Sub-Continent:

Rain- making activities are not uncommon among the primitive or the tribal societies in Indian sub-continent also, comprising India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Sri-Lanka, too, is no exception. At Poona in India when rain is needed, the boys dress up one of their members in nothing but leaves and calls him 'King of Rain'. Then they go round to every house in the village, where the householder or his wife sprinkles the Rain King with water and gives the party

food of various kinds. When they have thus visited all the houses, they strip the Rain King of his leafy robes and feast upon what they have gathered (Frazer, J., 1963:80).

It appears from records collected by Frazer that the primitive people believed that certain trees have power to cause rain. The Buddhists believe that God Buddha had the power to cause rain and thus the Bodhi tree which symbolizes God Buddha, has the same magical power. The Bodhi tree is endowed with another power to grant children to barren women. This is also remnant of a primitive belief found in many folk cultures where women who seek children are taken near the tree that has such power and are made to water it, embrace it or tie it with a thread round it and so on. Such kind of belief is prevalent among a section of the Buddhists in Sri-Lanka (From Soba, an Environmental Publication, Vol.II, No.2, 1990, pp, 20-23). It is very often believed that prayer itself could bring rain. The Muslims have such type of faith. And on occasions, there appeared rain when people prayed to Allah, standing under the sun.

Rain making, in fact, was an important occupation among the primitive races and there had been strange rites which were practiced by these races in order to bring about the desired result. Rain making was felt utmost necessity when drought persists for a long time. Agriculture production suffered much for want of water. It happened there were clouds in the sky but it did not bring rain. These necessitated people to study weather, winds wave and clouds and a hundred other objects from which the signs of coming changes in weather might be foretold. Farmers, hunters, shepherds, sailors have from sheer necessity learnt the behavior of cloud and wind or weather as a whole. This weather-wisemen and women became prosperous and

powerful among the primitive races, possibly weather based proverbs came into existence out of these weather-wise men and women. Jane Harrison writes, 'When a savage wants sun or wind or rain, he does not go to Church and prostrate himself before a false god; he summons his tribe and dances a sun dance or wind dance or a rain dance. When he would hunt and catch a bear, he does not pray to his god for strength to outwit and outmatch the bear, he rehearses his hunt in a bear dance (Harrison, J., 1935).



Prayer for rain Drought and water for life

Rainmaking: A Popular Belief among various religious communities

When there is continuous drought, people suffer, crops are either damaged or fail, people start praying to Allah, Bhagaban or Iswar, God for rain. They go to 'pirs' ormazars, mosques and temples, or follow certain procedures. These are primitive practices as have been done by the pagans or the animists. Hindu and Muslims have different practices. Rain making does not mean artificial rain. Rain when it comes, it comes as normal rain. Here we talk about rain making as it happens during instances of drought.



Muslim prayer for rain



Hindu prayer for rain

In Bangladesh, too, the peasant society still undertakes many activities when drought continues for a long time. In a Mymensingh village, 50 miles away from Dhaka, people when faced with continuous drought and the need of rain, dress young boys and girls of the village, in colorful attire, they gather together at a particular point in the village and tie up two living frogs and then make a rally in the village begging alms from each of the houses and singing songs invoking rains to come.

It is held that the pirs have control over the forces of nature. Shah Karim Ali of Jagannathpur in Tripura was thought capable of causing rains when and whenever he pleased. (Wise. J., 1883). Ali Sabr Shah was also connected with the making of rains. The folk people visited his Shrine in Bagiara in the Mymensingh district on the occasion of drought and poured 125 pitchers of water on the shrine in (sts) was on top, followed by the Kshatriya (warriors) Itihash, p.84, B.S.1323, 1916. Also see Roy, Asim, 1983:233)

In my childhood when I was school going, I heard a kind of folk song, 'Allah megh dey paani dey chaya derey tui, Allah megh dey' when there was a severe drought. The song states, "Oh Allah, bring in clouds as a shade to protect us from the scorching heat of the sun and give us rain."

They would then arrange a feast around the hole where they would leave the two frogs, pouring water on them so that they would then cry as if the rain had come. Then the boys and girls would go singing and merry making believing rain would be sure to come. "Aai brishti jhepey Dhaan (rice or paddy) debo mepey" Oh, Cloud! Bring rain for us. We shall pay you back with paddy or rice in proper measurement. There they too used to sing this song collectively. There again were people braving the heavy sun, they perform namaj or salath. The Hindus also prayed in their temples for rain. And there was then heavy rainfall as I recollect. Later I came to know that the song was composed by one Jalaluddin of Netrokona and sung by Abbasuddin and was recorded by HMV.

Frog marriage: A Primitive Approach

Frog marriage is still in vogue in Bangladesh among the Hindus and tribal people following severe drought. This practice is animistic and has been orally transmitted for generations. Such practice is seen in West Bengal, Assam, Orissa and many other parts of India. The male frog and the female are attired with leaves. The female is given a red head of vermilion and then they are released in a nearby pond or ditch in intimate association of frogs and toads. A kind of feast is arranged and it is shared by the community people. The young men and women also perform dance and music. A section of Hindus belonging to lower caste believe that frogs are custodians of rain and in the Ramayana there are references of frogs.

In some areas, villagers would gather together in an open field when persistent drought prevail, dig a number of holes and put frogs into them, and then they would pour water on

them singing a special kind of folk song known as 'jhapan', and 'gajan'.

They would then spank the earth and splash water mixed with mud among them. Then they would move in a procession singing folk songs invoking cloud to bring rain for them and visiting each house begging alms. After that they would arrange a big feast for themselves. The orthodox Muslims, however, would gather at a field under the open sky with sun shining sharply over them. They would then pray for hours crying and weeping, seeking mercy and blessings of Allah. During this period, the mothers would not feed their child thinking that the cry of babies for food would certainly help improve the situation as God would be pleased and rain might follow. Domestic animals are also not fed during this time.

Such kind of frog marriage was once popular among the low caste Hindu community and the peasant society. I heard about it when I was school going during the British period. Such type of frog marriage in Bangladesh is not very popular nowadays as the majority of the Hindus left the country when India was divided on the basis of religion and two nation theory. Of late we have heard about frog marriage among the Hindu and the tribal communities in a number of villages of Bangladesh belonging to Dinajpur and Rangpur, Mymensingh and Brahmanbaria. Such type of frog marriages are also found taking place in West Bengal, Assam and Orissa among the peasant and tribal societies. In frog marriage certain kind of rituals are followed. The marriage is done in Hindu or tribal way. The low caste Hindus beside offering prayers to deities, also arrange frog marriage because they believe frogs are symbols of rain and when they yell, it is believed that there may be rain.



Frog marriage ritual

In some villages people arrange baul or mystic songs, jari, or marsiyarelated to 'Karbala' and Muharram. Padma-purana and Bhasan Jatra are also arranged. The Hindu and Buddhists also participate. The songs are arranged for three consecutive days and people arrange feast for everybody. Young boys squirt water on one another through bamboo tubes. They mimic clouds or imitate the plump of rain by smacking the surface of water with their hands. In order to get rain, folk people generally tie a frog to a rod covered with green leaves and branches of the 'nim' tree (*Azadirachta Indica*) and carry it from door to door singing various kinds of folk songs seeking divine mercy and invoking rain. (Field reports) In some villages, frog marriage is common as it is held that frogs are symbols of rainfall.

Can Music Help Rainfall?

Obviously, the answer may be negative

Music is now considered a therapy. Anybody who is sick, when he listens to music, he reacts. Music undoubtedly has tremendous impact on one's mind. Many have been cured of their ailment. Snakes are also believed to react as they sway to music. We have heard about "Tansen", a noted singer in the golden past, that rain used to fall when he used

to sing "malhar". This is hearsay. We have heard about Hazrat Daud, a prophet of Allah, that when he used to read out the holy Zabur, the words of Allah as guidance to the mankind in musical tune, birds, trees, air from hills accompanied him to make the tune more effective.

In our country, music becomes a kind of prayer when there is severe drought. Such type of music is sung in many countries also for invoking rain. But music can bring rain. It may be a strange coincidence. Such things happened in Behar in British India when Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Assam formed a region. An anthropologist from West Bengal, India, Babu Sarat Chandra Mitra, gave a succinct description of the rain making by a group of Bihari women.

Late Sarat Chandra Mitra was a corresponding member of the Anthropological Society of Bombay. His story was published by the Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay in 1896, No. I issue. The incident centered round Bihari Women's ceremony for producing rain, entitled "Harprowri". Mitra in his story said: "It was about 10 o'clock in the night of Saturday, the 25th June last [1892], as I was about to retire to bed, I heard a great noise made by the singing in high pitched tones of some women in front of our house [Chupra]. I thought that women were singing some songs, as they usually do while parading the streets before some marriage takes place in a family. But on making enquiries next morning I came to learn that the previous night singing formed part and parcel of a rain bringing ceremony, known at least in this district (Saran) and that some women of the locality had formed themselves into a little band and paraded the neighboring streets singing songs a practice which they superstitiously believed would surely bring down showers. Curiously

enough a tolerably good shower of rain fell during the afternoon of the following day.

In the present paper I intend to give some further details as also to publish the text of the song which is sung on the occasion and a translation thereof. (As the present author has no knowledge about Hindi script, he prefers English translation instead of Hindi text). The song which is sung by way of performance of this rain bringing ceremony is an invocation to the god Vishnu who is the preserver of the creations in the Hindu pantheon and is as follows:

Translation of the song -

Stanza I

Some of the people saying that their shama (a kind of grain) crops are withering and others are saying that their tangooni (a kind of grain) crops are withering. Oh God! How much misery and distress you are inflicting on the people! This misery cannot be endured. The earth is getting baked with the heat [literally, the earth has become a frying pan] and this misery cannot be borne. Oh God! People are almost dying for want of rain. Oh Lord! This misery cannot be endured. Some people are saying that their crops of maize are withering and others are saying that their rice plants are withering. Oh God! How much distress you are inflicting on the people. Men have not even the strength to speak. Oh Lord! How much distress you have caused to the people.

Stanza II

Men are deserting their wives, Oh Lord! For want of food and for want of rain. Children are crying in their mothers' laps. Food cannot be had in the world; how is it possible for children to get milk to drink, when it cannot be had for want of rain. Men are deserting their wives for want of rain [i.e., for scarcity of food caused by drought].

Stanza III

Oh God Vishnu! Soon eat the choora (flattened rice) which has been prepared of Sarukahi rice, (a kind of rice with milk) of Suravi (the celestial cow) so that, Oh husband's sister! Clouds may send down copious showers of rain.

During seasons of drought, women in Bihar form themselves into little bands and, during the night, parade the streets of the villages and sing above mentioned song for ten or twelve days. After the lapse of this period, they go outside the village's boundary during the night, take hold of ploughs, and plough the lands in the month of Asahr, Sravan and keep Kartick for sowing. While ploughing the lands, the village women sing this song and pour forth volleys of abuse on the village officials such as Thikadar (or the lessee of the mouza) and the Patwari. Sometimes the women of the village abuse to their hearts content the proprietor of the village, and compel him to take a plough and plough up some land. During the commencement of the long -standing drought from which the whole of Bihar is suffering at present, the proprietor of Mouza Sewan, Babu Ismail Khan, was, I am informed, made to perform this ceremony and plough some land in order to appease the wrath of the offended Rain God. These

are the principal features of the ceremony as it is performed in this district. And especially as it has been performed in many villages of the Hutwa Raj during the present exceptionally dry season. It is said that before beginning to plough, the women sometimes strip themselves naked and then carry on ploughing operations.”

W. Crook, the Editor of the North Indian Notes and Queries, says, “During the Gorakhpur famine of 1873 -74, there were many accounts received of women going about with a plough at night, stripping themselves naked and dragging it across the fields as invocation to the Rain God. The men kept carefully out of the way while this was being done. It was supposed that if women were seen by men, the spell would lose its effect” (Vol.III, pp. 41, 115).

A practice almost similar to the above also was observed in the Mirzapur district of the north western Provinces. Sarat Chandra observes, “The rains this year held off for a long time and last night (24th July 1892), the following ceremony was performed secretly. Between the hours of 9 and 10 p.m., a barber’s wife went from door to door and invited the women to join ploughing. They all collected in a field from which all males were excluded. Three women from a cultivator’s family stripped off all their clothes: two were yoked to plough like oxen, and a third held the handle. They then began to imitate the operation of ploughing. The woman who had the plough in her hand shouted, “Oh Mother Earth! Bring parched grain, water and chaff. Our stomachs are breaking to pieces from hunger and thirst.” Then the Land lord and the village accountant approached them and laid down some grain, water and chaff in the field. The women then dressed and returned home. By the grace of God, the weather changed almost

immediately and we had a good shower.” (North Indian notes and queries, Vol.I, p.210)

Sarat Chandra Mitra adds, “The ceremony consists of a series of spells. These included: 1) An invocation to Rain God, 2) the nudity spell, 3) abuse or vicarious sacrifice; and 4) a ritual to propitiate the Mother Earth.

It will appear from the song of which the text has been given above that it embodies a touching appeal to the god Vishnu to send down copious rain.” (On Harparowri, or the Bihari Women’s ceremony for producing rain. Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal Vol.LXV. Part III – Anthropology and Cognate subjects. No. I. –1896)

Rain Making Ceremony at a village in Murshidabad, West Bengal, India:

Sarat Chandra Mitra records another rain making ceremony in West Bengal. In 1897 a rain making ceremony was held in the district of Murshidabad, West Bengal, India. India was then under the British rule. Sarat Chandra Mitra, a noted anthropologist, made the following observation as a participant observer. He later published his experience in the Journal of the Asiatic Society Calcutta in the year 1898 in volume no.1. Sarat writes, “There is a curious rain ceremony performed in connection with the deity Rudradeva. In times of drought and threatened failure of crops, the performance of this ceremony is had recourse to. All the outlets and drains in the temple of Rudradeva at Rupapur near Jamooa are closed and 100 to 150 Brahmans pour water on the idol till it is immersed up to its chin in water, when it is confidently believed by the people of those parts, the rain clouds gather and send down refreshing

showers” Sarat Chandra writes interviewing local people that this ceremony has been performed thrice in the village. In 1267 BS, there was no rain in the months of Ashwin and Kartik, the paddy crops were about to dry up, the people of the neighborhood raised some money by subscription from the members of the village community and then it was supplemented by the Zamindar of Pargana Fattah Singh, and organized the celebration of the rain bringing rites on an extensive scale. This ceremony was participated by a number of Brahmins also. Some of the Brahmins went to the river or a neighboring tank and, taking their stand in the water, began to offer prayers to the goddess Durga and Siva; while others commenced to present offerings of leaves of the holy Bilwa tree (*Aegle marmelos*) to Rudradeva. On the last day of this ceremony, all the doors and outlets of the temple of Rudradeva were, after the conclusion of the worship of that deity, closed up; Meanwhile 100 to 150 Brahmins in the village carried vessels full of water and pour the same on the image of the Rudradeva until it rose to the chin of Rudradeva’s image. After a while, rain clouds gathered and showers flooded the area with water. The paddy and others were thus saved from destruction. Sarat Chandra Mitra in his article mentioned that there had been references of rain making in the Rig-Veda when there appeared continuous drought. He writes, “Aryans of those ancient times used to offer up similar prayers to their rain –god, Parganya. This deity is one of the oldest of all the Aryan gods. Sarat Chandra quotes from Rigveda:

1. “Invoke the strong god with these songs! Praise Parganya, worship him with veneration! For he, the roaring bull, scattering drops, gives seed –fruit to plants.

2. “He cuts the tree asunder, he kills evil spirits; the whole world trembles before his mighty weapon. Even the guiltless flees before the powerful, when Parganya thundering strikes down the evil doers.”

3. “Like a charioteer, striking his horses with a whip, he puts forth his messengers of rain. From afar arise the roaring of the lion, when Parganya makes the sky full of rain.”

4. “The winds blow, the lightnings fly, plants spring up, the sky pours. Food is produced for the whole world, when Parganya blesses the earth with his seed.”

5. “ O Parganya, thou at whose work the earth bows down, thou at whose work hoofed animals are scattered, thou at whose work the plants assume all forms, grant thou to us thy great protection!”

“O Maruts give us the rain of heaven; make the streams of the strong horse run down! And come thou hither with thy thunder, pouring out water, for thou (O Parganya) art the living god, thou art our father.”

Sarat Chandra further writes, “Similar prayers for rain and snow are offered by the Navajo Indians of America to their deities Hasjelti and Hostjoghan. These gods dwell upon the mountain –tops and call the clouds to gather round them. Hasjelti is the mediator between the Navajo and the sun. He prays to the sun, as follows:

“Father, give me the light of your mind, that my mind may be strong; give me some of your strength that my arm may be strong, and give me your rays that corn and other vegetation may grow.”

Sarat says, "It is to this deity that the Navajo Indians address their most important prayers. It will thus be seen that the god Paraganya of Vedic times is represented in modern Hindu culture by Indra, Varuna and Rudradeva, who are believed to be endowed with the power for sending or withholding rain and are, therefore, propitiated for their favors. In the rain ceremony as performed in Murshidabad, it is Varuna and Rudradeva who come in for the lion's share of the worship and offerings; but Indra is left in the cold. Here animism also works in and through folk religion and Hinduism."

Sarat Chandra commented on the rain making ceremony as a kind of "sympathetic magic" and so often practiced by men in the lower culture. The "sympathetic magic of the savage races is based on the 'Association of Ideas' – a faculty which to quote Dr. Taylor's words, "lies at the very foundation of human reason, but in no small degree of human unreason also." Men in the lower culture, having often of physical phenomenon to be connected in actuality, erroneously invert this process of reasoning, and conclude that this ideal must involve a similar connection in reality. As the result of this mistaken mode of thinking, the savages think that they can discover, foretell and cause events by means of process which appear to men advanced higher in civilization to have nothing but an ideal significance.

Frazer (1963: 56) speaks, "Whenever sympathetic magic occurs in its pure unadulterated form it assumes that in nature one event follows another necessarily and invariably without the intervention of any spiritual or personal agency. Thus its fundamental conception is identical with modern science; underlying the whole system is a faith, implicit but real and firm, in the order and uniformity of nature. The magician does not doubt that the same causes will always

produce the same effects, that the performance of the proper ceremony, accompanied by the appropriate spell, will inevitably be attended by the desired result, unless, indeed, his incantations should chance be thwarted and foiled by the more potent charms of another sorcerer. He supplicates no higher power: he sues the favor of no fickle and wayward being: he abases himself before no awful deity. Yet his power, great as he believes it to be, is by no means arbitrary and unlimited. He can wield it only so long as he strictly conforms to the rules of his art, or to what may be called the laws of nature as conceived by him. To neglect these rules, to break these laws in the smallest particular, is to incur failure, and may even expose the unskillful practitioner himself to the utmost peril. If he claims sovereignty over nature, it is constitutional sovereignty rigorously limited in its scope and exercised in exact conformity with ancient usage.

Thus the analogy between the magical and the scientific conception of the world is close. In both of them the succession of events is assumed to be perfectly regular and certain, being determined by immutable laws, the operation of which can be foreseen and calculated precisely; the elements of caprice, of chance, and of accident are banished from the course of nature. Both of them open up a seemingly boundless vista of possibilities to him who knows the causes of things and can touch the secret springs that set in motion the vast and intricate mechanism of the world. Hence the strong attraction which magic and science alike have exercised on the human mind; hence the powerful stimulus that both have given the pursuit of knowledge."

Water as a Symbol of Fertility

In all cultures water stands as a symbol of fertility. This is particularly true with the belief in animism. Female fertility and agricultural fertility belong to the same order of existence. We have already talked of human reproduction and agricultural production. The anthropologists agree that women were the first agriculturists. Briffault (1952) suggests: The fertility of the soil retained its immemorial association with the woman who had been the tiller of the Earth and were regarded as the depositories of agricultural magic.

The successful carrying out of the agricultural labors of women is regarded in primitive thought as due to the magical powers with which they are credited, and is thought to be, like their power of child bearing, inherent in their sex and to appertain to the very nature of womanhood. Primitive man thinks of the cultivation of the soil as being magically dependent for success on woman and connected with childbearing.

In Hindu and tribal religions, water is taken as the symbol of fertility. In the marriage ceremony, a white thread ties the fingers of both bride and bridegroom together and then sacred water is poured upon the fingers (Deviprasad, 1956). In Muslim marriage, the bride and bridegroom feed each other with a glass of 'sarbat', a kind of sweet drink. It is commonly believed that such an action between bridegroom and bride would help beget love, and their conjugal life would last long. This practice is in vogue in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

In a number of villages in West Bengal, India, on the occasion of marriage ceremony, a decorated pot full of water is kept ready at the house of the bridegroom for use

of the bride who uses the same for bath after the marriage is consummated. The use of water by the bride is preceded by a simple ceremony participated by young girls. Such ceremony is called purul bhora. This pot which is full of water stands as fertility.

Bangladesh has people who have diverse types of religious beliefs. They are Hindu and Buddhist on the one hand, and the Muslims, the Jews and the Christians on the other. They have their own culture. The Muslims, the Jews and the Christians believe in one God. Their approach to life is also different from the Hindus and the Buddhists. The Hindus and the Buddhists are idolaters. Christians, in certain respect, are also idolaters, in so far as it relates to Christ as the Son of God. The Aryans, who came to India before at least 1500 BCE years ago, brought with them the Vedas, their religious books. The Veda means knowledge or wisdom. The Vedas are not the work of a single person. It is believed to have been written by a number of persons, called Rishis who belonged to the Aryan race (Keith, A.B., 1925; Wilkins.W.J., 1979). These books have points of similarities with the Bible and the Quran. It is still unknown how these books were produced. The religious people believe that God in all ages had sent messengers. They spoke of one God and His Angels. The Aryans originally came from Europe and settled in Central Asia or Persia, the present Iran, where a number of religions prevailed. The Aryans were reportedly white skinned people.

The major religions of the world such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism have references of water for guidance to the followers. In the Indian sub-continent, the Hindus, the Buddhists and the Muslims have respective uses of water. It is held that Buddhism is, to a great extent,

a continuation of Hinduism (Barth. A, 1952), and for this we use the word Hindu as a general pattern. It should be mentioned here that prior to the arrival of the Aryans India was the land of the non-Aryans. The Indus Basin civilization and the Ganges Basin civilization are the products of the non-Aryans. In almost all cases agriculture played a great part in shaping the civilization (Briffault. R, 1952). Gods and goddesses are also non Aryans. The Veda, the religious book of the Aryans, although it speaks of one single god, who has no color, shape or caste, however, incorporated non-Aryan gods and goddesses in the religion. And it is the Indus that shaped the Aryans as the Hindu afterwards. The Muslims of India, by way of their conversion from Hinduism into Islam, continue with many Hindu traditions in their way of life. Islam, therefore, contradicts with many practices as these are observed by the Muslims of the Sub-continent (Rubbee, Khandker Fazli, 1895).

It is quite amazing that the ancient's scriptures such as the Veda of the Aryans record in great details, inter-alia, the knowledge of cosmology in regard to the evolution of the Earth, the science of rainfall, climatology, meteorology, hydrology, use of water and its management. All these suggest that the people, who carried with them the Veda, were certainly most civilized. The non-Aryans, too, who also built the Harappa and the Mohenjo-Daro, were equally civilized (Bagchi, P.C. 1929).

Water as a Remedy for Various Diseases:

The use of water as an agent in the treatment of disease has been continuing from the time immemorial. The history of various ancient nations, including India and Bangladesh,

provides sufficient evidence that the use of the bath, recommended as a curative agent was of a very remote origin. If we take up the oldest medical authors we will find numerous references to the bath and recommendations of its use in various cases of disease. J.H. Kellogg speaks of bathing in Egypt and in Persia. These countries had set up public baths. Bathing was a regular practice among the Jews because of religious instruction. History also records the bathhouses among the Greeks and also the Roman Baths.

Celsius and Galen, the two noted Latin physicians, considered bathing as an invaluable remedy for diseases almost two thousand years ago. Galen thought about bathing with cold water as a possible remedy for high fever. Such a thing was not unknown in Bangladesh. I remember an incident that took place in winter more than 70 years ago in a rural Bangladesh. A young boy was attacked with high fever. The oldest man in the family took him to a nearby pond where he put the baby in cold water at least three or four times and then gave him rice mixed with hot dry chilly, properly grinded, and the baby was cured of high fever. The Emperor Augustus was cured by the bath that baffled all other remedies (Kellogg, J.H., 2004).

Bathing is also necessary for one's protection against cold. Kellogg further writes, "It is an erroneous notion that bathing renders a person more liable to 'take cold by opening the pores'. Colds are produced by disturbance of the circulation and not by opening or closing the pores of the skin. Frequent bathing increases the activity of the circulation in the skin, so that a person is far less subject to chilliness and to taking cold. An individual who takes a daily bath has almost perfect immunity from colds, and is

little susceptible to changes of temperature. (Kellogg, J. H., 2004-28).

Islam has introduced ablution for each one of the daily prayers to keep the body free from diseases. Frequent ablution prevents the body from all kinds of skin diseases. The prophet of Islam suggested regular bathing for his followers. Bathing cleans both body and mind. Inactivity of the skin is also very commonly associated with dyspepsia, with rheumatism, gout, hysteria and other nervous derangements. Also it is not an uncommon cause of bronchial and pulmonary affections. It is quite evident that the proper and most efficient means of preventing these diseases is to maintain the functional vigor of the skin by the proper application of water (Kellogg, 2004: 31). Islam as a religion thus has recommended regular bath and also ablution to make the body and soul clean. Moses, the Jewish prophet, also asked his followers to take regular bath as a part of religious duties to keep the body clean. The Greeks and the Spartans regarded the bath as one of the most essential means of securing physical health. Kellogg writes, "Daily ablutions were practiced by them, every person participating in the bath, from the new born babe to the oldest inhabitant. The Romans cultivated bathing to a remarkable extent, making it a luxury rather than dreaded penance" (Kellogg, J. H., 2004, 31-32). If one takes to nature, it is seen that rain is a natural shower bath in which all vegetation participates and gains refreshment. It is equally true with wild animals. These animals take baths in the river when there is no rain. Bathing thus has an invigorating influence on life and living. The warm bath is most effective for keeping the body fit as it causes proper blood circulation. The warm bath never exceeds the temperature of the body, and is usually below it. It also

promotes the action of the skin increasing both perspiration and absorption.

Bathing thus becomes a part of culture of human beings and we have heard about well decorated bath rooms and public bath all over the world.

Kellogg mentions that pure water is not found in nature. Rain water is the nearest approach to it. But even this gathers impurities of various sorts as it falls through the air, and thus often becomes unwholesome by the absorption of foul gasses and the collection of dust in this way. Filtered rain water and distilled water are the purest form of water attainable. (Kellogg, J. H., 2004:12)

Kellogg maintains, "Beverages which contain other substances are useful as drinks just in proportion to the amount of water which they contain, and are unwholesome just in proportion as the added elements are injurious," (Kellogg, J. H., 2004:23).

Kellogg adds, "Human body needs water for protection not only of life but also of skin. The skin is the most important depurating organs of the whole body. From each of its millions of pores constantly a stream laden with the poisonous products of disintegration. As the water evaporates, it leaves behind these non-volatile poisons, which are deposited as a thin film over the whole surface of the skin. Here water serves the most useful end if properly applied. It is unexcelled as a detergent, and by frequent application to the skin will keep it wholly free from foul matters. The necessity for frequent ablutions is well shown by the fact that nearly two pounds of a poisonous laden solution, the perspiration, is daily spread upon the surface of the body," (Kellogg, J. H., 25).

The Vedic Approach to water:

Water is considered very sacred in Hindu and Buddhist religions (Keith.A.B.1925). In the Vedic texts, water is named as Apah (Dutt.V. M.N., 1906). It is considered purifying in a spiritual context. "Hail to you, divine, unfathomable, all purifying waters." (Rig-Veda). Water is the very foundation of the universe (Chanda. R. P, 1916; Childe. G.1926, Sharma, K.N., 1998). 'In Water moves the Lord, surveying men's struggle for truth and their action for falsehood. How sweet are the Waters, crystal clear and cleansing...? From whom all the Deities drink exhilarating strength, into which the Universal Lord has entered' (Satpatha Brahmanas). This belief has given birth to animatisms and hydro cult. There always lives in water a soul or spirit (Wilkins. W. J.:1979).

Such an idea was prevalent among the Greeks also (Morgan, H. L.; Thomson, G, 1949). The early Vedic texts consider water as a manifestation of the feminine principle, known commonly as Shakti (Ehrenfels. O. R. 1941; Belvalkar, S. K., and Ranade, R. D., 1927). The Rishis (gaints) mentioned in the Veda 'I call the Waters, Goddesses, wherein our cattle quench their thirst; Oblations to the streams be given.' (Rig-Veda. It is thus said that the cosmic man or Purusa was born of the Waters and thus 'Water is female ...' (Satpatha Brahmanas). The concept of purification in the early Vedic texts was essentially spiritual and not merely moral and/or physical (Keith. A.B., 1925). The Vedas thus take water as the very essence of spiritual sacrifice or 'the first door to attain the divine order' (Atharva Veda). Thus it appears that the Veda has bestowed a sacred character on water which is identified as a medium to spiritual enlightenment (Barth. A., 1914). The Veda also suggests that a cleansing bath might liberate one

from sin and impurity. 'Whatever sin is found in me, whatever wrong I may have done, if I have lied or falsely sworn, waters remove it far from me ('Rig Veda'). Water is thus taken as the real and spiritually conceived source of life. Ganga-Jal or the Ganges water is taken as a thing of all Hindu worship of all castes. But this water also needs purification (shodona) by rituals and mantra. Use of ritual water is essential in Hindu death ceremony known as 'Shraadh' (Das, Abinash Chandra: 1921, Sharma, K. N. 1998).

Water, thus, plays a key position in all activities of the Hindus. In birth as well as in death water is considered as an essential thing for the Hindu life. The Ganges water purifies



all, and for that it is sprayed all over the human body for purification of body and soul (Wilkins. W. J., 1979:460). Hence, no puja or worship is possible without water. The Hindus believe that in the beginning of creation when everything was enveloped in deep darkness, water was everywhere. Life emerged out of water following a sex play and thus water is taken as a symbol of fertility. Water is one of the four elements of life. The other elements include Earth, Air, and Fire. 'Sky' forms the fifth element and is called 'byom.' These elements are basic things of life.

Hindus believe that no good work is possible without water. The Brahmin begins worshipping of gods and goddesses keeping a purna ghat which is full of ritual water and is kept before him. (Chatterji. Deviprasad, Lokayata:

1956); Shastri, H. P., 1925) the purna ghat is taken as 'mangola' or an auspicious thing. The Purna Ghat is an earthen vessel filled with water. The puja begins thus: First, five varieties of corn seeds (pancasasya) and these are scattered on a lump of flattened and square – shaped clay. Then an earthen vessel filled with water is placed on it. Then rice, mixed with curd is put into the vessel and around the neck of the vessel is tied a piece of red thread. Its open mouth is covered with five varieties of leaves. Then an earthen plate with rice and betel nut is placed on the leaves. On the plate of rice, again is placed another fruit, preferably a green coconut with its stalk intact. The fruit is smeared with vermilion. On the surface of the vessel containing the water, is drawn the picture of a human with vermilion paste, it is called 'purna-ghat'. (Chatterji, Deviprasad, Lokayata: 1956); without this, any puja or religious activity such as marriage etc., is impossible. Ritual water is sprinkled and spread over everything. It is also necessary for purification of the body. The Hindus consider it as a religious duty to bathe in the Ganges and the Brahmaputra rivers. The Ganges bathing is known among the Hindus as the 'Dasahara- snan' and the Brahmaputra is taken as the 'Astami snan' Bathing in a holy river on the seventh of the Bengali month, Magh was known as Maghi saptami snan. Doljatra and Rathajatra are connected with water and rain. Bangladesh, although, is a country where the majority are Muslims, she also has a large number of Hindu, Buddhist and other religious communities.

These people enjoy equal religious rights and worship their gods and goddesses including rivers, lakes and hot water springs. There are rivers which they take as holy and perform 'Tirtha snan' (holy bath). In Bangladesh, there is a place called 'Langal-bundh' where Hindu men and women

gather on particular religious occasions for sacred baths. 'Jala-Devi' water goddess is worshipped before undertaking any journey. In Bangladesh, on every religious occasion of the Hindus and tribal people, water is worshipped at the beginning of the ritual. 'Kalash' (pot) full of water is used as one of the religious symbols and is shown as a motif. On Chaitra Sankranti, the last day of the last Bengali month Chaitra, low caste Hindus arrange a number of puja celebrations and festivity welcoming the New Year and praying for their prosperity, (Radhakrishnan, S., 1923).

In many places in Bangladesh, the Hindus also have made stair cases or steps on the banks of the rivers for public good. Besides these, the Hindu kings and rich people also made tanks or water reservoirs, ring wells and tube-wells along the road-side for the use of people. There are references of such activities by the Hindus in the contemporary religious literature and also in folk songs. In the Vedic literature we come across a number of references to the construction of canals and dams for irrigation purposes. Vedas are the foremost record of great wisdom and advanced thoughts, presented first ever by humanity since its awareness of the physical world around and the metaphysical elements pervading it. The knowledge of Vedas is synonymous with knowledge of science and metaphysics of creation. They are the repository of eternal knowledge and wisdom, (Radhakrishnan, S., 1923).

The whole material world is believed to have been developed from five prototypal gross elements called Panchamahabhuta (Dasgupta, S. N.:1921; Seal, B. N., 1915). These are Prithivi (Earth), Aap or Jal (Water), Agni or Tej (Fire, Energy), Vayu (Air) and Akash (Ether, Space). These five bhuta's constitute the physical universe. The

hymns in the four Vedas, namely, Rig-Veda, Yajur-Veda, Sama-Veda and Atharva-Veda were composed by various enlightened sages or seers (Rishi's) through an estimated time span from 6,500 BC to 1,500 BC on various aspects of scientific truths unraveled by them regarding psychological matter (consciousness) pervading the physical matter (electrons) which is present in the whole material creation/universe in three forms. In latent form it is present as Agni (fire) on the earth, in violent form as vayu (air), in dominating factor in mid sphere as Indra (god of atmosphere), and in a dominating factor in celestial sphere ionized or luminous form as Surya (sun), (Mitra, R. L., 1881).

Medicinal use of Water in Ancient Hindu Literature:

Jaggi writes, "During the Atharvavedic period, it appears, there existed two main types of healing arts and their adherents: the first type largely depended upon incantations of magical verses and sacrificial practices to bring about cures; the second type, while using magical formulae, depended more heavily on the empirical or rational use of herbals and other medicaments" (Jaggi, O.P., 1973:xiii) The medicinal quality of water has also found enough mention in the Vedas- "I have this day entered into the waters (for bathing), we have mingled with theiressence. Agni



aboding in the waters, approach and fill me with vigor" (RV 10.9.9). Rig-Veda hails waters as the reservoir of all curative medicines and of nectar. It invokes waters which the cows drink and offer oblations to deities presiding over the flowing waters.

"O Water, which we have drunk, become refreshing in our body. May you be pleasant to us by driving away diseases and pains – O divine immortal waters," (RV 63), (Keith, A.B., 1925).

Atharva-Veda describes various sources of water and describes them as dispeller of diseases and as more healing than any other healer. The scriptures believed that water averts pain, they are restorative/curative, and they are medicinal. Wherever water falls on earth, excellent plants there abundantly. The hymns in Atharvaveda (6.23, 24, and 57) hail water as possessing medicinal qualities. It is prayed to as a dispeller of diseases. A hymn in Atharva-Veda prays waters to cure 'incurable' diseases (Sharma. K.N., 1998).

The Rig-Veda (1.161.9) states – 'there exists no better element other than water which is more beneficent to the living beings. Hence waters are supreme.' Varuna is a cosmic ruler as well as the deity that dwells in water, He presides over them and others pray to him for granting strength and virility from waters. "O Varuna, the ruler, you possess hundreds or thousands of medicines."

The Samhitas also regard water as capable of alleviating pain – "O water which we have drunk, become refreshing in our body. Be pleasant to us by driving away diseases and pains, O divine immortal waters."

"Waters, sovereigns of precious treasures, granters of habitations to man, I solicit of you medicines (for my

infirmities). Within the waters, Soma has told me, remedies exist of every sort, and Agni, who brings blessings to all. Waters bring to perfection all disease dispelling medicaments for the good of my body, so that I may long behold the sun,” (RV 10.9.5-73; Sharma. K.N., 1998).

Skin Care in Rig Veda

Care of skin was considered very important in the Vedic religion. There are reports about skin diseases in the Rig-Veda and Samhita. Regular bathing was recommended for maintaining good health and skin. In the Vedic period there had been reports of skin diseases and also necessary medicine for remedy and cure. Both in the Rig-Veda and the Atharva-Veda recommended use of water for treatment of various diseases. “Apsu antar amṛtam apsu bheṣajam apām uta praśastaye devā bhabata vājinaḥ.” “Amrita is in the Waters; in the Waters. There is healing balm: Be swift ye Gods, to give them praise.” Ṛgveda.I.23.19. “apsu me somo abravīd antar viśvāni bheṣajā agniś ca viśvaśambhuvam āpaś ca viśvabheṣajā.”

“Within the Water – Soma thus hath told me – dwell all balms that heal, and Agni, he who blesseth all.” The water holds all medicines.

Beside skin diseases, there had been various kind of diseases like leprosy and hair diseases. RigVeda speaks: “...ghoṣāyai cit pitṛśade duroṇe patiṃ jūryantyā aśvinau adattam.” Ṛgveda.I.117.7, 19. Ghoṣā was healed from her leprosy and could get married by the grace of the divine physicians Aśvins. Similar incidence has been mentioned in the hymn I.117.8 where the physician duo, Aśvins cured Śyāva of leprosy.

The hymn 50 of Book VII, the Rigveda further adds: “yadvijāmanparuṣi bandanaṃ bhubadastībantou pari kulphou ca dehamagnistacchocannapa bādhatāmito mā māṃ padyena rapasya bidattasaruh.”

“Eruption that appears upon the twofold joints, and that which overspreads the ankles and the knees, May the refulgent Agni banish far away: let not the winding worm touch me and wound my foot.”

Yellowness of the body or jaundice has been mentioned in Book I: “śukeṣu me harimāṇaṃ ropaṇākāsu dadhmasi atho hāridraveṣu me harimaṇaṃ ni dadhmasi.”

“Rising this day, O rich in friends, ascending to the loftier heaven, Surya, remove my heart disease, take from me this my yellow hue,” Ṛgveda.I.50.12.

Hair disorders have also found place in this Veda: Verse 126.7 of Book I perhaps was an example of hypertrichosis – a condition considered an annoying feature in female during this period. On the contrary, scanty hair was also considered as a setback for a lady. Apālā, the Ṛṣikā of the hymns, had some hair disease and in the verse could be seen praying for the growth of hair in her body as well as on her father's scalp: “imāni trīṇi viṣṭapā tānīndra bi rohaya śirastatasyorbarāmādidam mā upodare.”

“O Indra, cause to sprout again three places, these which I declare, – My father's head, his cultured field, and this the part below my waist.” Ṛgveda. VIII.80.5 “asau ca yā na urbarādimāṃ tanwaṃ mama atho tatasya yacchirah sarva tā romasā kṛdhi.” “Make all of these grow crops of hair, you cultivated field of ours, my body, and my father's head.” (Ṛgveda. VIII.80-6).

Whether it was any genetic hair disease was not conceivable from the above text. The yakṣmā or consumption had been mentioned in almost all vedic literatures. Therefore, it may be assumed that it was a common disease during the ancient days. A hymn of Book X mentioned about it describing the affection of the hair and nails:

“mehanādbaṇāmkaranallaombhyastanakhebhyah yakṣam sarbasmādātamanastamidaṃ bi brhāmi te.”

“From what is voided from within, and from thy hair, and from thy nails, From all thyself from top to toe, I drive thy malady away.” (The Ṛgveda.X.163.5).

“angadangallomno lomno jataṃ parvaṇi parvaṇi yakṣam sarbasmādātamanastamidaṃ bi brhāmi te.”

“From every member, every hair disease that comes in every joint, from all thyself, from top to toe, I drive thy malady away” (The Ṛgveda. X.163.6).

The Ṛgveda has interesting information regarding social hierarchy. The fair complexioned Aryans enjoyed privileged position in the society. The non-Aryan inhabitants with darker complexion were considered as sudra or untouchables. They were placed in the lowest and outcast group in the social system. This is evident from verse 100.18 of Book I of the Ṛgveda, the fair-skinned Aryans had camaraderie among themselves in everyday life.

In the Rig-Vedic India, healing practice was in vogue. Chanting mantras, offering oblations and various kinds of rituals were common practice in the management of various kinds of diseases including skin diseases. Beside these, herbal medicines, hydrotherapy, organic and inorganic materials like anointment were in practice.

Anointment was a common method of therapeutic measure practiced by the Vedic physician. It is evident from hymn X.161 that the physician used to recite the mantra and touch the various parts of the body of the diseased with his hands anointed with ritually prepared clarified butter (ghee). The physicians, in those days, had sufficient knowledge about plants and minerals. The Rig-Veda speaks: “yatrouṣadhih samanmataha rājānah samitāmiba bipraha sa ucyate bhishakbaksohamība cātanah.” “He who hath store of herbs at hand like kings amid a crowd of men, physician is that sage's name, fiend-slayer, and chaser of disease” (The Ṛgveda.X.97.6).

In verse VII.50.2, mentioned earlier, the description is very much suggestive of the use of fire for cauterization. Some of the hymns like that in verses 50.11–13 of Book I are suggestive of knowledge of heliotherapy, particularly in the treatment of yellowness of the body. Ṛgveda.I.23.20. “Yatrouṣadhih samanmataha rājānah samitāmiba bipraha sa ucyate bhishakbaksohamība cātanah.” “He who hath store of Herbs at hand like Kings amid a crowd of men —, Physician is that sage's name, fiend-slayer, chaser of disease” (The Ṛgveda.X.97.6).

The Vedas give some idea about the prevailing medical conditions of the ancient Aryan societies. Though Atharva Veda deals more with the diseases and their remedies, Ṛg-Veda also throws some light on it. Vedas formed the base work for the highly developed Ayurveda of the later period.

Skin and its diseases were not only important from the health point of view, but also they had social significance. The Rig Veda also reports about somekind of physiotherapy like massage and tender touch on the body. “Ayaṃ ye hasto bhagavānayaṃ me bhagabattarah ayaṃ me

viśwabhesajohayaṃ śivābhimarśanaḥ.”“Felicitous is this mine hand, yet more felicitous is this. This hand contains all healing balms, and this makes whole with gentle touch” (The R̥gveda. X.60.12).

The Vedic seers also used water for the management of various diseases (Hydrotherapy): Along with the mention of skin ailments in the R̥gveda, the care of the skin in health was also given an important place. The daily care of the skin and use of perfumes was very much prevalent: “imā nārividhavāḥ supatnīrānjanena sarpiṣā saṃ viśaṃtu.”“Let these unwidowed dames with noble husbands adorn themselves with fragrant balm and unguent” (The R̥gveda.X.18.7).

Hair styling and hair care were also very popular among both sexes: “śwityanco yatra namaṣā kapadirno dhiyā dhīvanto asapanta tṛtsabah.”

Caste as the Basis of Culture and Conception of Pollution: The Sudra

The Aryans after their take-over of the Indus basin reshaped the whole economy. They introduced the principle of caste, which formed the basis of the Indian social system (Ghurey.G.S. 1969). The non-Aryans who surrendered to the Aryans were made slaves and they formed the lowest strata ‘Sudra.’ The social hierarchy of the caste system in Hindu society is said to have originated from the four-fold class system. The Brahmin (priests) was on top, followed by the Kshatriya (warriors) and the Vaisya (Merchants). The Sudras (slaves) were untouchables and were at the lowest strata and not allowed to touch the Veda. They were, however, sub-divided into a number of groups or sub-

cultures such as shoe-makers, jugglers, basket and shield makers, sailors, fishermen, weavers and oil makers, goldsmith, blacksmith and potters, hunters of wild animals, musicians, and artisans. They were outcastes. The lowest of them were Hadi, Dom and candala. However, presently also, these low castes are considered as most unholy and unclean and are, therefore, not allowed to enter the courtyard of the great temples. Their touch is considered so much impure as to pollute the Ganges water and hence their contact is always avoided (Kane, P.V., 1930; Dutta, B.N., 1944).

Notions of purity and pollution determine the basis of caste system. Impurity of human body is considered very serious and distressing. Bodily secretions of matters associating with these are considered as polluting. Water has, since the Vedic period, been recognized as a primordial symbol of purity. It works as an instrument to determine the rigors of social-ritual purity and pollution of the human body.

In the Hindu caste system, Brahmans are held as the purest and enjoy the most superior position in the social-religious activities. On the other hand the Sudras are identified as the most impure because of their defiling activities which they were forced to do by the upper castes. The tasks of the Sudras include among other things the work of cremating the human dead, handling dead animals, handling human feces, cutting hair, nails, washing and cleaning blood, semen, urine and other things associated with bodily excrements. According to Dube, the Sudras are considered eternally polluted and polluting because of their occupational nature which includes polluted social events and polluted human matter (Dube, L., 1996). Gradually the Sudras inherited the occupation by birth and it was made a

rigid social practice, not undertaken by any other upper caste.

Besides this, all women, regardless of the caste system, are considered impure if they are polluted through menstruation or childbirth. In such cases, however, after a required amount of days, which are considered a period of impurity, the use of water would make them clean and pure. In all religions, water is taken as most holy and a common medium of purification. Water has an intrinsic purity and has also the capability to absorb pollution. (Murray, 1994). History suggests that in the early Vedic period, social stratification in human society was made on the basis of color, class and occupational aptitude but later caste was determined on the inheritance-based rights and privileges (Kane, P. V., 1974, Crawford, 1982).

Initially the distinction existed between the fair skinned Aryans and the dark skinned non-Aryans who were made slaves or Dasa. As it was said earlier that there were four varnas or classes from the Purusa or the Eternal Man, such as: the Brahman was his mouth, his arms were made the Rajanya (Kshatriya), and his thighs were Vaisya and from his feet was born the Sudra. Despite this distinction or social stratification in the early Vedic period, there was no concept of untouchability or of physical impurity and pollution (Kane 1974, Jaiswal 1998). The superiority of the Brahman and the inferiority of the Sudra are certainly of later dimension. The Smritis or post Vedic literature introduced the notion of rituals. Water was used as the determining factor in the ritualistic or bodily purification of human existence. Rituals thus helped construct the Dharma, which was known as the Laws of Manu or Manusmriti (Crawford, 1982). In fact, Manu was responsible for the rigid implication of caste system as a social order (Kane,

1974). Dharma or the Laws of Manu now persist steadfastly in Hindu society and is practiced tenaciously as the culture (Kane, 1974, Nagarajan, 1994).

The Sudras were considered by the Dharmasastras as the very essence of pollution and for that they were required to live outside the village confines. Fa Hein, the Chinese traveler to India writes that the Sudras, known as candalas, had to give notice of their arrival by striking a piece of wood, thereby, to warn others to avoid contact with them (Kane, 1994). A Sudra male was completely forbidden to have any physical association with any female belonging to the superior castes. Any such association would lead to castration or even death, even if it were mutually desired. But the punishment was minimum for the Brahmans or others belonging to upper castes if they had physical association with the Sudra. A cleansing bath or a sort of sacrifice would help purify them. In the Dharmasastra water was taken as a medium to purify the pollution. It was also stated when Sudras touch a well or any other stagnant water source, the water and the source are polluted (Khera, 1997). In fact, the Dharmasastra went on saying that the Sudras had no god and therefore were to be excluded from all religious knowledge and rituals. Apart from the eternally polluted Sudras or the untouchables, the laws of Manu or Dharmasastra also refer to few cases of pollution. All persons regardless of caste become polluted during birth and death in the house and therefore remain as untouchables for a period of time until they bathe in water. Similarly women on account of their bodily secretions during their menstrual cycle and childbirth are considered as polluted. Water, however, is a medium for purification of all these forms of pollution.

Religious Use of Water in Bangladesh

I am presenting here a brief overview of religious approach to water in India and Bangladesh (Bangala/Bengal) during the pre-Aryan and the Aryan (Rig-Vedic India) periods as available in the contemporary Hindu and Buddhist religious books (Barth, A, 1914; Hopkins, E.W., 1895). Muslim approach to water as delineated in the holy Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, (peace be upon him), has also been studied. The people of India and Bangladesh, mostly follow their own religious instructions, customs and conventions in regard to water use. The Muslims follow the Qur'an and the Hadith but in many cases, there has been intrusion of local Hindu cultures. This happens because of their age-old relations and associations with the Hindus (Schimmel, Annemarie, 1980; Rubbee, K.H. Fazli, 1895). In India and Bangladesh local people were converted into Islam by the Sufi mystics who were liberal to Islamic practices (Karim, Dr. Abdul 1959), (Herklots, and G.A.1921). Sufism syncretised different religious ideals--such as those of ancient Persian religions, Hinduism, Vaishnavism and Buddhism on the one hand, and Christianity and Islam on the other. The religion of Islam is based on the fear of Allah, and in Christianity, however, it is the love of God and the Christ is pre-dominating (Arberry, A. J, .1950; Nicholson, R.A. 1966). In Sufism, love figures prominently and this has been borrowed from the Biblical and the Vaishnavite philosophy (Chatterji, S.K, 1946: 4-5).

All religions of the world agree that water is the basic and most vital part for life. It is also holy and divine. There was water all around when the earth came into being. From water came all created beings excepting human beings. Water is sacred and also purifying (The Bible, The Qur'an

and the Rig-Veda). The same is true with the Pre-Aryans also (Piggott, S, 1950; Marshall.J, 1938). They used water as a social good and they set up dams and cross-dams for irrigation in agricultural land. They used boats and ships for navigation. We have no knowledge if they were guided by any religious books. They however believed in gods and goddesses. The presence of Mother goddess in the Indus basin civilization clearly suggests that the pre-Aryan or non-Aryan people believed in fertility rituals and agriculture played the most decisive part in the making of the Indus basin civilization (Dikshit, S.K.; Ehrenfels, O.R., 1941). These people believed in ghosts and spirits. They had tremendous faith in mountain gods and tree or forest spirits. But they were certainly not pagans. They were animistic in their approach to life. These people also believed in male and female deities. As regards the use of water, it can be said that the pre-Aryans have full knowledge about building of cities and other things; otherwise they could not have built such type civilization in the Sindhvalley. We thus understand the importance of water from the beginning of creation.

The anthropologists and the sociologists agree that although religion is a part of culture, it plays a vital part in the making of culture (Weber.Max, 1958). The Veda of the Aryans, although it had been known to be recorded orally from the Rishis or saintly persons, these were put into written form much later, but remains the earliest written record, and it is a commonly held belief that the Veda is not yet properly deciphered.

Hindu approach to Water

In the previous chapter we talked about the Hindu approach to water during Aryanization of the sub-continent. The Hindu community in India and Bangladesh follow the Veda in regard to the use of water. A thorough discussion has already been made in the previous chapters. Here we talk specifically about the use of water by the Hindu community living in Bangladesh. It should be mentioned that the rituals and other things connected with it are the same in other parts of India. The rivers and river water thus have been treated with great reverence since the ancient times. Traditionally the Ganga is regarded sacred and is also worshipped as a goddess. The traditional Hindus in Bangladesh sprinkle drops of Ganges water on themselves, invoking the holy river for purification of the body thus: "In this water, I invoke the presence of holy water from the river Ganga, to make this water pure and blissful." Rivers in India and Bangladesh are hailed as the shaper of people's lives. It is sustainer and nourisher of material and spiritual life. In Bangladesh, like India, no Hindu rite is complete without water. In Hindu rituals rivers are symbolically represented by a pitcher (kalasha). This is the reason that at every auspicious occasion, including social events like marriages, or religious rituals/performances, the pitchers will be visible.

Puja in the River

There are various social, cultural and religious activities and rituals in the Hindu traditions and in all cases, the basic element is water. Indian mythology attaches a lot of importance to bath (snana) which is mandatory for participation in any important religious occasion. A dip in

the holy rivers is considered an essential part of Hindu culture, especially on specific occasions such as the solar and lunar eclipses or occasions specified on the basis of specific planetary configuration, which are considered to have its cosmobiological effect on the human body and mind.



Ritual Bathing in the River

Hindu Festival

In Hindu religion, each month is holy and is associated with a festival. Sun worship is part of faith in Hindu religion. The New Year is also celebrated as a Puja festival and similarly the Harvesting season Agrahayan and Poush (Autumn and Late Autumn) and Nabanna Utshab is also associated with Puja. Hindus all over India and Bengal perform Puja in each month as part of nature worship. The festivals are connected with feasting, bathing, general

rejoicing and alms giving. Various rites and rituals are observed by the Hindu communities. Gang-snana or bathing in the Ganges is considered very holy by the Hindus. Ganges water is also thus considered very holy. For details, one can read, Wilson, HH, The Religion of Hindus (1847).

Durga Puja

Durga puja is the greatest of all Hindu pujas. Durga is considered as the Mother Goddess. It is celebrated with pomp and grandeur both in India and Bangladesh. Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan also celebrate the puja. In Bengal, it is held in the season of autumn and it is why it is generally called Sharodutshab. Puja mandap and connecting streets are well decorated. The ministers visit these Puja mandaps and exchange greetings. Musical soiree and cultural programs are held. Festivity prevails everywhere. Muslims also greet their Hindu friends.

The puja epitomizes the victory of good over evil. The festival concludes with the immersion of Durga's



Immersion of Durga into the river



Puja in the river

wordly mud avatar into the river.

There are other pujas also, among which are Kali puja, Sharashwati puja and Shib puja. The Ganga puja is organized after harvesting or nabanna. Men and women come to the river side and perform puja.

Holi and Dol-Purnima/Dol-Jatra:

Holi is a Hindu religious festival invoking spring season after the end of winter. The festival takes place on the occasion of full moon day. It lasts for two days. The festival date is determined by the Hindu and the Georgian calendar which falls sometime between the end of February and the middle of March. The festival is dedicated to Lord Krishna who stood against the evil and established the truth, the good. In Bangladesh, the holi is best known as dol-jatra or dol-purnima. The festival is connected with Sri Caitanya or Gauranga who elevated the passion of Radha and Krishna to a high spiritual plain.



On the occasions, the youths, men and women are found using abir, a kind of small crystal. Both holi and dol-jatra are water based. The followers organize bonfire and the

game of colors spraying colored waters to others. The festival is associated with bhajana, a kind of musical performance by the followers of Radha-Krishna cult. The women followers of Krishna cult also take themselves as gopi and make sports with each other in ponds as believed to have been done by the gopis in presence of Krishna. The Bauls, more particularly the Lalon Shahi Bauls arrange a three day festival at Lalon Academy during dol-purnima in March. Lalon Fakir himself organized such kind of function during his time. The Bauls include both the Vaishnava and the Sufi. Karta-bhaja, Khushi-Biswashi, Shahev-dhani also perform such kind of function during dol-purnima

Vrata: Seasonal Puja

The Hindu women also perform some other minor pujas, known as Vrata(s) in which water plays an important role.

Kojagara

It is to be observed on the occasion of full moon of Aswin (September-October). The puja is offered to goddess Lakshmi and god Indra. Lakshmi moves about at midnight in the world saying "Who is awake?" On this occasion, the Hindu people drink cocoanut water besides eating traditional sweets.

Asokastomi

It is observed on the 8th day of the bright half of Chaitra (March-April). On this occasion Hindus will drink water infused with eight Asoka buds as this will free one from

sorrow. All tirthas and rivers come to the Lauhitya (Brahmaputra) on this occasion, and a bath in it yields rewards from god.

Kartikasna

Hindus believe that in the month of Kartik (October-November), any body takes bath in the early morning outside the house, and engaged in a japa of gayatri and partakes only once in the day of sacrifice (havisya) food becomes free from all sins committed in the year. This vrata is mentioned in the Padma-purana and in Himadri and Bhojo's works.

Dasahara

This is to be observed on the 10th of the bright half of Jaistha (May-June). This day is called Dasahara and on this occasion the Ganga (the Ganges) descended to earth. One who takes bath on this day in the Ganga and gives away gifts becomes free from sins. There are many other vratas and the women folk perform these as part of their faith.

Vaisakhi Purnima

It is observed on the full moon night of Baishakh (April-May). On this day cooked rice, water, vegetables, and sweets are offered to people.

It is to be mentioned that Hindus have puja in each month of the year.

(Source: Shahanara Hussain, *The Social life of Women in Early Medieval Bengal*, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1985, pp.110-114).

Diwali Festival of the Marwaris:

The Marwaris also celebrate diwali utshab in India and Bangladesh with big festivity. The food and drinks also are served to the guests. At night, houses and temples are well lit. It is a treat to eyes and also presents a gala night and a grand show.

Bangladesh, although, is a country where the majority are Muslims; she has also a large number of population belonging to Hindu, Buddhist and other religious communities.

These people enjoy equal religious rights and worship their gods and goddesses including rivers, lakes and hot water spring. There are rivers which they take as holy and perform 'Tirtha snan' (holy bath). In



Bangladesh, there is a place called 'Langal-bundh' where Hindu men and women gather on particular religious occasion for sacred bath. 'Jala-Devi' water goddess is worshipped before undertaking any journey. In Bangladesh, on every religious occasion of the Hindus and tribal people, water is worshipped at the beginning of the ritual. A 'Kalash' (pot) full of water is used as one of the religious symbols and is shown as a motif. On Chaitra Sangkranti,

the last day of the last Bengali month Chaitra, low caste Hindus arrange a number of puja celebrations and festivities welcoming the New Year and praying for their prosperity.

There are occasions on which Hindu population is subject to use of water, like certain rituals concerning birth of a child. The house in which a child is born is considered unclean. People who visit such a house must clean themselves by taking a bath after they return home. Similarly, the house where any death occurs is also unclean. People need to clean themselves with water or bathe when they return home. Any Hindu when he or she visits temples or undertakes a pilgrimage must have ceremonial bathing. The Buddhists, too, have the same formalities. Domestic animals and the place they are housed are also considered unclean and thus are subjected to such kind of ritual purification. The cow and the bull are considered sacred by the Hindus and as such they are given ceremonial bathing. Cattle used for agriculture and other kind of jobs are taken to tanks, wells or rivers for cleaning by giving a bath. In purifying houses either Ganges-water or water mixed with cow-dung is used and sprinkled. Turmeric is also considered a purifier. Hindus believe that water is sacred and holy. It is a tangible manifestation of the divine essence. They keep a jar (pitcher) filled with water and keep it before them in the place of worship or in daily ritual. In Hindu weddings water is poured on the hands of the couple for blessings of divinity. The couple is also made to search for their rings in an earthen pot full of water mixed with turmeric. At death water is used. At the funeral rights, the eldest son of the dead walks round the pyre three times, carrying with him on his shoulder a pot containing water. He is followed by the barber who makes a cut in the

pot or vessel and the water begins to drip out. At the end of the third round, the son stands with his back to the pyre and the water falls behind him. He places the lighted sandalwood into the pyre, beneath the corpse's head and then kindles the fire. The son then walks to the pond or to a river where he takes a bath without looking back before returning home. The son then throws away a portion of the remains he carried with him during funeral on the 31st day after the funeral. When a Hindu child is about five or six years of age, his or her hair is cut and is offered in the river to god as a vow by the priest.

Use of Water in Tribal Culture

In Bangladesh there is a section of people who are tribals. Although the majority of them live in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, a good number of tribals are spread over the plain regions also. They go by different names. In Chittagong Hill Tracts, the tribals are Buddhist and consider Buddha as their god. These people follow, in most of the cases, Hindu religious activities. In the plain lands, they have mixed rituals and beliefs.



Tribal people have a number of uses for water in their culture. This is done at marriage ceremonies, the birth of a child and the death of a person. The tribals who are Hindus generally follow Hindu custom. They take marriage as a symbol of fertility. In death, they perform 'shraaddh' like the Hindus and here also water is used as purifier in their

culture. The death ceremony which involves cremation and burial according to respective tradition is done by the side of a river.

Buddhist Approach to Water

Buddhism is believed to be a continuation of Hinduism with certain changes as directed by their religious leader, Gautam Buddha. The Buddhists believe in the bodhi tree. It is the most sacred tree among the Buddhists. One of the rituals performed at the 'bodhi tree' is to pour seven pots of water at its foot. At the height of drought in the dry zone, village folk perform at the foot of the 'bodhi tree' and a ritual is made. Water is brought in new clay pots from the nearby reservoir to the bodhi tree in a procession, and then poured on its roots. The water offered to the Buddha image is a regular Buddha puja. Bathing is considered holy by the Buddhists. Water also stands as a symbol for fertility. Water is also used in marriage festivals in different form and shape (Disanayaka, J.B. 1992:27-32).

The Buddhists believe that offering of water at Buddhist shrines symbolizes the aspiration to cultivate the virtues of calmness, clarity and purity with one's body, speech and mind. According to the Buddhists, water represents the sweet 'nectar' of the Buddha's teachings. It quenches one's spiritual thirst and nourishes the body and mind spiritually. Water is also sprinkled in consecration ceremonies during chanting services in temples and homes for blessing purposes.

The teachings of Buddha suggest that the existence and welfare of sentient beings (humans, animals and others) is interdependent upon and intertwined with the quality of

flora and the various elements, including water. The Buddhists thus strive to practice mindful respect and care of the environment in all its aspects – the land, the air and the sea.

Christianity: Use of water in the Bible, Baptism

A good number of people in Bangladesh are also Christians. They follow the Bible.



These Christians have two forms of purification – physical and spiritual. They also consider water as sacred. Admission to Christianity needs a ceremonial bath. This is known as Baptism. Both Catholic and Protestants have baptism as essential part of their faith. Bathing is considered a necessity in Christianity

Water has been given topmost priority in the Bible. Several hundred references have been made in the Bible regarding various uses of water. According to the Bible, Water existed before the creation of earth. The Bible quotes: God created the earth out of water and the sky in the midst of waters. And God continues to bathe his creation with water as a sign of His care (Revelations 22:17). The Bible gives utmost emphasis on purity and cleansing with water. Ceremonial bathing is a necessity when one is baptized. Water is also sacred and regular bathing was suggested for the followers. Wastage of water is considered a sin. The Bible is full of passages that link water to God's creating,

blessing and saving work. Water thus has a spiritual importance in the Bible. One earns the blessings of God if one provides water to a thirsty person or animal. The Bible has the following statement about water. In Genesis 1:20, it is said “Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that have life.”

In Isaiah 55: 10-11 it is said, “as the rain and the snow come down from the heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for eater; so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

In the Bible it is said that Moses was instructed to make bronze basin and fill it with water. The priests would wash both their hands and feet before they entered the Tabernacle so that ‘they die not.’ Bathing is very important if anyone who offers sacrifices.

The Bible quotes “Isaiah 41:17-18), When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. Water is also symbolic of God's blessings and spiritual refreshment. The longing for water indicates spiritual need as in Psalm 42:1- As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.

In Ezekiel's vision of God's house the waters that poured from under the threshold represent the unrestricted flow of God's blessings upon his people (Ezekiel 47:1-12).

Jeremiah describes God as "the fountain of living waters," (Jeremiah 2:13, 17:13).

In the New Testament water is connected with the gift of eternal life. Some examples are John 4:14 But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

Revelation 21:6...I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. Water is also connected with the baptismal cleansing for the forgiveness of sins as in Hebrews 10:22-

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Islamic Approach to water: Zam Zam Water and Its History

The Zam Zam well is located near the Holy Kaba and the believers collect water for drinking from there, as it is considered holy. The flow of water is spontaneous, by the grace of Allah. The use of water was made a part of religious ritual. Both the Holy Kaa'ba and Jamjam well are therefore very important for every Muslim. The reconstruction of the holy Kaa'ba by



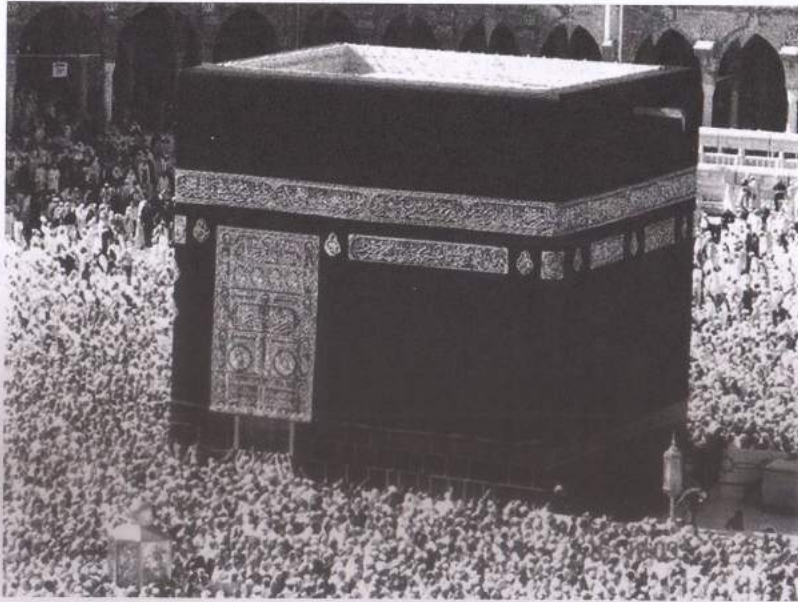
the Prophet Ibrahim and his son Ismail was predesigned by Allah and the Zam Zam well precedes it.

The well of Zam Zam retained its importance in later generations. The grandfather of the Prophet Muhammad, Abdul Muttalib, was honored with the responsibility of taking care of the well and the pilgrims to Mecca.

The Prophet Hazrath Ibrahim settled his family in the Arabian desert as part of Allah's mission for him. Hajera was alone with her child in the desert. It was a hot dry valley. There was no tree, no water. In her desperate search for water, Hajera ran seven times back and forth in the scorching heat between the two hills of Safa and Marwa to provide for her baby who was dying of thirst. She was searching for it while watching at her son and would run whenever she could not see Ismail.

According to Islamic religion, Allah then sent the Angel Zibrail (Gabriel), who scraped the ground, causing the spring to appear. On finding the spring, and fearing that it might run out of water, Hajera enclosed it in sand and stones. The name Zam Zam originates from the phrase "zomë-zomë", meaning "stop flowing", a command repeated by Hajera during her attempt to contain the spring water. The area around the spring, which was later converted to a well, became a resting place for caravans, and eventually grew into the trading city of Mecca, birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

The Holy Kaaba



The first mosque, the first place of worship and the first house was built by Hazrat Adam, the first man created by Allah, in the shape of the House in Heaven, called Baitul Ma'moor at Makka, now under the province of Hejaz in the western part of Arabia and not far from the Red Sea. The House of Kaaba was rebuilt by Hazrat Ibrahim and his son Ismail. (The Qur'an: Sura Baqara)

It should be mentioned here that any Muslim entering into the Holy Kaaba must have a clean wash with water and is required to have ablution for purity of body and soul. In fact, the use of water is compulsory to maintain purity. This is true to the women folk also. And Jamjam water is enjoyed by every Muslim visiting the Kaaba and performing Hajj.

When Allah made the Hajj an obligation, people began coming to Mecca "from every remote path." This is because humanity is one in their being called to worship their Creator. Allah's message is universal. Allah says: "And upon humanity is the pilgrimage to the House, whoever among them is able to undertake the journey." [Sūrah Āl `Imrān: 97]

This is compulsory for those who are rich. The participants need to have a bath and ablution to make one clean before attending the Hajj.

Use of Water in the Holy Qur'an

Water is most sacred and holy in Islam. It has appeared 63 times in the holy Qur'an. The throne or the arsh of Allah, has been described as resting on water and He created the earth and heavens in six days. Paradise is described as "Gardens beneath which rivers flow," (47:12). The creation of Adam is also done with the clay, the hard substance of water." And Allah has sent down the water from the sky and therewith gives life to the earth after its death (16:65). The Qur'an which constitutes the words of Allah states: 'We made every living being from water (21:3). In fact, life and knowledge originated from water, a divine gift of Allah, the Creator of universe. All human beings depend on water for life and health but for Muslims water stands as a thing that purifies body and soul through ablution and bathing for prayer. This has been rightly corroborated by science as these were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in the 7th century.

Do not the Unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth we joined together (as one Unit of Creation), before we

clove them asunder? We made from water every living thing (Quran, 2:30).

Water covers more than 70% of earth's surface (mostly seas and oceans). The Scientists discovered water in clouds, the galaxy and the Milky Way. Water has also been found on Mars. It also appears as one of the first molecules on our planet.

The Holy Qur'an speaks the following with regard to living creatures:

And God has created every animal from water: of them there are some that creep on their bellies; some that walk on two legs; and some that walk on four. God creates what He wills; for verily God has power over all things (Quran, 24-45).

It has been scientifically proven that all the actions of human beings such as talking, thinking, doing, undoing, writing and inventing are all on the basis of water. The scientists also suggest now that babies have 75% water, and the body of an adult human being contains approximately 60% water. Animals also have on average 60%. Vegetables have up to 75%. Human brain is composed of 90% water. The holy Qur'an has exposed all these truths as a source of knowledge and wisdom when Allah made revelations to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

Water stands for purity in Islam. The followers of Islam wash their body regularly and also have ablution before they go to prayer five times a day. Allah has brought life from death, and death from life, as the Holy Qur'an speaks:

And He it is who sends the winds as heralds of glad tidings, going before His mercy, and we send down pure water from the sky.

That with it We may give life to dead land, and slake the thirst of things we have created, cattle and men in great numbers (Quran, 25, 48-49).

Water is also a media or means for refreshing the soul and also for spiritual awakening. It is the basis of culture for the believers in Islam. Water is a gift of Allah in the form of seas, oceans, rivers, lakes and streams and as such all human beings have rights to share its various uses. Water is also a kind of sadaqah when a Muslim provides it to others, be he a human being or an animal in any form as one needs.

Muhammad, the Prophet of Allah (pbuh), made instructions to all of his followers to distribute water to others as and when it is required. None has a right to withhold water unlawfully. The distribution of water has to be made in such a way there is equity among all living beings, humans, animals, and plants. It is a divine gift and the elixer of life.

Life has its origin in water. The Quran speaks, "Allah has made from water every living thing," (21:30). In another verse it is written, "Allah has created every animal from water. Of them are some that creep on their bellies, some that walk on two legs, and some that walk on four. Allah creates what He wills, for truly Allah has power over all things," (24:45). Science is now convinced that the Qura'n has the origin of the scientific truth. The Quranic verses that came to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in the 7th century clearly stated that life began in water. This corroborates the scientific theory that life originated in water.

It is evident from numerous verses in the Qura'n that water is a major theme in Islamic cosmogony and it is a gift of Allah so that humanity can benefit from it. The Qura'n also suggests that water has its purifying power. Several verses

in the holy Qura'nspeak on the subject of purification and personal cleanliness. "It is He who sends down water upon you from the sky with which to purify you," (Sura of Booty 8, 11). Ablutions with water are a necessity for attaining a state of purity. The Qura'n describes in detail the procedure to be followed when performing them. "Believers, when you prepare for prayer wash your face and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe your heads and wash your feet up to the ankles," (Sura of the Table 5,6).

Hadith: The Sayings of the Prophet

The Prophet of Islam Muhammad (pbuh) urged upon all Muslims to maintain equity in regard to the use of water. A Muslim can not hoard excess water. On the other hand he is obliged to allow others to benefit by it. The Prophet says, "Muslims have common share in three things: grass (pasture), water and fire (fuel)", Abu Daud 3470.

In Islam man and animals enjoy equal rights and share in water. Animals can not be allowed to die of thirst. "He who digs a well in the desert ... can not prevent the animals from quenching their thirst at this well," Al Bukhari, 5550. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is also reported to have said that a prostitute was forgiven by Allah because, passing by a panting dog near a well and seeing that the dog was about to die of thirst, she took off her shoe, and tying it with her head-cover she drew out some water for it, so Allah forgave her because of that (Al Bukhari, 4.538)

Allah condemns those who waste water. "O Children of Adam! ... Eat and drink: But waste not by excess, for Allah loveth not the wasters (40:18). The Prophet Muhammad says, "Do not waste water even if performing ablution on the bank of a fast flowing large river," (Al Tirmizi: 437).

In Islam, water is a gift of Allah and so no individual literally owns it. Humans are the stewards of water and other common resources that belong to the community. It should be stated here water is fixed in nature. "And we send down water from the sky in fixed measure," (Qur'an, 7:31). In Islam, the use of water may be categorized as private and public. But water even if it is private, a Muslim can not restrict others from use of it if it is sufficient.

Abu Hurairah (Allah be pleased with him) reported that Allah's Prophet (Peace be upon him) said: "On the Day of Judgment, Allah, the Exalted, will say: "... O son of Adam! I asked you to give water to me, but you did not give it to me!" The son of Adam will say: "O Allah, How come you ask me for water even though you are the Lord of the Worlds?" Allah will say: "My slave asked you for water and you refused to give him. Don't you know that if you had given him water, I would have rewarded you?" Note: Reported by Muslim in Al-Birr WaSilah (No.2569).

Rights of Animals to water:

"A man felt very thirsty while he was on the way, there he came across a well. He went down the well, quenched his thirst and came out. Meanwhile he saw a dog panting and licking mud because of excessive thirst. He said to himself, "This dog is suffering from thirst as I did." So, he went down the well again, filled his shoe with water, held it with his mouth and watered the dog. Allah appreciated him for that deed and forgave him." The Companions said, "O Allah's Messenger! Is there a reward for us in serving the animals?" He replied: "There is a reward for serving any living being." - Imam Bukhari.

Medicinal Value of Water: Islamic Way

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has given top priority in the use of water. It is true in respect of the human body. A detailed account of the Prophet's medicine has been given by Imam Qayyim Al-Jauziah, translated by Jalal Abual Rub and edited by Abdul Rahman Abdullah, formerly Raymond Manderola of Fordham University, U.S.A. and was published by Darussalam, Riyadh, London and New York, Second Edition in 2003. In this wonderful book, we get a clear picture of medicine prescribed by Allah and his Prophet Hazrath Muhammad, (peace be upon him). Ablution and bathing are important not only for prayer, this is also important for having perfect health also.

The human body consists of four basic elements: water, solid (earth) air and fire. The Prophet of Islam Muhammad (peace is upon him) gave each of these elements its due share in the body. The stomach also is an important part of the body. The foods we eat are either for necessity, sufficiency or excessiveness. The Prophet of Islam, Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh) says, "The son of Adam never fills a vessel worse than his stomach. The son of Adam only needs a few bites that would sustain him, but if he insists, one third should be reserved for his food, another third for his drink and the last third for his breathing. One only needs a few bites to sustain him, so that his strength does not fail him. When one wishes to exceed what is barely enough, he should reserve a third of his stomach for his food, another third for the water or drink and the last third for breathing."

This is the best method of eating; both for the body and the heart. When the stomach is full of food, there will not be enough space for drinking. When one consumes something

to drink on a full stomach, one's breathing will be difficult, thus bringing about laziness and fatigue. The body will be strong when it gets the nourishment it needs and can utilize, not from the quantity of food one eats. Fire plays its part as a burner. Whatever one eats, one must burn it. When someone is attacked with fever, one is concerned. The Prophet of Islam says, 'Cool it off with water. Fever is a breath of Hell's fire; therefore cool it with water, or with ZamZam water.' The Prophet of Islam means that persons, who live in Makka when attacked with fever, may use Zam Zam water because it is easily available there. Any kind of fresh and cool water will help cure fever. He further says, 'If any of you comes down with fever, let him sprinkle cold water on himself for three consecutive nights before day break.' According to the Prophet, fever occasionally is good as it removes sin. 'Do not curse it, for it removes the sin, just as fire removes the impurity of the iron. The doctors of medicine are of this opinion that fever is usually followed by diet avoiding improper foods and requires consuming beneficial food and medicines. The sick person's body will be cleansed from all purities and septic elements and materials having a similar purifying effect as the fire have when it removes the impurity of the iron. The Prophet says, 'fever is a bellow of Hell's heat, so remove it from you with cold water.' Using cold water to relieve fever during summer and in hot areas is beneficial; because the water would be the furthest from the rays of the sun just before the day break at its coolest). Also, just before the day break the body is at its strongest, for the ailing person would have taken his due share of sleep and relaxation also he would have less polluted air to breathe. The strength of the body will be added to the strength of the medicine—water in this case—and they will both relieve the fever that

is not a result of malignant tumors or septic substance or conditions. Allah will then extinguish the heat of the fever by His will.

Honey as useful medicine: The Qur'anic view

Honey contains liquid or water. The Qura'n speaks of honey as the best of all medicines. Allah says in the holy Qur'an, "And thy Lord taught the Bee to build its cells in hills, on trees, and in (men's habitations; Then to eat of all the produce(of the earth), And find with skill the spacious paths of its Lord: there issues from within their bodies a drink of various color, wherein is healing for men; Verily in this is Sign for those who give thought,"(Sura XVI, The Bee). Honey is nutritious, softens one's bowel movement and is a good preserving agent. Honey also reduces the bitter taste of other medicines, cleanses the liver and the chest, aids in producing urine, and dissolves the phlegm that is accompanied by coughing. When honey is consumed hot and mixed with rose oil, it cures animal bites and the effects of opium. Taking honey mixed with water helps against the bite of rabid dogs and the effects of eating poisonous mushrooms. If fresh meat is kept in honey, it preserves its freshness for three months and fruits by several months. Likewise, if gourds, cucumbers and eggplants are kept in honey, they too will be preserved. Honey will add softness and beauty to the hair. Honey also whitens the teeth, preserves their health and the health of gums, and opens the orifice of the veins along with causing the flow of menstruation. Furthermore, licking honey on an empty stomach will help the body get rid of mucus and phlegm. It cleanses the stomach and rids it off harmful substances or mixtures, heats the stomach mildly and opens

up the pores. Honey has similar effects on the kidneys, the prostate and the liver. It is indeed the least harmful sweet substance for congesting the liver and kidneys. Honey is a food, a drink, a remedy, a type of refreshment and an ointment, along with its numerous medicinal values. The Prophet of Islam used to drink some honey mixed with water on an empty stomach. Honey cures diarrhea. A follower of the Prophet named Abu Said Al-Khudri says, "A man came to the Prophet and said, 'My brother is complaining about his stomach or he is complaining about diarrhea.' The Prophet said, 'Give him some honey.' The man went back and came back later to the Prophet saying 'I have given him some honey, but it did not help,' or he might have said, 'It made his diarrhea worse.' The Prophet further asked him to continue with honey. In the third or fourth time when the man came to the Prophet, the Prophet said, 'Allah has said the truth while your brother's stomach has lied.' Finally, he was cured.

Honey mixed with water helps cure many diseases. Again, when honey is consumed hot. And mixed with rose oil, it cures animal bites and the effects of opium. Taking honey mixed with water helps against the bite of a rabid dog, and the effects of eating poisonous mushrooms. It cleanses the stomach rids it of harmful substances or mixtures, heats the stomach mildly and opens up the pores. Honey has similar effects on the kidneys, the prostate and the liver. Honey does not have any side effects. No harm except for those suffering from bile and who should take it with vinegar to neutralize its harm. Honey is also a food, a drink, a sweet, a remedy, a type of refreshment and an ointment.

Honey as a preserver

Honey will keep fruits fresh for at least six months. It preserves dead corpses. Honey also whitens the teeth; preserve their health and health of the gums. Honey also will add softness and beauty to the hair and will also help it grow longer-- Imam Ibn Qayyim Al Jauziyah.

Use of water with milk is good for health

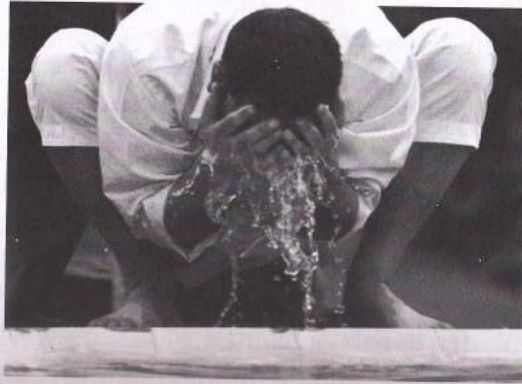
The Prophet of Islam also suggested that milk mixed with water is good for health. One should not take pure milk without water as it might cause harm to him. Water is, thus, a very basis of life and shapes culture of all creed and nation.

In Islam, the importance of water cannot be over-emphasized. In talking about Islamic use of water, I made frequent use of English Translation made by Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali, The Holy Qur'an and translation of the Hadith by Al-Bukhari and others. The Holy Qur'an speaks, "And Allah has sent down water from the sky and therewith gives life to the earth after its death" (16:65). Water is considered a blessing of Allah and every person or thing has a share in it. The Prophet Hazrath Muhammad, peace be upon him, says, 'Muslims have a common share in three things: grass (pasture), water and fire (fuel) ('Abu Daud: 3470). I slam believes in equitable distribution of all resources created by Allah relating to human and non-human beings. During the time of the Prophet water was very scarce in Arabia because of its being a desert. For that reason, the Prophet asked his followers to be quite careful about its use. He himself used minimum water for his house. Every Muslim should help others to quench one's

thirst. It includes human being, cattle or domestic animals. The Prophet says, 'There is a reward for serving any living being.' 'He who digs a well in the desert... cannot prevent the animals from quenching their thirst at the well.' (Al-Bokhari: 5550). According to the Hadith, a prostitute was forgiven by Allah because while passing by a panting dog near a well and seeing that the dog was about to die of thirst, she took off her shoe and then tied it with her head-cover she drew out some water for it. So Allah forgave her because of that (Al-Bokhari: P4538). The Holy Quran says, 'Water is for vegetation of all kinds.'(6:99). Water should be made available for nourishing vegetation and various colors and also for drinking animals. The Prophet Harrah Muhammad (peace is upon him) was very concerned about pollution. He forbade urination into stagnant water (Al-Muslim). Misuse of water is a crime. The Qura'n says, 'and we send down water from the sky in fixed measure'(40:18). 'O children of Adam! Eat and drink. But waste not by excess, for Allah loveth not the waster. (7:31).

In Islam water is thus considered very vital both for one's health and also for environment. It has been seen that the Muslim kings and sultans took special interest in digging tanks or ponds for people. The Muslim warriors and religious leaders also took all pains in digging canals and ponds for public use. Khan Jahan Ali, Shah Jalal, Shah Makhdum and many others made water available for public use by digging wells and ponds. In Islam also, water has its various uses, but no river is considered holy or sacred. The divine well, ZamZam, is located in Mecca, near the holy Kaaba, and is considered sacred. The well, which is a kind of a spring, was a divine gift to Hazrat Bibi Hajera during the time she was left alone with her son Hazrat Ismail by her husband Hazrat Ibrahim.

Water resources in Islam are public property (Faruqui, 2000). This helps make proper management and administration of water. Islam does not impose any restriction on trading of water. And its use can be transferred to others.



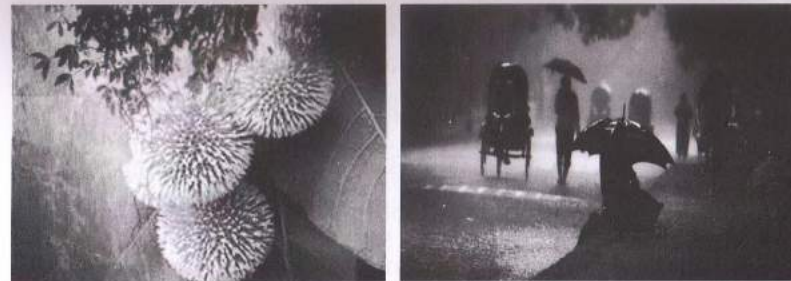
In Islam, water is used for cleansing and purification. Bathing is compulsory if any one goes for love making with his wife. And until he has purified himself in this way it is unlawful for him to eat, pray, touch the Quran or to go to the mosque. Ablution is also important and necessary for saying prayer. It cleans both the body and mind. Health specialists consider such practice as ablution very much effective for maintaining good health. It should be noted here that the water used for ablution must be clean. Stagnant water, if unclean and dirty, cannot be used for ablution. No ablution is possible if a dog touches the water or drinks from it. Misuse of water is forbidden. A Muslim when he dies is made clean with water. This is part of Muslim faith. The use of water is essential after defecation. Toilet paper may be used only when water is not available. Washing of face and mouth is also held important.

Water resources in Islam are public property. This helps make the proper management and administration of water. Islam does not impose any restriction on trading of water. And its use can be transferred to others.

The Quranic account of creation is in line with the modern scientific thought about the development of the universe and life on earth. Muslims acknowledge that life developed over a long period of time. Description of creation has been clearly indicated in the Quran and is set in context to remind the readers of Allah's majesty and wisdom.

"What is the matter with you, that you are not conscious of Allah's majesty, seeing that it is He Who has created you in diverse stages? See you not how Allah has created the seven heavens one above another, and made the moon a light in their midst, and made the sun as a (glorious) lamp? And Allah has produced you from the earth, growing (gradually)" (71:13-17).

Characteristics of Rain Water



In Islam, it is held, rainwater is considered exactly as distilled water, resulting from the vaporization of the water from the seas and its condensation in the form of clouds then it descending as rain. Therefore, it is thoroughly pure water. Rainwater can remove the dirt on human skin more than regular water, thus this water is considered a disinfectant used in medicine. It is believed to be free from viruses and bacteria, gases and dust particles. In the Qur'an, Allah says: "And we send down from the sky pure water."

The word "Tahura" (purified) means it is pure and has the power of removing of dirt and impurities.

The Fresh (Sweet) Water

Allah (swt) has mentioned the name of the river water and that stored under the ground as "sweet" water. Again, in Islam, the sea water is taken as "salty" water. Rain water, in Islam is not only pure but also refreshing. In the Qur'an, Allah says, 'Remember, when He (Allah) overwhelmed you with drowsiness [giving] security from Him and sent down upon you from the sky, rain by which to purify you and remove from you the evil [suggestions] of Satan and to make steadfast your hearts and plant firmly thereby your feet) Al-Anfal, 11. In the Qur'an, It is discernible that the Qur'an differentiates between the word "Tahur"/pure and "Furat"/sweet in its verses, for Allah says: ... and have given you to drink sweet water (Al-Mursalat, 27). The water from the rivers, springs and wells is considered acceptable and it tastes sweet. It also contains a quantity of minerals that may cause the water to taste sweet. The rain water is distilled and it does not have any taste.

The rain water when it descends from the sky is pure but when it gets mixed with the minerals, it becomes sweet.

The Bitter Water

The Qur'an also speaks about sea water as the "bitter" water. Allah in a number of verses has described sea water as salty/bitter). If anybody takes sea water as drink, one might face severe ailment in the stomach leading to death. But the sea contains fish, and Allah has permitted to enjoy

it. Similarly, sea also contains pearl and such other things and Allah speaks in the Qur'an that these are usable by human beings.

"What is the matter with you, that you are not conscious of Allah's majesty, seeing that it is He Who has created you in diverse stages? See you not how Allah has created the seven heavens one above another, and made the moon a light in their midst, and made the sun as a (glorious) lamp? And Allah has produced you from the earth, growing (gradually)" (Qur'an, 71:13-17).

The Qur'an thus has made it clear that life begins with water and all living things, either animal or non-animal originate in water and that too, by the order of Allah. Allah creates what He wills, for truly Allah has power over all things," (Qur'an 24:45). These verses support the scientific theory that life began in the Earth's oceans.

Muslim Use of Water in Bangladesh

The Muslims in Bangladesh follow the Qur'an and the Hadith. Cleanliness is the most vital part in Islam. Ablution with water is a necessity and when one is having a bath, he undergoes ablution. But it is not compulsory. Any one when he/she is unclean by having sex with wife or husband, a ritual bath is compulsory. Defecation is also unclean. Menstruation also is considered unclean. A menstruating woman needs a bath after the period is over. A woman giving birth to a child is also unclean. A child is given a ceremonial bath on the occasion of circumcision, known as khatna or during naming known as akika. A number of Muslims of Bangladesh follow many Hindu customs with water during ceremonies. In marriage or

death ceremonial bath is compulsory. Juice or sharbatis served during marriage.

In Bangladesh water is part of common man's life. The farmers in the village take panta-bhat (rice mixed with water) in the morning. It is good for health and provides energy. In the past, the village people used to take home-made saline water for curing diarrhea. Pulses mixed with garlic and salt helps cure sunstroke. Cold water is better than warm water inside the body. In rural areas people on occasion take cold water when one has a gastric problem. Fresh milk mixed with water is good for health. Warm water is good for old people and those suffering from epilepsy.

When one is afraid of evil spirits while walking alone at the dead of night, a glass of water with salt mixed in it cures him. Burn injury is treated with cold water in rural areas.

Muslim Festivals

Muslims have few festivals as detailed in the Traditions of the Prophet, peace be on him. These include, the two Eids, Circumcision or khatna, Marriage followed by walima (feast), Akika or child birth, in all these cases water is used in different form. No festivals are considered Islamic if these do not conform to the Qura'n and the Hadith. Festivity on the occasion of Shab-i-Barat is not permitted. However, one may go fasting on the occasion. Prayer and fasting are permissible. Feeding of poor is permitted but if one feeds himself or others in the hope that it would bring fortune for him is totally un-Islamic. On this occasion, many unholy and un-Islamic activities are performed, such as distribution of sweets at the graveyard.

Akika Ceremony

Muslim society in India, Bangladesh and elsewhere follows certain festivals which are based on local traditions. These are not Islamic. In Islam, the Qur'an is the book of Allah. Next to it is the tradition of the Prophet, known as the Habit. These two constitute the Seerah. Anything outside of it Seerah is not acceptable, Muslim have use of water, such as ablution or was. It is necessary for saying prayer. Water is used as sharbetwhile one breaks one's fast. In marriage sharbatis provided to the guest and also to the bride and bridegroom. Eid-ul Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha, the two major Muslim festivals need bathing when one goes to say one's prayer. The same is true with khatna. The person concerned must have bath before it is done. In Islam, all religious activities begin with water. But water, though sacred, it is never worshipped as by the Hindus. Ceremonial bathing is a must when one is taken to the grave as he dies. Each mosque has arrangement of water for ablution. Construction of tube-wells or tanks for general public are very much rewarding. Muslims of Bangladesh generally break their fast with water. Menstrual period of a woman is considered unclean and she needs bathing after the period is over. This is common in all Muslim world. Bathing makes one pure.

Akika is a kind of ceremony which confirms the naming of a child. On the occasion, the baby's hair is cut and he or she is required to bathe and then naming ceremony is held and a feast is arranged in which a sheep or goat is sacrificed in the name of Allah.

Khatna or circumcision ceremony involves a male child's cutting of fore-skin of the penis. The boy is given a ceremonial bathing after a week or less when he is free to

move. A function is held on the occasion of circumcision (khatna). Relatives participate and enjoy with the family. But nothing more can be done in excess. But in Bangladesh khatna or circumcision is associated with many practices which are not at all Islamic.



Eid Festivals



The two Eids are the greatest festivals for the Muslims. The one is called the Eid-ul Fitr after the month-long fasting in the month of Ramadhan. And the other is Eid-ul-Azha: The Festival of sacrifice. On these occasions, prayer or salattakes place either in the mosque or in the open field. And bathing and ablution both are obligatory. On Eid-ulAzha, the person responsible for slaughter of the cow in the name of Allah must have a bath before performing the ritual.

Muharram Festival by Shia Community

Muharram is the first Arabic month. This month is very important for Muslims because it has a very sad and tragic episode concerning the death of Hazrat Imam Hussain and other members of his family



at Karbala in Iraq in a battle between the Umayyad King Yazid and Hazrat Imam Hussain. Hazrat Hussain was the grandson of the Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh). Hazrat Hussain was on a mission to Kufain Iraq. The King Yazid waged a war against him. His soldiers surrounded the Euphrates and Hazrat Imam Hussain and his entourage were not allowed to drink water from it. And in the fight that followed Hazrat Hussain and others were killed on the 10th day of Muharram. Commemorating this day, fasting and prayer are permitted. The Shia sect, however, brings out mourning procession all over the Muslim world and feeds the poor and the distressed with food and drink.



Tazias are seen being immersed into river water

In Dhaka a big mourning procession is brought out by the Shia community on the occasion of the Muharram festival from HussainiDalan and parade the various roads with the tazia, a feretory carried in imitation of the coffin of Hazrat Imam Hussain until they finish near the Buriganga river where the Tazias are immersed into river water. The participants make various kind of display imitating the battle of Karbala where the soldiers of the Caliph Yazid and the followers of Hazrat Imam Hussain fought. Hazrat Imam Hussain lost the battle and suffered at the hand of Yazid's soldiers. It is a very tragic story. The followers of Hazrat Imam Hussain were denied right to drink from the river. Mir Mosharraf Hussain made a unique novel, entitled 'Bishad Sindhu' or the Ocean of sorrow, detailing the story about the battle of Karbala between HazratImam Hussain and the soldiers of the Caliph Yazid.

Mir Mosharraf Hussain of Kushtia (1847 –1912) who was a novelist, poet, playwright and essayist, made a wonderful contribution to the use of water in his epic work, Bishad Sindhu (Vast Sea of Sadness). The novel was historical but he made use of his imagination in respect to the relationship between Yazid, the Caliph and Hazrat Hussain, the grandson of the HazratMuhammad (pbuh). The novel 'Bishad Sindhu' referred to a conflict between Hazrath Hussain and the Caliph Yazid regarding policy matters of Islam but the hostility finally centered over a pond from which Hazrath Hussain and the members of his family wanted to drink water to quench their thirst. The Caliph sent his soldiers and captured the control of the pond and the soldiers killed both Hazrath Hussain Hussain and the members of his family. The tragic story affected the entire Muslim community in the whole world. The Muharram Festival centers around this incident and the Shia

community of Persia made it a world event. However, the novel written in such a way that the tragic event did not leave its great impact not only in the mind of Muslims of Bengal but also it affected the Hindu community. The language, the use of imagery and over and above the master minded description of Mir Mosharraf Hussain left a permanent impression on everybody not only among his contemporaries but also among those who had been living even today. In Bangladesh the novel was widely read by both Muslim and Hindu community. There was a time the novel, Bishad Sindhu was considered very sacred work of art. Every devout Muslim used to read this novel or read out the part of it before others ceremonially when Muharram was observed in Bangladesh. Mir Mosharraf was a contemporary of Lalon Shah, Kangal Harinath Majumdar and Rabindranath.

Marriage Festival



Muslim marriage ritual

Water plays an important part in the marriage system. On this day the bride and the bridegroom need to be clean by taking a bath. When the bridal party arrives at the bride's home or at the marriage spot, everybody is fed with 'sharbet' or juice. It is also a general practice that

everybody is clean by performing ablution before the marriage begins. The verses from the Qur'an are read out. After marriage, there is an exchange of sharbet between the groom and the bride.

The Hindu marriage originates in the Veda. The marriage ceremony is primarily based on the marriage of Surya, the daughter of Savita (The Sun) to Soma. Savita gives away his splendid bride (daughter) to the groom in a ceremonial way. A Brahmin is called to conduct the marriage ceremony. The language of the ceremony is in Sanskrit. It includes many rites and rituals. Hindus are married for life both in the world and hereafter.



A Hindu marriage ritual

Chapter

IV

Bangladesh: A Land of Tanks and Mosques

Chapter

IV

Bangladesh: A Land of Tanks and Mosques

Bangladesh was once known as the land of tanks and ponds. Although rainfall was as usual but on occasions there had been no rainfall for days together. Following continued drought, crops were damaged, sometimes famine also broke out. People starved and died for want of food.

Famine in Bengal:

The Bengal under the British rule saw the most severe type of famine that the country ever experienced. This great famine took place between 1769 and 1773 known as Chhiattorer monnontar (1176-1180 B.S.). The whole of lower Gangetic plain of India and also in Bihar, Assam, West Bengal and Bangladesh was under famine in which over 10 million people, men, women and children, died without food or succor. There was severe lack of rainfall and fields were barren of crops. Under such circumstances, the British forced the local people to cultivate opium and indigo cultivation. It was due to the fact that the British East India Company as part of its strategy was to export opium and indigo to China in place of food grain and for that the British government forced cultivation of opium and indigo resulting in acute shortage of food grain for the local people. Most threatening was that the British government did not provide any relief to the people. There were types

of famine in preceeding two years, 1941 and 1942. The author of this book has witnessed the suffering of the people between 1942-1943 in a sub-division named Jhenidah under Jerssore district.

The Bengal famine of 1943 under the British was also severe. The famine occurred not because there had been crop failure, but it was caused because the British Empire took more than 60% of all harvests and ordered Bengal province to supply a greater proportion of the food for their army to fight against the Japanese in World War II. The demanded exceeded the supply. It was too an artificial crisis. Out of 60.3 million people, at least half of the people died of starvation, malnutrition and disease. It should be mentioned here that the there had been no crop failure in 1943, rather there had been increase of food-stuff. It was an artificial shortage. But the government was very oppressive following the support of Netaji Shubhas Chandra Bose to Japan. There were types of famine in preceeding two years, 1941 and 1942. The author of this book has witnessed the suffering of the people between 1942-1943 in a sub-division named Jhenidah under Jerssore district.

The two femings in Bengal which causes millions of people to starve and also to die, caught the attention of the philamthroug is to and they made construction of tanks for people.

Bangladesh has sometimes been called as the land of 'beels and baors,' (swampy and marshy land). Where there is a village there is either a 'beel' or a 'baor'. These are naturally made and not man made. They look like lakes. And these are used for different objectives, such as irrigation, fisheries, and religious activities and recharging ground water.

In Bangladesh there had been kings and queens and also the Sufis and Zeminders or Landlords excavated ponds and tanks for public good.

In Bangladesh there are private and public tanks. The public tanks (or ponds) were built either by the Hindu or the Buddhist kings for the purpose of drinking by the common people. They took it as their sacred task as they considered kingship, a thing that connects the divinity. For the people, the kings were gods.

The Land Lords or the Zeminders and the rich but religious people of the locality used to dig tanks and ponds for the poor villagers. In many areas, Tanks and big ditches were made in the farm field for irrigation and fishery.

Asoka was considered a benevolent king who built a number of tanks and canals in the country for the benefit of his subjects. Asoka di it for not only human beings but also for animals, to drink water from. The reign of Asoka has gone down in history as one of the most active periods of tank building. He is credited with building several tanks in the country. King Asoka was a changed man after he accepted Buddhism. Previously he was a cruel king and killed hundreds of people in the battlefield or otherwise. History records a good number of the Buddhist and Hindu Kings undertaking such noble deed for their subjects. In many districts there are a number of big tanks constructed by the Kings. These tanks have many stories associated with them. In Dinajpur, there is very big tank known as 'Ram-Sagar' made by a King. It is held that the tank did not contain any water. The King then dreamt that a human sacrifice was to be made. He then decided to kill himself in the tank and when he killed himself, the tank was full. Since the tank was known as Ram-Sagar. There is another

story, a queen asked a king to construct a tank as long as she could walk. But the King stopped her halfway because of huge cost involvement told her that her feet were bleeding and she should not continue any further. The tank was however made by the king in honor of the queen.

Many Muslim kings and sultans also had built tanks for the benefit of the people particularly in dry areas.

The Muslim missionaries and the Sufis specially built several tanks in the areas where they visited or settled. Khan Jahan Ali, a Muslim warrior and saint, built a number of tanks in Bagerhat where he lived and died. Similarly in Rajshahi, Sylhet, Chittagong and Comilla many tanks were made by the Muslim missionaries.



Khan Jahan Ali's tank at Bagerhat (Caption)

In October 25, 1459, Khan Jahan Ali conquered Bagerhat and became its ruler. He was an officer of the Bengal's Sultan Nasruddin Mahmud Shah I (1437—1459). He was also known as Ulugh Khan and this suggests he was Turkish by birth.

He founded some townships, built mosques, madrasahs, roads, highways and bridges excavated a large number of dighis in the districts of greater Jessore and Khulna. Besides, he built three townships, such as Maruli Kasba, Paigram Kasba and Bara Bazar. It is popularly held that Khan Jahan Ali built the large size tank overnight with the help of jinns. Initially there were two crocodiles; one was named Kala Pahar and the other Dhala Pahar. One was male and the other female. It is also popularly held that any body coming to visit the mazar of Khan Jahan Ali and offers chicken he or she gets her desire fulfilled. These two crocodiles gave birth too many. Now a days, hardly any crocodile is seen.

Khan Jahan Ali had number of colleagues. They also conquered other places like Khan Jahan Ali and founded townships, excavated tanks and roads and bridges like Khan Jahan Ali. Later, they were taken as Sufi saints and people, both Hindu and Muslims visit their mazar.

Shah Jalal in Sylhet, Shah Makhdum in Rajshahi, Baizid Bostami in Chittagong and other missionaries in other areas also took similar action. These tanks were used only for drinking purposes. At that time people depended on rainwater. As population started rising, causing food problem, people in some areas raised foodstuff by following indigenous method of irrigation. Gradually people faced drinking water problem as the tanks got polluted. Now a days no tank is fit for drinking water. This is also true of rivers and canals, as they remain mostly dry in dry season. Pollution of water is a big problem in Bangladesh now days.

The advent of the Muslims, particularly the various Sufi sects opened the gates for the gradual expansion of Islam and the subsequent establishment of Muslim

Political power in the sub-continent (Rahim.M.A 1967: 18). This was possible because of the fact that the Muslims at that time were the foremost seafaring and maritime people of the world (Rahim.M.A, 1967). The arrival of the Muslims also changed the life pattern of the people and enriched the culture of the country by gradual blending of the two major religions, Hinduism and Islam (Roy Asim, 1967: 17-19). Many of the Buddhists accepted Islam and those who were left either joined Hinduism or maintained their old religion personally in seclusion. It may be noted here that Buddhism flourished in Persia and Afghanistan during the rule of Asoka who ruled India during the Maurya dynasty. The Sufis, who represented syncretistic religious ideals, borrowed ideals from Buddhism and the Buddhists of India and the local people accepted Islam as they found many things in common with their own (Roy, Asim. 1967).

On the border with India, at a place called 'Gaur', there are many Islamic architectural relics in the form of mosques left. Most of them were built during the rule of the Muslim Sultanate in the late 15th century. Many of these mosques bear fine examples of the mature architecture of the Ilyas Shahi period; among them Darasbari Mosque, Dhanichak Mosque, Chota Sona Mosque, Khania Dighi or Rajbibi Mosque are famous.

Bagerhat as a city of mosques

Bagerhat is best known as a city of mosques. The mosque of Khan Jahan Ali was situated in Bagerhat at the confluence of Ganges and Brahmaputra Rivers, at a maximum of about 60 kilometers (37 mi) from the sea coast during the of Khan Jahan Ali. Presently, there are no traces of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra and on the other hand, the city of Bagerhat is spread over an area of 50 square kilometers (19 sq. mi.), on the banks of the Moribund branch of the Bhairab River. The area was part of the Sundarbans mangrove forest.



Shatgombuj in Bagherhaat

The historic Shatgombuj or sixty domes mosque is situated at Bagerhat, Khulna district. The Shatgombuj Mosque is a 15th century Islamic edifice situated in the suburbs of Bagerhat, on the edge of the Sunderbans. Shatgombuj is among the most imposing and largest multi-domed mosque in Bangladesh. It is an enormous Mughal architectural site covering a very large area (160 multiply 108 feet). The mosque is unique in that, it has sixty pillars, which support

eighty one (81) exquisitely carved domes that have worn away with the passage of time. Everywhere there are sketches of ancient arts and the whole building representing the 15th century Turk architectural view.

Dighis and Ponds in Bangladesh



Bangladesh is a land of ponds and tanks. These ponds or tanks are either man made or created unusually. These ponds and tanks were made by the Kings, Landlords or Sufi missionaries for the benefit of the people. Generally it has been seen that each village in Bangladesh has pond or ponds. These ponds were in use for drinks either by animals or used for domestic good. Bangladesh has experienced famine because of continued draught. It is for this, there has a saying that agriculture in Bangladesh is a gable mosoon. In the past the Kings and queens were found constructing tanks for the benefit of the people. The following ponds or tanks have tales to tell.

Sindur-Moti pond in Lalmonirhat



The Sindur- Moti pond is located at Panchogram in Lalmonirhat Sadar Upazila under the district of Lalmononirhat A Landlord or Zeminder, named Narayan Chakravarti, in view of famine in the area during the month of Caitra, planned to dig a pond for the people. After the pond was dug there appeared no water. The Zeminder was saddened because of this. But he dreamt a dream in the night that some one was telling him that if his two daughters Sindur and Moti could stand in the middle of the pond there would be water. In good faith the Zeminder or the Landlord told her two daughters to go to the middle of the pond. As soon as they arrived there suddenly there was water and before the two daughters could be rescued, the pond was full and the two daughters Sindur-Moti were drowned. The Landlord started crying and everybody in the

family was tremendously shocked at the sudden death of the two daughters. At night the Landlord or the Zeminder dreamt that his two daughters were made immortal and were in heaven.

Gradually, the pond became very famous as the Hindu devotees from home and abroad started coming to the pond for taking bath and offering puja to the pond. Now a days almost every year, a mela or village fair is organized. Temple has also been set up to immortalize the event.

Durga Sagar



Durga Sagar is the biggest pond or dighi in the southern part of Bangladesh. Barisal city. A story goes that Rani Durgabati mother of Raja Joy Narayan, a Zeminder of Barisal excavated this dighi for the benefit of the people. A hummock is seen in the center of the lake which looks like a small island. The word 'sagar' is used to denote the vastness of the ponds

Nilsagar



Nilsagar, a famous dighi or pond is located at Dhobadanga Nilsagar a famous historical dighi (big pond) which stands at Dhobadanga under Gorgram union about 14 km southwest of Nilphamari district headquarters. It is held that during the reign of Raja Birat there were many cow farms at Gorgram. Raja Birat dug a large dighi for the cows for drinking s. A Hindu mandir stands on the east bank and an abode of a Muslim darvesh on the west bank of the dighi. The area of the dighi is 21.449 ha and depth ranges from 7m to 12m. The entire dighi is surrounded by brick walls. The main decorated ghat of the dighi was made by Raja Birat. Every year the banks of the dighi are used as a village fair site especially during the occasion of Baruni Snan festival in full moon of the month of Baisakh. Usually in the fair the Harikirtan singers play music

Ramsagar at Dinajpur



Ramsagar is possibly the largest dighi or pond in Bangladesh. It is located in the village Tejpur, eight km away to the south from Dinajpur town. The width of the Dighi is around 1079 m north-south and length 192.6m in the Est-West. Ramsagar is believed to have been dug by a King named Raja Ramnath for his people. The Dighi has crocodiles and is a safe haven for migratory birds. The sights and scenery is unique.

Hazrath Shah Jalal pond in Sylhet

The pond is located beside the Mazar of Hazrath Shah Jalal® and it is held that the pond was made by Hazrath Shah Jalal for the benefit of the people. The pond contains sacred



catfish. Shah Jalal (R) a major Sufi saint of Bengal. His full name is Shaikh Jalaluddin. Shah Jalal (R) commands great respect of Muslims of the subcontinent. He lies buried at SYLHET.

Shah Jalal's name is associated with the Muslim conquest of Sylhet. Tradition goes that a Hindu king named Gaur Govinda ruled the Sylhet area. Burhanuddin, a Muslim who lived in the territory under his control once sacrificed a cow to celebrate the birth of his son. But a kite snatched a piece of flesh of the slaughtered cow and it fell from its beak on the house of a Brahmin. According to another tradition, the piece of flesh fell on the temple of the king himself, which he took as a great offence. At the order of the king, Burhanuddin's hands were said to have been cut off and his son killed. Burhanuddin went to gaur and submitted a prayer to Sultan SHAMSUDDIN FIRUZ SHAH for justice from him. The sultan accordingly sent an army under the command of his nephew Sikandar Khan Ghazi, who was however, defeated twice by Gaur Govinda. The sultan then ordered his sipahxalar (armed forces chief) Nasiruddin to lead the war. During the same time Shah Jalal (R) with his 360 followers reached Bengal and joined the Muslim army in the Sylhet campaign. This time the Muslim army won, Gaur Govinda fled the country and Sylhet came under Muslim rule.

Tomb of Shah Jalal (R), Sylhet

Though based on folk tales, historic evidences support the truth of the war event. King Gaur Govinda, Sultan Shamsuddin Firuz Shah, Skiandar Khan Ghazi, Nasiruddin, Shah Jalal are all historical persons; there might be some imaginary accounts in illustrating the story, but the main

event, ie, the conquest of Sylhet, is a historical fact. Sultan Shamsuddin Firuz Shah ruled Bengal during the period from 1301 to 1322 AD and expanded the territory under his rule in all directions. Epigraphic and literary sources also attest the fact of the conquest of Sylhet during Shamsuddin Firuz Shah's rule and of the involvement of Shah Jalal (R) in the process.

IBN BATUTA visited Bengal when Sultan FAKHRUDDIN MUBARAK SHAH was ruling at Sonargaon (1338-1349 AD). He met Shah Jalal (R) in the latter's KHANQAH and stayed three days there in 1346 AD. Ibn Batuta, however, wrongly recorded the name of the saint as Shaikh Jalaluddin Tabrizi (R). Scholars have established that Ibn Batuta's 'Tabrizi' is a mistake for 'Kuniyayi', the epithet for Shah Jalal (R).



The earliest and most acceptable source of information about the first Muslim conquest of Sylhet and the advent of Islam in the area is a Persian inscription of 918 AH/1512 AD issued in the reign of Sultan Alauddin HUSAIN SHAH (1494-1519 AD). According to the inscription, Sylhet was first conquered by Sikandar Shah Ghazi in 703 AH/1303 AD in the reign of Shamsuddin Firuz Shah. The inscription was dedicated to the sacred memory of Shaikh Jalal Mujarrad ibn Muhammad. Though the inscription was issued after a little more than two hundred years of the event, it seems to have the accurate historical dates.

Tanks that contain Mysterious Tales

In Bangladesh there happened to be a number of folk tales connected with tanks or ponds and a sort of rural lake called beel or baor. These rural lakes were found in existence for generations. Lot of mysteries surrounded these tanks or rural lakes and these orally transmitted from one generation to the other. . There are also tales of overnight ponds that connect either a Sufi Fakir or a Sannyashi. In Khan JahanAli's mausoleum in Bagerhat, Khulna there is a large tank believed to be constructed by Khan Jahan, but it is also popularly known as thakur dighi. This large tank has crocodiles. They originated from the two original crocodiles, popularly known as kala pahar (black hill) and dhal pahar (white hill). Many tanks are also associated with demons and Jinns or spirits. Thankur maar jhuli of Dakshina Mitramajumdar has enough of it. Beowulf like English stories are not uncommon in Bengali folk tales. Wali's story is one among such kind of folk tales.

On the Legendary Origin of the River Kumrul and Bil Kakuli, in the District of Jessore:

In Bangladesh there are certain ancient tanks which speak of tales mysterious but these contain matters relating to folk religion. These tanks are very old and people do not know who actually made it. The following story is retold by Abdul Wali, a noted Indologist. He was also a fellow of Royal Asiatic Society and was given the title of Khan Shahib by the British. He was a senior officer in the Registration Department.

THE PORA CIVA

This river and the lake let with several of its offshoots are situated in Sub-Division Jhenidah, Zila Jessore. The following legends as to their origin are current, and narrated by the young and old of North Jessore.

It is said that once upon a time there was somewhere an image of the Hindu god Civa, with a paras-patthar, or philosopher's-stone, on its crown. A holy Sanyasi, in the course of his wanderings happened to come to the place where the idol had been established. The precious stone, a mere touch of which would convert iron into gold, was too tempting, even for the holy man, who at once conceived of a plan to rob the idol of the precious stone. The plan adopted was this. In the day time he used to gather cow-dungs and twigs, to which he would set fire at night, close to the temple of Civa, and would cry at the top of his voice "O come and rescue me; the Sanyasi is burning me." People on hearing the cry ran towards the Civa temple, and what they saw was that the Sanyasi was sitting by the side of the fire, adding fuel to the flame, and himself crying as such. The villagers came for a day or two on hearing the above cry of the wily hermit, but none did come after the lapse of a few days.

When the Sanyasi saw that none would turn up at the cry of alarm, one night he kindled a huge fire as usual, and having confined the idol with a charm, dragged it into the burning flame. The image then began crying like the Sanyasi, "O come and rescue me; the Sanyasi is burning me." But nobody came. Being quite helpless, Civa (for the idol was no longer an inanimate being) implored the Sanyasi to desist from burning him; and asked him what he wanted of him. "I want the paras-patthar" said the Sanyasi. "Nay, do

ask something else," said the helpless god. The hermit persisted that nothing but the stone he wanted. At last Civa was compelled to yield, but cursed the Sanyasi. The paras-patthar became at once separated from the crown of Civa, which the Sanyasi secured, Civa being thus rescued, plunged into a Bil.

After a while the god appeared to a fisherman in a dream, and told him to take the image to his house, for it would be good for him. This the fisherman did, and the image was thenceforth called Pora-Civa, or burnt-Civa. According to another version, the fisherman, while fishing in the Beel, found the burnt image, and took it home.

The Sanyasi

The Sanyasi having thus got the precious stone, again set out on his wandering expedition, and arrived at Mauza Dignagar, a village close to the Harinakundu Outpost, Sub-Division Jhenidah. In that village there lived at that time a Kumar or potter named De-Pala, to whose house the Sanyasi repaired, and became his guest. The potter was very pious and hospitable towards his guest. The hermit having rested a while, hung his Jhola (wallet) at the puisala (a house where the potters burn the earthen pots), went to have a bath at the Baor or lake. The wallet in which was the philosopher's stone was wet; and drops of water that fell from it upon a spade that was beneath transformed the latter into gold. De-pala at once saw what the wallet, from which the drops fell, contained. He searched the wallet, took the stoneout, while the Sanyasi was still absent, and went into the secluded part of his house, where he found it after experiment to be the genuine elixir, or paras-patthar. The Sanyasi was in the habit of washing it

with water, after his daily bath, and drinking the water, and then making puja. Having returned from the customary bath and ablution, he searched his wallet; but to his horror he found that the stone was not in it. He then accused the potter that he must have taken it, but De-Pala swore that he knew nothing of it. The Sanyasi became very much mortified, and asked the potter that if he would return the stone he would bless him, and that he would become a great and happy man. The potter, however, persisted that he had no knowledge of the stone. The Sanyasi to his great mortification said, "De-Pala, you shall no doubt be a very wealthy man, but remember that at last your family shall become extinct."

Thus having cursed, with a curse on his own head, the unhappy Sanyasi proceeded on with his Jhola, and gave up his ghost close to a place called Singa, or Singa-Jangal; and everything that he had in his wallet fell scattered. So far the curse of Civa was fulfilled. From every part of his unholy body as well as the things cast asunder gushed out dahas, or more properly lake lets as a consequence of the curse of Civa.

The Beel Kakuli and Its Offshoots

The Sanyasi dropped down dead, north and south. His two arms and head are indicated by a daha, or lakelet, called Hatha-daha and Matha-daha (Hatha=arm: Matha=head). The lakelet is also called Jogi-daha in memory of the death of the Jogi or Sanyasi.

His body and legs are also indicated by a part of the daha.

The two Beels, called Bara-Kakui and Chota-Kakui (that is, big and small Kakuis) were formed on the spots where the

two Kakuis or Combs—big and small—had fallen. Kakui or Kakui=a Comb).

At-la-daha is the name of that part of the daha, where the Atla (a hollow mortar used for grinding bhang or Indian hemp) was thrown.

Chota-daha is the name of that part of the daha where the stick of the Sanyasi had dropped, (chota = a stick).

The 'khal, which touches the Hatha-daha and Matha-daha, and joins with the Bara-Kakui is named either Chota-daha or Hatha-khal, being the spot identical with the left arm of the Sanyasi.

The entire space occupied by the above water-channel or rather lagoon, measures about three miles by one-and-a-half. Viewed from a high place, the entire space looks somewhat like the body of a human-being.

Raja De-Pala and the River Kumrul

The potter became in time very rich and a Raja, and established his capital at Dignagar. The rent which he used to collect was—neither gold, silver or shell, but—old ploughs, spades, and things made of iron. These he transmuted into pure gold by the touch of the paras-patthar, stolen from the wallet of the Sanyasi. After a while Raja De-Pala had a Kumir (crocodile) made of gold, and caused it to be placed into a tank, called Salphaliya—the dried bed of which can still be seen. The golden crocodile was restored into life, and no sooner was an eye given to it, then it issued from the north-east of the tank, and proceeded onward. The spots traversed by the crocodile became a river, called Kumrul—after the Kumir (or crocodile). The

Kumir in this way went as far as Sonargaon, in the District of Dhaka (Dacca), where it was killed. The course of the channel, as traversed by this supernatural agent, is very zigzag and tortuous; the river is navigable in certain places, in the rainy season, and becomes dry, more or less, in other seasons of the year.

The river Kumrul, as stated above, issues forth from the Salphaliya tank, in Dignagar, and runs through Phalsi, Andoliya, Tola, Narayan-pur, Arnyakandi Sohagpur, Srip haltala, Dudsar and Bisnupur. Here, at the last-named place, the river takes the name of Kamarhor. On account of construction of roads and embankments, in places the traces of the river are almost lost. The river

Kumrul has so many bends because, so it is believed, the crocodile had but one eye.

The Carrier-Pigeons and the Death of the Raja Together with His Family

The Raja enjoyed his ill-gotten wealth for a time, built houses, and constructed roads, and had several children born to him. At last he, or according to another version, one of his descendants—Raja Salphaliya—was summoned by the reigning Nawab or Emperor. Being apprehensive of his life, as well as that of his family, the Raja "took a pair of carrier-pigeons with him. Before proceeding, he told the members of his household that if any evil befell him, he would let the pigeons off, so that as soon as they should see these pigeons they should conclude that he was condemned to death. But lest they themselves be dishonored, they were told, that as soon as they saw the carrier-pigeons, to go on board a boat, and drown themselves in the Salphaliya tank

by locking the cabin of the boat, and letting the water in by making holes in its bottom.

The Raja was, however, honorably acquitted, and rode triumphantly towards his home at Dignagar. Being thirsty, he stopped at a place—some four miles south of his capital—to quench his thirst. The pigeons which were on his arms became restless at the sight of the water and got accidentally released. The Raja knowing full well the terrible consequence of this, rode off with a view to reach home before his family and children had taken the fatal step. But alas! He was too late. The boat had already gone down; only its topmast was visible. De-Pala or Salphaliya seeing that his life—without those who were nearest and dearest to him—was not worth living, himself plunged, with his horse, into the tank. Thus the curse of the Sanyasi—who too had been cursed by Civa—was literally fulfilled. The place where the Raja had stopped to drink from the water of the stream and see the pairas (or pigeons) let loose from his arms is from this time called Pairadaha (or Pigeon Abyss). Every year during Baruni Ganga bathing festival in the Bengali month of Chaitra (March—April) people go there to bathe in the stream.

The story of the Raja is variously related, but the main plot is the same as stated above. The tank of Salphaliya is said by some to be the work of Raja Salphaliya—or more correctly Raja Sali Mohan—who was the last of the line founded by De-Pala. There is a Jangal or a very wide road—passing from Dignagar towards south—said to be constructed by De-Pala, or Salphaliya.

Some years ago, while digging earth, traces of a house with stone-pillars and roof were found at Dignagar, believed to be the remains of the Kingdom.

Abdul Wali (1855-1926)

[Khan Shahib Abdul Wali, a Registrar in the Registration department of the British government. He was a linguist and an authority in Persian language. He authored a number of books and research articles in British India. He was a linguist and knew at least 10 or 12 languages. Wali was a renowned scholar of Persian language in British India and had a number of books in Persian language to his credit. He was given the title Khan Shahib by the British government. He was a Life Member, Asiatic Society of Bengal and a Fellow Royal Asiatic Society. The present article was published in the Journal of the Asiatic Society in 1899. He was born in Sarulia village under present Satkhira district.]

Chapter

V

Bangladesh: Land River People

Chapter

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Bangladesh: Land River People

Bangladesh is a land of rivers and her civilization and culture has been built primarily by its water resource as economic and social good. Water is a natural resource. Everybody has the right to use it as a gift of nature. As a human being we have to look into other's interest. If we want to create a better world for humanity, rivers should be allowed to flow naturally. Bangladesh is a small country and located at the northeastern part of South Asia. It lies between 20° and $34'$ and 26° $38'$ north latitudes and between 88° $01'$ and 92° $41'$ east longitudes. The total area of Bangladesh is 147,570 square kilometre



Photo: Anwarul Karim

The country is fenced by the Bay of Bengal on the south and India on the east, north and west. There is a small strip of frontier with Burma (Myanmar) on the southeastern edge. The country is a flat, alluvial and deltaic plain is interspersed by a network of countless rivers. The Padma (the Ganges), the Jamuna (the Brahmaputra) and the Meghna have large number of tributaries and distributaries. These rivers the lifeline of the country's economic prosperity. The country has a number of hills and ridges on the northeastern part of Bangladesh in the districts of Sylhet and Chittagong Hill Tracts. The Sunderban, the biggest forest zone of the country, is on the southeast overlooking the sea.

Bangladesh has three broad types of landscapes: floodplains (80 percent), terraces (8 percent) and hills (12 percent). Land is the basic resource in Bangladesh being the mainstay of a primarily agricultural economy. The arable area constitutes 8.74 million hectares out of 14.76 million hectares which is about three-fifths of the total area. Of the net cultivable area, 33.3 percent is single cropped; 45.0 percent is double cropped, 11.5 percent is triple cropped and 10.2 percent is cultivable waste and currently fallow. The overall cropping intensity is 1.76. The three cropping seasons approximately coincide with the three meteorological seasons: Kharif-1 (pre- B6 monsoon), Kharif-2 (monsoon) and Rabi (winter or dry). Aus, Aman and Boro are three rice varieties grown respectively in three cropping seasons. Aman is the leading rice crop. It occupies 56 percent of the total area under rice followed by Boro (27 percent) and Aus (17 percent). HYV (High Yielding Variety) boro rice cultivation is now gaining increasing importance following introduction of modern irrigation and reclamation of marginal or wet lands (QK Ahmed: 2000).

Bangladesh is in the lower Gangetic region. The land has a wonderful network of rivers, big and small. It has canals or rivulets called 'Khals' and 'Beels'. It also has swamps and marshy areas. Most of the rivers flow across the plain towards the south. Further, it has ponds and tanks all over the country. There are also lakes formed naturally and are now known as 'Baors'. These have many legends also. Tanks and ponds were made by religious wealthy people for the good of the people.

The Brahmaputra River enters Bangladesh from the north and flows south for 270 km to join the Ganges River at Aricha, about 70 km west of Dhaka in central Bangladesh.

The Ganges River flows east-southeast for 212 km from the Indian border to its confluence with the Brahmaputra, then as the Padma River for about a further 100 km to its confluence with the Meghna River at Chandpur.



The Meghna River flows southwest, draining eastern Bangladesh and the hills of Assam, Tripura and Meghalay in India to join the Padma River at Chandpur. The Meghna then flows south for 160 km and discharges into the Bay of Bengal.

The combined discharge of the three main rivers is among the highest in the world. Peak discharges are of the order of 100,000 m³/s in the Brahmaputra, 75,000 m³/s in the Ganges, 20,000 m³/s in the upper Meghna and 160,000 m³/s in the lower Meghna.

Out of the 230 water courses in the country, 57 are transboundary rivers coming essentially from India and about 93% of the catchment areas of the rivers are located outside the country. On average, 1,105.612 km³ of water cross the borders of Bangladesh annually, 85% of it between June and October. Around 54% (598.908 km³) is contributed by the Brahmaputra, 31% (343.932 km³) by the Ganges and nearly 15% (162.772 km³) by the tributaries of the Meghna and other minor rivers.

It is to be mentioned here that the natural surface water resources in Bangladesh are obtainable from the country's dense network of river systems, which include upstream inflows and 'runoff generated' from rainfall in canals, creeks (beels, haors, khaals in Bangla) within the country. Streams are part of the surface water available. A huge flow of water is available in the monsoon period. But no storage system has been developed as yet. This often creates water logging as there is no proper management of water can be made so far. In Bangladesh, six sectors are the major users of water, such as, agriculture (for irrigation when rainfall is not available) domestic or municipal, fisheries, navigation, including salinity control. But there is, however, a change in climate scenario following manmade destruction of nature. This will make the river systems suffer following acute shortage of water due to low flow condition. This will cause huge demand for irrigation during winter, salinity will increase and agriculture will also suffer. Such situation will be further aggravated by arsenic contamination in ground water. In view of problems confronting water issues among nations, the U.N. initiated the Global Water Partnership Program. All nations are part of it. Each nation or country has organized a Country Water Partnership (CWP) under the Global Water Partnership

(GWP). In Bangladesh, the CWP has formulated the Water Vision 2025 to focus on three principal themes: a) water for people (domestic/municipal use); b) water for food (irrigation for crop production during winter) and c) water for environmental sustainability. In Bangladesh, the country also faces severe flood problems during wet season as a lower riparian country and also because of India opening of all the doors of the Farakka Barrage.

Land and Water Use in Bangladesh: A Socio-Economic and Cultural Approach

Water resources:

Bangladesh as she stands today is a country with a large peasant population. As the country is known as a land of rivers numbering around 230, the civilization she represents is also undoubtedly water based. There can be no life and culture without water.

Once Bangladesh had 15,000 miles (24,000 km) of rivers, streams, and canals and that covered about 7 percent of the country's surface. But the situation is completely different now. Once these rivers lakes, creeks, marsh and streams served as the lifeblood of the country. The towns and village markets grew up along the rivers. But in the absence of water, these have lost their glory and tradition. The river system of Bangladesh has now changed. Heavy siltation blocks navigation.

As stated earlier, in Bangladesh people have different uses of water. As a human being, one needs water for his life, for cleaning and also for satisfying his thirst. Bangladesh is an alluvial land with water all over it. Water is available in sea and river, tanks and ponds, ditches, ring wells and tube

wells. It is also made available through deep and shallow tube wells.

There is water in springs and also in waterfalls. Unlimited water is available when there is rain and shower. The hills and mountains also provide water when snow melts. Water is also available in lakes and rivulets, canals, 'beel, haor and baor'. Water can also be made available if rainwater is stored in roof tanks or in artificial ponds for the use of individual and community. Rain and surface water may be stored in barrage or water reservoir. Water is necessary for agriculture. But now a day's agriculture suffers because rain water is uncertain follow-up change in climate.

The early settlers of the country once lived along these rivers. The outsiders who conquered the country and became the citizens of this country built cities and preferred to live along the river banks. These outsiders had different languages and cultures, but their gradual association with the local people, ultimately helped them Bangla culture. The outstanding feature of this culture and civilization is unity in diversity. The culture of Bangladesh is thus the result of the interaction between ecology and environment on the one hand and the diverse human society on the other.

Water thus is taken as the 'central reality' of Bangladesh. According to information available, at least 15 percent of the people live in boats; 40 percent depend on the sea and rivers for livelihood; and 100 percent of the people depend on rain and floodwater is the main source of fish and vegetation, and this stands as the lifeblood to crops and other human activities.

Hence, water is considered not only an economic good but a social good. It is the greatest source of wealth and prosperity to the people of the country. The country has the

world's largest delta system and the maximum flow of water go to the sea. It has water from the sea, rivers, rain, wells, tidal waves, floods, dew and humidity. The melting snows of the Himalayan Mountains also add to it. Herein Bangladesh water is fresh and saline, sweet and brackish, blue and green, muddy and gray. Water, thus, is the stuff of Bangladesh. The country has, probably, the biggest areas for inland navigation and internal transport in the world. It has more than 5,000 miles of perennial and seasonal navigable channels and about 85 % of its internal transport is carried by water. Rivers of Bangladesh are thus the greatest wealth of the country. The fertility of the soil, the prosperity of the people, the abundance of crops and the population of the territories all depend on rivers. In fact, the way of life which the people of Bangladesh undertake, what we call culture, is completely water oriented. Water shapes one's life from the day he is born until he is taken to the grave for burial.

The people of Bangladesh mostly live in rural areas. This is due to nature, which is bounteous in the production of agricultural products. The rivers and rains contribute much to the fertility of the plains. The productivity of the soil encourages cultivation and attracts larger and larger numbers of people to settle in the plains. Thus the rural population has grown rapidly in the river based territories of Bangladesh and now it is the more densely populated country in the world.

Rural communication



The boat is the major means of travel in Bangladesh. But the situation has been changed following non-availability of water in most of our rivers during dry season. Once Bangladesh earned name

and fame for her rivers. All foreign visitors spoke high of Bangladesh for her rivers and village market on the banks of these rivers. Rivers were always full of water and for this navigation by country boats were smooth. Things could be transported to any part of the country with ease and less cost. The rivers facilitated greatly these village markets which were located mostly on the banks of the rivers.

Eirik G. Jansen in the book entitled *Sailing against the wind, Boats and Boatmen of Bangladesh* (1992; Dhaka) makes the following observation:



"Some of the greatest rivers of the world flow through Bangladesh. These rivers form what is perhaps the most complete system of inland water navigation to be found anywhere. Few places in

the world do boat operations in inland water play a more prominent role than in Bangladesh. The way of life for the 120 million people who live in Bangladesh is to a large extent governed by inland water. For several months every

year one third to half of the land is submerged under water. Millions of people take to the boats and the life of Bangladesh becomes a floating world. It is estimated that there exist more than 700,000 boats in the country employing several million people. In the past nothing in the fabric of the boats depended on anything that could not be made by a carpenter, a blacksmith and the village weaver. The country boats were truly and genuinely made in Bangladesh. Since the mid 1980's a technological revolution has taken place in the country boat sector. Several hundred thousand country boats have been fitted with small engines. The beautiful sailing boats and the life around them will soon be remnants of the past.'

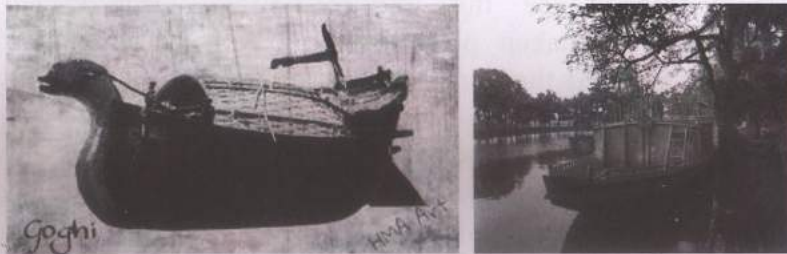
Country boats

In Bangladesh there are various types of country boats. These are made according to regions. Country boats are used for public use. They carry passengers from one place to another. Ferry boats are used for ferrying people from one bank to the other. There are fishing boats also. They are used for catching fish either in the rivers or in the sea.



There are also various types of cargo boat. They carry merchandize from one place to the other. These boats make business operations both in inland and also in the open

seas. The sea going boats are designed for rough weather: for waves and strong winds. And these are rigged in such a way that they can sail to windward. These boats ply along the east coast of the Bay of Bengal. The most important routes include, between Chittagong in the south and Dhaka, Naryanganj and Chandpur in the north. The western routes include, between Barisal and Khulna and Barisal and Patuakhali.



These commercially operated cargo boats have names such as Sampan, Balam, Jali and Gozni. These are among the largest country boats which can carry cargo around 4,000 mounds (160 tons). The small cargo boats can carry goods around 1,000 to 2,000 maunds.

These boats are constructed in Chittagong, Cox's Bazaar, Swandip and Hatia. Passenger boats also have different names such as, Panshi, Ghashi, Jong, Palowari, Bhedi, Goina, Doroka, Kathami, Padi, Bidira, Bhedi, Bachari, Malar Ubori etc. Sharonga is a sea-going boat that comes from Barisal and Khulna. Presently transport communication by boats is suffering because most rivers in rural areas are without water. It is workable only during the monsoon season and that too is limited.

Rivers in Bangladesh make people not only poets and musicians but also artisans and craftsman. The carpenters are artisans as they work on boats. They enjoy migratory

birds that come from distant places. These birds are ducks and swans. As they swim over the rivers they catch the attention of men and women living along the riverside. "The Gogni" is one such boat that looks like a duck. In fact the beautiful panoramic sights and scenery together with landscape, the meadows and deep meadows leave a deep and lasting impression on their mind.

Other forms of rural communications

In old days roads in Bangladesh were low lying and muddy. In rainy season it was much too difficult to walk across the land.



Bullock and buffalo carts happened to be the only means of communication in rural areas. The wheels were made of woods and these were useful to move through rain soaked and muddy roads.



In low lying areas Buffalo carts were also used for carrying goods. It is also used for carrying paddy from low lying farm fields to village home. Buffalos are hardier than the bullocks.

Palanquin, commonly known as paalki, also was in use especially by the rich. Duli was used by poor people, particularly when someone was sick. This also was used in hill areas. Horses and asses were also used as a means of communications. Rabindranath Tagore occasionally used palanquin and it was carried by sixteen bearers. He also used a bug size boat, known as the Padma boat. He used to perform his daily transactions of zemindari or land lordships at his Padma boat. Steam boats and steamers used moved through the rivers.

Life, here, thus is intricately bound up with water. The rain and the river together with sea and cloud are water based.



Peasant Society and Villages

'Bangladesh lives in villages' was a familiar saying in the past. More than 90% people of her population lived in villages. These villages were then both economic and administrative units. They were centres of corporate life and culture. In those days, the villages had their festivals and festivities. Rural people organized folk songs, folk dances, games and sports and melas where people used to gather for merry-making and selling of village products. The villages then constituted the main element of stability and strength. Each village 'has its central residential site with an open space for corn fields and cattle shed. Stretching around this nucleus lay the village land

consisting of a cultivated area and grounds for grazing and wood cutting. The arable lands have their several boundary marksThe inhabitants of such a village pass their life in the midst of these simple surroundings welded together in a little community with its own organization and government which differ in character in the various types of villages, its body of detailed customary rules and its little staff of functionaries and traders'. (Dr. John Matthai, Village Government in Ancient India, Also see, Kuryenson, Rural Reconstruction, Madras, 1950, pp.8-9)

Each of these villages consisted of 1) Village Headman, 2) The Accountant 3) The watchman iv) The boundary man v) The superintendent of tank and water courses vi) The priest vii) The School master viii) The astrologer ix) The blacksmith x) The carpenter xi) The potter xii) The washer man xiii) The barber xiv) The cow herd xv) The folk medicine man/kabiraj xvi) The dancing girl xvii) The musician/poet.

There were families who were engaged in weaving. Beside them, there were farmers, fishermen, oil makers etc.

The most characteristic feature of village life was the 'Panchayat' or the village council. The villages were self governed.

Taking these villages into considerations, Rabindranath Tagore said, "Villages are women. In their keeping is the cradle of the race. They are nearer to nature and are therefore in closer touch with the fountain of life. They have the atmosphere which possesses a natural power of healing. It is the function of the village, like that of woman, to provide peopled with their elemental needs, with food and joy, with the simple poetry of life, and with those ceremonies of beauty which the village spontaneously

produces and in which she finds delight.” (Rabindranath Tagore, Introduction, Reconstruction And Education in India by Prem Chand Lal, London, 1932)

Traditional Cropping Pattern:

The traditional cropping pattern in Bangladesh is monsoon based. Rain water is the only source for cultivation. For this, it is often said that agriculture in Bangladesh is a gamble in the monsoon. The farmers, however, take recourse to the traditional irrigation system.

In Bangladesh where irrigation is not available, farmers initiate a mixed cropping pattern to help conserve soil fertility. In many parts of Bangladesh, the following cropping patterns are used in absence of irrigation and periodic drought.

Folk Forecasting of Weather: Folklore! Folk wisdom

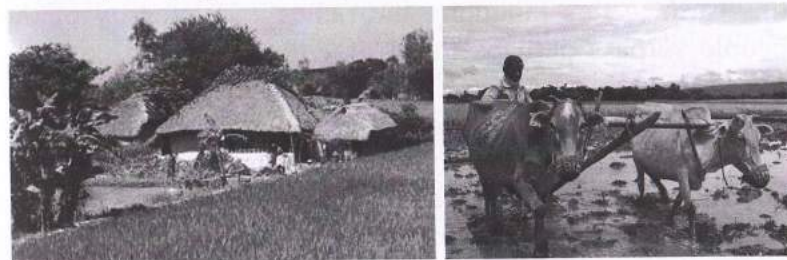
Folk people, who are in most cases non-literate, can forecast about rain or no rain. They have acquired this knowledge for generations through oral transmission.

‘Signs of impending rain: Thick clouds and lightening in the north-east combined with the moon having a halo;’ streaks of lightening in the east with a rainbow in the west and high winds from the north, north-west and southern winds; ants building mounds. Signs of no rain: a wind from the south-west, the frequent formation of a halo around the sun and the moon, a rainbow in the east with the occurrence of clouds followed by the sky remaining clear at night, and the sun hiding behind the clouds. If the weather remains very dry in the month of Chaitra (March-April), storms and

thunder will follow in the following month of Baishakh (April-May). Again, if there is clear sky in the month of Jaistha (May-June), there will be heavy rain during the monsoon’ (Dwijen Mallick Investigating Indigenous Knowledge in Paul Sillitoe, 2000: 41).

The Golden Bengal: Agriculture and Commerce

Agriculture is the basis of civilization in the Ganges basin area. There was unprecedented prosperity in agriculture, industries and commerce in the past. The large volume of its foreign trade functions through its river based network and sea routes. This caught the attention and admiration of the foreign traders and travelers visiting the country at that time so much so that they called the country a garden and a paradise (Rahim, M.A. 1967 :17-18). With natural irrigation facilities from its countless rivers, the plains of Bangladesh (Bangalah) were the most fertile region on earth for centuries. Ibn Batuta, a foreign traveler who visited the country during the 14th century was so much struck at the sight of the greenness and fruitful fields on both sides of the Meghna that he observed: “By the river were water-wheels, gardens and villages on the right as well as on the left, as in Egypt by the Nile.... We sailed on this river for 15 days by villages and gardens, as if we were going through a market place,” (Bhatshali, N.K., 1922: 142-143).



A Bangladesh village and a view of a farm field

Rice can be grown and harvested three times a year in many areas. Due to a number of factors, Bangladesh's labor-intensive agriculture has achieved steady increase in food grain production despite the occasional unfavorable weather conditions. These include better flood control and irrigation, a generally more efficient use of fertilizers, and the establishment of better distribution and rural credit networks.

Self sufficiency in food is the prime objective of the country. Bangladesh needs to expand food grain production as the total population continues to increase. This performance was possible through high-yielding seeds, irrigation and plant nutrition. As the population keeps increasing, more food and livestock feed needs to be produced. In the future more water needs to be applied to this purpose. Irrigation agriculture will have to claim large quantities of water to produce the food required to feed the world. The main source of food for the population of Bangladesh is agriculture. Fishery and live-stock are part of it.

Comments from Chinese visitors:

One Chinese envoy visiting the country at that time remarked: "The seven heavens have scattered the gold of this earth to this kingdom, the riches and integrity of the people surpass perhaps those of Palembang and equal to Java," (Rahim.M.A.1967: 384). Another Chinese envoy records, "The soil is fertile and products are in abundance, for they have two crops every year. They do not weed, or hoe their fields; but men and women work in the soil and weave according to season," (Rahim. M.A. 1967, Ibid). In Bangladesh after rice, wheat and maize have been

assuming greater importance. Tea also grows in the northeast and it is also an important cash crop.

Harvesting



Rice was the principal food crop. There were large varieties of rice, fine and coarse, grown in the country. This continued throughout the Muslim period. Abul Fadl, a visitor during the Mughol dynasty observed, "If a single grain of each kind were collected, they would fill a large vase," (Jarret RT, Vol.I, 134).

Jute, the Golden Fibre

Jute was considered the golden fiber of the country from time immemorial. It was the chief cash crop of the country. The cultivation of jute was also in abundance.

Plenty of references about rice and jute and jute cloths are available in medieval literature. Varnaratnakar, compiled by Pandit Jyotirishvar of the 14th century, records that women put on varieties of jute sari (patta-bastra) (Rahim, M.A. 1967, Vol. 385). There was a reference of a kind of jute plant that is found in a work known as prakrit-pingala, (Roy, Nihar Ranjan (1993:173; Rahim, M.A. 1967, Vol.385). It records that a husband was considered fortunate if his wife could entertain him with hot rice, pure

ghee (clarified butter), soup maurali fish and a jute leaf vegetable (Roy, Nihar Ranjan, 1993:537).

In the Ramayana of Krittivas, in Manik Chand Rajar Gan (Songs concerning king Manik Chand), Joyananda's Chaitanya Mangala, Vijaygupta's Manasha-mangala, Muhammad Kabir's Monohar Madhumalati and in many other Bengali works of the Muslim period there are evidences of the uses of jute sari (Vijayagupta, Manosha-mangala :133; Rahim, M.A. 1967, Vol.I,386) by the common women of the country. Jute became an exportable commodity in the 17th century. But the country was also quite rich in jute manufacturing trade. It is known from the Manasha-mangala Kabya that the merchant Chand Saudagar went to neighboring countries by river routes with much merchandise, including jute saris and jute dhutis. In one country Chand Saudagar sold these jute cloths to the king of the country who was induced to buy several garments for himself and for his queen (Roy, Nihar Ranjan, 1993:537; Rahim, M.A 1967, Vol.I, 385).



The country under the Muslim rule also produced the finest quality of cotton known as muslin. Amir Khashru, the noted musician of the time writes: "It was so fine and light that a hundred yards of this muslin could be wrapped round the head and one could still see the piece of this cloth inside one's nail; yet it was large enough to cover the world when

unfolded (Rahim, M.A.1967, Vol.I,391). AbulFadl writes: "The Sarkar of Sonargaon produces a species of muslin fine and in great quantity," (Rahim, M.A. Ibid).

Irrigation: Rain Water Harvesting

Of late, Bangladesh has taken resort to rain water harvesting following irregular rainfall and acute shortage of water due to unilateral withdrawal of water from the rivers that flow through India. Records show that Bangladesh has an annual rainfall of 2500 to 3000mm in the coastal belt, Sylhet and Chittagong Hill Tracts. In other areas rainfall varies between 1200mm and 1900mm. In view of recent changes in the atmosphere, rainfall is very irregular. Depressions cause tidal waves, and cyclone and rainfall becomes sometime very rampant. Further, water becomes polluted even in tube wells. Many tube wells are now contaminated with arsenic. Safe water becomes unavailable. In rural areas the problem is acute. Rain water harvesting is thus becoming the only way out for safe drinking water.

Rain water harvesting, though it sounds quite modern, is, in fact, as old as Biblical times. This technique of rain water collection was in vogue since antiquity. In ancient Rome,



where they could collect rain water. According to history, rain water harvesting was in practice 4000 years ago. The

island of Gibraltar has one of the largest rain water collection systems.

In some areas of Bangladesh, rural people store rain water for domestic and agricultural purposes during the dry season. These are done in two ways: 1) Roof catchments; 2) Ground catchments.

Rain water collected in roof catchment is used for drinking water and other domestic purposes and the ground catchment of rain water is used for both domestic and irrigation purposes. Ground catchment includes ponds, ditches and canals.

During rain, pure water can be collected either directly or from housetops made of corrugated galvanized iron-sheets. Such water is used mainly for domestic purposes and irrigating homestead gardens.

Rainwater collected in ground catchment such as ponds and canals are used for irrigation in agricultural land and also for development of fishery and livestock.

In some parts of the country rainwater is often stored by building a small catchment across a canal or stream with an earth dyke to create a reservoir. In the dry season, the water is used for irrigating the low-lying areas and nearby agricultural fields. Aquaculture and duckling rearing is practical along with small irrigation. These traditional techniques help improve efficiency of water use and also maintain availability of water throughout the year.

In certain areas in Bangladesh it has been seen that during dry season farmers pull a rope across the rice field early in the morning for dewdrops which would accumulate on the leaves during the nightfall and then moisten the soil. It has also been seen that raw cow dung is diluted in water and

sprinkled in paddy fields during the dry season. Farmers believe that this would help increase the water retaining capacity of the soil.

Rural people cultivate a range of crops on the same plot of land in different seasons. It has been observed that farmers arrange cultivation of rice and jute during Kharif season (summer and rains) followed by pulses, oil seeds, wheat, barley and tobacco and a variety of vegetables in the Rabi season (winter times). In April and May when there is occasional rainfall, jute seeds are sown and jute is harvested in 3-4 months, and then amanrice paddy is transplanted during the monsoon. The aman rice is harvested in November-December, and then Rabi crops such as pulses, oil seeds, millet and vegetables are cultivated in the almost rain-free winter season.

Farmers also practice inter-cropping, raising ridges over the potato crop and sowing wheat seeds of the 'kanchan' variety and sometimes vegetables like 'napasak' and 'lalsak', a kind of edible herb or spinach in the furrows. Cauliflower, cabbage, and tomato are also grown as a short term inter-crop in sugarcane fields. In rural Bangladesh farmers occasionally cover farm fields with rice straw or water hyacinth and allow the plants to grow. This practice helps conserve the soil moisture and reduces water for irrigation for potato cultivation.

Traditional Water Management and water Lifting Practices

Man is by nature innovative. He understands that necessity is the mother of invention. He started inventing things according to his necessity as and when required. The

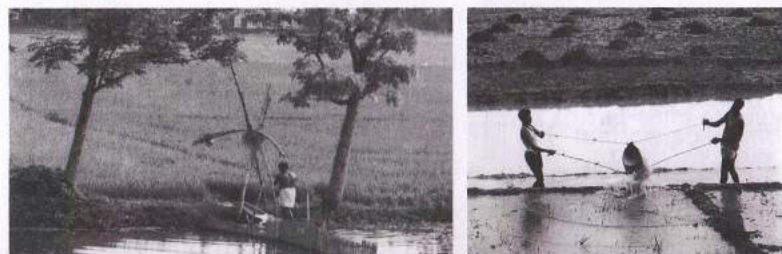
traditional water lifting devices are such innovative mechanisms of man. These are indigenous because these are made locally with locally available technology. They are a part of popular or folk wisdom.

Nobody knows actually when and where these traditional devices were first made and who made them. These have been transmitted by means of physical display from one generation to the next.



History records that in primitive days different tribal groups lived in Bangladesh and the tribes were separated from each other by rivers and streams. At that time, there was a tribe known as 'Bangal or Bango' who lived in the southwest and eastern regions. There were flood plains and the impact of floods was heavy. These tribes then used a local method, known as 'aal' or 'aail'. It was a sort of raised earthen mounds, called in Bangla 'bundh', a kind of small embankment which served the purposes of flood embankment. These mechanisms were used by the tribes to save themselves from floods or tidal surges during the monsoon and in the dry season they used them as devices for irrigation. Gradually the whole region bearing different tribal names such as Pundra, Rarh, Bangal, Sohma, etc., became one and it was later known as 'Bangala' or Bengal. The country was then known as the land of rivers and streams. It was primarily an agricultural land and the natives used various methods or devices for food

production. The following devices were used from time immemorial (Khan, A.R. Small scale irrigation. Indian Farming, 1951).



It may be pointed out here that the oldest device for lifting water is the cupped- hand, used mainly to draw water for sustaining man's thirst and serving other domestic need including lifting water from streams and pools for human and livestock consumption. Gradually when the demand of water was heavy beyond the capacity of the cupped- hand or simple containers, man, by his innovative brain or ingenuity, was led to the development of what we may call as man- and animal-powered water lifting devices such as the scoop, swing basket, 'don' or 'doon' etc. After this came hand pumps and power pumps. The Traditional Water Management Practices (TWMP) which has a number of indigenous tools and practices are folkloric in nature as these have passed from one generation to another suggesting the knowledge and wisdom of a group of people or community called 'folk'. These folk people have no formal education and may thus be taken as belonging to a non-literate society. They are also not sophisticated and have little knowledge about the philosophy of modern technology and development. But this does not mean that they are averse to development. Rather, they have their own concept of development. This can be very complimentary to the modern development procedures and techniques.

These localized, traditional knowledge and technologies are considered folkloric as these refer to learning and wisdom of the folk people living in either rural or urban areas. The TWMP which has a folkloric bias, therefore, needs to be documented, and disseminated for designing appropriate development policies and actions on a local, regional and global scale. The TWMP would focus on some issues of Bangladesh relating to water, watershed, agriculture, and fishery, livestock, forestry, health and sanitation, housing and disaster management. The main strength of TWMP lies in the fact that it is deeply rooted on the local, socio-economic fabric and thus enjoys wide social acceptability. These practices are often of low cost, time efficient, flexible and adaptive.

Cupped-Hand or Hand Made Plate or Container/Scoop

It is a simple tool for limited amounts of water either for domestic or kitchen garden purposes. The device was also used for irrigating small plots of land. The user first makes a drain and then lifts water through this drain to reach his nearby plot of land. It may be done singly or collectively. Men and women may take part in such a device for lifting water. When one person operates, he will be able to lift water to a height approximately 1 meter or more at an average rate of 8 or 10 cubic meters per hour.

Swing Basket

This device consists of a basket or shovel like scoop to which four ropes are attached. It is triangular in shape, made from bamboo woven sheets. Sometimes plane iron sheets or ordinary kerosene tin are also used to make this

equipment. Two men facing each other and each holding two of these ropes, swing the basket between them. At one end of the swing the basket catches some water from the source of the supply and at the other end of the swing it is tipped so as to spill the water into a delivery pool or channel. Heights to which water is lifted sometimes exceed three feet. Approximately 0.35 to 0.40 acre can be irrigated. Operators can swing the basket 20 to 25 times per minute at 2' 3' lift; 40 to 45 gallons per minute could be lifted. Water holding capacity of the basket is 2.5 to 3 gallons. The length of the basket is 20", width 13", weight: 1 lb. Height at triangular end 12", capacity to lift water from a depth of 5 ft. Average working life: one fourth of the year. Local cost: Tk. 6 to Tk. 10.

It is the most popular traditional equipment for lifting water to land. Season: winter, spring, late autumn and summer.

Don or Doon:

This lifting device for supplying water to the field for crop production is extensively used by the farmers to lift water from a depth of around 4 ft. It is made of plain iron sheet. Its shape is more or less like a channel section about a few feet length with one end slightly curved and closed. The appliance is fitted to bamboo cross bars with a long bamboo pole which works as the fulcrum. A counter weight is added to facilitate the working of the don or doon with minimum exertion. It may also be taken as a water ladder. It is used to lift water from a depth of 3 ft. to 4 ft.

Hand Basket

This is a simple triangular shaped irrigation device. It is made of plain iron sheet or kerosene tin. Sometimes bamboo woven sheets are also used to make this equipment. Its lifting capacity varies from 1' to 3 feet. One man runs it. Average working life is 3 years. Output: 25 to 30 gallons per minute at 1' to 2' lifts. Season to use: winter spring, late autumn and summer. Materials of construction: Body: plain iron sheets. Handle Bamboo and rope. Weight: 3 lbs, Dimension: body length: 20"; width: 15" to 18". Height at triangular end 9". Operator: one man. Irrigation capacity to rice crops: 0.12 to 0.15 acres of land. Duration of each swing is about 2 minutes. Water holding capacity of this equipment varies from 1, 1/2 to 2 gallons.

Hand Pumps

With the introduction of hand pumps for drinking water, the villagers in many places use the hand pump for irrigation. They make drainage channels and irrigate land quite easily.

Folklore or Indigenous Heritage: Patronization by the Government

The recent government policy documents in Bangladesh have given increased recognition and attention to folkloric or traditional heritage. The present Agricultural Extension Policy maintains: It is recognized that farmers' indigenous technical knowledge is often environmentally sustainable, and efforts should be made to support and learn from farmers (MoA, 1996, 10). The Constitution of Bangladesh also upholds the traditional practice and heritage of the

people. Article 23 of the Constitution reads: The State shall adopt measures to conserve the cultural traditions and the heritage of the people". The Traditional Water Management Practice for agriculture and other things is undoubtedly unique to 'a given culture of society.' The potential of TWMP has been recognized by scientists in recent times (Sillitoe: 1998). The scientists now understand that the use of traditional knowledge or folklore is a thing not only of the past but of the present and future also due to its adaptability and compatibility. In Bangladesh rural people widely use traditional knowledge and practices in water management, soil conservation and land management, seed preparation, pest control, crop rotation, irrigation and agro-forestry. These techniques have evolved through ages and are adopted according to the demand of the people and socio-environmental changes.

Traditional Knowledge for Soil Conservation and Land Management

It has been found that the major rivers of Bangladesh and their innumerable tributaries deposit a vast quantity of silt beyond the river basins and across the entire flood plain delta each year when the flow of the rivers is obstructed or changed in any way. This may cause decline in soil fertility. In order to help improve the situation, local people set up 'bundhs' or temporary embankments for the protection of crops from inundation. Further, the farmers plant a kind of shrub known as 'dhaincha' in the farm field in erosion prone areas. These shrubs are generally cut down when their purpose is served and then are mixed into the soil for use as fertilizers. The rural people also use banana leaves, stems, logs and roots to prevent soil erosion from rainwater. Ashes are very often used to improve soil

structure and fertility in agriculture, particularly in broadcast 'aman' cultivation. The Agro-scientists are of the opinion that this practice increases the nutrient and water holding capacity of the soil and thereby helps improve soil structure and quality.

Fishery in Bangladesh

Fish is the major food after rice for the people of Bangladesh. The country has diversified fishery resources. It has many species. But the fish resource has suffered as rivers and canals have been dried up.

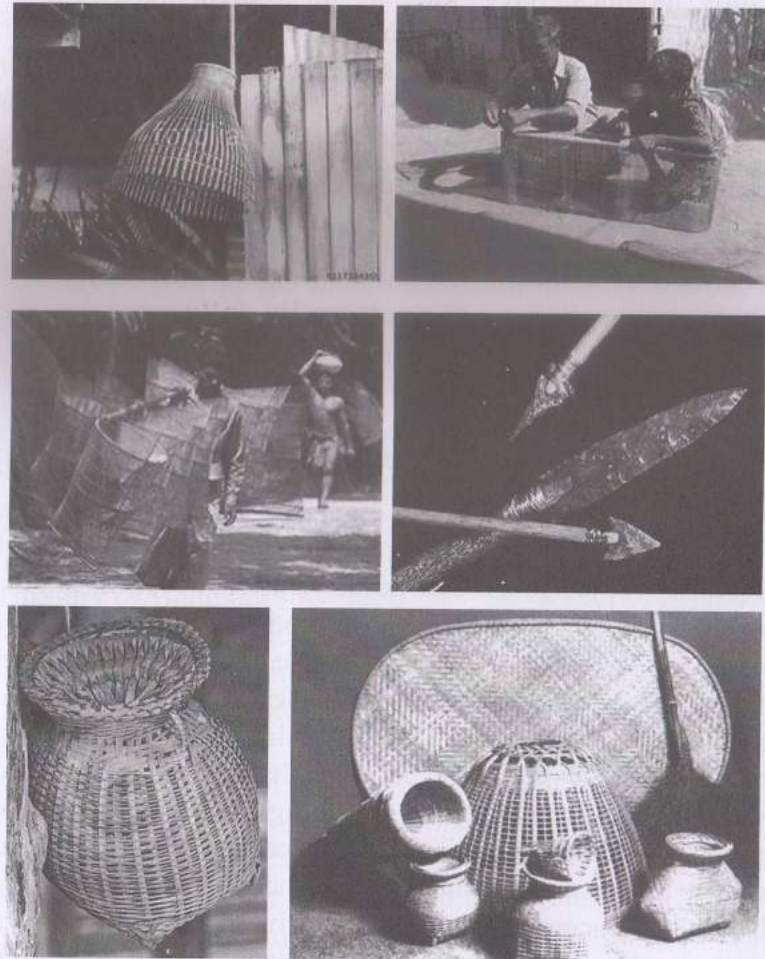


Photo: Anwarul Karim

Fishing Tools:

Bangladesh is a land of rivers and also of fish. Beside rivers, there are streams, canals and creeks, called 'beels', 'baors' and 'haors'. These are marsh and water lands. They are spread over throughout rural areas. Again, we also notice, there are road-side ditches, flood plains, rain-soaked

farm fields. Fish is the major food after rice for the people of Bangladesh. The country has diversified fishery resources. It has many species. Excepting Hilsha and sea-fish, big and small fish, such as, rui, katla, mrigal, shoal, magur, jiel, tangra, taki, maya, tinkata, puti, etc are available in large quantity in all these things. For catching of these fish, the rural people have various kind of fishing tools or traps.



Fish of such kind as aforesaid, are normally caught in the wild. Techniques for catching fish include hand gathering, spearing, and netting, angling and trapping. Fishermen harvest fish from natural resources by using above mentioned techniques. These techniques or tools may be of different kind in different regions. These tools may be innovative and improvised. They have different names also. Netting includes, 'jal', 'khepla -jal', 'thela- jal', 'khora-jal', 'koi-jal', etc. For catching small fish, fishermen or rural people use fishing tools, such as chata or chatai, a thin slip of bamboo or wood, a coarse mat made of bamboo slips, bamoo-sticks, polo, ghuni, durey, charo are also made of bamboo. Beside these, there are hooks and twine hooks, conch etc.

Fishermen also follow fishing folklores which claim that fish feeding patterns are occasionally influenced by the position of the sun and the moon.

Folkloric knowlodge for increasing fish production

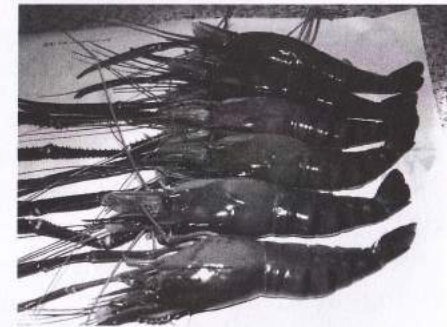
In Bangladesh, folklore or indigenous knowledge is used for increased production of fish. They use the intestines of livestock (cattle, goats, and poultry) as fish feed in ponds. Cow dung is also used to increase food production. In order to make ponds clean folk-people use lime, banana plants and branches of the neem tree. These are also good at preventing fish disease. The floodplains of the southern area are mostly poldered but they have been segmented over the years changing the hydrological condition in the region. More roads have been constructed than bridges and culverts and as a result the canals or beels, floodplains have also been disconnected from the rivers and these have seriously affected the survival and production of fish. Fish

are now hardly available in the Gorai and the Madhumoti. It is estimated that 30% of the gross area of the Sunderbans are water bodies (rivers and canals and creeks). These areas constitute important fishery production in the country. It is estimated that fishery resource of the Sunderbans contribute at least 5% to the total fish harvest of Bangladesh. The annual harvest of fish from the Sunderrbans include 761MT Hilsha, 134 MT Cat Fish, 141 MT Bombay duck, 232 MT Zoo fish, 214 MT Bagda, and 274 MT Golda fish. Around 396 MT of live crabs are also exported from the Sunderbans (Source: F.A.O.: 1995). About 2.53 million of shrimp fry is collected from the Sunderbans. The annual value of fish caught is calculated to be Tk. 1.84 billion. But fish resources in the Sunderbans might suffer following the rise in salinity. This is taking place because of fewer water supplies in the dry season. It is feared that fish like pangas, bhetki and golda may be invaded by datina, poa and sharks.

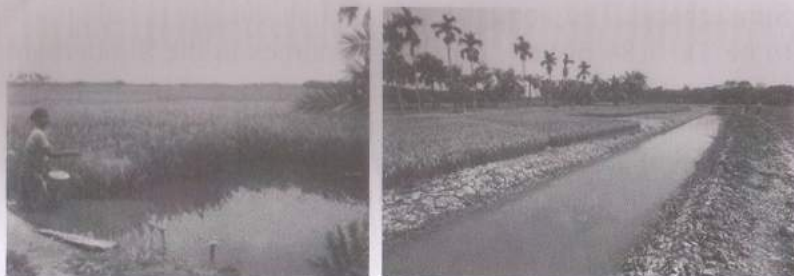
Shrimp Production

Shrimp plays an important role in the economy of Bangladesh. It is the second largest export industries after garments from which Bangladesh earned as US\$456m in the year 2006 (BFFEA, 2008).

Among shrimp producing countries, Bangladesh ranks fourth with respect to area of shrimp farming and sixth in volume of production. The fisheries sector including



shrimp, contributes about 6% to the national GDP and 5% to the national export earnings. Shrimp alone contributes about 93% of sectoral export earning and 4.99% of the National earning item in Bangladesh (DoF, 2007a). However, shrimp culture is an old practice in the coastal areas in Khulna, Satkhira, Bagerhat and Cox's Bazar districts. In the past, people trapped tidal water in low lying inter tidal lands by constructing small dikes and harvested shrimp after 3-4 months. Shrimp species harvested from the country are mainly black tiger shrimp (Bagda), brown shrimp (Horina), Indian white shrimp (Chaka) and giant freshwater shrimp (Golda).



A fishing 'gher': Past and Present

After the independence of the country, interest in shrimp production grew with rising price and demand in international markets. Shrimp farms are being set up in peripheral lands near the mouth of coastal rivers where inundation of saline water is possible. From the late 70's to early 80's, shrimp culture system expanded steadily. The industry grew rapidly during the mid 1990's and since then, shrimp cultivation is very much on rise now. (M. M. Rahman and M. M. Hossain, Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, Bangladesh, Dhaka)

Ilish or Hilsha fish

Ilish (Hilsha in English) is a popular fish to eat among the people of the Bangladesh. It is the most popular and national fish of the country and extremely popular in many countries of the world.

Each year a large number of fish are caught in the Padma (The Ganges) and the Meghna rivers; It is a sea fish but it lay eggs in large rivers. After



being born the young Ilish (known as Jatka) then swim back to the Bay of Bengal. They are caught before they swim to the sea. Ilish is also caught from the sea.

Hilsha Fish as food

Panta Ilish- a traditional food is generally eaten by rural people, particularly when they work in the field under the sun. It avoids sun-stroke. They eat green chilli, onion and raw pulse along with it.



Traditional Management of fishert

Water is vital for fishery. Occasionally water gets polluted because of industrial waste and the improper use of water. The pollution of water causes death to fish. In such cases local people use their folk knowledge for protection and preservation of fish. The use of lime and fragments of banana plants help improve pollution in water. Neem tree leaves also help prevent fish disease. Cow-dung, poultry waste greatly help fish production instead of chemical fertilizers.

In majority area the rural people construct ponds and ditches in the farm field. In the dry season, they provide water for irrigation and maintenance of livestock. These ponds are also used for the cultivation of fish. Local people also plant a special kind of plant, the leaves of which are used as fodder for live stock.

Besides these, traditional water management practices also help control pests and improve environmental pollution.

Forest Resource around the Sea and Rivers: The Sunderbans

The Sunderbans is the biggest mangrove in Bangladesh. Two-thirds of the Sunderbans is in Bangladesh while the other one-third is in India. This region is densely covered by mangrove forests and is one of the largest reserves for the Royal Bengal Tiger and other wild animals. The name Sundarban may have been derived from the Sundari trees that are found in the Sunderbans in large numbers.

The Sundarban forest lies in the vast Gangetic delta and beside the Bay of Bengal. The forest covers 10,000 km, of

which about 6,000 are in Bangladesh. The forest has been subject to intensive human use for centuries, and the eco-region has been mostly converted into intensive agriculture, with a few enclaves of forest remaining.



The Royal Bengal Tiger

To the south the forest meets the Bay of Bengal and to the east it is bordered by the Baleswar River and to the north there is a sharp interface with intensively cultivated land. The natural drainage in the upstream areas, other than the main river channels, is everywhere impeded by extensive embankments and polders. The Sunderbans was originally measured (about 200 years ago) to be of about 16,700 km. Now it has dwindled into about one third of the original size.

The Sunderbans along the Bay of Bengal has evolved over the millennia through natural deposition of upstream sediments accompanied by intertidal segregation. It was a water-logged jungle, in which tigers and other wild beasts abounded. The Sunderbans was everywhere intersected by river channels and creeks.

The Sunderbans that constitute a mangrove ecosystem supports more than 300 species of plants, over 400 species of fish and more than 400 species of wild life (IUCN 1992). It is the last remaining habitat of the Royal Bengal Tiger in Bangladesh. The Sunderbans protects the Mangla port, Khulna city and adjacent areas from cyclones and tidal surges. It is one of the most important breeding and grazing sites for brackish and saltwater creatures including fish and shellfish. A large number of people are involved in collecting shrimp fries from the Sunderbans and adjoining areas. There are three wild life sanctuaries, covering an area of about 33,000 ha. It has been declared as a Ramsagar site for its rich bio-diversity, and UNESCO has declared it as a World Heritage site. In the Sunderbans a dynamic equilibrium condition is maintained between the freshwater flow from upstream and sea water from the Bay of Bengal. Historically, mangroves of the Sunderbans have evolved under the influence of reduced salinity, which used to be maintained by a large amount of freshwater flow through the rivers from upstream. Mangrove biota has been changing in interrelated ways due to the diversion of water through human intervention. Species distribution in the Sunderbans is mostly directed by the freshwater influx from rivers. Principal discharges are from the Ganges through the Gorai and various other distributaries of the Ganges. Most of the distributaries, more particularly, the Gorai and the Bhairab have lost their connections with the Ganges main flow due to geological processes, and the rest due to human interventions. The Ganges has lost its previous flow because of the Farakka Barrage and further by another road bridges over the Ganges beside the Hardinge Railway Bridge causing severe decline in the flow of water and this would cause more areas to come

under high saline zones. The environment of the Sunderbans would continue deteriorating following increase of salinity in the dry season threatening fish and bio-diversity. With the rise of sea level due to change in the climate, it is most feared that the effect of change in climate and environment on the Sunderbans would be disastrous.



Wild Life in the Sunderban is threatened

The tiger is the pride of the Sunderbans. But the number of tigers is now limited in the Bangladesh part of the Sunderbans. Many tigers have died following the acute shortage of food or environmental degradation. The wild animals are also very limited. People also kill tigers and spotted deer. Of late, the forest departments caught a number of persons doing such type of activities and brought them to book. Geologists are of the opinion that there has been a rise in the sea level water and in absence of sweet water the the adjoining rivers around the Sunderbans have been affected by salinity causing serious Damage to the wild life.

The Sunderban, the biggest mangrove in Bangladesh has been facing environmental crisis. This has been caused by chemical pollution and resource depletion. Although UNESCO considers the Sunderban as World Heritage, there has been no effort so far made for protection of wild life. Killing of wild life could not be stopped. Royal Bengal Tiger is now very limited in the Sunder ban. Spotted deer are also very few in numbers. Environmental degradation Launches and steam boats move through the Sunder bans with tourists and local people who live in the region. This is threatening for the age old Sunderbans and disturbs the wild life. Many human activities also cause destruction not only to the mangroves but also to the Royal Bengal Tigers. Many tigers and wild animals have also died. The Sunderbans is undoubtedly a tourist resort, but this should be well organized and protective to the Sundebans. Recently accidents took place in rivers around the Sunderbans when oil tankers were exploded and the rivers were full of oils and that damaged not only the environment but to the innumerable fish also.



Rivers: Sundarbans' fresh water source

The Sunderban's Honey

The Sunderbn honey has a good market both in Bangladesh and also outside. Honey is collected in different times from the bee-hives directly. The color and the taste also



differ according to seasonal flower as available. There is, however, no local effort to set up an industry on honey. This could be an exportable commodity. There are few NGO's in Shyampur under Satkhira district, engaged in collecting honey and selling in the Bangladesh market.

Collection of honey at the Sunderbans is very risky. Now a days, various companies both local and outsiders collect honey from the Sunderbans. Honey is now an exportable commodity and it contributes to our national economy.

In my childhood days, I heard about individual collection of honey from the Sunderbans and many were killed because of tigers. Despite all these, honey collection is an important source of livelihood for the poor people living in around the Sunderbans. These people use indigenous method in collecting honey. In many areas there are people who collect honey directly from bee-hives. Corn-flower honey is common. Honey collected from neem flower is considered very high quality and good for health. In Bangladesh foreign honey has flooded our market. The Sunderban honey has a good market. It need patronization by the government.

Personal experience:

On completion of my tenure of service in the Islamic University, Kushtia in 2009, I joined Northern University Bangladesh, Khulna. Here I worked for six years. Allah has said in the holy Qura'n (SuraNahl, Bee) that it is a panacea and wonderful medicine. I enjoyed honey collected by local honey hunters but I was told that the Sunderban honey is the best. I also visited the Sunderbans a number of times. I met Mawalies, who generally collected honey from the deep forest risking their lives. As a folklorist, I was curious about their way of life. They use magic and witchcraft in collecting honey. It is a kind a 'mantra' which they learn from the Ojha Shaman. But interesting part of collecting honey is 'fire' which they use as technique to drive bee from hives and also tiger. These Mawalies never go alone into the forest. They have groups and all are equipped with security measures locally made viz, spear with pointed edge, chopper or heavy sharp knife with a shaft. The forest officials do not allow them to take guns with them. The forest guards also help them without the notice of the Forest conservator secretly on payment. Despite all these, many of them lost their lives when tigers attacked them. As I talked to them, they disclosed that it was a kind of addiction that compelled them to collect honey. Many of these Mawalies, are fishermen and local villagers who live nearby villages. Generally, honey is collected between late March and June, every year.

These Mawalies have selected areas for collecting honey and they 'travel through Muddysaltwater Rivers, creeks and narrow channels that criss-cross the Sundarbans forests.' It is difficult to ascertain the purity of honey if one collects from middlemen. On average, the price of honey is around Tk.450 to Tk.500/-per k.g. There are few techniques but in

most cases these do not work. These honey collectors are very poor and they have taken it as a profession. It is undoubtedly very risky profession. They are also cheated by the middlemen. As these fishermen go for collecting honey from beehives, they face risk not only from tigers, but also from snakes and crocodile. The bees are also dangerous. Any attack by them, may be dangerous and cause death. Nowadays, many companies engage people to collect honey and use chemicals. Honey is now an exportable commodity.

Folk Deities in the Sunderbans

Bon-Bibi, Gazi-Kalu and Dakshin Roy in the Sunderban forest Bon-Bibi or Bon-Devi is worshipped as a tree-spirit for protection from Tigers and Crocodiles by the wood cutters, honey collectors or persons who visit the Sundrbans.

Bonbibi, the lady of the forest, also Bondevi, Bondurga, is a guardian spirit of the Sunderban forests. She is highly venerated by both Hindus and Muslims who are residents of the Sunderbans and adjoining areas. She is called upon mostly by the honey-collectors and the woodcutters before entering the forest for protection against the attacks from the tigers. It is believed that the demon king, Dakkhin Rai (the lord of the south), an arch-enemy of Banbibi actually appears in the disguise of a tiger and attacks human beings.

There are several texts of Banbibi composed by the Bayatis (folk singers). These are known as as the Banbibir Keramati (the magical deeds of Banbibi) or the Banbibir Jahuranama (glory to Banbibi). Bayanuddin and Mohammad Khater are the two well known Bayatis or

composer of Banbibi songs. These texts consist of two major episodes, Bambini's battle with Dakkhin Rai and the narrative of Dukhe.



Scene from Banbibir pala

The story goes that Bonbibi, the 'lady of the jungle', was chosen by God to protect people who worked in the Sundarbans against tigers.

Dokkhin Rai was a sage meditating in the forest, who was constantly disturbed by the villagers entering the forest to collect wood or honey. In a fit of rage he decided to feed on them. Using his ascetic powers he took the form of a tiger. Soon, he refused to share any of the forest resources with humans. He proclaimed himself the master of the Sundarbans and of all the tiger's spirits, gods, and demons that inhabited it.

On noticing this, God decided to put a stop to Dokkhin Rai's reign of terror. He chose for this task Bonbibi, an orphan who was abandoned in the forest as a baby and was

raised by the deer. Dakkhin Roy was made a Demon by the wish of God. Along with her twin brother Shah Jangoli, she came to the deepest forest of the Sundarbans. Here lived Dakkhin Roy. But Dokkhin Rai was wily and clever; he always managed to evade them.

There, in the neighboring village lived a poor young boy named Dukhe. His mother was poor and he had no father. He used to cry and his cries could be heard across the river to the neighboring village. One summer he was lured by his uncle Dhona to join him for collecting honey from the forest. Dukhe's mother reluctantly allowed him to leave, with the advice that he should call out to Mother Bonbibi should any harm befall him. Once in the forest, Dhona was confronted by the demon Dokkhin Rai, who promised to give the evil uncle Dhona seven boats full of honey and wax if he could have Dukhe in return. The greedy Dhona decided to leave Dukhe on the banks of Kedokhali Island and sailed off in his wooden boat. Just as Dukhe was about to be devoured by Dokkhin Rai, he cried out to Bonbibi. Hearing the loud cries Bonbibi was able to locate the elusive tiger and sent her brother Shah Jangoli to beat up Dokkhin Rai.

After a battle Dokkhin Rai was overpowered and brought to Bonbibi. Bonbibi was about to order his death when a wise man named Ghazi intervened. He pleaded to Bonbibi that if Dokkhin Rai was killed there would be no difference between good and evil. Instead of killing the demon, we should kill the reason that led to Dokkhin Rai becoming a demon. Bonbibi understood the wisdom in this. A defeated Dokkhin Rai complained that if the humans are given a free reign, there will be no forest left. She accepted Dokkhin Rai's apology and accepted him as her 'son'. Later, she ordered her pet crocodile, Seko, to drop Dukhe to his

village. It is after his return to the village that Dukhe popularized the worship of Bonbibi – The lady of the Jungle.

Gazi Kalu and Champavati

The name of Gazi-Kalu is also associated as pirs who have powers to protect one from tigers and crocodiles or any mischief that may take place in the Sunderban. The name of Dakshin Roy is also associated with them in connection with protection from the tigers in the Sunderban. The name of Khawaja-Khijir is also heard as water spirit or invisible pir who has power to protect one from the crocodiles in the Sunderbans and also from storms when any sea-voyage is made. The local people arrange big cultural programs in the Sunderbans in honor of Ban-bibi, Gazi-Kalu and Dakshin Roy.

The Ghazi-Kalu-Champavati legend is very popular among the folk people who live along the sea-side and the regions of the Sunderban. He is also known as Bara-Khan Ghazi or Ghazi Shaheb. The name of Kalu is associated with Ghazi. Based on Abdul Karim Shahitya Bisharad, Asim Roy in his book, *The Islamic Syncretistic tradition in Bengal* (1983) writes; “King Sikander and Queen Ojhupa of Bairatnagar were deeply distressed at the loss of their only son and child. The Queen went for a stroll along the bank of the river Ganga and discovered a baby in a box floating in the river. She brought the child home and named him Kalu. Later the Queen conceived and the fate of the unborn child was written on its forehead by the divine agency in the sixth month of the pregnancy. In the seventh month, the ceremony called sadh, of entertaining the would-be mother with a variety of food, was performed. The child born, in

due course was Ghazi, who was destined to become a celebrity in the world. Ghazi and Kalu grew up together as inseparable companions and both were firmly devoted to God and endowed with supernatural powers. The King offered the throne to Ghazi when he was ten but the latter declined it on the ground that his life's mission was to become a “spiritual mendicant in the way of God.” The offended and enraged king tried unsuccessfully various means to chastise his disobedient son, who finally convinced his royal father of his divine powers by picking up a needle thrown into the sea, with the help of a crocodiles.

One night Ghazi and Kalu left secretly the comforts of the royal palace for the life of a Faqir. They reached the wild tracts of Sunderban in the southern Bengal, where not only did tigers, crocodiles and other wild animals offer submission to Ghazi, but Hindu deities like Siva Durga, Ganga and Sati also accepted him as a son.

Once the two friends strayed into a place called Safai-nagar “in search of food.” They were maltreated by its Hindu ruler named Sri-ram. Kalu prayed to Allah to burn down the place, convert all local people to Islam, and kidnap the queen. Allah responded to his prayers and his wishes were fulfilled through the agency of KhawjaKhizir, the universally popular Muslim saint. The Hindu ruler offered his submission to Ghazi, greatly honored him and Kalu, and built a mosque in the place; while in return, the kidnapped queen was restored to the king.

At another place, the two friends, tired and hungry in the course of their wanderings, received the kind hospitality of seven wood cutters. Ghazi repaid them with a huge quantity

of gold obtained through the goddess Ganga, whom Ghazi addressed as his maternal aunt (masi).

This set the stage for the most central event in the traditions of Ghazi, namely his infatuation with the Hindu princess, which involved him in a war with her father, and the final triumph of Ghazi. The circumstances of Ghazi's meeting with the princess diverged wildly in the two accounts. In Abd al Karim's version, while Ghazi and Kalu slept one night in a mosque, the former was carried by a group of fairies (pari) to the bed-chamber of Champavati, the daughter of Raja Mukut of Brahman-nagar, a place largely inhabited by orthodox Brahmans who "performed purifying penances at the mere sight of a Muslim." Ghazi and Princess, however, fell in love with each other and married secretly in the Hindu gandharvastyle. They were again separated in their sleep, Ghazi being brought back by the fairies to the mosque.

In Zain-al-Din's account Bada Khan Ghazi, in the company of his close friend Kalu, was engaged in reading the Quran, under the shadows of a tree on the bank of the Ganges, when he saw Princess Shubhadra, daughter of Raja Mukut of Khanaiya -nagar, taking a ceremonial dip in the Ganges, on the Hindu auspicious day of maha-Baruni. Shot by cupid's arrow, Ghazi was immediately infatuated with love for her.

In respect of subsequent developments, the two accounts present a considerable difference. From this particular point in the narratives, it may be convenient to present them separately. To pick up the thread of Karim's account, Ghazi, first united and then separated from his beloved princess, set out in Kalu's company for Brahman-nagar. On the way, Ghazi was pleased to observe a number of good

omens, such as a snake on his right, a lizard calling from somewhere above his head, a pregnant mother feeding her child, a rider on an elephant, a flower-girl carrying a basketful of blooms, a milkmaid carrying milk in a pitcher, women carrying pitchers full of water, and a cow suckling her calf. Kalu appeared rather skeptical and wondered, "How could a Muslim marry a Hindu." Ghazi advised absolute trust in Allah.

In the meanwhile, the Princess Champavati, unable to bear the separation from Ghazi, confided in her mother, who advised her to worship Shiv and her consort Gauri. Gauri assured Champa:

Ghazi Pir is my sister's son,
He shall be your husband.

On his arrival in Brahman-nagar, Ghazi sent Kalu to the raja with the proposal of marriage. The indignant raja heaped humiliation on the messenger and threw him into prison. Ghazi returned to Sunderban to raise a pack of tigers, and later attacked the raja. Raja Mukut invoked Dakshin-ray, the Hindu tiger-god. The latter seemed hesitant to face Ghazi, commanding a tiger-force. Dakshin-ray approached goddess Ganga for a contingent of crocodiles. She told him about goddess Gauri's and her own affection for Ghazi and advised him to persuade the raja to marry Champa to Ghazi, a marriage that was destined to come through, despite the entire world taking stand against Ghazi." The tiger-god eventually obtained a 52000- strong crocodile force from Ganga, having resorted to the emotional blackmailing of Ganga by the threat of committing suicide. Extremely reluctant to displease Ghazi, Ganga agreed only after Daksahin-ray undertaking that the matter should not come to Ghazi's knowledge. The

crocodiles were no match for the tigers and Dakshin-ray defeated and desperate, approached Gauri for an army of ghosts and goblins. Gauri acceded to his request on the same undertaking as for Ganga. The attack of the invisible spirits threw the tiger-force into initial disarray, but Ghazi mustered his army and turned the scale of the war totally in his favor with the help of thaumaturgic powers instilled in his mendicant's stick (asa) and the pairs of wooden sandals. Thoroughly vanquished, Dakshin-ray was bound hand and foot and not released until he promised to prevail on Raja Mukut to marry the Princess to Ghazi. The raja was left with no choice other than taking the field against Ghazi. It resulted in his crushing defeat. He agreed to solemnize the marriage of his daughter and Ghazi and embrace Islam, before he was restored to his position with dignity.

In Zain-al-din's version, Bada Khan's love at first sight with Subhadra, daughter of Mukut-raj was followed by Kalu's gathering information about Mukut-raj and family. Kalu did not like the idea that a Muslim should marry a Hindu. But finally he went to King Mukut-raj in the guise of a Brahman and a proposal was made to the King for the marriage of Ghazi and Subhadra. Ghazi presented himself as a Brahman. But the king came to know this fraudulent practice of Ghazi and Kalu. Both were expelled and a war was imminent. Ghazi engaged his tiger-force and defeated Mukut-raj and the king was forced to give her daughter in marriage with Ghazi and accepted Islam. The other Brahman Hindus boycotted the marriage ceremony but the marriage was performed with great festivities to the satisfaction of all. Ghazi then returned to Chandipur.

Relics at Barobazar: Mosques and Shrine

Gazi Kalu – Champaboti Garrh (fortress)

In many places of Bangladesh and West Bengal the legends of Ghazi Kalu Champavati has been very popular. Quite a good number of shrines or mazar were also set up in many places. One such Shrine of Gazi Kalu Champavati has been found at Barobazar, an Upozila under Jhenidah district recently. The shrine has a garrh or a trench full of water. The shrine has been renovated by the Archaeological department. At Barobazar a number of historical relics have also been discovered. These are beside Jessore—Jhenidah road. Baro Bazar is a historic place. Here relics of the Mughols have been unearthed. There had been a number of powerful Hindu Raja or Kings. Khan Jahan Ali of Bagerhat also conquered this place and established mosques and tanks. He also built roads and bridges. There appears a fortress with a rampart full of water near Barobazar under the name of Gazi Kalu- Champabati.



Shrine of Gazi Kalu Champavati at Barobazar, Jhenidah

Sea level rising and salinity intrusion

During each monsoon or wet season almost the whole of Bangladesh is submerged. The sediments are carried from the upper riparian to the lower riparian. This will cause salinity intrusion to sea bound rivers. Agriculture will be greatly affected. Wild life in the Sunderbans has faced a serious threat. One of the greatest challenges people living in the Ganges basin area might face is the threat of rising the sea level and more particularly in the Sunderban region. Climate change is also a big threat to the people of these regions. In many of countries mangrove wetlands, freshwater reaching the mangroves was considerably reduced from the 1970s due to diversion of freshwater in the upstream area by neighboring India through the use of the Farakka Barrage bordering Bangladesh near Rajshahi. Of late, salinity in the rivers of Bangladesh, particularly in Khulna and Faridpur, is also very threatening to the fresh water resources and agriculture. This might affect the Sunderbans and wild life. Change in climate has seriously affected agriculture, fishery and livestock. Change in environment is also a threat to human life also.

Water in Fruits: A Natural Gift

Water is also available in fruits. Coconut directly provides water to people who need it to quench their thirst. Water melon and palm fruit have water in them. Sugarcane, all seasonal fruits such as mango, jackfruits, date-palm, anaras or pine apples, cucumbers, orange, grapes, apples, guava, papaya, and quite a good number of fruit contain water. Water is also available in spinach and vegetables, and in leaves of trees. The cow provides us milk, and the bee's honey. These are alternatives for water. Water is thus

available in natural resources and also by artificial methods. We need water for drinking, purification, cleaning, bathing, cooking, domestic use, navigation, transport and commerce. It is necessary for crop production, agriculture, fishery, livestock, pottery, and weaving. It is also vital for hydraulic energy.

(Source: <http://www.Sunderban>, Google internet)

Water and Women: Scarcity of Drinking water



Women in Bangladesh are the maximum users of water in so far as it concerns domestic life. A woman in a family gets up much earlier than men and they clean the house, feed the domestic animals and cook for everybody. She also cooks for those who work in the field, and on occasions she also works in the field as a labor, and also elsewhere in road and house building activities. She also works as a rural 'dai' or a midwife, and thus provides relief to the pregnant women when they give birth to a child. A woman in her household works also washes all clothes, cleans utensils and lastly in the evening she goes either to the pond or to a river for bathing. In all these works, she needs water. Meanwhile she makes time for kitchen gardening. And here also she needs water. Many women in Bangladesh who are Muslims, own land due to the Muslim law of inheritance. In case of the death of husband, she has to manage her land for agriculture. She has to arrange

cultivation and also is engaged herself in the job. In rural Bangladesh and even while working in cities and towns, it is women who procure water from outside in the case where water is not available. She brings or collects water either from the tanks or rivers for the family. She occasionally works as a shop-keeper in the village. In many villages, old women also work as a traditional healer this practice, they follow for generations. They are known as Ojha fakir. In many cases, they are part of family professions. They take the help of jinns-- a creation made of fire by Allah. They are spirits and remain invisible from human byre. This jinns or unseen spirits are good and bad like human beings. The woman takes the help of jins in their healing activities, known as jhar-funke. It is a kind of practice in which the healer recites 'mantra' and then flows over the body of the affected persons.

Chapter

VI

Water in Bengali Folklore

Chapter

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Water in Bengali Folklore

Bangladesh has a very rich folkloric heritage. And water is a part of our folklore and folk life. Our folktales, legends, proverbs, riddles, nursery rhymes, folksongs, wedding songs and ballads, etc., have involved water and women. In all cases women are intelligent, smart, clever and cooperative. In our proverbs, the name of 'Khona,' a woman figure prominently. Her identity is not much known. But she is very popular among the peasants for she guides them through proverbs in farm field, in house-building, in food and nutrition and health and sanitation. She also guides in marriage and various social functions. The name of 'Daak' is also very important in our folklore, particularly in regard to proverbs. He is a male person. His identity is also not very clear. The name of 'Baraha' and 'Mihir' is equally important in our folklore. 'Gopal Bhar' is a humorous character in our folktales. Many of his stories have water and women in his discourses. In nursery rhymes gods and goddesses are involved along with women.

For example:

Bristi porey tapur tupur nodei elo baan
Shib Thakurer Biia holo tin kanno daan
Ek konney raadhan baaren, ek konney khaan
Ek konney naa kheyee baaper baari jaan

Meaning:

There is continuous rain- fall and the river is full of flood water. In such a situation, the god Shiv is offered three women for marriage. One woman cooks in his house, another eats and the other one angrily goes to her father's house.

There is one more story concerning Shiva:

Rodh holo bristi holo
Shiba Thakurer Biiey holo

There is sun and shower on the same breath. And the god Shiva is married.

There is however another version in which it is jackal instead of god Shiba who gets married.

In fact, there are a hundred and one stories in our folklore which involve, water and women. In our folk tales! Thakur maar jhuli (Grand mother's stories) Brahmis are made fool and less intelligent.

Bangladesh is quite rich in folklore. Our proverbs known as 'Kshanar bacan' suggest a lot of traditional knowledge to combat drought and flood. They also speak of impending rain and drought by referring the movement of wind, star, sun and cloud. A rainbow also suggests whether there would be rainfall or not. For example: Signs of impending rain: thick clouds and lightning in the northeast combined with the moon having a 'halo;' streaks of lightning in the east with a rainbow in the west and high winds from the north-western and southern winds.

No rain is signaled by a wind from the south-west, the frequent formation of 'halo' around the sun and moon; a rainbow in the east with the occurrence of cloud followed

by the sky remaining clear at night and the sun hiding behind the clouds.

Forecasting Storm and Rain: Folk Knowledge

When weather remains very dry in the month of Chaitra (March to April) storms and thunder will follow in the month of Baisakh (April and May), When the sky remains very clear in the month of Jaishtha (May to June), there will be heavy rain during the monsoon.

From the time immemorial, the rural folk shaped their life and living condition observing closely the activities of animals, birds and insects and also the environment around. It is their folk wisdom or folklore that helped build their life a secured one in moments of crisis and disaster. They had an animal and insect friendly society. Domestic animals, birds and insects in trees and plants could sense on-coming disaster or good omen that the humans sometimes could not.

Fish sense the smell of the stream where they hatched, and coral fish also have a smell memory of the reef where they came from. Corals also will spawn in response to a combination of environmental factors — water temperature, time of year and the phase of the moon.

The rural folk understand that in extreme hot days, ants miraculously sprout wings and fly to the skies. Similarly when there is rain or storm, the ants go to their holes for protection.

Birds and animals can sense and predict the arrival of summer or spring and change in weather by their behavior. Ants grow wings just before the first storm of summer hits; they've actually been ready for weeks.

Khona and Folklore

Khona is a female astrologer, poet and non literate sociologist. She was reportedly born in a village Deuli under Barasat district in 24 parganas, West Bengal, India. She was a non-Aryan Bangalee who opposed the Aryan culture and Hindu Brahmanism. Although she was widely popular among her people for her wisdom, her name was not recorded in the Vedic literature. There are two popular accounts of her life. In one, she was married to the son of a Hindu astrologer who ordered her son to cut her tongue out of jealousy, when Khona superseded her father in law in knowledge and wisdom. In another account, it is said that Khona was the daughter of a King in Sri-Lanka. Later, she was married to Mihir who was also famous for forecasting public good. However, the sayings of Khona were orally transmitted, in matters of house-building, agriculture, fishery, live-stock, food and nutrition and health and these were proverbial. Till now, Khona became unrivalled in Bengali proverbs. Her name is a household matter in Bangladesh and in India. Recently a mound has been discovered at Chandraketugar in Southern Bengal with the names of Khona and Mihir associated with it. It is further reported that Koana was the daughter in law of a famous astronomer and mathematician and one of the Navaratnas, Varah in the court of Vikramaditya. Varah, however, could not endure Khona for her outstanding astrological performance and finally cut off her tongue and made her silent. Varah belonged to Southern Bengal'

Folk Knowledge on Agriculture and Forestry

Folk people in Bangladesh have wisdom on agricultural cultivation and forestry. If there is rainfall in the Bengali

month of magh (Late December-January), production will be vigorous and rampant. Application of soil mulch in bamboo groves in spring (March-April) will help induce regeneration and vigorous growth of bamboo shoots. Water hyacinth and other mulching materials at the base of coconut and other trees during the dry season will help conserve soil moisture. The use of dried neem leaves will protect stored grains from insect infestation. Folk people have lots of knowledge which is orally transmitted for generations together.

Folk Wisdom: Forecasting a Good Harvest

If there is rainfall by the end of Magh (January-February), the land is blessed because of good harvest.

People living along the river banks very well understand the advent of flood by experience. They move to safer zones or store things for use during the flood. They also store seeds which they use in their fields when the water recedes. They also build flood embankments by raising mounds and planting trees along the bank for their protection from river erosion.

Following are the few proverbs that relate to Khona:

Jodi barshe aagoney

Raja jabe magone

Meaning: If it rains in the month of Agrahayan (aagoney), there shall be crop failure and the King then goes a-begging.

Jodi barshey maagher shesh

Dhonni rajar punni desh

Meaning: If it rains in the month of Magh (January – February), both the king and the country would be blessed and the crops would grow in abundance. The period covers paush (December – January.)

According to Khona, if the sky is covered by mist in Chaitra (March-April) there may be plenty of paddy in Bhadra (August – September)

If the southern wind blows in the month of Ashar (June-July), there may be flood in the year.

Khona maintains further: If in paush (December-January) there is heat in the atmosphere and cold in Baishakh (March –April), there may be heavy rainfall in the year.

If the cloud takes the form of Kodaly megh, as if clouds are cut by spade and axe and the wind blows off and on, it is understood that there may be rainfall in a day or two.

In fact, there are several hundred of such sayings made by Khona and all the cover the peasant society, there way of life and living condition.

Following are the few more:

“Thakte balad na kare chash
tar dukhkha baro mash”

Meaning: He who owns, but does not plough, his suffering never in twelve months of the year.” This suggests that if anyone is idle and does not plough his land, he will suffer in his life.

“Kala ruye na kaatey path
Tatei kaapor, Tatei bhath”

Meaning: One who plants banana and does not cut its leaves, he would easily arrange food and clothes for himself and for others.

“Aage putey kala
Bag-bagicha fala”

Meaning: If one intends to have an orchard, he should go for plantation of banana and this will help him have an orchard as he will desire. One understands that Banana cultivation will bring fortune for him.

“Bish haath korey faakh
Aam kaathal putey rakh
Gacchey gaach ropey naa
Fal taate falbey naa”

Meaning: For plantation of mango and jackfruit one needs to give a good space to begin with.

If there is no gap and trees are planted very close to each other, no fruits will grow.

”Matthe giye aage koro dik nirupon
Purbo dik hotey haal korocho chalon
Khonaboley more kotha shuno mohashoy
Phashal pholibey odhik nahi songsoy”

Meaning:

After going to the field, the farmers, at first should select the spot to start plowing and it should be from the east, Khona says if someone follows this suggestion he definitely will have good harvest.

“Amabashya ar purnimatey je ba dhorey haal
Taar dhukhkho thakey chirokal”

Meaning

A farmer who holds the plow on the Amaboshya (new-moon-day) and on Purnima (full-moon-day) he will be unhappy throughout his life.

”Aaush dhaner chaash
Laagey tin mash”

Meaning

It takes three months to cultivate Aasuh paddy (One kind of rice in Bangladesh)

“Kala ruyey naa keto patah
Taatei kaapor taatei bhath”

Meaning: After plantation of banana tree, don't cut off its leaves. It will remove your all wants of life. It suggests that it would make him self sufficient.

Khona'r Baccan: Medical Folklore

Khona'rbachan is taken as Bengali proverb. Proverbs are historical truth, transmitted orally from generations to generations. We are not sure if these are the compositions of Khana. But these are told and retold by Khana as folk wisdom. In many countries such kind of proverbs are available. But there is no doubt that these proverbs have many things that concern health and environment. These work as medicine also. In view of these, I consider this part of Khana'rbaccan as medical folklore. Telakucha (*Coccinea cordifolia*), in villages this wild herb is found available in the backyard jungle of village homesteads. It keeps the body cool and free from skin disease. This is also good for curing headache. Gaja, Cannabis Indica can help cure migraine. Tulshi (*Ocimum americanum*) is very good

for curing common cold. Thankuni (*Centella asiatica*) is a wonderful herb for curing number of diseases, particularly for digestive problems. It helps maintain a healthy appetite.

House building and environment - “Pubey Hansh

Pacchimey Bansh
Uttarey Berey
Dakshiney ccherey
Ghar korokey pota jurey”

Meaning: Duck in east means, One should dig a pond in the eastern part of the dwellings. Duck will swim in the pond; it would be good for farming poultry. Evaporation of water in association with southern breeze will help reduce heat and humidity. This would also be good for health and environment.

Bamboo in west

It means the cluster of bamboo trees should be in the west to protect one from heat and the sun. It will also keep house and its courtyard cool and also will provide shades

Fencing on the north

Plantation of banana tree along with other fruit bearing will help protect cold. It will provide defused light

Southern part will be kept free

If the southern side of any dwelling is kept open, it will help flow of southern breeze and the span of life will be purified

Khona and Medicinal Trees: Medical Folklore

Khona made use of different kind of trees which have medicinal value and are also good for environment. She made a list of these trees which are proverbial and historic truth.

“Neem nishinda jatha
Manush ki marey tatha”

Meaning: One who plants neem –nishinda tree, there environment remains fine and none dies unusually.

In the chart, first four trees are of herbal values, next three are recognized for nitrous fruits; eighth and ninth number trees of the list are of less importance. Again, the bamboo is the most important element for construction and used as a building material in vernacular architectural practice of Bangladesh. These trees and the flowers are available in Bangladesh. They leave deep impact on the surrounding environment and protect inmates from disease. The botanical names of these trees are given below:

Melica azadirachta

Neem

Vitex negundo

Nishinda

Ocimum sanctum

Tulshi

Adhatoda vasica

Bosak

Musa paradisiaca

Banana

Aegle marmelos

Wood apple

Zizyphus mauritiana

Indian plum

Tamarindus indica

Tamarind

Borassus flabellifer

Palm

Bambusa arundinacea

Bamboo

Mimuspos elengi

Bokul

Hedychium coronarium

Chapa

Sesbania grandiflora

Bok

Erytherina indica

Madar

Table 1: List of native trees found in the verses of Khona

VII

The Culture of Bangladesh

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The Culture of Bangladesh

Hindu – Muslim Amity:

One remarkable feature of Bengali life is the Hindu Muslim amity. For generations these two communities live together sharing love and friendship, food and drinks. Apart from their respective religion, beliefs and practices, they have nurtured a common culture for generations. The advent of the Sufis, who represented a religious syncretism, greatly played their part in the making of a common culture. The culture of Bangladesh is like rain and river. They flow through all and sundry. The past history of Bangladesh clearly speaks of a society where the Muslims and the Hindus lived together for ages. They maintained good neighborly relations sharing pleasure and pain. Many people both men and women who live in villages occasionally come to enjoy the Durga festival of the Hindus quite unconcerned about their religious faith. Ratha-Jatra or Aarong which is held twice in the month of Ashar (June –July) when monsoon sets in, is a festival where Hindu and Muslims unite to buy household goods in merriment. It is a big occasion for the Hindu Muslim unity.

The Bangladesh culture has its diversity because of the presence of different religions such as Hindu, Buddhists, Muslims and Tribal's. The folk cults such as Sufi, Baul, Marfati, Maizbhandari, Vaishnava, etc., also play an

important role in the making of the Bengali culture. It should be mentioned here that India and Bangladesh were the land of Hindus initially. When Muslims came to this country many locals accepted Islam. These locals were Hindu and belonged to low castes. High caste Hindus did not accept Islam initially. These converts could not change their previous way of life and continued practicing without proper understanding of the new religion. As a result these new converts had with them many Hindu tenets and practices knowingly or unknowingly. In Bangladesh at least 70 percent of the Muslims still do not have proper understanding of Islam. Muslim marriage, khatna, akika, shabibarar have many Hindu practices. Water plays a key role in many such religious and cultural practices of the Muslims.

The Muslims brought in a liberal force in the sub-continent. The Muslim rulers followed a tolerant policy toward Hindus and others irrespective caste and creed. The Sufis who represented different religious ideals, however, played a great part in this regard. The name of the Panch Pir and the Satya Pir are the names which bear the mark of the Buddhist and Hindu influence on the Muslims. The sailors and boatmen of the country always invoke the blessing of Panch Pir along with the name of Pir Badar for their safety and security when they sail out.

Anthropologists and Folklorists agree that although religion is a part of culture, it, however, plays a vital part in the making of culture. For example, Bangladesh has people who have diverse types of religious beliefs. They are either Hindu or the Buddhist, on the one hand, or the Muslims and the Christians on the other. Each has its own culture. The Muslims and the Christians have faith in one God and

in no other deities. Their approach to life is thus different from the Hindus and the Buddhists.



Tribal Dance on Baishakhii Festival

In the Indian sub-continent, as well as in Bangladesh, the Hindus, the Buddhists and the Muslims all regard water as sacred and they have respective uses of water. In Bangladesh water plays a most important ecological element that has formed the cultural life. This happens because of the unique and extensive network of rivers and different water bodies that work in and through the land and life of the people. To the Hindu, the land and river stand as the Mother Goddess. The land becomes 'basumata' or Maa-Durga and the Ganges, Maa Ganga. The Hindus thus consider the Earth as the Mother Goddess. The concept of *bande -mataram* originates from this belief. The land and river are both sacred to him. It is why when the fishermen go to the river for fishing, they invoke the river as Maa-Ganga and seek her mercy for a good catch and also for keeping them safe while they are fishing. Water also removes all his sins when bathing. The Ganges water

is very sacred for all Hindus and Ganga-snana is thus very holy. Every year the Hindus gather at Langolbandh, a place near Dhaka where the river Ganga and the Brahmaputra meet, for a holy dip.

Islam, though considers water as sacred, it never becomes an idol of worship. But the ordinary Muslims who live in Bangladesh for generations consider the land or earth as *maa-khaki*. In Bangladesh, *khatna*, (circumcision) a religious rite, when performed by rural Muslims, have many things that relate to *maa-khaki* such as bunch of paddy (*dhaner shish*) and a piece of *Ilish* fish together with juice (*sarpath*). It is due to their poor or no knowledge about Islam. Allah never shares power with anybody and He has no partner. In many marriage festivals in rural areas one may notice use of Hindu rites and rituals such as *mongol-ghat* by ordinary Muslims. This is, however, done by rural women. Similarly, a Muslim saint named *Khaja Khizir* is considered a water saint and both Hindu and rural Muslims seek his mercy while moving out either into the sea or the river with merchandise. Hindus have a female idol, named *Jala-Devi* (water goddess). A special kind of prayer is very often made when one makes a sea-voyage for protection from storm and drowning. Rural people in Bangladesh generally build houses at a place where it is surrounded by trees. They have beliefs in trees, particularly banana tree, as symbol of fertility. All rural people, be he a Hindu or a Muslim, believe that there lives in the forest a female idol, named *bana-devi* or *bana-bibi* who has power to protect anybody entering into the forest if one worships her. This is true in regard to the *Sunderbans*, the biggest mangrove in Bangladesh. The wood-cutter or honey seeker prays to *Bana-Devi* or *Bana-Bibi* for protection from the tiger. This is the influence of animism which the savage or

rural people hold in high esteem despite their conversion into Islam.

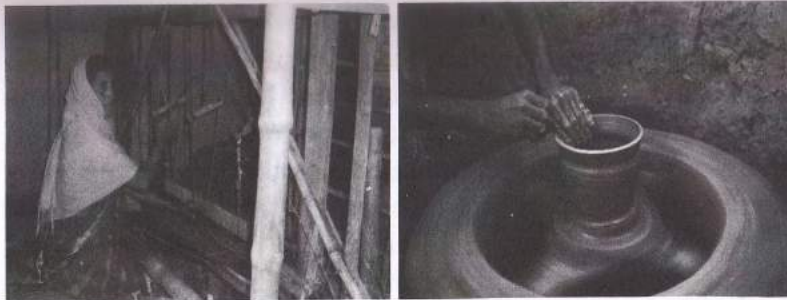
Many curious tenets and Hindu practices have entered into Muslim culture and these are not at all Islamic. The Sufis also have introduced a number of practices, which too are un-Islamic. The Sufis, who are considered Muslim mystics, incorporated many practices borrowed from different religious ideals. The Sufis are from Iran, and before it came under Islam it incorporated many diverse cultural heritages and traditions. The Aryans who came from the Scandinavian countries and Germany settled themselves in Central Asia or Persia, presently Iran. Zoroastrianism was a dominant religion in Persia. Hedonism, Judaism and Christianity prevailed alongside with animism and Baalism. Vaishnavism and Buddhism also formed a part of Persian culture. The Aryans brought with them this Persian culture when they invaded the country. They believed in the Sun God. They ruled the North and the Indus, known to be *Sapta-Sindhu* for generations. India was aryanized except in the South. The Southern part was peopled by a different linguistic race, known to be the *Kolarians* and the *Dravidians*. Their branches were spread over the Southeastern part, known as the land of the *Bangals* and the *Pundra*.

History records, that the Aryans who lived in Persia and the Aryans, who lived in the Indus basin of *Sapta-Sindhu*, stretching from the *Sind* to *Punjab*, shared the same language, religion and culture. These Vedic Aryans, although believing in one God, however, had several gods and goddesses whom they worshipped, especially *Fire* (*Agni*) and the *Sun* (*Barun*) under the name of *Mithra*. They also performed *Soma* sacrifice. Later they also worshipped *Indra*.

The objective of this study is to suggest that the Kolarians and the Dravidians were the original inhabitants of the Punjab and Sind, who were driven to the South when the Aryans conquered the land.

The Indian and Bengali culture which pre-Aryan or Dravidian culture had later on got mixed up with the invading Aryan culture. The Maurya, Gupta, Pala and Sena dynasties all left their mark on the land and people. Sanskrit was the Royal language. Caste system with the Brahmin on top was severely executed. The pre-Aryans who accepted Buddhism were tortured when the Palas lost to the Senas.

The Idyllic Culture



Woman weaver Pottery

The culture of Bangladesh is pre-eminently idyllic. The country has lush green meadows and overflowing rivers and rivulets. People here are moody. The wonderful nature has made them so. Here men and nature are almost the same. This is true with regard to their moods that also change according to a change in the season. The culture of Bangladesh is rural and folk based. The majority of the people still have been living in rural Bangladesh. Weaving

and Pottery still serve the need of the rural people. Beside them, there also lives carpenter, black-smiths, oil pressures, and shoe makers,

Impact of Folklore on Bengali life

Folklore also plays a significant role in the life and living condition of the people. There are proverbs known as 'Khana -r bacon' (sayings of Khana), a woman legendary in Bangladesh. These sayings are tested truth in house building, food and dress of the folk people in rural areas. The food, dress and housing pattern of the people are water oriented.

As Bangladesh is a country of rivers and rain water, these also condition the dress and housing pattern. Muslims use a kind of cloth, known as lungi, and Hindu community wears dhuti. Women wear sari, a common dress for Muslim and Hindu women. This type of dress is suitable in a country which is under water for at least half of the year. In view of constant rains, people also have a special kind of housing. These are made with corrugated iron for the roof, thatches, mud, wood and bamboo. This type of house is seen in rural areas where 85 percent of the total population lives. There is no doubt that poverty is one the causes for construction of houses with cheap material

Bangladesh is a land of six seasons. The culture of Bangladesh centres round these seasons. From Baishakh to Chaitra people move with the seasons.

This is manifested in various ways: in festivals, in games and sports, kite flying and boat races are one of the important occasions for people.



The country, however, is not an island and is not a land that lives on water, rather water is very much on it. It appears that one third of the country's total physical space is comprised of water in the dry season while in the rainy season over 70 % of the areas are submerged. The Ganges which takes the name of the Padma as it enters into Bangladesh and moves into Rajshahi, Kushtia and Faridpur zones is still the life line of Bangladesh along with the Brahmaputra-Jamuna on the north-east and the Meghna. These rivers and their innumerable tributaries are the source of her cultural heritage. These rivers stand as the mute monument of the success and failures of the Kings and Kingdoms, love and hatred of the people, their pleasure and pain joy and sufferings, their songs and dances, ceremonies and festivities, over and above the cycle of the seasons portraying the mood and emotions of the people, their moments of worries and awe during devastating flood, tidal bore and 'Kal-Baishakhi.'



Pahela Baishakh: Bengali New Year, A Glorious Occasion for National integrity and Chhyant observing Baishakahi festival at Ramna Gardens

Baishakh is the first month of Bengali year. The first day of the month is called the Pahela Baishakh. It is a national for the people of Bangladesh. The month is greeted by pomp and grandeur, feasting all day, visiting friends and relations. Business world organize colorful Haal-Khata inviting clients and others to participate in the program. A new account is opened. Sweets are distributed.

For the Hindus all over India and Bangladesh or in any part of the world, it connects Hindu puja and ritual (Source: HH Wilson, *The Religious Festivals of Hindus*, 1847). Feasting, bathing, alms giving and rejoicing are associated with Baishakhi puja.

However, in Bangladesh it is taken as a non-religious function.

Pahela Baishakh is the first day of Bengali month Baishakah. It is the beginning of New Year. Bengali year month is as follows : Baishakh (April 14 – May 14 = 31 days); Jaishtha (May 15—June 14=30 days); Ashar (June 15—July 15=31 days); Sraban (16 July – August 15 =31 days); Bhadra (August 16—September 15=31 days); Aswin (September 16—October 15=31 days); Kartik (October 16—November 14=30 days); Agrahayan (November 15—December 14+30 days; Paush (December 15—January 13= 30 days); Magh (January 14 –

January 12=30days) Falgun (January 13 – March 14=31days) and Chaitra (March 15—April 13=30days). Bengali Calendar has six seasons: (Baishakh—Jaishtha) Grishma/ Summer; (Asharr—Sraavan) Barsha/monsoon; (Bhadra—Aswin) Sharat/ Autumn; (Kartik—Agrahayan) Hemanta/ Late Autumn; (Paush—Magh) Sheet/ winter; (Falgun—Chaitra) Basanta/ spring.

Bengali year is colorful, consisting each two months as parts of a season and almost each season has a festival. Throughout the year, these seasons become a source of inspiration. Agriculture provides the succor (the food and drink); these seasons make Bengali people, men and women very romantic and soft. But these also make them hard and brave. Bengali people laid down their lives for mother tongue and that too is unique in the world and finally, the war of liberation-- our freedom.

Baishakh begins with summer invoking cyclone and storm to take away all unholy things from life. Let the life begin with cleanliness, clean heart and clean health, clean country, all afresh. Baishakh is historically important because the Mughal Emperor Akbar the Great fixed Baishakh, a Bengali month, instead of Hijri for collection of taxes from the peasants considering their convenience. In fact, agriculture is the basis of Bengali culture. Our literature, music, games and sports all center round agriculture and related activities. Our poets and writers all highlighted Bengali season which is part of Bengali life and culture. The pleasure of life which once commenced with the farm field in the peasant society is now a part of city life. Each city and town greet this day with pomp and grandeur, organizing colorful function. Bengali people greet each other, visiting and merry-making throughout the day. In Dhaka, this day is made most colorful and the

morning is greeted with music and feasting. For Hindu people Baishakh is sacred and they offer puja (worshipping) to Baisakah, a deity. Throughout India, Baishakh is observed as a puja (worshipping) festival. Muslims observe Baisakah as the New Year. According to Islam, nature and other things, however powerful these may be are brought under the control of human being. Earth, Water, Fire and Air, all are subordinate to human beings. Baishakh and all other seasons are the creation of Allah and these serve human being as Allah's design.

But the change in climate has seriously threatened our culture. Summer continues uninterrupted, winter is now far behind the spring.

Nabanna is associated with the Hindu puja but in Bangladesh it is a traditional festival on the occasion of harvesting a new crop. It takes place in Bengali month Agrahayaon, Autumn and late Autumn in English. It becomes a gala day for the farmers and the members of their family. Farmers rise to the height of exuberance. In the farm field, a team working for crop-cutting start singing folk song such as, dhua or barashey with much enthusiasm. After harvesting, the paddy is brought to the house by a bullock cart and kept in a fixed place, called, 'kholen' (courtyard) where husking and thrashing continue for long and then women folk perform winnowing in a team. All these are done in a festive mood. Homemade bread, rice pudding, sweets etc., are prepared with molasses (gur) from the date palm juice and distributed among friends and relations. Relations visit each other enjoying moments in relaxation. Sometime rich people in the village organize musical soiree by the boyatis (folk singers) for a night-long program. Men, women and children attend the program with much enthusiasm. Hindu community in the village

also offers prayer to the deities. Now Nabanna as a culture is being shared by the city people also. Colorful programs are being organized in the cities by different cultural organizations, universities. Colorful rallies parade through streets with decorative banners and festoons. Poetry reading sessions, musical soiree and discussions are also arranged on the occasion.

Folk Games and Sports, Swimming

Bangladesh is famous for its stick games (Laathi-Khela). It is an age old game. It was a part of Bengali culture since bygone days. It was introduced to keep the body and mind healthy. Gurusadai Dutta, the noted Indian Civil servant who gave up his job for the cause of the country and dedicated himself to rebuild the youth. His, 'brotocari' dance and stick-dance became very popular.



He was nationalist and contributed towards liberation war against the British. During Panchaet system in the British period, each village organized 'Lathial Bahini'. They used to protect the village from enemy attack and also from tigers and elephant. Afterwards, the Landlords or the Zeminders used to keep paid 'Lathial Bahini' for their protection.

Swimming: Brojen Das, the Champion swimmer

Land-river-people – these three go with the name Bangladesh. River provides Bangladesh with food and succor but at the same time she earned name and fame in the field of swimming. Once swimming was a pastime for each of Bangladesh's boys and girls.



Brojen Das is a famous name in Bangladesh. He was who became the champion of the swimming world when he conquered the toughest and very cold English channel on the afternoon of August 19, 1958. Swimmers of 23 countries also participated in the swimming competition. Brojen Das entered into cold English Channel on Aug 18, Midnight, 1958. It took a full one day to cross the English Channel. He easily swam ashore defeating his competitors. Brojen Das crossed the English Channel at least 6 times from 1958 to 1961.

As a son of the river and soil, Brojen practiced swimming in the Buri Ganga river. And on his own initiative he organized the annual swimming competition in Dhaka for the first time with the help of East Pakistan Sports Federation in 1953. On being invited to take part in the English Channel Swimming competition, Brojen Das started his practice training in the Sitalakshya river and in the Meghna covering a distance of 46 miles from Narayanganj to Chandpur. To our surprise, Brojen Das also swam in the Mediterranean from Capri to Naples prior to his swimming in the English Channel. The Queen Elizabeth the Second, the Queen of England, received Brojen Das on

his final crossing of the English Channel in 1961. Brojen Das represented Pakistan Swimming team to the Olympics in 1956

River: A source to Enjoyment, Music, Art and Poetry



Rivers in Bangladesh always have contributed to our life and living, enjoyment, music, art and poetry. When the rivers are full, people arrange boat race. It is a big source to the enjoyment of people living by the side of rivers. In Bangladesh water brings succor for life, its art, music and poetry. Boatmen sing while plying; they are part of the tide, they know the wear and tear of the time. They have faced the odds of life and never are they subdued. They look forward for a brave new world singing for life and life hereafter and life beyond. They combine the material with the spiritual. The 'River', to them, is a living being, – 'a motion, and a spirit that impels all thinking things and objects of all thoughts and rolls through all things'. Lalon Shah, Rabindranath, Nazrul and Jivanananda all made

people think differently when they made rivers as partners of life. The river which was Jivan-devata to Rabindranath Tagore was however, the Man of the Heart to Lalon Shah. Bangladesh, as an alluvial land and interspersed by numerous rivers, was called the Golden Bengal. The rivers and rains then contributed much to its great productivity and prosperity.

Water and Literature

Water and literature are both part of life. Since Bangladesh is a land of rivers, our writers have used it the way they have liked it. But Rabindranath brought in water in his writings in a superb way. Nazrul, Jivanananda have made use of water metaphysically. Lalon Shah, Hason Raja used water in their songs as symbols of mystic thought. Rabindranath covers the whole of it as it relates not only to his poetic vision but to the minute details of life also. The impact of the Padma is deep and penetrating. Sometimes he looks like Wordsworth or Coleridge but a close study of Tagore in his use of water speak of his greatness and here he is different from others.

Rabindranath Tagore, lived at his Shelaidah Kutthi (cottage) beside the Padma, when he was made zaminder or landlord by his father to look after the estate. The Gorai was little away from Shelaidah. These two rivers changed the life of Rabindranath. The poet admitted this consciously in his poems and letters. Tagore used to move from Shelaidah (Kushtia) to Shajadpur in Pabna and Patisar in Rajshahi in boats through the Padma and its off-shoot rivers. The Padma dominated all his lives. It actually made him the world poet. He wrote all his great works while he lived in this part of Bengal. In the dry season during winter, the

Padma shrank to a small river, the whole family used to live on the houseboat, the 'Padma' "moored on one of the gleaming white, spotlessly clean sandbanks known as chars". Tagore was awarded Nobel Prize for his works, Gitanjali, or Song Offerings, which he composed and translated during his stay in Bangladesh. His letters, known as Chhirapata or Torn leaves are world class and they present Tagore with his totality.

Tagore could never forget the Padma. In a time when he became sick and could not come back to Bangladesh, he wrote from his sick bed,

Once I lived on her sandy moorings
Isolated, far removed from men.
Walking at dawn I saw the morning star
At night I was watched by the Great Bear,
Asleep on the roof of the boat.
The myriad thoughts of my solitary days mingled
With the margins of her aloof current –
The way a traveler passes by
Domestic bliss and sorrow, near yet far.
(Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson)

Krishna and Robinson wrote in their book, "Rabindranath Tagore, the Myriad minded man" (1995: 111) that the Padma - both the boat and the river – were integral to the letters. At times they seem as much characters as the people Tagore described. Besides eating and sleeping on board, he wrote and read copiously there too. But most of all he watched life on shore. It might be a ferry endlessly loading and unloading villagers for market; or a group of boys raucously rolling a log along the bank until stopped by a disgusted small girl; or a tiny cowherd prodding a gigantic docile buffalo for no good reason; or a line of women in

dripping saris weaving gracefully homewards with water-jars on their hips; or a free—spirited village belle sailing away to another village leaving behind a crowd of tearful well-wishers; or a gypsy woman boldly giving a high-handed police constable a piece of her mind; or, less pleasantly, a woman well-wrapped against the cold bathing a small naked boy and clouting him when he shivered and coughed.

Nothing no matter how trivial, escaped Tagore's gaze. Everything was imbibed and stored until the moment was ripe for a poem or story or play or song to express it afresh." (p.111).

Rabindranath Tagore wrote a number of poems on the Padma. Here he studied the river in relation to man. His philosophy of life was also changed when he viewed the rivers as he through these day and night visiting people, sharing their way of life. "Sonar Tori" represents his philosophy of life. The river here is not a mere river. It is 'a motion and a spirit that impels all thinking things, and rolls through all objects of all thoughts'.

Clouds rumbling in the sky; teeming rain.
I sit on the river bank, sad and alone.
The sheaves lie gathered, harvest has ended,
and the river is swollen and fierce in its flow.
As we cut the paddy it started to rain.
One small paddy-field, no one but me -
Flood-waters twisting and swirling everywhere.
Trees on the far bank; smear shadows like ink
On a village painted on deep morning grey.
On this side a paddy-field, no one but me.
Who is this, steering close to the shore

singing? I feel that she is someone I know.
The sails are filled wide, she gazes ahead,
and Waves break helplessly against the boat each side.
I watch and feel I have seen her face before.

Oh to what foreign land do you sail?
Come to the bank and moor your boat for a while.
Go where you want to, give where you care to,
But come to the bank a moment, show your smile -
Take away my golden paddy when you sail.

Take it; take as much as you can load.
Is there more? No, none, I have put it aboard.
My intense labor here by the river -
I have parted with it all, layer upon layer;
Now take me as well, be kind, take me aboard.

No room, no room, the boat is too small.
Loaded with my gold paddy, the boat is full
Across the rain-sky clouds heave to and fro,
On the bare river-bank, I remain alone -
What had has gone: the golden boat took all.

Rabindrath Tagore explains the poem in the following words:

The world receives all the fruits of our labor, but it does not receive us. When I load the world's boat with the harvest of my entire life, I nurse the hope that I too might find a place there; but the world forgets us in a couple of days Those who have built up man in many ways through the ages, have their work immortalized among us, but they themselves, with their names and addresses, their joys and sorrows, have been lost in oblivion. Yet each of them had said to the world, "Take all I have. I have labored only for you; my happiness lies in giving to you. Take all I have.

But do not cast me aside, do not forget me; preserve my impress in my work. But where is the room? The harvest of our lives stays on in some form or other, but we ourselves do not stay on.

In his book, *The Religion of Man*, Rabindranath Tagore says, ".....I have expressed my belief that the first stage of my realization was through my feeling of intimacy with Nature --- not that Nature which has its channel of information for our mind and physical relationship with our living body, but that which satisfies our personality with manifestations that make our life rich and stimulate our imagination in the harmony of forms, colors, sounds and movements.When I was eighteen, a sudden spring breeze of religious experience for the first time came to my life and passed away leaving in my memory a direct message of spiritual reality. One day while I stood watching at early dawn the sun sending out its rays from behind the trees, I suddenly felt as if some ancient mist had a moment lifted from my sight, the morning light on the face of the world revealed an inner radiance of joy. The invisible screen of the commonplace was removed from all things and all men, and their ultimate significance was intensified in my mind; and this is the definition of beauty.

When I grew older and was employed in a responsible work in some villages I took my place in a neighborhood where the current of time ran slow and joys and sorrows had their simple and elemental shades and lights. The day which had its special significance for me comes with all its drifting trivialities of the commonplace of life. The ordinary work of my morning had come to a close, and before going to take my bath I stood for a moment at my window, overlooking a marketplace on the bank of a dry river bed, welcoming the first flood of rain along its

channel. Suddenly I became conscious of a stirring of soul within me. My word of experience in a moment seemed to become lighted, and facts that were detached and dim found a great unity of meaning. The feeling which I had was like that which a man, groping through fog without knowing his destination, might feel when he suddenly discovers that he stands before his own house.

In a similar manner, on that morning in the village the facts of my life suddenly appeared to me in a luminous unity of truth. All things that had seemed like vagrant waves were revealed to my mind in relation to a boundless sea. I felt sure that some Being who comprehended me and my world was seeking his best expression in all my experiences, uniting them into an ever-widening individuality which is a spiritual work of art. To this Being I was responsible; for the creation in me is as well as mine." (The Religion of Man: Reprint 2008)

One may feel happy thinking that such a philosophy of life can be attainable by those who lived by the river side as in the case of Rabindranath Tagore. Shelaidah and the Padma are the two symbolic names in the creation of a man who made the world spell bound by his poems as they listened to 'the Song Offerings' (Geetanjoli) at the residence of poet Rothenstein. These songs appeared to them as psalms of life having a beautiful exposition of unconventional and pure mystical doctrine as both the theme and the notes were uncommon. Tagore offered them to his 'Jivan-Devta' or the Man of his Heart in a devotional submission. Tagore was at once declared 'The World Poet' in 1913. W.B. Yeats talked about Tagore's Gitanjoli in the following way : "...I have carried the manuscript of these translation about with me for days, reading it in railway trains, or on the top of the omnibus and in restaurants, and I have often had to close it

lest some stranger would see how much it moved me....If the civilization of Bengal remains unbroken, if that common mind which as one divines—runs through all, is not, as with us, broken into dozen minds that no nothing of each other, something even of what is most subtle in these verses will have come, in a few generations, to the beggar on the roads...A whole people, a whole civilization, immeasurably strange to us, seems to have been taken up into this imagination; and yet we are not moved because of its strangeness, but because we have met our own image..."

But such things did not come to the World Poet easily. There is no doubt that he enjoyed the blessed mood with which he had known the unknown, yet could not attain the unattainable. The Unknown remains an elusive bird of the Baul, who met the poet when he lived at Shelaidah beside the Padma.

Rabindranath Tagore who was sometime zaminder or landlord of the Tagore Estate (1889- 1922) in Shelaidah under Kushtia district, was the first to bring the Bauls to the lime light of the scholastic world. He collected the songs of the Bauls and LalonFakir and published them in a noted Journal Probashi in 1915. In 1925 he made a speech on the Bauls at the National Philosophical Congress held in Calcutta under the auspices of the Calcutta University before distinguished scholars from home and abroad. In 1928 He published an article on the Bauls in the Viswa Bharati Quarterly. Later in 1930 he made a speech on the Bauls of Bengal and their philosophy under the title The Religion of Man at Oxford University. It was known as the Hibbert Lecture.

Commenting of the Bauls Rabindranath Tagore said, "...These people roam about singing their songs, one of

which I heard years ago from my roadside window, the first two lines remaining inscribed in my memory:

Nobody can tell me
Whence the Bird Unknown
Comes into the cage and goes out
I would feign put round its feet
The fetter of my mind
Could I but capture it?

This village poet evidently agrees with the sage of Upanishad who says that our mind comes back baffled in its attempt to reach the unknown bird, and yet this poet like the ancient sage does not give up adventure of the Infinite, thus implying there is way to its realization.

It reminds me of Shelley's poem in which he sings of the mystical beauty:

The awful shadow of some unknown power
Floats, though unseen, among us visiting
This various work with its inconstant wing
As summer winds that flower to flower
Like moonbeams that behind some piney mountain shower
It visits with inconstant in constant glance
Each human heart and countenance

That this unknown is the profoundest reality though difficult of comprehension, is equally admitted by the English poet as by the nameless village singer of Bengal in whose music vibrate the wing beats of the unknown bird.....Only Shelly's utterances is for the cultured few, while the Baul song is for the tillers of the soil, for the simple folk of our village households who are never bored by the mystic transcendentalism."

In fact Rabindranath was so much influenced by the Baul philosophy that in one of his later writings, he declared '...I felt that I had found my religion at last, the Religion of Man in which the infinite became defined in humanity. And finally the Man of the Heart of the Baul also became his 'Jivan -Devata', the Lord of his life. Elaborating this, Rabindranath said, "... It spoke of an intense yearning of the heart for the divine which is in man and not in the temple or scriptures, in images and symbols.'" (Rabindranath Tagore: The Religion of Man, London 1931 P.96-97 (Hilbert lecture delivered in Oxford University, 1930)

In 1913 Rabindranath earned Nobel Prize for his memorable work, Gitanjali, The Song Offerings. Most of the songs of the book contain Baul ideas and philosophy. And this idea was quite new to the western people and they were amazed and spell bound. Rabindranath admitted this and said, "those who are acquainted with my writings, they know it very well that I have expressed my love and regard for the Baul songs in a number of my essays. I have infused tunes of Baul songs into many of my songs and I have consciously or unconsciously followed them in other cases as well with regard to the composition of songs. From this, it is quite evident that the Baul tune and wordings have quite easily entered into my feelings which I cannot ignore," (Probashi, Caitra 1334, Calcutta, and English rendering by by the author.)

Rabindranath was drawn towards the Bauls because he found in their songs the philosophy of the Upanishad. He says, "The Upanishads say with great emphasis, Know thou the One, the Soul. It is the bridge leading to the immortal being. This is the ultimate end of man, to find the One which in him; which is truth, which is the soul; the key

with which he opens the gate of the spiritual life, the heavenly kingdom” (Rabindranath Tagore, *Sadhana*, 1920, Calcutta, p.30)

Tagore says, ‘.....It spoke of an intense yearning of the heart for the divine who is in Man and not in the temple or scriptures, in images and symbols.Since then I have often tried to meet these people, and sought to understand them through their songs, which are their only form of worship.....It is a village poet of East Bengal who preaches in a song the philosophical doctrine that the universe has its reality in its relation to the Person, which I translate in the following lines:

The sky and the earth are born of mine own eyes,
The hardness and softness, the cold and the heat are the products
Of mine own body.

This poet sings of the Eternal Person within him, coming out and appearing before his eyes, just as the Vedic Rishi speaks of the Person, who is in him, dwelling also in the heart of the man:

I have seen the vision,
The vision of mine own reveals itself, coming out from me.
(Hason Raza)

Cchinnapatra: (Torn Leaves) and The Glimpses of Bengal

Rabindranath is a poet of the soil, a true Bengali who represents his country truly through his creativity. His works, be it songs, poems, stories or essays, perfectly reflect water and culture. But nothing is absolutely perfect as those of his letters. Each of his letters, not less than 250, presents Bangladesh with her water and culture. These

letters are unique and significantly a marvel. In each letter, a beauty is born. In fact, these are brilliantly radiant with the hue of water and culture. He epitomized the Padma and its tributaries and the people around it. Rabindranath presents these letters as glimpses of Bengal. Bangladesh is a country where ‘nature never betrays the soul that loves her’. Shelaidah Shajadpur, Patisar all symbolize water and culture with the Padma flowing by majestically creating, destroying and again recreating until she meets her love—the Bay of Bengal. Life is portrayed with all its pleasure and pain, sorrow and enjoyment with sorrow dominating. There one ‘looks before and after and pines for what is not’ as ‘our sincerest laughter with some pain is fraught’. And ‘our sweetest songs are those that tale of a saddest thought. “Cinnapatra” or “Torn Leaves” span the most productive period of Tagore’s life. As a young man he intended to explore the unknown and the metaphysics of life into the deep delved earth. These letters in no way a kind of ‘literary extravagance’ as Tagore mentioned in the Introduction of his book, *The Glimpses of Bengal*, rather these suggest how great he was in analyzing human life and the mystery of the world as an onlooker while moving through rivers and reverine villages. He has seen life closely and could understand the darker and brighter aspects of life. Poverty, though reigned supreme in villages of Bangladesh, yet the rural people know that if winter comes, spring cannot be far behind. When the earth is dead because of severe drought it again gives birth to life when rain comes in. These letters present a philosophy that concerns the life cycle, as it is true with the cycle of nature also, ‘from dearth to plenty and from death to life’. Here land river and people all became one and lively in all his letters.

“Chinnapatra”, the torn leaves written by Rabindranath Tagore and addressed to Indira Devi Choudhurani, his niece and daughter of Satyendranath Tagore are unique as it reveals Tagore in his totality. These letters are not ordinary. These are also works of art. These letters are unique in a sense that Tagore tried to understand nature and people of Bangladesh as he moved through the Padma and the Gorai and innumerable rivers. Here he has been able to come close to the people in their day today life. He shared their pains and pleasure, their odds of life.

Here he gets the pulse of poetry and the life. He is more Romantic than Wordsworth. He has seen life more than he did. His works are the true voice of feeling. Rabindranath was fully committed to his people. He was not a social reformer but a poet who was visionary. Land River and people of Bangladesh made him. Tagore owed his greatness to them. In “Cinnapatra” Tagore comes out with all the glory and stands supreme. Here he gets nature and learns the philosophy of life. The Padma is symbolic to him. In his Torn Leaves, he initiates his reader into the secret of his soul. To Rabindranath, Bangladesh appears as formative influence superior to any other. She is the educator of his senses and mind alike, ‘It speaks to the child in the fleeting emotions of early years, and stirs the young poet to an ecstasy, the glow of which illuminates all his work and the rest.’ Land, river and people became a safe guide to his wisdom and goodness; it was the instinct with the irradiating presence of the divine. In Bangladesh he developed a kinship between man and nature. Here he nourished his hopes for a brave new world. He changed the concept of the Zeminder or the Land Lord. The strong republican sympathy prevailed upon him as a glow to his pictures of rural life in Bangladesh. “Here the real and the

ideal meet and blend.” Tagore atlast found his solace and love in huts, where poor men lie. His letters give a picturesque description of the rural Bangladesh surrounded by the Ganges (the Padma) and his tributaries. These rivers are sometimes full of waters during wet season and without or limited water during dry season.

Below are few examples of Tagore’s letters, translated by him and quoted from his book, *The Glimpses of Bengal*.

Tagore writes:

SHELIDAH (16TH June 1892)

The more one lives alone on the river or in the open country, the clearer it becomes that nothing is more beautiful or great than to perform the ordinary duties of one’s daily life simply naturally. From the grasses in the field to the stars in the sky, each one is doing just that; and there is such profound peace and surpassing beauty in nature because none of these tries forcibly to transgress its limitations.

Yet what is one does is by no means of little moment. The grass has to put forth all its energy to draw sustenance from the uttermost tips of its rootlets simply to grow where it is as grass; it does not vainly strive to become a banyan tree; and so the earth gains a lovely carpet of green. And, indeed, what little of beauty and peace is to be found in the societies of men is owing to daily performance of small duties, not to big doings and fine talk.

Perhaps because the whole of our life is not vividly present at each moment, some imaginary hope may lure, some glowing picture of future, untrammelled with everyday burdens, may tempt us; but these are illusory.

SHELIDAH (2nd Asrah, June 1892)

Yesterday, the first day of Asarah, the enthronement of the rainy season was celebrated with due pomp and circumstance. It was very hot the whole day, but in the afternoon dense clouds rolled up in stupendous masses. I thought to myself, this first day of the rains, I would rather risk getting wet than remain confined in my dungeon of a cabin.

The year 1293 will not come again in my life, and, for the matter of that how many more even of these first days of Asarah will come? My life would be sufficiently long could it number thirty of these first days of Asarah to which the poet of the Meghaduta has, for me at least, given special distinction. It sometimes strikes me how immensely fortunate I am that each day should take its place in my life, either reddened with the rising and setting sun, or refreshingly cool with deep, dark clouds, or blooming like a white flower in the moonlight.

What untold wealth!

A thousand years ago Kalidash welcomed the first day of Asarah; and once in every year of my life that same day of Asarah dawns in all its glory—

Of the Bengal era

In the Meghaduta (Cloud Messenger) of Kalidas a famous description of burst of the Monsoon begins with the words: On the first of Asarah.

That self- same day of the poet of old Ujjain, which has brought to countless men and women their joys of union, their pangs of separation.

Every year one such great, time-hallowed day drops out of my life; and the time will come when this day of Kalidas, this day of the Meghaduta, this eternal first day of the Rains in Hindustan, shall come no more for me. When I realise this I feel I want to take a good look at nature, to offer a conscious welcome to each day's sunrise, to say farewell to each day's setting sun, as to an intimate friend.

What a grand festival, what a vast theatre of festivity! And we cannot even fully respond to it, so far away do we live from the world! The light of the stars travels millions of miles further off are we!

The world into which I have tumbled is peopled with strange beings. They are always busy erecting walls and rules round themselves, and how careful they are with their curtains lest they should see! It is a wonder to me they have not made drab covers for flowering plants and put up a canopy to ward off the moon. If the next life is determined by the desire of this, then I should be reborn from our enshrouded planet into some free and open realm of joy.

Only those who cannot steep themselves in beauty to the full, despise it as an object of the senses. But those who have tested of its inexpressibility know how far it is beyond the highest powers of mere eye or ear—nay, even the heart is powerless to attain the end of its yearning.

P.S – I have left out the very thing I started to tell of. Don't be afraid, it won't take four more sheets. It is this that on the evening of the first of Asarah it came on to rain very heavily, in great lance – like showers. That is all.

Letter (Cchapatravali, The torn leaves)

On the way to Goalunda, 21st June 1892

Pictures in endless variety, of sandbanks, fields and their crops, and villages, glide into view on either hand --- of clouds floating in the sky, of colors blossoming when day meets night. Boats steal by, fishermen catch fish; the waters make liquid, caressing sounds throughout the livelong day; their broad expanse calms down in the evening stillness, like a child lulled to sleep, over whom all the stars in the boundless sky keep watch – then, as I sit up on wakeful nights, with sleeping banks on either side, the silence is broken only by an occasional cry of a jackal in the woods near some village, or by fragments undetermined by the keen current of the Padma, that tumble from the high cliff like bank into the water.

Not that the prospect is always of particular interest--- a yellowish sandbank, innocent of grass or tree, stretches away; an empty boat is tied to the edge; the bluish water, of the same shade as the hazy sky, flows past; yet I cannot tell you how it moves me. I suspect that the old desires and longings of my servant-ridden childhood----when in the solitary imprisonment of my room I pored over the Arabian Nights, and shared with Sinbad the sailor his adventures in many a strange land --- are not yet dead within me, but are roused at the sight of any empty boat tied to a sand bank.

If I had not heard fairy tales and read the Arabian Nights and Robinson Crusoe in childhood, I am sure views of distant banks, the farther side of wild fields would not have stirred me so--the whole world, in fact, would have had for me a different appeal.

What a maze of fancy and fact becomes tangled up within the mind of man! The different strands --petty and great--of story and event and picture, how they get knotted together!

Tagore's letters are a kind of poetry, different in color and shape, presenting life with so much and comfort! His genius is yet to be measured. No Nobel Prize can judge his talents. Tagore became a different man when he was in touch with land, river and people. In fact, it is Bangladesh that made him great as a world poet. His letters best represent the Bengali culture with river, rain and water as the household matter.

Such philosophy that represents the idyllic culture comes out only when one views the world and the life in its totality. Civilization does not mean cities and buildings, industries; rather it means those things with which man, the maker of cities and civilization lives to glorify not only the human beings but also the Person who made them. 'Man has made the entire geography of the earth his own, ignoring the boundaries of climate'. This is the spirit of man, his culture, that he produces and nature with its bounteous grace supplements it.

There are other poets and writers also such as Nazrul, Jivanananda, Jasimuddin, and Lalou Shah who also talked about river and nature and imbibed them in their works, but none as affluent with all these as Tagore held them. Tagore discovered in nature a 'soul' who at once became his friend, beloved and his spiritual guide, the guardian of all his moral being, the Jivan Devta or the Bauls' Man of the Heart. Tagore, a number of times admitted in his writings that he had found his religion in Baul faith. The Sufi, Hafiz, Omar Khayyam, Jalaluddin Rumi, Rabia, and the Vaishnava Radha-Krishna, Chaitanya, all have found their

period. The people of the world now recognize 21st of February, 1952 as the 'International Mother Language Day.' River and sea thus figure prominently in all our literature, music and paintings. Our folk literature which is orally transmitted from one generation to the other, the Mymensingh ballad, which thrilled the Western mind, particularly the Bengali belles as they fought for their survival in male dominated society is unique.' Mahua, the heroine in the folk drama, 'Mahua' committed suicide when her right to chose her life partner was terribly ignored or turned down by her foster father and instead she was asked to kill her love in their presence.

In this folk play of Bangladesh, which is over three hundred years old and was collected from a Mymensingh village by researchers in 1921, has presented a crucial gender issue which posed a serious threat to our development program. The play was usually sung in all the villages of Mymensingh and elsewhere as a part of our cultural heritage. In the literature and the music of the medieval period the sea and rivers thus became partners of life. They were never hostile to people. The rain and rivers have a softening influence on the people with a lyrical and musical temperament.

Our folk songs present a social relation. It takes into consideration the life of the rural people in moments of pleasure and pain. The rural people have dependence on nature and its beauty. They are deeply in communion with nature, the clouds and stars, rivers and trees. It is nature that tells them when to sow, when to reap; and when the fish will be in plenty. So the village singer either in farm field or in boat sings in praise of nature and God Almighty. The singer sings:

"It will rain fairly mother.
The country will turn green, thus will it rain,
Roundly, roundly will rain."

In fact, in Bangladesh, we have song for every month, for every season. Baromasya songs, the songs of 12 months are sung almost everywhere in Bangladesh.

A folk singer sings:

I shall be the swan and swim in your tank
I shall be a pigeon and sit on your roof;
I shall be perspiration and enter your body
I shall be a fly and kiss your cheek.

We know all songs of Bangladesh are related to water and river, yet not all songs are water based. But water has its various symbolic usages. Below are the few such songs.

River and Music

Bhatiali:

Bhatiali song has been developed in a region where rivers reign supreme. The word bhatiali refers to the downstream or ebb. It is generally taken as an act of proceeding along the course of a river during the ebb-tide. Sometimes boatmen during their up-journey across down streams also sing bhatiali song. But such type of song when sung during moving towards up-stream is not consistent with Bhatiali tune since it is performed by a forlorn individual singer when he is on the river or in the open field. It is seen that the boatman sings all alone and there is no other singer than himself. The song takes aloud flight of top notes in the beginning. Gradually the tune slides down to a lower note. The song is sung by boat men when gliding down from the

upper stream. The song speaks of a solo tune and lonely mood. It has a slow tempo and quite feeling. It has a philosophic approach to life. Dehatattva (body mystery), forms a part on occasion and is expressed through common place symbols and imagery. Bangladesh is a land of music. Here the river and rain have inspired poets and musicians to compose songs for the people. Of these Bhatiali and Shari are important. The word Bhatiali refers to downstream. Herein the boatmen while plying their boat quite leisurely to the downstream start singing Bhatiali songs to express a melancholic approach to life and living. The tune of the song is long drawn and lingering and in concert with the ripples of the river. It has an irresistible charm and takes one to a domain of melody since the major part of Bangladesh is rural, the people are also rural people, and their music is also folk music. Three of the world's largest rivers and their countless tributaries criss-cross the lush green land of Bengal. Here boats are the main means of communications. Where there are boats, there are boatmen too, and these boatmen sing the popular type of folk song called "Bhatiali." Like any folk song, the composers are after anonymity. These undaunted fearless boatmen, while rowing their boats on ocean-like rivers, sing out loud the "Sari" songs which are incomparable. They are composed and sung by boatmen of East Bengal. This branch is a fitting reminder that Bengal is the land of rivers. The mighty flow of the Ganga, Padma, Brahmaputra, Kabotaksha, Tista, Meghna, Madhumati and The Buriganga not only brought the Bengal Delta to life, it also gave its people one of the cheapest forms of transport. Also, it's not unusual that a lot of people live on boats. The beauty and tranquility of passing villages, the murmur of flowing water, whistling wind on the sail and the rhythms

of baitha (oar) can only bring a touch of poetic creativity to lonely hearts; away from home, separated from the loved ones. Sadly, it seems as if life has been passing by like the overflowing Padma. The thoughts become words, words become lyrics and rowing rhythms help to add a tune or two. The river banks, the destination, look close yet far—the longing seems forever. Memorable compositions survive generations, new ones replace the old, creative inspirations never will end. Few examples of Bhatiali song:

Bandhu kai raila re akuley bhasaia bandhu kai raila rey

Tr. My friend, where are you? Keeping me afloat in boundlessness where do you stay now?

Orey mon majhi tor baitha ne re

Ami to aar baitey parlam na

Tr. Oh, the boat-man of my mind

Take back the oar; I fail to row any more

Bhawaiya:

Bhawaiya is a popular music in north Bengal usually sung by the cartmen imitating a woman who is in deep love with a person who she has known for a short while and does not know if he would come back again. These songs occasionally have symbols of water in the form of boat and river. The song is melancholic and the theme refers to a very sad sensitive soul who cannot stand the separation from her lover.

Bhawaiya song:

Oki garial bhai, kato rabo ami panther dikey chayya re

Tr. O cart driver, how long shall I wait for your return

Sari

Sari (or Shari) songs are associated with boat races. Boat races used to be a popular pastime in Bangladesh during the monsoon months. Village youths would draw immense courage, determination and pleasure to take part and win in the races. Large crowds would gather along the banks of the river to celebrate the occasions. Boats would be gracefully prepared with colorful decorations. Sari means the song sung by the leader of the party in rows on boat. In Bangladesh, the song is sung when there is a 'nauka-baich' or boat race. It is a remarkable folk song of Bangladesh. There is always a festivity when such boat race takes place.

Sundariya majhir nau ujan cale dhaiya

Aga pachai nishan orei

Nei jubotir mon kaira re

Tr. The boat of, Sundairya, the boat man,

Rushes upstream speedily

Flags are fluttering in the front and also in the back

And it catches the mind of the young lassies.

Dhuagaan

Dhua is also another kind of folksong and is sung by the bayati or folk singers, during any festival in the village. It is sung during harvesting time. Pagla Kanai, a noted folk singer of Jhenidah, presently a district of Bangladesh earned name and fame as a performer. Dhua also speaks of human body and the creation of universe and how does it relate to each other. The boatmen also sing this type of song when they ply their boat in a leisurely mood.

The word Jari refers to the Persian word Zari meaning lamentation. Jari gaan connects Muharram festival but the song is sung commemorating a battle that occurred in 680 A.D. (61 A.H.) on



the banks of the Euphrates river at a sight known as Karbala in Iraq. Hussain the grandson of the prophet Hazrath Muhammad peace be upon him was killed with the members of his family by the army of the current caliph of the Muslim world, named Yazid after sixty years of the Prophet's death. Most of the Jernigan refers to water for drink which was not available to Hussain's family because of Yazid's army. A song is sung in the following ways:

At Karbala, Hussain wept bitterly and prayed to Allah

"In this danger before me, no one but you, Allah is my friend.

Each one of my followers has died – without food, without water. I hear our people crying in the camp for water:

I have no friend left who can fetch water." So saying Husain was weeping bitterly.

Traditionally, Kabials belonged to Hindu community and they derived their materials from the Hindu mythology and Hindu way of life. The Muslim Kabials also composed various types of songs, and the chief being known as Jarigaan. The Muslim folk poets were inspired by life and activities of the Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) and his disciples, and their themes were based on Islamic folk heroes and religious beliefs. It was not uncommon, however, to find Hindu and Muslim kabials, participating

in all such folk songs composed for both Hindu and Muslim religious beliefs. The Muslim folk singers were much more popular as they composed songs relating to Hindu theme and participating in musical soiree. In Bangladesh there always existed Hindu-Muslim amity for years.

Vaisnava sect in Bengal

In Bangladesh for generations there had been a sect known as Vaisnava. They were also known as bostoms. They had female partners known as bostomi. They were not married and had no children. They exchanged beads and could stay with one another as long as they liked. They belonged to bhakti cult centering Radha and Krishna. Chaitanya Deva also was a follower of Krishna cult. Vaisnava movement had its rise in the 11th and 12th century. The Bhakti cult was an off-shoot of Vaisnava sect. Vaisnava had its origin in god Vishnu. Krishna was his follower Both Vaisnava and Bhakti cult were erotic. Both these cult considered bhagabat. As their scripture. Of all the qualities of the Bhagabat, love played the key role. Guru or the religious mentor is the supreme in the cult.

It may be pointed out that love is an invention of the eleventh century. The Charya songs of the Buddhist mystics had first used love in their songs. In many of the songs of Vaisnava, there had been use of water:

O my friend, my sorrow is unending
It is the rainy season, and my house is empty.
The sky is filled with seething clouds,
The earth with rain, and my love is far away.
Cruel Kama pierces me with his sharp arrows:

The lightning flashes, peacocks dance,
The frogs and water birds, drunk with delight,
Call constantly. And my heart is bursting.

A darkness fills the earth;
The sky lights restlessly.

Vidyapati says,

How will you pass the night without your lord.

(Edward C. Dimock, jr. *Doctrine and Practice among Vaisnava of Bengal in Krishna: Myths, Rites and Attitudes*, Edited by Milton Singer, 1966, USA, p.61)

The gopis have longing for Krishna and are deeply in love with him; man by his nature longs for union with God, though, by nature of the two, actual union is impossible. But the gopis love for Krishna is most satisfying.

Yadunatha sings:

Water to the creatures of sea,
And nectar to the cakora bird;
Night is companion to the stars,
As is my love to Krishna.

.....

.....

As day without the sun,
So is my heart without my lord.

Yadunatha says, Cherish this and keep it young,
O lucky girl! Who deeply loves.

(Dimock, *ibid* p.62)

Dimock comments, "...The Vaisnava lyrics are religious documents, but they are also love poetry. The poets found in Radha especially not only an aspect of divinity, but a real woman. Her affair with Krishna, with all the jealousies and pique, the angers and satisfactions of human love, is not only allegory but is marked with human passion. And this

lends to it a quality of warmth not usual in religious poets of any time or place.” (Dimock, *ibid* p.63)

Baul Cult

The word 'Baul' originated from the Persian word, 'Baal' means one who is infatuated or mad in love. It is like the word, 'Diwana' or mad in love. These people who are called Baul do not associate with traditional lifestyle or norms. Bauls have Sufi bias and do not believe in religious scriptures. They are a sort of iconoclast. They believe in humanism and disregard color, caste and custom. They take 'soul' as the 'beloved', as it connects the Divinity and identifies Him as the Man of the Heart. And the Bauls have a longing for Him who acts as his guide and guardian of all his moral being.



Baul Mahim Shah

Sufism was introduced into almost all parts of Bengal and the Bauls were deeply influenced by the Sufi and Vaishnava philosophy. Lalan Fakir for example was certainly one of the leading Bauls who refused to be identified with any one religion. Bauls were intensely occupied with either Sufi or Tantric meditation.

Baul song is the most popular mystic song Bangladesh and is sung by a group of religious mendicants either singly or jointly who move from place to place as nomads. The Bauls belong to an obscure Sufi sect who are esoteric and move from place to place as nomads singing and begging for their livelihood. The Bauls carry with them ek-tara (one stringed), do-tara (two stringed) and a dugi (kettle drum). Dugi is tied to the waist of the singer. 'Water' forms the basis of their religious cult, which is also erotic in nature. There is various symbolic use of water and fish in the songs of the Bauls and Lalon.

One such song is as follows:
When the web is caste
All types of fish will be netted,
Regardless of big or small

Lalon Shah is the chief exponent of this cult in Bangladesh. The poet Rabindranath was greatly influenced by its philosophy which speaks of religious syncretism, anti-caste system, iconoclastic approach and humanism. There was a time when rural Bangladesh would resonate with the beats of the dugi, the ektara and the mystical songs of the Bauls. The Bauls are very colorful community and known for their wit, humor, nomadic life-style and unique mystical or Sufi music. They express their emotions, feelings, and philosophy through their songs. These songs are a kind of faith, dedicated to the Man of the Heart who, though invisible, is never away from the persons who love him. Today, this community is confronted with competition from the electronic media and is in danger of losing its charm.

The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) proclaimed Bangladesh's

traditional Baul Songs as a "Masterpiece" of Heritage of Humanity (November 28, 2005).

Baul Music and its characteristics

Baul songs form an important genre of Folk songs of Bangladesh and are believed to date back to the 14-15th century or earlier because of the Sufi contact. Baul song was in vogue and it was orally transmitted (by word or mouth). Common people knew the meaning of the term Baul, Baur and Aul and it was why Shah Muhammad Sagir, Daulat Ujir Bahram Khan, used these terms in their poetical works. But no Baul song is available except the songs of Kabir. Lately Carya songs have been taken as the earliest form of Baul songs. The songs of Sher Ali, Budu Shah Lalon Shah, Panju Shah, Siraj Shah and Duddu Shah were all orally transmitted and these might have been written by their contemporaries or the followers afterwards. As the Bauls do not believe in propaganda and consider these songs as part of religious folk songs, they make these songs for public enjoyment and for their disciples' instruction or understanding. These songs do not represent collective thinking. They are composed by individuals. These songs are also known in rural areas as dhua gaan (Metaphysical songs). Bhav-Sangeet (mystic song) is devotional and ritualistic. It is sung in the Mazar/Akhra of the Baul Guru and also outside. Songs of Lalon Shah, Panju Shah, Duddu Shah and Gagan Harkara were considered Bhav-Sangeet. Dhua Gaan was sung by Pagla Kanai, Bijoy Sarkar and Idu Biswas. The vocabulary of these songs is colloquial. These songs, however, belong to Kushtia, Jessore, Faridpur and Khulna regions. Although songs of Hason Raja and Shah Abdul Karim are Murshida-Marefati songs, these are now

considered as Baul songs. Baul song or Baul music is the most popular folk music of Bangladesh, sung by the members of an obscure Baul Sufi cult and noted for its mystic music and esoteric practices and unconventional approach to life. It is a type of traditionally based Sufi music and has been transmitted orally from the medieval period to the present time.

Performance of the Baul songs has two frame works: (1) dainya. Here the performer sings in praise of his guru or murshid in deep reverence (2) prabarta. Here the songs are of general nature, concerning creation of the universe and the human life. There are songs which are also known as raga dainya and raga prabarta. These ragas are not the Ragas of classical music but of the Bhajans (devotional songs). Baulsong is inspired by both Sufism and Vaishnavism, expressing deep love or longing for the divine soul. This sentiment is especially noticeable in raga dainya.

Baul songs may be sung at Baul Akhras or in the open air. At Akhras, songs are sung in the style of hamd (song in praise of Allah, Guru/Murshid), Ghajal or Nath (song in praise of the Prophet Muhammad (Sm)), in a mellow voice and to a soft beat. Baul songs at open-air functions are sung at a high pitch, to the accompaniment of instruments such as the Ektara, Dugdugi, Khamak, Dholak, Sarinda, and Dotara. The common Tala or musical measure is dadra, kaharba, jhumur, ektal or jhanptal. The singers occasionally dance as they sing. Baul songs as sung in the akhra are not accompanied by dancing. Bauls may present songs singly or in groups. There is usually one main presenter; others join him for a chorus or dhua.

In the past there were no fixed tunes for Baul songs. Subsequently, Lalon's disciple, Maniruddin Fakir, and his

disciple, Khoda Baksh, attempted to put these songs into a particular frame. Khoda Baksh's disciple, Amulya Shah, was a reputed musicologist who set Baul songs, especially Lalon songs, to music. These songs were developed by his disciples: Behal Shah, Shukchand, Dasi Fakirani, Chandar Gauhar, Takkel Fakir, Mate Shah, Nimai Shah, Khorshed Shah, Mahendra Gosain, Kanai Kshyapa and Moti Fakirani. These were further developed in later years by Mahim Shah, Khoda Baksh Shah, Jharu Shah, Karim Shah Bader Shah, Swarup Shah Bellal Shah, Fakirchand, Jomela, Suklur Shah, Laily and Golam Yasin Shah.

Baul songs generally have two tunes, one for the first part of the song and the other for the second. Towards the end, part of the second stave is rendered again at a quick tempo. The first and middle staves are very important. The first stave is often called *dhuua*, *mukh* or *mahada*. In songs with a fast tempo, the first stave is repeated after every second stave. Some songs have ascending and descending rhythms, while others are accompanied by dancing, believed to have originated from the rural Panchali.

Baul music has been composed and delivered, in a traditional style from Guru to disciple. It is one of the oldest and fascinating mystic songs representing Sufi, Sahajiya and Bhakti traditions and these include different religious beliefs such as Baal erotic cult, Tantrism, Buddhism, Sufism, and Vaishnavism. The performers take to dance when occasion so demands, music and singing conveying intimate joy and universal brotherhood and their longing for a universal soul that becomes the Man of the Heart. In Baul song of Bangladesh there is influence of Carya songs so far as the text and structure of the song is concerned. The texts and structure of the Carya and Baul songs together with refrain suggest that their musical form

is strikingly similar to each other. Sama songs of the Sufis are also similar to Bauls. In Baul songs the refrain generally recurs at the end of each stanza. The stanzas are roughly divided into two musical phrases, the first of which tends to hover around the lower tetra chord of the basic octave range, while the second reaches up to the higher tonic before descending again to the refrain that cadences on the lower tonic. They transmit the insights and mysticism in metaphors taken from day to day life.

In West Bengal, Baul songs are known as Rarh / Radh Baul, (Bauls of Birbhum region). History suggests that a section of the Bauls with Hindu religious background of the medieval ages settled in Birbhum district. Bauls with Sufi faith are found flourishing in Bangladesh (western part of Bangladesh) during the nineteenth century. This actually resulted in a significant expression in text and performance. The music of Rarrh / Radh Bauls is different from Bangladesh. Some Baul songs have been influenced by the Kirtan, reflecting the Vaisnavainfluence. The Vaishnava Bauls are mainly from the 24 Parganas and Birbhum. They accept Krisna, Caitanya Dev and Joydev as of their own faith. Baul songs, however, have also been heavily influenced by Sufism. Baul songs are common to Bangladesh and West Bengal, India, but these differ somewhat in tune and theme. In Baul songs from West Bengal there is a strong influence of Sahajiya Vaisnavism, whereas in Bangladesh the influence of Sufi ghazals is stronger.

Baul songs are at times elegiac in tone, reflecting the pain of deprivation or longing for the Divine Soul (*moner manush*). They are inspired by the idea that the human body is the seat of all truths and herein lies *maner manush* or the Man of the Heart). Every song may be interpreted in

two ways: in terms of human love and in terms of divine love. Bauls refer to these two ways as the lower stream and the upper stream.

Baul Gharana

There are five Gharanas of Baul songs, devolving from the well-known exponents of this genre: Lalon Shahi, Panju Shahi, Delbar Shahi, Ujal Shahi and Panchu Shahi. Although Baul songs come mainly from the region of Kushtia, singers of other regions bring in different influences particularly in tunes and style. At times even the words vary.

At times Baul songs reflect the influence of bhatiyali tunes. Majhees (boatmen) also sing these songs while plying their boats in the rivers. Baul songs are not confined to Bauls, as non-Bauls too have adopted them because of their profound themes. During epidemics, villagers ask Bauls to sing and pray, believing that this will cleanse their village of pestilence. There is no doubt that Baul music undoubtedly has a glorious past. Abdul Wali (1855- 1926) a noted scholar and a life member of the Asiatic Society of Bengal presented a paper in Calcutta at a general meeting of the Anthropological Society, on Wednesday, the 30th November, 1898. Lt. Colonel G. Waters, I.M.S. presided over the meeting. Wali's paper was entitled as "On Curious Tenets and Practices of a Certain Class of Faquirs in Bengal." The paper was later published in the Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay, Vol.V, No 4, page- 203 – 218, 1900... In his paper Wali mentioned the names of Lalon Shah, Siraj Shah, Shah, Shir Ali, and Budhu Shah. Of them, Shir Ali and Budhu Shah belonged to the 24 Parganas. Lalon Shah and Siraj Shah were from

Jessore. Wali in his paper said 'The songs of Lalon Shah, Siraj Shah and other Fakirs, sung by boat-men and others were very good in their own way', He added.

Music in which they excel and which they much practice, is one of their chief instruments of winning the hearts. As regards Allan Shah, he said, " Another renowned and the most melodious versifier, whose 'dues' are the rage of the lower classes, and sung by boatmen and others, was the far famed " Allan Shah". He was a disciple of Sera Shah and both were born at the village Harrisburg, sub-division Jhenidah, District Jessore. Having traveled long and made pilgrimages to Jagannath and other shrines, and met all sorts of devotees, he at last settled at Mauza Siuriya; near the sub-divisional headquarter of Kushtiya (Nadiya). Here he lived, feasted, sang and worshipped and was known as a Kayastha, and where he died some ten years ago. His disciples are many, and his songs are numerous" (Journal of the Asiatic Society Vol.V, 1900, p.17). Kabîr is one of the most interesting personalities in the history of Indian mysticism. Born in or near Benares, of Mohammedan parents, he had brought to Northern India the religious revival that had shown a reaction against the increasing formalism of the orthodox cult. Kabir talked about heart or soul as the prime object of his love for humanity against the intense intellectualism of the Vedanta philosophy, the exaggerated monism which that philosophy proclaimed. It took preaching as the form of an ardent personal devotion to the God. He made his religion as the mystical religion of love.

Kabir was greatly influenced by the impassioned poetry and deep philosophy of the great Persian mystics, Attâr, Sadi, Jalaluddin Rumi, and Hafiz. These Sufi poets exercised a powerful influence on the religious thought of

India. Kabir dreamed of reconciling this intense and personal Mohammedan mysticism with the traditional theology of Hinduism. -Some have regarded both these great religious leaders as influenced also by Christian thought and life: We may safely assert, however, that in their teachings, two—perhaps three—apparently antagonistic streams of intense spiritual culture met, as Jewish and Hellenistic thought met in the early Christian Church: and it is one of the outstanding characteristics of Kabir's genius that he was able in his poems to fuse them into one.

Lalon Shah

Lalon Shah (1774(?)-1890) was a Sufi and Vaishnava Baul. He was a religious leader (guru or mentor) of Baul community. He was a composer of Baul songs and also a noted performer. According to tradition, he was born in a village Kulbaria Harishpur, Thana Harinakundu, under Jhenidah district (formerly a subdivision of Jessore) and later he came to Kushtia where he was known as 'Kayastha', a caste Hindu. In his young age he was found unconscious by the side of Kaliganga River adjacent to Seuria village under Kumerkhali Upozila. Matijan Bibi wife of one Malom Fakhir of the same village picked him up while she came to the river for fetching water and took him to her house. Later it was found that he had been suffering from small pox. Motijan and her husband cured him of his disease. Lalon did not disclose his identity for reasons known only to him and expressed his desire to stay with Malom's family. Both Malom and Motijan were disciples of one Seraj Shah, a Sufi Fakhir who belonged to Harishpur village of Harinakundu Thana of present

Jhenidah district. Once when he came to the house of Malom Fakhir, Seraj inducted Lalon to his cult. Since then, Lalon used to accompany him on most occasion. Molom being childless took Lalon as his foster child and arranged an Akhra or a religious resort within his property. Since then, Lalon lived there with a young girl, named Bishaka who, he brought from an unknown place. She used to take care of Lalon and was treated by his followers as 'Guru Maa'. Lalon died at Seuria on October, 17, 1890. Both Lalon and Bishaka were buried in the same place known today as Lalon Mazar. Lalon was known to the Tagore Estate at Shelaidah where the grandfather of Rabindranath Prince Dwarakanath Tagore established his Zemindari Estate during the British period. Rabindranath's father Debendranath Tagore looked after the Estate and Zemindari. Many of the members of Tagore family of Jorashakon, Calcutta, including Jyotindranath Tagore, an elder brother to Rabindranath who took over the management of the Estate but finally, Debendranath asked Rabindranath to look after the Estate in 1888-89. Lalon Fakhir was known to the Tagore family at Shelaidah and it was Jyotirindranath Tagore who made a pencil sketch of Lalon Fakhir on the Padma boat over the Ganges. Rabindranath Tagore heard of him when he came to Selaidah first with his father and next with his elder brother, Jyotirindranath Tagore. Lalon used to visit to the Tagore Estate and performed songs with others. Rabindranath came to Seuria on a number of occasions. He collected many of Lalon's songs, written in two 'khata' (note book) personally. It is reported that he donated money to make the grave brick -built. Later in 1963, Lalon Folk Literature Centre was founded by local initiative led by Prof. Anwarul Karim, the researcher of the Baul poet Lalon Fakhir and help from the District Administration of

Kushtia. Mr. Q.G. the Deputy Commissioner, Kushtia set up a mausoleum on the Mazar of Lalon Fakir, built the entrance gate and a Folk Literature Centre. It was opened by the Governor of East Pakistan, Mr. Monem Khan. After independence further improvement was made with the help of the government and local initiatives. Prof. Anwarul Karim, who was awarded a Ph.D. degree on the Baul cult and Lalon Fakir, was made the Founder Director of Lalon Academy.

Lalon was a humanist and an iconoclast who rejected all distinctions of caste and creed. He was a 'bayati', composer and performer of songs. During his life, he organized a three day program on a full moon night, Dol-Purnima, (birth date of Krishna) in the month of Falgun (March-April) after his death, his followers used to arrange program on October 17, and the first day of Bengali month Kartic. After Independence, the government of Bangladesh led by Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, built a complex at Seuria. It has an Auditorium, a Library, an Office and open space within the complex for the Bauls to stay as and when required. The government also built a performing stage over a vast open space beside the Academy. Thousands of Bauls come to the Mazar of Lalon Shah twice a year, one in Dol-Purnima and another in October, on the occasion of his death anniversary. During these three-day program tens of thousand comes to the Lalon Mazar and pays rich tributes to Lalon Fakhir.

Lalon Shah left no written records of his songs. His disciples and followers communicate his songs orally when they perform.

A pencil sketch by Jyotindranath Tagore, May 05, 1889 at the Padma Boat over the Padma (The Ganges) near the

Kuthibari at Shelaidah. The sketch of Lalon Shah by Jyotindranath Tagore was never used; instead, an imaginary pencil sketch by Nandalal Basu was in vogue. An initiative was taken by the author when he was the founder Director Lalon Academy, Kushtia. Immediately after liberation, a number of old people were interviewed in Seuria village and they claimed that they had seen Lalon Fakir at their childhood. Their age varied from 90-95.

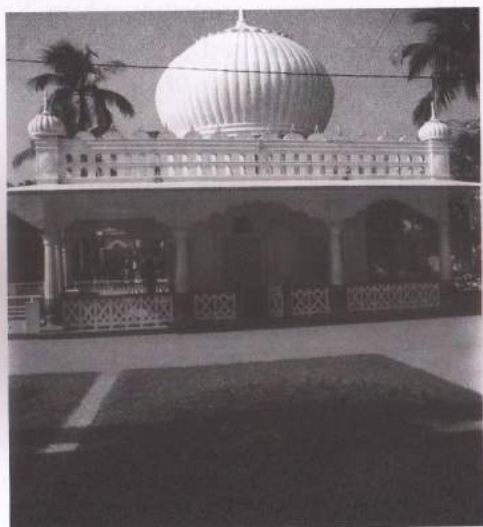


The sketch of Lalon Shah by Jyotirindra Nath Tagore

These people vehemently challenged the pencil sketch made by Nandalal Basu. Later, two scholars in Wes Bengal, India Prof. Tushar Chatterji and Prof. Sanat Kumar Mitra discovered the pencil sketch made by Jyotindranath Tagore from Rabindra Bharati museum. They sent a copy to the author and it was kept in the Lalon museum and from there the sketch of Lalon Shah was copied by others.

In Bengali culture Lalon Shah has become an icon of religious tolerance and secularism whose songs inspired and influenced many poets and social and religious

thinkers, including Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam. He revolted against social custom and caste system and rejected all distinctions of caste and creed." He was non-communal, a humanist and an iconoclast who denounced caste and creed.



Lalon Mausoleum or Shrine

Lalon Shah Mausoleum or Mazar was built in the year 1963 at Seuria village under Kumerkhali Thana now Upozila in the district of Kushtia with the initiative of the present author in collaboration with the then District administration. Mr. Q.G. Ahad, the then Deputy Commissioner arranged fund from the government and also from the Zila Parisad. The Deputy Commissioner was also the Chairman of the Zila Parisad. The local philanthropists also contributed to the construction of the mausoleum and the ornamented gate. It was set up on the Akhra (religious resort) of Lalon donated by his guardian father and mother Malom and his wife Motijan of Seuria village for carrying on with his spiritual activities. Both were Sufi fakirs and

were disciple of Sera Shah, a native fakir. Lalon also was inducted to his cult afterwards. Lalon Loke Shahitya Kendra was converted into a Lalon Academy in 1975. At present a big Lalon complex with an auditorium, open and spacious floor for Bauls to live in congregation along with a three storied office, library and museum has been built by the present government. A performing stage for the Bauls has also been built in an open space beside the dead Kaliganga river. Twice every year, the Bauls use to come to the shrine of Lalon Shah, one during dole-purnima (March April) and another on the death anniversary of Lalon Shah, 1st of Bengali month Kartick (17th October) for a three day program to pay homage to their guru or spiritual mentor. Lalon used to perform dole-purnima during his time for three days. During these three days, the Bauls are fed three times a day. The morning meal is called balya –Sheba, Lunch and night meals are called purna-sheba or full meal and in between adhibesh or discussion along with musical performance is held and it continues throughout the night.

Shelaidah Rabindra Kutthibari



Shelaidah Kuthibari stands on the south bank of the river Padma in Kumarkhali upazila in Kushtia district and it is about six miles north of the district headquarters, Kushtia, across the Gorai River. Shelaidaha is also famous for the Tagore's kachhari and Tahsil office. Here also was located the post office of the Birahimpur zemindari and the historic kuthibadi (home) of Rabindranath Tagore. Gagan Harkara the noted Baul singer and a contemporary of Lalon Fakir was the postman. Rabindranath's elder brother Jyotirindranath Tagore made a pencil sketch of Lalon Fakir on May 5, 1889.

Rabindranath set up a charitable dispensary in the name of his father, Maharshi Devendranath. Shelaidah was also famous for indigo cultivation. A businessman, Shelly, had his office and a residence at Shelaidah beside the Padma. After his death, his house and office became a part of the Tagore Estate. Rabindranath Tagore lived here for some time.

Shelaidh Kuthibadi is a picturesque two and a half-storied terraced bungalow, constructed with brick, timber, corrugated tin sheets and Raniganj tiles. Shelaidaha Kuthibari is nestled within about eleven acres of beautiful orchards of mango, jackfruit and other fruits, evergreen trees, a flower garden and two ponds. Shelaidaha has an enchanting natural beauty and rural landscape. The Villa, enclosed within a boundary wall, is entered through a simple but attractive gateway on the

South. It accommodates about 17 apartments of various sizes with a large central hall on the ground and the first floors. Each of the open terraces on the ground and the first floors is partly covered with a sloping roof of Raniganj tiles, while the central part over the ground floor has a

pitched roof with gable ends. A short pyramidal crest farther variegates the roof over the second storey. A tennis court located on the northeast part of the Kuthibari was added attraction as the tourists to the Kuthibari used to play tennis both in the morning and in the afternoon. On the western part of the Kuthibari there was a pond overlooking the meadows and deep meadows. Two 'Bakul' trees were planted beside the staircase that kissed the pond by the Tagores. Rabindranath used to sit here occasionally enjoying the beauty of sunset.

Rabindranath lived here for the rest of the period of his Zemindari. Prince Dwarakanath Tagore, the Grand father of Rabindranath purchased the Zemindari Estate in three places, one at Shelaidah in Kushtia under Birahimpur Paragana, Shahajadpur in Pabna under Shahjadpur Pargana and Patisar in Rajshahi under Kaligram Pargana during the British period. Kushtia was then a sub-division of Nadia district.

After his death, his son Devendranath looked after the Zemindari and also founded Tagore & Company for carrying out other business. In his old age, Rabindranath's elder brothers could not maintain the Zemindari properly. The oldest, Satyandranath Tagore, was a civil servant and was busy doing his job. Finally Devendranath Tagore decided that Rabindranath should look after the Estate. It was a great challenge and responsibility for Tagore. Rabindranath took it as an opportunity for his writing as this would bring him in contact with the people around, and also nature that had special attraction for him for years. Rabindranath came to Bangladesh twice in his young age. First when his elder brother, Jyatirindranath Tagore took him to Shelaidah, Kushtia in 1875 and the following year, Rabindranath accompanied his father Devendranath and

visited Shelaidah in 1876. These two visits made a lasting impression on him. The mighty Padma and the small villages all around together with the lush green beauty of nature presented a panoramic view.

Rabindranath took over the responsibility of the Tagore Estate in 1889 at the age of 28. By this time, he was married and settled at Shelaidah. There the poet lived for more than a decade at irregular intervals between 1889 and 1901. During his stay at Shelaidah, eminent scientists, literateurs and intelligentsia of Bengal including Sir Jagadish Chandra Basu, Djendralal Roy and Lokendranath Palit and many others visited him on various occasions. There the poet lived for more than a decade at irregular intervals between 1889 and 1901. Sitting at his desk in the Kuthibari or on a boat on the Padma, Rabindranath wrote a number of masterpieces: *Sonar Tari*, *Chitra*, *Chaitali*, *Katha O Kahini*, *Kshanika*, most of the poems of *Naibedya* and *Kheya*, and the songs of *GITANJALI* and *Gitimalya*. It was here, in 1912, that the poet started his translation of *Gitanjali* into English, which earned him the Nobel Prize in 1913. Rabindranath had a deep attachment for Shilaidaha and the Padma, which is evident in his *Chhinna Patrabali*. The poet once wrote in a letter, 'The holy place of my literary pursuits during my youth and middle age was the village of Shilaidaha kissed by the waves of the Padma'.

Rabindranath started his experimental work with village development and modern methods of cultivation at Shilaidaha, which he later undertook at Patisar. He established a primary school there in the name of Pratima Devi, his daughter-in-law. With his prize money the poet set up the Agricultural bank at Patisar for helping the poor farmers. He did it in Shelaidah where his son Rathindranath Tagore set up an agricultural farm.

The present Shelaidah Kuthibari was constructed by Nitindranath Tagore son of Djendranath Tagore, the eldest son of Devendranath Tagore in the year 1892. Rabindranath's son Rathindranath helped Nitindranath constructing the Kuthibari with materials of a Neel-Kuthi, which was owned by the Late Shelley, an indigo merchant who introduced indigo cultivation at Shelaidah.

The brickwall represents the waves of the Padma. It is a two and half storied building. The topmost part of the house was built according to his desire. It had architectural excellence. The Poet used to have a proper view of the Padma and the landscape.

Shelaidah Kuthibadi is now a protected national monument and is now looked after by the Archaeological Department of the Government. It has now become a tourist resort. The Zila Parisad constructed a Dak-Bungalow for the tourist.

Art and Architecture in Bangladesh:

Architecture is the mother of all arts. Bangladesh has a very rich architectural heritage. The art or paintings of Bangladesh can be classified into two broad divisions, such as the traditional and the non-traditional. In non-traditional art, the personal moods generally are reflected in art or paintings. In traditional art, it is always anonymous and the artist's approach is imaginative and conceptual. Traditional art may also be regarded as functional. Traditional art is as old as human civilization. It originated from man's approach to nature and resulted in the making of symbols and cult images in earthly substances. Traditional art is also religious. The Paharpur, the Mainamati and the Mahastangarh excavations discovered many art objects and

paintings that represent traditional art. The traditional art, however, left their impact on the early medieval and Muslim period. Excavations at Paharpur in the Naogaon district during the 1920's and 30's resulted in the discovery of the remains of a Buddhist monastery. It is one of the greatest monasteries in Southeast Asia. A large number of antiquities, including several stone sculptures have also been discovered. Archaeological excavations at Mahasthangarh, the site of the ancient city of Pundranagara in Bogra district has been amply rewarding.

Recent excavations at Mainamati (Comilla), Sitakot (Dinajpur) and Bhasu Bihar (Bogra) have also resulted in the discovery of a large number of antiquities. It may be noted here that Bangladesh is an alluvial land and the medium of all early sculptures was clay and other such perishable materials. The use of stone was of at a much later date. That is why the number of stone sculptures was limited. The early architectural history of Bangladesh is divided into following distinct periods. The ancient period (3rd Century B.C. – 11th Century A.D.) is predominated primarily by the Buddhist monasteries and later by the Hindu temples. The cruciform Buddhist stupas were unique and became a standard model of temple forms in Southeast Asia. Hindu temples however followed a different art form as they underwent a series of transformations into the local context.

The next was the beginning of the Muslim Sultanate period (1203-1576 A.D.). The Muslims introduced the new building type of mosques and mausoleums. These however borrowed local materials and adopted regional forms and existing features.

The Mughols (1576–1757) were great builders. But, in Bangladesh, their architectural accomplishments were modest in comparison to the North Indian counterparts. The British (1757–1947 A.D.) introduced a completely alien style of architecture. The Muslim architecture in Bangladesh represented the socio-religious and cultural aspect of the people. The building art of the country was natural to its soil and also local practices. There were, however, fundamental differences between the Hindu and the Muslim faith. There were adjustments in some socio-cultural fields. The Muslim and the Hindu place of worship—temples and mosques—contrasted with one another.

The architecture of Bangladesh was conditioned by the nature of the soil, climate and materials readily available for building. It is a land of rivers and rains. Erosion of rivers and the change of their courses has been a peculiar feature in the life of Bengal for ages. Moreover, the rural areas were almost submerged under water for over five or six months in the year. Hence the people preferred to construct light structures. The roof style was also little different because of rains. People preferred to devise roofs in a curvilinear form with a view to withstanding the heavy rains and showers. Bamboo was in abundance in the country. This was used in the construction of thatched houses.

Stones were rare in the country but the alluvial clay was in plenty. It was made into bricks and that is why the brick masonry dominated the building art of Bengal in the past. This alluvial clay of a very fine texture was used for modeled terracotta. This bore the specialty of the country's marvelous art design. In pre-Muslim and the Muslim period, roofs were made of bamboos thatched over with dry

grass and buildings were made of bricks. The bamboo houses were built with curved roofs. Roofs were generally of two shapes, chauchala and dochala types. In the former type, the roof has four sides, while in the latter it has two sides with gable ends and a central curved ridge. An idea of the brick style of pre-Muslim period in Bangladesh is available from the remains of the Mainamati, the Paharpur and the Mahasthangarh. The monolithic pillar was a conspicuous feature of Hindu architecture. The Muslims, with necessary modifications, borrowed the style. The Muslims brought to Bangladesh their own tradition in architecture. This was, of course, shaped according to local needs and style. Mosques and tombs were the main types of Muslim buildings.

Architectural Bangladesh had great cities built along the river banks during the non-Aryan period, prior to the arrival of the Aryans. These are no longer in existence. The Buddhist and the Hindu temples were built along the riverbanks. These were destroyed by the erosion of rivers and the change of river courses which damaged everything that came on their way. In fact, these posed a serious threat to construction of heavy buildings and also big cities. But despite all this, Dhaka, built along the Buriganga riverbank, still exists. Chittagong has survived the wear and tear of time as a seaport. Faridpur, Khulna, Barisal, Kushtia, Pabna and Rajshahi are some of the cities and towns which are located along the riverbanks. In Bangladesh, there are, however, relics of the Buddhist-Hindu and Muslim architectures in the form of temples and mosques.

Non-Traditional Paintings

The non Traditional art form or paintings were represented by Zainul Abedin, followed by Kamrul Hasan and many others. Of them Zainul Abedin was world ranking. His fames spread far and wide during his life time. None could supersede him in painting so long. It is because his paintings have parallel as these were taken from the crude reality of life. The Charu-kola department bears the good name of Zainul Abedin. Once he headed the department.

Zainul Abedin and his world class paintings

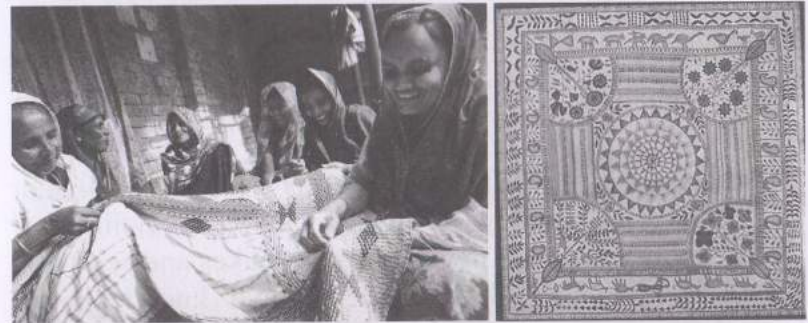
The world famed and most recognized painter Zainul Abedin was born at Kishorganj, Mymensingh on December 29, 1914. He spent his childhood days along the banks of Brahmaputra river. River was always a source of inspiration to him. He framed a number of rivers in his painting. His noteworthy works were about the great famine of 1943 during the British period and it was created by the British as they seized over 60% food-stuff from the farmers and others to serve the interest of the British army against Japan and Germany in the Second World War. As a result there appeared famine and moreover the British always forced Bengali agricultural farmer to go for cultivation of poppy and indigo instead of paddy. These resulted in unusual famine causing death to at least 10 million people. Beside famine, he had other noted painting that earned him name together with world class painters. Zainul Abedin founded the Folk Art Foundation at Sonargaon in 1975.



Famine and Life

Nakshi Kantha: Embroidered Quilt

Kantha is a kind of embroidered quilt, which the female belles along with the older women used to make during their leisurely hours, particularly when the monsoon sets in. The Kantha as a folk art takes a longer time, occasionally years, to complete. It was developed not merely as an art but out of needs for domestic use or when guests used to visit the house on occasions. The makers of this embroidered quilt represent the female community who put into it their love, emotion and belief in art form. It is a rich folkloric heritage of Bangladesh. In Baul song, there has been symbolical use of Kantha by the Baul poets.



“Aasman jora fakhirre bhai Jomin jora kantha” The sky is full of mystics, O brother, The land is covered with quilt. The poet Nazrul Islam also makes a metaphoric use of kantha in his poem that gives a beautiful scenario at dawn. “Usha didir uthar aagge uthbo pahar chure Dekhbo nicce ghumai sahar sither kantha mure.” I shall be on the mountain top much ahead of the sunrise and shall see with pleasure how the town keeps on sleeping wrapped up in an embroidered quilt during winter.

Water Based Society

Bedey or Bediya

Bedey or Badiya, a water based nomadic community has been living in Bangladesh from time immemorial or from the ancient time. They are taken as water gypsy and are found in most districts, particularly in rural areas in their peculiar gesture and posture. Census Report of Bangladesh does not have any record of their numbers as gypsy. They might have been included as schedule castes. According to their own estimate, they are around 50 million in the country. They are occasionally found living either in boats or on plain lands in improvised or make-shift houses little away from locality with the members of their family. They

are non-literate but have folkloric knowledge and this has been orally transmitted, for generations. But this knowledge is uncommon with the other folk or indigenous people.

These groups go by different names as Bedey or Badiya or folk healers, Shapurey or snake charmers, Bajikar or magicians or Sardars. They also catch snakes and sell them to foreign buyers. These Bedeys have knowledge of hypnotism or mesmerism which has been transmitted orally for generation together. They are popular in magic tricks. The origin of these Bedeys is not known to people, but we notice the existence of the Bedey community in the medieval oral literature which was collected by the University of Calcutta with the initiative of Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sen. under the name and title as the Mymensingh Ballads or East Bengal Ballads. 'Mohua' one of the important folk plays includes the story of the Bedey community who lived in the dense forest of Mymensingh. Beside other things such as selling goods or perform as traditional healers, this Bedey community used to perform circus and folk music. According to some elders the Bedey people have been residing in this region for more than 700 years. No one knows how many Bedey exists in Bangladesh today, but it is estimated that the population might exceed thirty million.

As modern persons have no time to enjoy moments with the Bedey for their activities, these Bedeys have now taken recourse to catching and selling snakes. They earn more money by doing this. However, they are still popular for their traditional activities as snake charmer and making magic tricks.

These Bedeys have patriarchal system in their way of life. Male dominance is prevalent in the Bedey community. However, the women are also active and are very popular among village women who purchase things from them. They follow mixed religion. They have Muslim or Hindu names but are not found performing Muslim and Hindu rituals; their women are not allowed to inherit property. The property of the deceased is distributed among the brothers and sons only. Surprisingly, in case of divorce, which is rare in the community, women are not supposed to take their children with them. The husband becomes the custodian of their children. But if he is unwilling, the wife takes the responsibility of her children. They are working community as both men and women are found engaged in selling various kinds of goods and herbal medicine. They are also known as magic healers.

Every local Bedey community has a Sardar, or a leader. This Sardar is in charge of the rules and regulations within the group.



They have a peculiar kind of language which they speak among themselves and these are unknown to the people outside their community. It is neither Bangla nor any kind of known language. They use magic and charm.

The women folk of this nomadic group move from house to house selling bangles and domestic goods, necessary for women. They also sell typical kinds of medicine for women. The males play with snakes and monkeys. They are also known as medicine man or ojha (shaman) who use

magic for one's treatment. They also use black magic and witch-craft for fertility to women and for recovering goods. They use water as a therapy in curing patients. They also are found selling unusual types of herbal medicine for rheumatic patients. A kind of birth control pill made of herbs is also sold to rural women. Men and women of the Bedey community are also found providing music with dance and the sell goods to people. Bedeys are still deprived from proper education, health services, access to public resources; they even prefer not to be identified as Bedey as their identity always results in stigma and discrimination.

Early marriage, polygamy, and illegal migration are some few common problems that prevail in the Bedey community.

Presently it is found in Bangladesh, many of the Bedey community have adopted Islam as their religion and their children are going to schools.

Water and Magic

Our folklore speaks of many events, which concern our folkways and folk life. The peasant society in Bangladesh is Animistic. As such, magic plays a very important part.



Women desirous of children take recourse to bathing where

the roads meet. The barren women are made to sit on a stool, which is lowered into a well. She strips off, bathes, dresses, and is then drawn up. When it is not possible for her to descend the well, the rite of bathing is performed under a tree. It is believed that the rite absorbs water. The fertile energy of the well or the tree infuses the same into the woman. The well dries up, the tree withers away, and the woman conceives. (Deviprasad 1968:290). In Bangladesh the barren women is taken to the confluence of two streams and water sprinkled on her. It is believed that the fertilizing rains and all the flowing water, which fecundate the earth, can also fecundate women. According to a Bengali proverb: "Ja acce bhande ta acce brahmande", whatever things the body contains, the same happens with nature and vice versa. Whenever a drought occurs in northern Bangladesh, tribal women belonging to the Santals and the Rajbanshis strip themselves stark naked and make a performance like other primitive societies (Deviprasad, 1968:294-295). Similar practices are also found among other tribes in other parts of Bangladesh and India.

In the Hindu religion, Durga is called "Mother Earth" or "Mother Goddess." The "Markandya Purana" has a well-known section called Devi Mahamya. The Hindu women belonging to the peasants' community once performed the Vasudharabrata. It takes place during the mid-summer drought. At this time, the Ganga or the Ganges/ Padma are almost dried up and the sky looks cloudless. The 'vrata' is designed to fulfill the desire for rain, for plenty of water. Then the women sing for rain and showers. They mimic clouds and also create rains. They would hang a jar on the tree, fill it with water, and bore holes in it. The jar is the cloud and water drops from it like rains. (Deviprasad 1968:114) That suggests how they enact fantasy, the

fulfillment of the desired reality. Deviprasad (1968:114) comments, "This is true that the vrata song does not bring rain, nevertheless, these songs are not futile. For the midsummer drought is long and appalling; it is by far the severest trial in the lives of our peasants. And the sight of rain, which they see in the songs, --of land submerged and children swimming merrily -- though not a material reality is certainly a 'psychological reality.' That is, the songs assure the peasants and lead them to overcome the feeling of helplessness before a hostile nature. This is how magic, though an illusory technique, is an aid to the real technique (Deviprasad, 1968:114).

It is true that the peasants of Bangladesh are not primitive people. But it is interesting that in their cultural life this primitive element still survives as a living force. The 'Holi' festival of the Hindu-Vaishnava community, which relates to the birth of the Sree Caitanya, has also various use of water. Young boys and girls make fun with each other by sprinkling colored water on each other. This is held in the month of Falgun or the spring (March-April) at a full moon time. It is called 'Dol-Purnima'. The Bauls of Bangladesh and West Bengal, India celebrate the occasion by singing. Lalon Shah, the great Baul of Bangladesh, who influenced Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel laureate, by his songs when he stayed in Kushtia as the Landlord of his estate, also celebrated 'dol-purnima' during his lifetime. His followers in Bangladesh and elsewhere now celebrate the same ceremony after his death for three consecutive days. Similarly 'Janmastami' connected with another Hindu god 'Krishna' also has a ritual use of water.

In the Veda, the holy book of the Hindus, water is considered very holy. In fact, water is part and parcel in the Hindu way of life. It is customary to help a dying man to

drink water. A dead man is also washed with ritual water and then cremated by the side of the river and after that the remnants of the dead body are offered to the river for salvation the soul. The puja celebration of the Hindus always ends up with the river. The Hindus then go in a procession to the riverside and finally dispose of their gods and goddesses when they throw them to the deep river as part of their religious rites.

Water has always been used as 'Love Charm', 'Love Philter', 'Love Potion.' If anybody drinks such magical water, he or she is under the influence of love magic. Shakespeare has used such symbolic use of water in his plays. In the witch-lore of the west, it is held that witches live in water and therefore can float as long as she desires. Water has a very effective therapeutic action. Oral saline is a folk therapy. Rural people used it for generations. In high fever, a cold bath is generally given to the patient. Water mixed with salt is given to the patient who suffers at a fearful sight. Fear makes blood clot and oral saline works very quickly. Spraying of water on the face cures one who becomes senseless.

Folk Medicine: Medical Folklore

Folk medicine speaks of a kind of folk knowledge and wisdom, transmitted orally or by acts and deeds in regard to diseases and its subsequent curing. It may be taken as Medical folklore. It has wide coverage beginning with birth and ending with death. Traditional healing, use of magic, faith healing all these come within the purview of medical folklore. In Bangladesh, there are women healers, ojha (shaman), fakhir (mystic who use magic or mantra, a kind of mystical words, used in a magical formula, a kind of

mystic and native healer who was capable of detecting such a sorcerer's crime with the help of magical methods, such as the use of a magic glass known in Bengali as *ainabaron*. The *fakhir* explained that the sorcerer took away some of the hair and chest skin of the victim and put these into an amulet either on a *Shanibar* (Saturday) or *Mongolbar* (Tuesday) during the night of the new moon, or *ama-vasya*, and then closed its mouth with wax from a bee's comb. The *fakhir* further said that the victim in such a case must be a mother's first child, and that the death of the child would procure an off-spring for another childless mother. The off-spring who was thus procured would continue to live as usual. The *fakhir* added that if the crime of the sorcerer was detected before any damage was done to the life of the victim, this was to be brought at once to the attention of everybody in the village. An announcement should be made that the sorcerer had taken away the hair or nail or chest skin of the victim. Then the entire victim's hair should be cut, burnt, and buried at the meeting point of three roads. The victim would then be safe. During our stay in the village, we came

Across another incident in which the hair of a child was cut. At once the villagers were informed by an announcement, and a ritual was performed accordingly and no damage was suffered by the victim.

This kind of sorcery is not uncommon in rural Bangladesh. Although sorcery for malevolent use was condemned, the story of a childless mother suggests that such actions could be done also for benevolent intentions. It had been used to facilitate childbirth and to procure off-spring for barren women. It also helped cure ailing children. A sorcerer is capable of using both magic and witchcraft for fulfilling his designs. He can destroy a person but at the

same time can explain misfortune and reveal the cause of sickness with the help of supernatural powers (see Lessa and Vogt 1979, 332-333).

A shaman is like a sorcerer, but performs primarily white magic and deals only secondarily in black magic and witchcraft to counter sorcery and its evil effects. In traditional societies, a shaman is a kind of healer who makes use of supernatural powers and magic for various healing or curing of disease. A shaman specializes in spirit illness and spirit possession, deals with good as well as evil spirits, and is a mediator between the supernatural and the community (Kakar 1983, 90). On many occasions the shaman is found working as a medium and mouthpiece of supernatural beings, and his power comes from direct contact with the supernatural (Lessa and Vogt 1979, 308). It may be pointed out here that although witchcraft is considered evil, a shaman may use it in an attempt to benefit society as a whole.

The term "shaman" is believed by scholars to have its origin in Asia, though it is used to describe similar phenomena in many parts of the world, which are found not only among hunters but also in contemporary peasant nomadic and urban communities as well (Eliade 1964).

Shamanism is assumed to have originated in association with hunting and gathering (Lessa and Vogt 1979, 301). It is commonly held that the shamans are a kind of mystic and can cure sickness by virtue of their techniques of ecstasy and magic. The shaman can "see" the spirit and he himself occasionally behaves like a spirit. He can leave his body in a trance and travel in ecstasy in all cosmic regions. He recognizes various diseases through mystical insight or with the help of his "pet-spirits" who are at his disposal,

and he is capable of curing these diseases with his healing techniques. Although he has a number of auxiliary spirits at his disposal, he is not possessed by them.

Bangladesh is a small country with an area of over 55,000 square miles and a population of over 100 million. It has 68,000 villages and few cities. At least 80% of the people live in rural areas where people are mostly illiterate and have limited health and medical facilities.

There is one physician for 7,810 people and one hospital bed for 4,000 people (Government of Bangladesh 1985). Although Bangladesh is a land of rivers, these are dry most of the time, and people must depend on the rainy season which, in fact, is a gamble on the monsoons. They live in houses built of mud with thatched roofs and narrow rectangular windows. These people still drink water either from the river or ponds and suffer from various diseases including diarrhea, dysentery, jaundice and fever. Cholera and dysentery often break out in epidemic form. Their farming is still primitive and at a subsistence level. In the absence of proper diet they suffer from acute anemia and malnutrition.

A recent study of mine in three Bangladesh villages reveals that 90% of the rural men and women use indigenous health care. Shamanistic and herbal care are common. The persons engaged in shamanistic and various ways of herbal health care include both men and women.

Shamanism in Bangladesh, which evolved as an integral part of folk or animistic religion, later was assimilated into Hinduism and Buddhism, especially Tantric Buddhism. With the introduction of Islam by the Sufis, who syncretised different religious ideas and incorporated the same into mystic Islam, shamanism became an integral part

of folk life. It may be pointed out here that although shamanism is rooted in animistic culture, it is intended for correcting disturbances in the individual's social order. The shamans perform the same role in a traditional society as psycho-therapists in modern society.

Water and Muslim Mysticism

Water is considered very holy in all religious ideals in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is a land of mixed religious beliefs. Sufism has a syncretistic religious approach. It originated in Persia and came to the sub-continent much ahead of the arrival of the Muslim Kings. In Bangladesh, Sufism had tremendous influence on the life and living condition of the people. The Sufis were mystics and were believed to have supernatural power over other things. As a result there had been many miracles concerning their life. Bangladesh is a land of rivers and tanks. The Pirs who are known as the spiritual leaders of the Sufis enjoyed tremendous control over earth, water, fire and air. The Hindus and the Muslims irrespective of their religious beliefs believe in them.

Following are the few stories concerning the Pirs (Religious mentors or guru) and mystics in relation to water.

The Traditions of Kawaj Khijir

The Traditions of Kawaj Khizir is associated with beliefs in water spirits. He is believed to reside in the seas, rivers and tanks. There is a reference of Kawaj Khijir in the Holy Quran concerning the Prophet Musa or Moses of Judaism.

Moses met him by the order of Allah and the Prophet could understand that Khawaj Khijir was superior to him in matters of the unknown.

He has been made the wisest and knowledgeable person by Allah and lives as long as Allah desires. He remains invisible by the order of Allah. The popular religion shaped him as the universal spirit who lives in water and is considered as the protector of mariners from shipwreck and those who are seafarers like boatmen, fishermen and traders. And is occasionally visible only to those who accomplish a forty days watch on the bank of the river. Hindus and Muslims make vows to him in times of trouble. The people also propitiated him at the first shaving of a boy, at marriages and during rainy season by launching small paper boats, decorated with flowers and candles into rivers and tanks. The name of Peer Badar is taken by all people belonging to Hindu Muslim and Buddhist as the guardian spirit of waters. His name is invoked by every sailor and fisherman when he starts on a sea-voyage or during a storm. There is a shrine at Chittagong in the name of Pir Badar who was believed to have arrived in Chittagong 'floating on a rock.' It is also held that he had power over the Jimsor spirits made of fire. People belonging to all religion and caste used to visit his shrine on a hillock in Chittagong where he is believed to have lighted his lamp. Candles were offered and burned at night. The name of Pir Badar is also associated with the name of Khawaj Khijir. The popularity of Pir Badar as a sea-faring saint is also associated with the name of Ghazi -Shaheb or Ghazi Kalu who was believed to have enormous power and could control tigers and crocodiles in the Sunderbans. He has a shrine at Baro-Bazar in Jessore and a Garh surrounded by water.

Pir Badar

Pir Badar was believed to have power to walk across the river Ganga. The name of Shah Sultan Mahisawar is associated with the fact that he came to Bengal riding on a fish. Mahiganj in Rangpur is believed have been named after another Pir called Shah Jalal Bukhari who had a shrine in Rangpur. The name of Shah Jalal of Sylhet is very popular for his super power. The shrine of Shah Jalal still preserves his sword, Zulfiqar, a deer-skin and a pair of sandals and these objects are held in utmost veneration by the believers and the water used in the ritual cleaning of these objects is often drunk for the recovery from sickness or illness. In Khulna, there is a big tank believed to have been made by Khan Jahan and is known as Thakur-dighi and it had two crocodiles named kala (black) and dhala (white). Men and women used to visit this tank and make votive offerings to the crocodiles. Many of these Pirs are believed to have power to make rains on the occasion of a drought. There were pirs who had powers. The name of Ali Saber Shah who had a shrine at Mymensingh is associated with rain-making.

People of Bangladesh and West Bengal (India) organize a kind of raft festival known as 'bera.' It begins when small paper boats are launched in rivers and tanks decorated with flower and candles. The festival of "Bera" is popularly observed in Bangladesh and West Bengal, India on the last Thursday of the Muslim year or Bengali month of Bhadra (August-Sept.) when the river is full. The 'Bera' festival is generally observed by boatmen and fishermen belonging to Hindu-Muslim communities. The 'Bera' or raft is usually made of paper ornamented with tinsel, has a prow resembling a female face, with the crest and breast of a peacock. The effigy is then placed on a raft of a plantain

stems and then is set afloat at sunset and with its flickering lights that gives a marvelous picturesque view in the dark and stream.

It is generally held by the people of Murshidabad that Bera festival was launched by the last Nawab of Bengal, Nawab Siraj-ud-Doula who initiated a Hindu-Muslim amity during his reigns against the British. Since then, Bera festival is anybody's function in West Bengal, India. The river Bhagirati is illuminated by hundreds of rafts floating with the stream and the inhabitants crowd the banks. It is quite customary that person launching a 'Bera' should deposit on the bank a few slices of ginger, and two, three plantains. In Bangladesh, in many villages along the river banks and also in the tanks such a type of festival known as 'Bera' is performed in the month of Bhadra (Aug.-Sept.) when the river is full of water. Among the Hindus there is a popular belief that there is also a demi-goddess known as 'Jala-Devi (water goddess) who takes care of those who believe in her. The seafarer, traders, businessmen, boatmen and fishermen pray to the goddess before they go on a voyage. They offer various things to the Jala-devi for their safety.

The Pir Badar is yet another character who is highly venerated by both Hindus and Muslims and is also regarded as the guardian-spirit of waters. Pir Badar shares the dominion of the rivers along with Khwaja Khijir. He is invoked by every sailor and fishermen when they are out on a voyage or when a squall or storm overtakes them. It is popularly held that the Pir Badar arrived in Chittagong floating on a rock, and informed the terror-stricken people of Chittagong and neighborhood who were then infested by the Jins and evil spirits that he had come all the way from Akayab on the novel craft and then exterminated them and took possession of the whole country. In fact in Muslim

mysticism, particularly with the Sufi pirs, there have appeared a number of stories relating to the water spirit. These pirs are believed to have been able to control forces of nature. Shah Karim Ali of Jagannathpur in Tripura was thought capable of causing rains when and wherever he pleased. Ali Sabar Shah was also connected with the making of rains during drought. He has a 'dargah' in the village of Bagiara in the Mymensingh district 107 The name of Pir Badar is associated with beliefs in the water spirit. Every sailor and fishermen often invoke his name when they are on a cruise on the sea. Shah Makhdum who was also known as Shah Sultan Mahiswar was thought to have come to Bengal riding on a fish. Therapeutic powers were widely attributed to pirs and mystics. Sheikh Hamid used to dip in water an edge of the shoe used by his pir, Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindi and the water was believed to possess the potency of curing people of their ailments. Some tanks constructed by the pirs are believed to have powers to cure all kinds of skin diseases. The shrine of Shah Jalal in Sylhet preserved his used sword, called Zulfiqar, a deer skin, a pair of wooden sandals, two copper cups, and an egg believed to be that of an ostrich brought by him to this country. These objects were held in high esteem or utmost veneration by his followers and people for recovery of illness drank the water used in the ritual cleaning of these objects.108 Khan Jahan Ali's mausoleum in Bagerhat, Khulna has a large tank believed to be constructed by him which contained a large number of crocodiles. Of these crocodiles, the two were named as 'Kala Pahar, black hill' and 'Dhala pahar,' white hill. Womenfolk make votive offerings to the crocodiles attached to the shrine in the belief that this would procure them offspring109. Hundreds of such stories are connected with the pirs and mystics.

Water as Charms

Water is also used as charms for curing disease or for other purposes. For all purposes magic squares are written on a porcelain paper, the inscription being washed off and drunk. The Muharram festival of the Shiites in Bangladesh and India has various uses of ritual water. Further, religious leaders, Imam of the mosques and khadim of the majars (mausoleum) recite or read the Quran verses and blow it over water for curing diseases. Water is also used for treating persons who are spirit possessed. The Bauls during the period of initiation of any of the caste member arrange a ceremonial bath for the initiated ones.

The reference of 'Abey- Hayath is very often made in Muslim mysticism. Anybody who would drink its water would never die. It is held that a prophet named Kawja Khijir somehow managed to drink water from Abey-Hayath and became ever living. It is believed that he lives in water and would only die when the world will end by the order of Allah. The mystics, however, use the name 'Abey-Hayath' symbolically in relation to their mystical activities.

There are a number of tanks which are known as the tanks of the Pir. The Pir once lived alongside. On his death, the tank was considered very sacred. Men and women used to visit these tanks and bathe seeking the help of the dead Pir in curing disease and begetting a child for the barren woman.

It is also held that Khawaj-Khijir, who belongs to the Muslim myths of Bangladesh, inhabits the river. And his blessings are necessary to get cured of spiritism. The folk people, particularly women believe that a menstruating woman should not bathe in the river (Blanchet, T.1984:41-93). This is because Khawaj-Khijir inhabits the river and

will be angered by such an act that might pollute the river water. Khawaj is believed to be the King of water. He is believed to be living in wells, ponds, and rivulets. He is also taken as the guardian spirit of water and is not found outside the Gangetic delta. James Wise wrote about Khawaj in 1894 in an article for the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta. The name of the article was "The Mohammedan of Eastern Bengal." (Wise, James, 1984:38). Here he describes the festival of 'Bera' or a paper raft festival, which is celebrated every year in Khawaj's name. A paper raft or 'bera' ornamented with tinsel, and a prow resembling a female face, is sent floating onto the swollen rivers at the end of the monsoon. Boatmen and fishermen especially keep the festival (Wise. 1984:38). In fact, the boatmen when they take their boats to the rivers, they take the name of Khawaj khijir for protection and make offerings to the river. 'Pir Badar' is another Muslim pir who is also taken as the guardian of sea and rivers. Traders, businessmen, and fishermen who are bound for the sea and rivers always seek protection of Pir Badar from storm and other calamities. They also make offerings to him before they start for the river or sea. The boats are usually ornamented with decorative art symbolizing Khawaj Khizir and Pir Badar. Sheikh Hamid, a Pir, used to dip in water with the edge of the shoe used by his Pir, Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindi, and the water is believed to possess the potency of curing people of their ailments. Gazi and Kalu are best known as Pirs who had powers over crocodiles. Majlis Shaheb and Badar Shaheb, two brothers who were buried in Kalna, Burdwan, were also associated with crocodile spiritism. It was believed that between their tombs, almost a mile apart on the riverbank, a man was safe from any accident and crocodiles would not attack him. South of

Khan Jahan's mausoleum in Bagerhat, Khulna, there was a large tank, believed to be constructed by Khan Jahan but rather curiously called 'thakur dighi' or the god's pond. This contained a large number of crocodiles two of which were known as 'Kala-Pahar' black hill and 'Dhala-Pahar' white hill. People used to pray to them for curing of their ailments. A few more "pirs" were also related to water spirit. We have already mentioned the name of Pir Badr and Khawaj – Khijir as the guardian spirits of water.

Tradition also connected a number of pirs to some particular river. In the Village of Firozpur, on the bank of the river Bhairab in the Nadia district, India, the Dargah of Buda Diwan was quite popular. It was said about him that he threw into the Bhairab River everything that the people offered him and had anyone sought anything from him, he would ask Bahia to help to fulfill the supplicant's desire (Roy, Aim. 1983:233). In the Hindu faith, the Ganges is regarded as the most sacred. The river is taken as a goddess and stands as a symbol for purification. A sinner, who bathes in it, believes that he is purified, and is also free from past sins. The river has a number of sacred points where thousands of people bathe at certain times on religious occasions. These points can be found along the banks of the river. In our folklore, the goddess Ganga is represented as the presiding deity of the crocodiles.

In fact, rivers play a very important part in our folklore. They have a therapeutic effect. The following story bears testimony to this truth. :

Lakhindar was the son of one Chand merchant. He was married to one Behula. Once while Behula was sharing the same bed with her newly married husband, Lakhindar in the nuptial chamber fell fast asleep and her long locks of

hair, which were unfortunately untied, hung down to the floor of the room. A snake climbed up the bedstead along the long locks of hair of Behula and had bitten her husband lakhindar to death on the night of her marriage. And for this reason, women of Bangladesh do not go to bed with their locks of hair untied.

Behula was cursed for this. However, she took her husband in a raft made of a banana tree, and moved day and night over the rivers praying to the gods and goddesses, particularly the Ganga and Manasha, the serpent goddess for the life of her husband. At last she was successful. Lakhindar got back his life (Bhattacharyya, Asutosh, 1977:171-174). There are several other stories about Behula and Lakhindar. Here, the Hindus believe that the Ganges has power to do that. Scientists, however, believe that the river water has also therapeutic effect and the person who was bitten by a serpent did not die immediately and gradually recovered because of his association with river water. In fact, in Hindu culture, most rivers are sacred. Beside the Ganges/the Padma, the Brahmaputra, the Jamuna, the Gauri /the Gorai are concerned with the Hindu gods and goddesses. Water sports and water festivals were parts of religious activities in ancient times. Laxity in sexual morality, however, did not count at that time. In the Harivamsa, written after the time of Krishna, the following record had been made: "... Having thus issued his orders to the sea, he (Krishna) commenced to play with Arjuna, while Satyabhama, incited by a wink of Krishna, began to throw water on Narada. When Balarama tottering with drink, with great glee fell into the water, and beckoning the charming daughter of Revata by his side, took her by his hand. The sons of Krishna and the leading Bhaimas, who belonged to the party of Rama, joyous and bent on

pleasure, unmindful of their dresses and ornaments, and excited by drink, followed him to the sea. The Bhaimas belonging to the party of Krishna headed by Nishatha and Ulmuka, arrayed in many colored garments and rich jewels and bedecked with garlands of parijata flowers. With bodies painted with sandal wood paste and unguents, excited by wine, and carrying aquatic musical instruments in their hands, began to sing songs appropriate for the occasion. By order of Krishna, hundreds of Krishna's courtesans, led by heavenly Apsarases played various pleasing tunes on water and other instruments. ... Krishna and Narada with all of those who were on their side began to pelt water on Bala and his party; and they in their turn did the same on the party of Krishna. The wives of Bala and Krishna excited by libations of arrack (strong spirituous liquor) followed their example, and squirted water in great glee with syringes in their hands. Some of Bhaima ladies, over-weighted by the load both of love and wine, with crimson eyes and masculine garbs, entertained themselves before the other ladies squirting water" (Rajendra Lal Mitra, 1881, Vol.1, 439-440).

Chapter

VIII

Problems Confronting Water and Culture in
Bangladesh

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Problems Confronting Water and Culture in Bangladesh

Arsenic Contamination in Ground Water Resources of Bangladesh: A Case Study

Introduction:

Water is vital for life .It is a gift of nature - a chemical treasure, flowing freely everywhere. There are, however, various elements in water that may become very harmful to human health. These include arsenic, aluminum, asbestos, barium, cadmium, copper, fluoride, lead, mercury and nitrate. Of these, arsenic contamination in drinking water from ground level might pose a serious threat to human health and life when its intake exceeds the limits of 0.05mg/l. Arsenic poisoning in ground water has become a global problem. A number of countries in the world including China, Japan, Thailand, Argentina, Mexico, Hungary, Russia, the U.S.A., India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have been facing arsenic poisoning in groundwater levels. (Ahmed. Akhter SK.: 1998: 1). In India the position of West Bengal is quite alarming. Bangladesh have also been facing similar problem (Ahmed. A: 1998: 2)

According to studies made by the government and the non-government agencies, the present situation of arsenic

poisoning of ground water in Bangladesh is known to be the highest in the world (Hague. Shamsul: 1999). More than 95% of the people of the country both urban and rural are fully dependent on water supply from tube-wells. A few of these people, though have come to know of arsenic contamination, the majority of them, are still unaware of the presence of arsenic in the ground water and they continue drinking due to lack of preventive or control measures by the Health authorities. The social mobilization or motivational program is very much wanting. According to information available it is learnt that in 1998 over 40 million of people were affected by arsenic poisoning (Ahmed. A 1998). The study disclosed that tube-wells in 52 districts of Bangladesh have arsenic contamination and more than 6 thousand people in 37 districts have been identified as arsenic patients (Ahmed. A 1998:2). The report was the outcome of a countrywide survey of tube-wells by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Bangladesh and also by number non-government agencies in the country. According to these studies more than 39% of the tube-wells in Bangladesh have high scale of arsenic contamination (Ahmed. A 1998: 2). It is 100 -900 times higher than allowable limit of 0.05mg/l. Health specialists suggest that arsenic poisoning is rapidly absorbed in the body and is converted into less toxic form in the liver and is excreted with urine. When the amount of arsenic is higher than the excretion, it accumulates in hair, nail, skin, liver and bone. It also causes different major changes in the body. According to these experts, the first visible signs of arsenic poisoning include a darkened skin or dark spots in skin, chest, back, limbs and around gums, warts, cracks, scabies or there may be itches in hand and feet and many others known only to the doctors of specialists.

It may be noted here that the effects of arsenic poisoning may be visible on skins or different parts of the body only after years of continuous drinking of contaminated tube-well water. Lack of nutritious food helps accelerate arsenic poisoning. The Health Specialists are of the opinion that it may take 7 months to 3 years for development of the disease. Intake of protein and vitamin 'A' 'C' and 'E' in the body may occasionally delay the attack but it would certainly leave its mark on the body if no preventive measure were taken.

According to information available, the first case of arsenic poisoning was reported in West Bengal, India in 1983 and by 19% at least 7 districts with a population of over 2 Lac of people were found to have arsenic poisoning following drinking of arsenic contaminated tube-well water (Ahmed. A 1998: 2).

Although there had been private reports of arsenic poisoning in Bangladeshi patients being detected in India when they visited Indian doctors, in 1994 NIPSOM, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Bangladesh detected arsenic patients in western districts bordering West Bengal, India (Ahmed Akhtar 1998: 2)(In 1997 WHO acknowledged arsenic in drinking water as a 'Major public health issue ' and suggested that it should be dealt with on an 'emergency basis' (The Bangladesh Observer, June 12,1999 , Editorial).

There is no doubt that our doctors failed to detect arsenic poisoning in the past. And many people died of this disease without being identified as arsenic patient. Generally no post-mortem or autopsy is done in natural death. And as such no arsenic poisoning could be detected in any patient.

Many people in Bangladesh are still not aware of the presence of arsenic poisoning in tube well water because of the fact that no test for arsenic poisoning has been done in their tube wells as yet. The government and non-government agencies have made random tests of tube wells in certain districts. The Public Health Engineering Department stated that the department had limited man-power and with such limited resource it could never be possible to test innumerable tube wells. In such a case the role of the non-government agencies is very important. But the problem still exists there. There must be alternative source for safe water. Experts hesitate to recommend a return to surface water because of the high level of pollution. Then what else is there? Storage of rainwater may be the answer but in Bangladesh it would take several years to get people motivated to such alternatives. In view of this, attempts should be made to verify depth of water level or layer (lower or upper) as it has been seen that similar layer does not always contain arsenic poisoning. It also happens that arsenic contamination though found in a particular layer, might not be always same if the new tube well could be sunk little distance from the one that was arsenic contaminated. In such a case the PHE may go for a community tube well after proper verification of layer in the area.

The causes of the presence of arsenic in ground water are still not known. Many health specialists are of the opinion that the Ganges might have contained arsenic deposits along with the alluvial deposits during the past thousands of years. They hold that the alluvial deposits came from the regions having igneous and metamorphic rocks where there is existence of arsenic compounds. But the others say that organic fertilizers and insecticide may also add to the

arsenic contamination of ground water. (Observer, oct.31, 1998 Hague Shamsul AM). Whatever be the cause, the problem now is how one can get rid of it.

Arsenic poisoning has become a social malady in Bangladesh. As the people are not well informed of the physical manifestation of the disease, they are very often confused and take skin manifestations as leprosy. As a result they avoid mixing with persons thus affected socially. Parents cannot get their affected daughters married. Wives are also sent back to their parents together with their children. The persons affected also do not get jobs and people do not share food with them. Their lands and houses are very often mortgaged. These people borrow money from the money lenders during sickness keeping their property mortgaged or taking money with high interest.

Position of Kushtia

Kushtia as a western district and bordering West Bengal, India has also been identified as an arsenic area. In all its six thanas arsenic contamination in tube well water has been found (PHE). The government and non-government agencies have also sealed a number of tube wells and indicated their arsenic contamination with a red mark and people have been advised not to drink or use the water for cooking. Tube wells with a green mark are free from arsenic contamination. In the absence of alternative arrangement for safe drinking water, people in all the affected areas continue using the same tube well with high arsenic red mark. As a result arsenic disease has become widespread. The most distressing part is, people who are affected or threatened to be affected by arsenic poisoning

are still unconcerned because no proper diagnosis has been made in these areas by concerned health personnel and no motivational work for making people aware of the disease has been made. As the majority of the people in this region believe in popular or folk religion, their concepts of religion and life are dominated by animistic faith along with the major religions like Islam. The majority of the people here are very poor and illiterate and as such they also maintain the same view of life. As the doctors are not well conversant with the disease, they very often prescribe medicine that takes a long time and does not cure the patients. People then go to the Ojha (Shamans) or mystic faquirs or make sacrifices to appease the spirits as they consider the disease as the curse of Allah or the work of evil spirits.

Kamkrishnapur Village -A Socio-Economic Study

Objectives of the Study :

In view of the above, a socio-economic and cultural survey has been made in a village named Ramkrishnapur village under Bheramara Thana of Kushtia district. The objectives of the survey are a) to assess the communication needs of the people for raising awareness about arsenic contamination; b) to prepare a model communication package based on the above communication research and the test the package in two villages. Following is the preliminary report of the study under taken in the affected village between March 1999 and June 1999. The village was taken for study as it was considered badly affected village under Mocarimpur union of the Bheramara Thana. The Chairman and members of the union parisads also identified the village as most affected by arsenic poisoning.

The Public Health Engineering department both in Kushtia and Bheramara also recommended the concerned village as most affected by arsenic poisoning. The T.N.O. Bheramara also identified Ramkrishnapur as badly affected by arsenic contamination.

Methodology:

In order to fulfill the aforesaid objectives, a team of experts was engaged to conduct the survey and research. The methodology adopted for the study was participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and anthropological. A house to house survey was made on the basis of a questionnaire and personal observation. Two workshops were also held in the village and the villagers identified their problems and also recommended necessary measures for the solution. It appeared that the government agencies working in the Thana and union parisad hardly visited the village.

Following is a brief picture of the village:

Area of the village	: 4.2 Sq. Km
Population	: 1988 Persons
Male	: 1029
Female	(71.75%): 959
Children	(48.24%): 203
Total families	(10.21%)
Average member per family	: 4.9%
Total Literacy	: 33.65% (from class V and onward)
Male	: 369 persons
Female	(18.56%): 300 persons

Total	(15.09%): 669 persons
Adult Literacy (Non formal education)	: 2.59%
Religion Muslim	: 942 persons (97.69%)
Hindu	: 46 persons (2.31%)
Migrating from India (After partition)	: 47 persons (10 families)
Economic Status:	
Landless and homeless	: 207 families, 1035 persons
Lower income group	: 173 families, 865 persons
Middle income group	: 22 families, 110 persons
Principal Occupation	: Agriculture (Share cropping and Day labouring)
Principal Crops	: Rice, Wheat, Jute and Sugarcane

The village Ramkrishnapur which is located at four kilometers from Bheramara and 25 km from Kushtia over the Bheramara -Raita road, looked much neglected as no major development work had been undertaken during the last 28 years. The village at present has no good road and no electricity. There is one metalled road, which passes through the village from Bheramara to Raita. Raita was earlier connected with a railway line from Bheramara and train communication was afterwards stopped for reasons known only to the authority concerned. It was afterwards converted into a motorable road. The village has a population of 1988 persons. Of them 51.76% were male

and 48.24% were female. There is one secondary school which is yet to be included in the development program of the government. The teachers do not get regular salary. There is one government primary school; it also has received no govt. support. One of the school buildings was badly damaged by a cyclone and no repair work had been made during past several years. There is one madrassa, two mosques and an Eidgah. There is a playground but no games have been played during my study period. The majority of the people are very poor and they live below the poverty level. The survey of the village revealed that the village is badly affected by arsenic contamination disease and most people are ignorant of this disease due to lack of information resulting from the absence of communication media such as radio, television and newspapers. In the village there are only 3 televisions and 2 radios. There is no electricity in the village and because this televisions are occasionally used with the help of batteries. Batteries are too costly and therefore these electrical appliances for entertainment cannot always be used. The majority of the people are animistic and superstitious. They also follow age-old traditions and are not prone to social change. In the absence of clubs and libraries people cannot read newspapers and remain ignorant.

Ramkrishnapur is one of the most affected areas with regard to arsenic contamination and other health problems. The village has 206 tube wells, 30 belong to the government and 176 are privately owned. A total of 147 tube wells were tested one year ago and 43 tube wells were sealed with red markings as they had arsenic contamination. No one in the village could say who actually did the job. 59 tube wells have not been tested for arsenic concentrations. The Public Health Engineering

Department tested 18 tube wells during my study period. These tube wells tested were found to be arsenic free. The people of the village told me that no health personnel visited them last year. It was found that 1530 members were completely in the dark about arsenic poisoning. 43 families with 137 members had arsenic as a disease and 71 members were totally free although they shared the same food and used water from the same tube well for drinking. Many of these people have skin diseases but they did not show them to others. 35 families consisting of 155 members used to procure drinking and cooking water from arsenic free tube well of other people. 75 people including women have refused to talk about arsenic contamination for fear of being condemned by others and thus did not provide any information to the study groups. These people have different concept about disease. The majority of the people have viewed the name arsenic as a curse of Allah. 189 respondents said arsenic was a contagious disease. 1583 respondents said it was a curse of Allah or caused by evil spirits. 116 respondents however said that it was just like any other disease.

The study reveals that in Ramkrishnapur village (field study) a total of 43 families consisting of 203 persons used to drink from the same tube well having arsenic poisoning. Of them 132 persons had been affected by arsenic and 71 people showed no sign of arsenic poisoning. It was found that the age groups of 10+ were more prone to developing the arsenic disease (Table 1). This may have been caused due to a lack of nutritional food in their diet.

Table 1: Age structure and number of people affected and not affected by drinking water from the same arsenic affected tube wells:

Age group	No. of persons affected by arsenic	No. of persons not affected by arsenic
50+	15	23
40+	15	
30+	32	32
10+	63	9
5+	6	7
Babies	1	

These concepts about arsenic disease have, in many cases, left a very bad effect on the social and economic life of the people of the Ramkrishnapur village. Our survey revealed that 210 respondents said that arsenic disease was a bad type of skin disease and those who were affected should not mix freely with others or share food. My personal observation made it clear that many people deliberately avoided mixing with arsenic affected people making them socially outcast. This had forced them out of employment, and also they were denied participation in marriage ceremonies and other social gatherings like circumcision. Many of the inhabitants of the village disclosed that they had faced problems in procuring pure drinking water from arsenic free tube wells belonging to others because no empty vessels were allowed during early morning, noon and evening time as they considered it as an ill-omen. The study revealed that it was part of their belief, which had been transmitted from generations to generations. A number of people considered it as very insulting to go to another house for water. In a number of cases members of the same family on a number of occasions did not like to share food with affected persons. These people believed in

spirits and demi-gods, pirs and faquirs and made offerings and sacrifice to appease the spirits and demi-gods. A devotional musical soiree was sometimes arranged in the belief that the dead pirs and faquirs would help them get rid of such calamity. It has been observed that 51.21% considered arsenic as curse of Allah, 35.81% thought it to be an action of the evil spirits. 9.55% considered arsenic poisoning as contagious. A total of 6.53% persons did not get job in the village. 62.29% people did not know anything about arsenic. And although the literacy rate in the village is 33% only 7.79% people have very limited knowledge of arsenic. 7 families continued drinking from the same tube wells, which were arsenic contaminated and they did not procure 'drinking water from other's tube wells on the plea that it affected their prestige and they considered it very insulting to go to another house that belonged to lower strata for taking water.

It may be pointed out here that two married women recently died having skin disease and their tube wells were arsenic contaminated. Their husbands, sons and daughters were affected by arsenic poisoning. In Fakirabad village which is located by the side of Ramkrishnapur seven persons died of suspected arsenic poisoning in a single family and five more members of the same family have been suffering from arsenic poisoning following drinking arsenic contaminated drinking water. But one thing is significant here, many of the arsenic patients when stopped taking water from the contaminated tube well and took water from safe tube wells, they are getting better and their skin disease is becoming less. It appeared that everybody was not affected by arsenic poisoning although they used to drink from the same tube well. They included among others babies and minor kids. The study suggested that at least

53% people were not affected by arsenic poisoning although they used to drink from the same tube well.

In Ramkrishnapur village another significant finding is that all tube wells having the same depth do not necessarily contain arsenic. It was also found that tube wells of the same depth and as little as 5 meters apart differed greatly in concentration. One tube well would be contaminated while the next tube well 5 meters away had zero arsenic.

Table 2: Depth and Number of tube wells having either arsenic contamination or arsenic free.

Depth (feet)	No. of tube wells	No. of tube wells with arsenic
70	1	1
80	2	
90	12	4
100	6	1
110	14	2
118	16	
120	99	2
125	6	
130 j	11	4
135	15	4
140	5	
150	6	
160	3	
170	3	3
175	5	
180	1	
210	1	
Total	205	4

Findings

After the survey the following findings were made:

The village Ramkrishnapur under Mokarimpur union of Bhermara Thana in the district of Kushtia is one of the worst affected arsenic contamination areas. At least 62% of the people living in the village are quite in dark about arsenic poisoning in drinking water and arsenic contaminated disease. These people are superstitious and animistic in their approach to life. Although literacy rate is 33.65%, it is very low among the low-income group and lowest among the landless people. A little over 7% of the people have some amount of knowledge about arsenic poisoning. There is no alternative arrangement for safe drinking water, like a safe tank or pond, ring well and storage of rainwater. 59 tube wells have not been tested so far for arsenic contamination. Most of the patients suffering from arsenic contamination did not receive any medical aid. There is one patient who is a cancer suspect. Two women already died of arsenic. In the neighboring village of Fakirabad, seven persons have died of arsenic poisoning and four more have been suffering. They all belong to one single family. As 85% of the people live below poverty line they cannot pay for their treatment.

Recommendations and Plan of Action.

In view of the aforesaid observations and findings it becomes very clear that prevention as well as alternative use of safe drinking of water is essential to keep the health hazards contained. In order to achieve this goal the following plan of action is recommended:

Creation of awareness programme against arsenic contamination with the help of folklore. This includes various traditional media such as folk songs and folk plays on the issue of arsenic contamination. Folklore provides community knowledge in health education, particularly that directed towards arsenic poisoning and its subsequent prevention by using surface water such as ring well, well protected pond water after necessary boiling, rain water etc.; improving environmental solution, modifying habit, culture and custom of the people Alternative arrangement for safe drinking water such as the digging of small sized ponds and its subsequent preservation, storing of rain water in big drums, ring well etc.

Formation of small groups involving local people and community leaders like Matbars, Mondols, Mullahs, Imams, teachers of local schools, educated but unemployed youths, government and non-government workers working in the village for social mobilization and motivational work.

Formation of organized groups on the basis of co-operative' and participatory social development for adult literacy, mass education, self financing, self credit, health care, sanitation, arsenic contamination and environmental problems for sustainable mitigation against arsenic and other health social and economic development.

Setting up health camps for identification of arsenic patients and their treatment including testing of tube wells for arsenic contamination.

Action Research

On the basis of plan of action various research actions were undertaken in the village. Two workshops were held with local people in the village. These were attended by men, women, youths and students. A total of four cultural shows with view to creating a sense of awareness among the people against arsenic contamination in tube wells were held two in Ramkrishnapur village and the rest two in neighboring villages, Fakirabad and Nauda-khemirdear. A pond was made with the help of local people on participatory basis for safe drinking water, The Deputy Commissioner; Kushtia formally inaugurated the digging of the pond: The remaining 59 tube wells were tested with the help of an international NGO, Community Development Project, Kushtia in the village. Only 9 (nine) tube wells were found contaminated. Meanwhile regular group discussions are being held in the village with the community leaders and the local people. Teachers in the schools, Imams in the mosque, Mudarress (teachers) in the madrasa are making their students and local people aware of arsenic contamination. The Deputy Commissioner, Civil Surgeons, WHO consultants visited the village a number of times.

A seminar on arsenic contamination and mass-awareness program was also held in Kushtia in joint collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the Family Welfare and the Folklore Research Institute, Kushtia. It was attended among others by the former Vice-Chancellor, Agricultural University, Mymensingh, the present Vice-Chancellor of Islamic University, Deputy Manager, Arsenic, Ministry of Health and the Family Welfare Dr. A.Z.M. Iftikhar Hussain, UNICEF program Co-ordinator, WHO

consultants, the Civil Surgeon and many others. The Deputy Commissioner, Kushtia presided over the seminar.

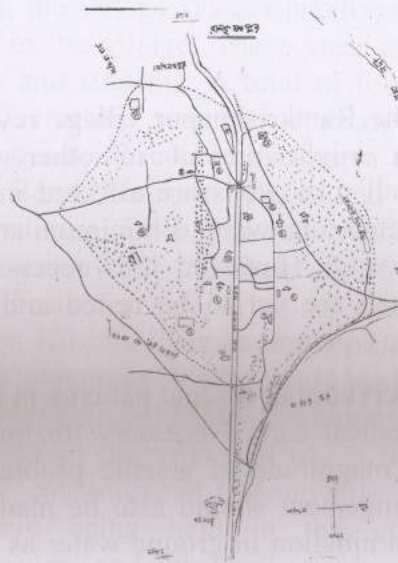
Conclusion:

The study in the Ramkrishnapur village revealed that the same situation might prevail in other villages also. Generally not all tube wells are affected in an area. The number of affected tube wells is minimum and as such it is not very frightening. However, it is necessary to test the tube wells which are yet to be tested and make people aware of arsenic contamination...

It has been observed that arsenic patients in the village did not get any medical care. Necessary treatment should be given and the magnitude of arsenic problems should be measured. Arrangement should also be made for removal of arsenic contamination in ground water as recommended by the Health authorities.

Over and above, motivational work and social mobilization by the use of folklore should be done on a priority basis in the affected areas.

Area of Field Study



Water Crisis: Solution and its Possibilities

The Ganges is known as the Padma when it enters into Bangladesh near the Rajshahi district. The river Gorai that takes off from the Padma near the Kushtia district Headquarters, two miles downstream of the historic Hardinge Railway Bridge, has been the largest perennial distributor of the Ganges -Padma river, supplying fresh water to the southwest region of Bangladesh for hundreds of years. The Caryya songs or the Buddhist mystic songs, the earliest specimen of the Bengali literature recorded the names of the Ganges and the Padma. There is, however, no doubt that these names of the rivers have been used quite symbolically to serve the mystic purposes. The Gorai River too is a historic one as the name also appears in a number old and middle Bengali literature. These rivers actually provided succor to the people for generations. Eight greater districts of SWR are dependent on the Ganges-Padma water and their tributaries such as the Gorai, the Madhumoti, Ichamoti, Nabaganga, Bhairab and Kumar. The total areas cover around 20,000 square miles. The districts, however, include Rajshahi, Pabna, Kushtia, Faridpur, Jessore, Khulna, Patuakhali and Barisal viz, Rajshahi, Pabna, Kushtia and Faridpur. The fresh water flow of the Gorai is key to the maintenance of environmental, social and ecological balance in the region, especially in terms of checking salinity intrusion. More than 50 years ago, Steamers, Launches and Big cargo-boats, known as Bajra used to ply on the Ganges-Padma, carrying on trade and commerce and provided economic support to the people living along these rivers. Markets developed and flourished. Kumerkhali, presently, an Upozila under Kushtia district and located by the side of the Gorai, was a subdivision of neighbouring Pabna district during the

British. It earned name and fame for handloom and weaving products. Here lived Rabindranath Tagore and his brothers who were landlords of the Tagore estate founded by their father and great grandfather at Shelaidah, three miles from Kumerkhali town and six miles from the district headquarters. The Shelaidah Kuthibari of Rabindranath Tagore was built beside the mighty, majestic and graceful Padma. Rabindranath Tagore in many of his articles, poems, and letters mentioned that the Padma and the Gorai brought about a revolutionary change in his career. The influence of these rivers was much too deep on his life. He came very close to the people and became a development philosopher. Fish were available in abundance, so much so that his son Rathindranath Tagore dumped thousands of Hilsha for use as fertilizer for his agricultural farm. The noted Manik Bandopadhyay in his novel, 'Padma Nadir Majhi' (Boatmen of the Padma) mentioned that Hilsha fish were available in abundance in the Padma. But these did not change the fate of the fishermen because of exploitation by the Middlemen known as the, Mahajans'. Lalon Shah, the noted mystic and Baul Poet lived along the Gorai and the Kaliganga River that moved through Kushtia. Kangal Harinath Majumdar, the noted Journalist, and the author of a novel, 'Bishad-Sindhu', Mir Mosharraf Hussain, Historian Akshoy Kumar Maitra, Jaladhar Sen., all lived along the Gorai, in Kumerkhali. The Tagore Estate was also under Kumerkhali Upazila. Rani Bhavani, the noted Queen of Natore had her Temple beside the Tagore estate. The environmental position was then so good that a host of people including scientist Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose had been regular visitors to the Shelaidah Kuthibari of Tagore.

The Gualando ghat and railway station which was located by the side of the Padma and had connections with Kolkata

and on the one hand and Dhaka on the other, greatly flourished and it earned name and fame as a gateway to the Golden Bengal. All these now are matters of the past.

The whole of Gualando is now either a sand-bank or a vast barren field. The Padma now flows through the Daulatdia ghat, a couple of miles downstream from the Gualondo ghat and the total scenario of the locality has taken a different look.

The Padma -- Gorai and Southwest region dilemma:

The Padma- Gorai rivers are important source of fresh water supply to the southwest region of Bangladesh and the Gorai is the only remaining major spill channel of the Ganges river flowing through this region.

The dry season flow of the Padma has decreased largely since the commissioning of the Farakka Barrage in West Bengal, India in 1975. For the last 30 years the dry season monthly mean flow (November- May) in the Gorai River has been decreasing and has reached a minimum value of 526m³/sec. Not just the dry season flow, the wet season flow is also declining. However, at the plan form conditions in the Ganges-Padma River between the Hardinge Bridge and the Gorai off-take developed unfavorable alignments. Erosion along the Ganges-Padma river bank due to high flood in combination with the hard point at Talbaria causes the off-take of Gorai located at the inner bend to catch more sediment deposited at or near the off-take area. The siltation and reduced flow in the Ganges-Padma together yield low flow in the Gorai River. And from 1988, there has been a resultant hastening of the natural decline of the Gorai River as it becomes totally cut- off from the Ganges-

rivers the intrusion of salinity is increasing rapidly. An area of more than 5000 square miles was under the influence of salinity. This has increased to a great extent and the salinity has now intruded as far inland as the Madhumoti and the Gorai. According to reports available, the concentration of salinity in Khulna areas has increased by 4000 percent and has penetrated into the main land. Besides, a number of industries including the Goalpara Thermal Station and the Newsprint Mills faced closure. The effects of salinity and lowering of the water level underground have seriously threatened the vegetative growth in the areas served by the Padma that carried about 55,000 cusecs of water during the most critical days prior to the unilateral withdrawal of water by India.

The High Salinity:

The high salinity caused by the salt water intrusion has rendered the river water unusable for drinking, cooking and washing purposes in Khulna and Bagerhat districts. Water Development Board source said that an all time record of saline contents in the river water in the SWR was registered at 120 Parts per Million (PPM) as against normal contents of 18 PPM since February, 1976. The Bangladesh Water Development Board further disclosed that the ground water level having direct relationship with the surface water level had been drastically disturbed in the entire southwest region due to heavy fall in the water level in the rivers by one feet to five feet. The surface water treatment plant of Khulna Water Supply had become inoperative due to sudden rise in the chloride contents from last year's record of 25 PPM to well over 2000 PPM or more. The source apprehended that if the present rate of salt water intrusion

continued, the present alternative source of supplying drinking water from shallow tube wells and hand pumps within the municipal area would become unusable. The 60 mgw Power Station in Khulna which supplies electricity to the western grid area covering the major part of Khulna and elsewhere is facing extreme difficulty due to unfrequented increase of salinity in the Bhairab river. The Bheramara Power Station has also become inoperative following sharp fall in the water level in the intake channel of the Ganges Kobadakh Pump House. Salinity in the Rupsa-Passur River had adversely affected the working of the Goalpara Power Station in Khulna. Thus it has become a matter of great concern is an observed increase in salt water intrusion to the river from the Bay of Bengal up the lower and low mid reaches of the Gorai and its various associated watercourses due to the lower dry season volumes of fresh water supply entering the system. In the absence of any option to supplement the fresh water supply to the SWR, the main problem appears to be salinity intrusion, environmental degradation and silting up of river channels and these need to be resolved immediately. A barrage on the Padma River can solve this problem to a great extent by diverting some flow through the Gorai in the dry season. But this is not possible because of huge financial involvement. Moreover it cannot meet the urgent need for augmentation of the Goral River. The study reveals that there has been an intrusion of salinity to the river Madhumoti in Faridpur district.

Navigational Problem:

The river transport system which is the main mode of transportation for passengers and cargoes face serious

problems following the formation of innumerable shoals and 'chars' in the rivers. This has caused serious environmental problem also... More than 70 miles of major waterways have been affected due to fall in the water level and intrusion of salinity that damaged the vessels having wooden bodies. During dry season, there is no navigation in the Ganges. The river is full of sandbanks. The Ganges or the Padma has also a dismal look as the river has become no better than a big canal full of char lands or 'shoals'. Once the Ganges -Padma were famous for wild ducks and birds. But these are no more. The acute shortage of water also has caused drinking problem to the people who live along the riverside.

Arsenic Problem:

The sharp reduction of water supply to the Padma-Gorai basin also has caused arsenic problem in the region. Most of the tube wells are found contaminated and these are unusable and are sealed by the authority concerned. The causes of the presence of arsenic in ground water are still not properly detected. Many health specialists are of the opinion that the Ganges might have contained arsenic deposits along with the alluvial deposits during several hundreds of years or more. They hold that the alluvial deposits came from the regions having igneous and metamorphic rocks where there is existence of arsenic compounds. But the others are of this opinion that organic fertilizers and insecticides may also add to the arsenic contamination of ground water. The Folklore Research Institute, Kushtia made a study in three villages of Kushtia located beside the Ganges-Padma in 1998-1999. These three villages are: Ramkrishnapur, Fakirabad and

Golapnagar under Bheramara Upozila in Kushtia district. Most of the tube wells were found contaminated and a number of people had arsenic disease. In Fakirabad village 12 persons were affected by arsenic and of them seven died.

Fisheries Problem:

At present fish becomes very scarce in the Ganges-Padma. No hilsha fish is available in the Padma- Gorai. It may be noted here that Bangladesh in the past years produced more than 95% of hilsha fish. It was due to availability of fresh water in all rivers through the Ganges-Padma. But with the construction of the Farakka Barrage and unilateral withdrawal of water by India, the hydrographic condition in the lower reaches of the river Ganges and its tributaries brought in drastic changes physically, chemically and biologically and these changes have seriously affected the migration and breeding of the Hilsha fish. In fact, the changes in the hydrographic condition have disrupted the natural food chains for different aquatic organisms including the fish and prawn and thus paved the way to their subsequent extinction. Thousands of fishermen who live on fishing are now facing extinction due to non availability of fish. Fish is the principal source of animal protein in Bangladesh According to experts; fish provide 6.4 grams out of 7.5 grams per capita animal protein consumes in Bangladesh. It is evident from a nutrition survey that more than 80 percent of the animal protein comes from fish alone. But the gradual decline of inland fish output might pose a serious threat to the protein supply in the near future.

The Sunderban:

The Sunderban, located at the southern boundary, is an internationally important mangrove forest that supports extensive bio-diversity with a wide representation of significant wild life including the Royal Bengal Tiger.

Environmental investigations have indicated that the increased river salinity might cause serious environmental damage to the Sunderban mangroves including the royal Bengal Tiger, the spotted Deer and innumerable fauna. The Sunderban is now a World Heritage and thus is of unique importance. The increased salinity of the rivers Sipsha and Posur, following reduction in the upland flow caused by withdrawal of the Ganges water at Baraka affected the Sunderban lying in Khulna district in the south. The area of the Sunderban in Bangladesh is estimated to be around 2.341 square miles approximately. The Sunderban in Khulna play a very important role and act as a shield against the onslaught of the devastating cyclones and tidal bore which occasionally hit the coastal districts several times in the past. But this time, the Sidr destroyed everything that came on its way and it is held that such devastation is the result of an environmental degradation in the whole of the SWR. The reduced flow of fresh water supply from the water sheds and the upstream connected with the Ganges- Padma and the Gorai has led to the 'greater penetration' of saline and tidal water in the major rivers and innumerable canals and creeks of the forest and thus contaminated the forest soil with excessive salinity. This has also brought in a disastrous ecological change and damage to the existing vegetation type. It is also seen that a number trees in other areas has been facing extinction. The Shishu tree is one such kind. In Kushtia and elsewhere in SWR this kind of tree is being wiped out. Of late, coconut

and betel nut groves have been affected. It is alleged that mobile phone towers are responsible for such kind of damage to environment. This, however, needs investigation.

Agriculture:

The physical degradation following acute shortage of surface water and intrusion of salinity has had many adverse socio-economic impacts. The increased sedimentation in the rivers and the canals, particularly in the tidal zone, has resulted in drainage congestion in the region. The physical degradation has seriously affected the life and livelihood of the people living in the region. The welfare of the people depends largely on Agriculture and Fishery activities but these are very much on the decline due to reduction in productivity following shortage of surface water.

The Ganges Kobadakh Project:

The Ganges Kobadakh Irrigation Project is the premier irrigation project of the country. The Project was conceived in 1954 to improve quality of life and economic solvency of the people living in greater Kushtia and Jessore districts by achieving self sufficiency in food through increasing agricultural production and preventing environmental degradation. The G.K.Project is situated on the right bank of the river Ganges (Padma) just beside the Hardinge Bridge. The Project is bounded by the river Ganges on the north; the Gorai- Madhumoti in the east; the Naboganga in the South and the Mathabhanga in the west. The Project covers an area of 197,500 hectares of land out of which

142,000 hectares are irrigable. After implementation of the project the crop intensity has increased from 125% to 226%. Cultivation of HYV is almost 100% within the project area compared 20% at national level. Production of crops was 12-13 mounds per acre before implementation of the project but it increased 5-6 times higher when the project completed. The project was a flood free zone and people were gradually becoming solvent. Environment was protected by improved water management, improved diversification of crops and forestation.

But such situation is no more in the project since the project suffered following acute shortage of water necessary for irrigation and crop cultivation. The required amount of water is no more available as the water level goes so down that the pumps failed to lift water the intake channel connected with the Ganges.

Population problem and environment:

Apart from the physical factors, there has been remarkable increase in population growth. During the last 10 years (1991- 2000), the population has increased by 20%. The mainstay of the people has traditionally been agriculture and the sharp rise in population growth has seriously affected agricultural sector for meeting increased requirement of employment, income and food for the people. The salinity intrusion has not only barred the production of some of the more desired crops, it has caused serious damage to certain crops cultivated in certain areas of the region. There has also been an acute shortage of grazing land for the cattle following salinity intrusion in surface water and cultivation of shrimp or 'Baghda'.

Meanwhile, other human induced environmental changes have also occurred following increased use of ground water for irrigation, domestic and industrial uses and the expansion of number of shrimp farms in and around greater Khulna and Jessore districts. It is feared that the entire area of the Gangetic basin would be useless for human habitation as the ingress of salinity might turn the fresh water zones into saline water zones. It is held that the decline in the Ganges-Padma water level also seriously affected the continuous flow of sedimentation in the Bay of Bengal. And this might cause environmental and ecological change in the atmosphere leading to 'Sidr' like devastation.

The aforesaid study clearly presents Bangladesh as a country with a very rich cultural heritage and here water has been playing a vital role in the making of it. But at the moment, Bangladesh has been struggling for existence due to acute shortage of water in the dry season or over-abundance of water in the form of high floods in wet season and it aggravates, when India opens all the gates of Farakka Barrage to avoid crisis in India regarding flood and water logging.

In Bangladesh water logging presents a serious problem. The problem is acute in the southwest region, more particularly in the coastal region.

Drinking water is a big problem as the water logging carries as tube-wells are under water. The same is true with latrines. These, too, are under water. People also suffer from various water borne diseases like diarrhea, dysentery, skin diseases. It is a harrowing tale of the sufferings of the people, particularly, children, old people and patients. People cannot use bath room as most of the houses are under water. Any heavy shower brings untold suffering to

the people. Snake-bite is also rampant. Most important part of water logging is absence of fire-wood. There is also acute shortage of fodder. Farmers suffer because they cannot utilize farm fields as these are under water. Many people are jobless. Education has also suffered. Most of the schools are also now under water. The position is threatening during wet season or during heavy shower and cyclone.

India and Pakistan had strained relations for years. East Pakistan by being a part of Pakistan suffered greatly. The problem concerned sharing of the Ganges water when India had set up Farakka Barrage over the Ganges in 1961 and unofficially started diverting water from the Ganges (The Padma) before the independence of Bangladesh from Pakistan to fulfill her needs. Pakistan protested and held meetings with the Indian Government for several years and final meeting was held in 1970. The problem continued when the country was liberated in 1971. Bangladesh faced a very critical moment in regard to water issues. The Farakka Barrage was officially commissioned in 1975. Bangladesh had water treaty signed with India in 1996. But Bangladesh never got due share of water as agreed upon. India was supposed to divert withdraw 40,000 cusec water from the Ganges but she withdrew and diverted water more than what was agreed upon.

The construction of a barrage over the Ganges after few years of independence, had dealt a severe blow to Bangladesh, a country that fought hand in hand with India during a nine-month war. The present situation in Bangladesh is: the rivers are without water during dry season, no navigation has been possible in some rivers. The agriculture of Bangladesh which involves men, women and children has been facing a serious setback due to non-

availability of water in the dry season and over abundance of water in wet season. The river transport system, which is the main mode of transportation of passengers and cargoes, faces a serious problem following the formation of innumerable 'char' (sandbar) and shoals in the rivers. Meanwhile the rivers belonging to the southwestern parts of the country also have been experiencing salinity and a scarcity of fresh water. Salinity has also affected the vessels, which have wooden bodies. Navigation in the channels of Chittagong and Mongla ports has also been threatened. The mighty Ganges or the Padma as it is called is now a mere name only. It is heavily silted and the river is no better than a stream. People cross the river on foot. The Ganges Kobadakh Project, the premier irrigation project of Bangladesh failed to supply irrigation to the millions of farmers belonging to the western districts of Bangladesh. The Gorai, an off-take of the Ganges is now almost dead, threatening life. The absence of fresh water has seriously affected the historic Sunderbans. The ground water level has gone so low that it has seriously affected deep and shallow tube well irrigation. Salinity is now destroying agriculture, forestry, and fishery. Livestock has suffered. Desertification and ecological imbalance and environmental pollution pose a serious threat to the life and property of the people. The total economy of the country has been facing a serious setback. Arsenic has become a big problem as over 80 % tubewells are now contaminated. Many people have already died of arsenic. The absence of fresh water is taken as one of the causes of Arsenic contamination. Bangladesh has been experiencing serious drought for the past several months. As a result, rain water, as an alternative for safe tube-well water, is now a far cry from happening. High flood during the past several years

damaged cities, towns and villages and caused havoc to the life and property, shattering the country's economy. Water then is everywhere, 'but not a drop to drink.'



The majority of the rivers in Bangladesh dry up in dry season. Moreover the country faces continuous drought. Ponds and ditches are without water. It seriously affects irrigation for agricultural production. The Gorai River which is an offshoot of the Ganges (the Padma) connects several southwestern districts for fresh water. But the mouth of the river remains heavily silted and a number of times were completely blocked for supply of fresh water to the whole southwestern region. As a result the total economy of the entire region suffered. The Government arranged re-excavation of the river, but before the work was complete, the dredging work was suspended causing a serious setback to agriculture, fishery, livestock, forestry, health – sanitation and environment. Salinity makes everything all the more worse. The Ganges (the Padma) was once famous for fish, particularly hilsha which is called the King fish, is no more available. The fishermen of this region have suffered much for this and they are now forced to give up fishing as a trade. Many communities such as potters, weavers, oil makers who used to live along the river banks have also been forced to give up their ancestral trade. Moreover, heavy and continuous river

erosion in the region has destroyed hundreds of villages leaving people shelter less and homeless.

The irrigation system, both surface and ground water, which is in practice, has also been facing crisis. No timely irrigation is possible because of non-availability of water in the Ganges. However, when irrigation is available to the people, it does not reach the tail-enders as the people who are in the upper region take the major share. In the absence of a water law, this problem cannot be addressed. A similar situation is in vogue by the ground water users. There is a conflict between the deep and shallow tube well users in the same region or locality. And here also there is no water law to prevent mismanagement in water use. In view of the above, the culture of Bangladesh is on the verge of ruination. The villages are no more the center of cultural activities. Boat races and other festivals are hardly organized; the folk singers are hard hit and have disappeared. Shamans and rainmakers are no more seen. Modernity has also seriously affected their way of life. Traditional way of life has been changed to non-traditional ones. Modern technology has replaced the traditional practices. However, a good number of modern uses in the agricultural sector proved detrimental not only to the production of agriculture and its allied discipline but also to the general health environment of the people. The scarcity of water, thus, has given a death blow to the cultural heritage of Bangladesh. Fish is being destroyed due to improper use of insecticide and chemical fertilizers. Many insects which are helpful to agriculture have faced extinction. Many birds and frogs are no more seen. On the other hand, use of chemicals also helps increase the arsenic problem. Drinking water has become a serious problem because of arsenic. Most of the tube-wells are now arsenic

contaminated. The Government of Bangladesh and the Ngo's working in Bangladesh with funds from outside have been working for long to mitigate this problem.

Meherunnessa, a Research Associate of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, published an article on 'A Step toward Solving the South Asian Crisis' in the George Town Journal of International Affairs on May 25, 2015.

In her article she discussed the water crisis now has been facing by South Asian Countries, more particularly Bangladesh being the lower riparian country. India, Pakistan and Nepal also have problems regarding water issues but the position of Bangladesh is acute. Bangladesh was once called the land of rivers and scenic beauty. Rivers shaped her future; so much so, that the country was called the Golden Bengal. She analyzed the problem quite dispassionately and urged upon countries that are in an advantageous position to be sympathetic and humane with those who depend on them in regard to water issues.

"For many years, water has been one of the most commonly contested bilateral and multilateral issues between and among the countries of South Asia. Conflict over water has, for example, strained India's relations with three of its neighbors: Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal. The rapid retreat of the Himalayan glaciers, increasing effects of climate change, deteriorating river ecology, and growing urbanization of the region have all impacted flows of fresh water in South Asia. India's unilateral approach to the problem has also made maintaining good relations among South Asian countries more complex. As a result, major trans-boundary rivers including the Indus, Ganges, and Brahmaputra, which straddle international borders and support the lives of an estimated 700 million people, are in desperate need of improved water governance.

Water-sharing conflicts among the countries of the region have a long and torrid history. Bangladesh and India maintain a tense relationship over issues of water management, one that has grown increasingly strained by the diversion of the Ganges River by India, the Farakka dam, the proposed Tipaimukh Dam, and the Teesta water-sharing predicament. India's hydroelectric projects — and the devastation they inflict upon the environment — have also created a bone of contention between the two countries. India's decision to divert the Ganges has created undesirable salt deposits in Bangladeshi farmland, negatively impacting fishing and navigation in Bangladesh. The Farakka Dam has prevented fresh water from reaching the Sunderbans, the world's largest mangrove forest. Indo-Bangladesh relations are also strained over the proposed Tipaimukh Dam in the state of Manipur..."

In her article Meherunnessa correctly identified the crux of the problem. It would be a big blow not only to the economic upliftment of Bangladesh but it would also greatly affect the life and living condition of 160 million people of the country due to unilateral action of India diverting water from the Ganges and the Brahmaputra as these rivers have their origin in Himalayan mountains and flow through from India .

The construction of Farakka barrage or dam over the Ganges (The Padma) has already left an adverse effect on the environment riparian areas of Bangladesh. It is further learnt that India is going to build another dam over the Brahmaputra and works are on-going. This would also lead to the drying up of two main rivers, the Surma and the Kusiara. Such an action would destroy Bangladesh economically. 'The dam would also have an adverse impact on the environment and bio-diversity of the lower riparian

areas of Bangladesh,' commented Meherunnessa. In fact, such action of withdrawing water by setting up barrage or dam over international rivers is very unfortunate on the part of India who fought hand in hand with the freedom fighters to liberate Bangladesh against Pakistan.



The hard reality is: our rivers which originate from the Himalaya or from any other mountain and then fall to the sea, can no more give birth to any poet, rather the sea together with rivers close to it, brings forth 'aila' in the southern part of Bangladesh, destroying 30 million souls. As the sea water rises, and salinity affects the farm fields, and the Sunderbans getting destroyed, there appears further fear of 'aila' or 'tsunami'. India explodes bombs in seas for experiment, Korea and China took the sea as a fertile ground for Bomb explosion. The sea is tortured and there appears a commotion. And Bangladesh becomes a victim by being a lower riparian country.

The change of climate together with the change in the environment also is caused not by nature herself, it is purely man made. Nature, in self defence or self-guarding,

became violent to bring in 'chaos' to the shaping of the earth as cosmos for her protection. She took protective measure to give human mind a lesson but it was merely a cry in the wilderness; her human child pays no heed to it.



The environmentalists in their study assessed that the 'country's environmentally vulnerable regions are also faced with the consequences of growing pressure on the environment as a result of rising demand for water, inadequate maintenance of existing embankments and other environmental protection measures, and rapid and often unmanaged urbanization and industrialization.' According to them, climate change in Bangladesh is expected to exacerbate many existing vulnerabilities. There may be increasingly frequent and severe floods, cyclones, storm surges and droughts. Sustained and sustainable growth, therefore, will not only be a far cry but also it would be very crucial in adopting long-term efforts to climate change in Bangladesh.'

Following change in climate, Bangladesh will remain highly vulnerable to the threat of floods. Again the coastal

zone might face severe type of cyclone and storms together with tidal surge. In the past we noticed, when there is severe flood in India all the gates of the Farakka Barrage are kept open and these affect Bangladesh because most of the rivers which have been dried up or are heavily silted, they cause high flood. Again many embankments in West Bengal are cut open to save people of the affected area but these high flood when enters into Bangladesh it causes severe damage to the life and property of the people. Such things happened in the recent past. At least twelve districts of the south western region were under water and the damage done was severe and unprecedented. This high flood was responsible for severe water logging and presently several Upozila in Khulna and Jessore districts have been experiencing a very severe type of water logging. All these caused heavy migration from rural to urban areas. The poor, however, could not leave the locality as a result the poverty accelerated.

Culture, as we stated earlier, covers the total way of life beginning from birth to death. It includes social, economic, religious and other human issues such as art, literature and music. The absence of water, particularly in rivers, directly affects these issues. In the absence of water there has been a tremendous migration from rural areas to urban areas. This also caused serious environmental problems also. As a result many of such people who lived years in rural areas amongst natural sights and sceneries with rivers and rivulets flowing alongside and contributed to art, literature and music, find their lives uncomfortable and not rewarding, left their age-old position in the village, changing their professions also. Fishermen, boatmen, bayati or music performers such as Bauls and other folk-singers, poets and artists also do not feel safe and

comfortable because of destruction of natural beauty and absence of river, together with quick urbanization. Further, the villages also suffer from severe poverty. Life is no more easy. And because of large scale migration, the villages have become den of criminal activities.

When such is the situation, the Global intervention is necessary. We can only pray now, 'Let good sense prevail' 'May God save human beings from total destruction by human beings.

Dr. Abu Yousuf Abdullah in his recent book, 'SAARC, Will it Survive?', published in 2007 from Dhaka, in the summary of his study said, "The South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation or SAARC was formally inaugurated as an association of seven states in December, 1985. It was initially established for regional co-operation in agriculture, rural development, telecommunication, meteorology, health and population control initiatives. Today it has been expanded to encompass more activities including trade.' (Abdullah, AYM. 2011:01). In the Preface of the book, he strongly endorsed his research in the following words:

"Twenty years have elapsed since the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation or SAARC came into being, twelve summits and good number of meetings have been held, but its achievement towards advancement and well being of the people is rather modest. Enlightened conscience may find it difficult to understand why the South Asian countries, constituting more than one fifth of mankind, having cultural affinities, economic complementary and similar problems have failed for long to unite in order to create a better quality of life for their people" (Abdullah, AYM. 2011: Preface).

In fact, it is due to non-cooperation of India as one of the big powers in the region, the purpose of SAARC could not be realized as yet. Although the relation between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, apparently seems good, the future looks bleak. India always plays the role of a big brother, the former Prime Minister, I.K. Gujral in his book writes, "The Gujral doctrine, if I may call it so, states that with neighbors like Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, we do not ask for reciprocity but give what we can in good faith". Abdullah comments, "But in reality it has never been applied or discussed at the policy level. Indian bureaucrats were skeptical about the idea. Also once Gujral is out of power, the doctrine went with him." (Abdullah, AYM. 2011: 221-222)

Amartya Sen, the Nobel Laureate, finally defends India. Abdullah quotes Amartya, "India must be the elder, not the big brother with special responsibility. It must not only be the largest country in the heart of South Asia, but also the country with the largest heart." (Abdullah, AYM.2011:222). Amartya Sen. was born in Manikganj, Bangladesh but now a seasoned Indian civilion. He visited Bangladesh a number of times and had full knowledge about the problems the country had been facing and looked to be unbiased and neutral as an international scholar but he too quite unexpectedly became an outright Indian at last.

With acute shortage of water for a long time, the country Bangladesh, which was known in the past as the Golden Bengal and the people enjoyed life with ease, having fish and curry with no limit (macce bhathe Bengali), the historical proverb is now no more true with the 170 million people of Bangladesh. The six seasons appear in rotation as nature fixed them, to fit in nature's beauty and bounty. The poet Keats once glorified autumn as 'Season of mists and

mellow fruitfulness, conspiring with sun how to load and bless'; the saying, however, appears to have gone with the wind now for Bangladesh, losing all the glamour, radiance and truthfulness. Presently, following change in climate and also in environment, the six seasons have now been acting quite differently. 'Khona'r baccan' the folk wisdom is no more effective in matters relating to social, economic and cultural activities. 'Daak' and 'Khona' the two historic wise man and woman who lived in the country in ancient time and were members of the Royal Court, donot anymore look wise and all their sayings seemed to be ineffective.

The people of Bangladesh, both old and young, fought for nine months in the war of liberation against Pakistan for oppressive and tyrannical rule; they now look dull, timid, moribund and insipid because of loss of severe hemoglobin. They cannot fight any more. They need sleep like Tennyson's 'Lotus Eater' who after a great fight against the Trojan, have lost all their energy and now needed only rest and sleep. This has added to a continued and prolong mental agony following failures in economic activities. Life is no more easy for them.

'Most weary seem'd the sea, weary the oar,
Weary the wandering fields of barren foam'

There is thus a melancholy strain, a languid air and a tired eyelid upon tired eyes:

Our hearts and spirits wholly
To the influence of mild minded melancholy'
And thus finally comes the yell,
'As when a soul lament, which hath been blest,
Desiring what is mingled with past years
In yearnings that can never be exprest
By sighs or groans or tears.

Under such circumstances, Ulysses continued hammering and finally led them to their country of heroic souls with rejuvenated vigour, telling them the truth of life:

Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive to seek, to find and not to yield.

Such clarion call was made by Bangobandhu on March 7, 1971 when East Pakistan under his leadership was almost at war with Pakistani army junta and the country was liberated after a 9-month war on December 16, 1971. Again, as the crisis begins, we hear the same voice inspiring Bangladesh from the grave to his people. Bangobandhu had been the Ulysses of modern Bangladesh. Bangladesh will certainly 'push off, and sitting well in order smite the sounding furrows'. Bangladesh will overcome all her odds and will come out victorious in her last fight for life.

There is no doubt that Bangladesh is now a country which is economically most vulnerable. Paddy or Jute is no more golden. Rabindra-Nazrul and Jibanananda who once eulogized Bengal or Bangla for her lush green natural beauty, solvency and security in food, had they been living here today, they would have cried for death as did Tithonous to Aurora. Aurora, the Greek goddess of dawn fell in love with Tithonous, a handsome youth who was happy moving on earth, sharing its glory and pangs of suffering as other human beings do, but forgetting all these, he drifted himself towards Aurora, who assured immortality to him by Zeus but not perpetuating his youthful vigour as of Aurora, for reasons known only to

her. Bangladesh was likewise enticed by India in her freedom struggle but later on she had forgotten to give her succor after her hard earned victory in the face of death and famine and cared only for herself. The Golden Bengal of Tagore now only has been passing through a pangs of sufferings as of Tithonous. What an irony of fate!

But Bangladesh though seems to have eaten up the forbidden lotus and looks as if she had lost all her hopes of life; it is not the whole truth. She knows how to survive, even when she faces 'aila', 'sidr' or 'roanu'. Such is Bangladesh! She never surrendered.

Conclusion

The above study of water and culture issues in Bangladesh clearly suggests that water is the very basis of life and activities in Bangladesh. In the past, it is the abundance of water by rain and river that made the country fertile and rich. The rivers then had no sedimentation problem. People had land, and the population was not threatened. Even during the period of the liberation war the population of East Pakistan was around 80 million. During Rabindranath Tagore's time, the number of people in undivided Bengal was 70 million. The majority of the people lived in villages and was non-literate. By village one could understand, a collection of dwelling houses, ill built and ill-ventilated and it was the den of poverty and ignorance. They had resources but no initiative. They could not even rise against themselves for a better future. They were, in fact, very passive. This was very much shocking for Tagore. He wrote in one of his poems quite lamenting, 'O Mother, You converted seven billion souls into Bengalese and not Bengalese into men!'

In East Bengal he had his zemindari or estate in Kushtia, Shahjadpur (Pabna) and Patisar (Rajshahi). In these three places he planned to bring about a change in the life of the rural people.

He tried his best to improve their condition by undertaking projects relating to poverty alleviation in rural Bengal. So much so, that he set up an Agricultural Bank in his zemindari or estate with his prize money which he earned as a Nobel Laureate for literature in 1913. But the attitude of the village people was negative. Life was easy as the land was fertile. Rivers were then full. People were thus happy go lucky. But the scenario has changed sharply. The country has been facing a serious type of population explosion. Now Bangladesh has 160 million people and unlimited poverty, and that has greatly reduced the GNP and has made all planning ineffective. There is temporary success in some sectors, but it cannot be called a sustainable one.

Water has become an increasingly scarce resource, and we must understand that every country has the right to have an access to fresh water source outside, and no country, no matter how powerful she may be, has the right to deprive others of doing so. This would be the violation of international rights and rules. Rivers are gifts of nature and we must allow them to flow naturally.

In Bangladesh the shortage of water is becoming very critical. The development of the country will suffer greatly if no measures are taken on a priority basis.

In view of the problems faced by the people, the Government of Bangladesh has undertaken measure to form a Joint River Commission with India. But it does not work because of India's non-cooperation. The Water Treaty

between Bangladesh and India is no more effective. The Ganges Kobadakh Project, a premier irrigation project commenced in 1954 during Pakistani period now stands as a mute monument of gross failure because of non-availability of Ganges water. In view of this, the project had to be declared closed. A number of national and international seminars and conferences held in Bangladesh and it was decided that the rivers should flow naturally. But all these are far cry and nothing substantial came out so far.

It is felt that all countries, particularly those who belong to the South Asian region should come forward in enhancing cooperation between nations towards sharing information on water and environmental issues and thereby creating jointly managed infrastructure facilities for the common good. These measures would help create new ways for civil society to participate in solving regional issues. There should be a regulatory body approved by the regional committee consisting of all four countries of South Asia, such as Bangladesh, India, Nepal and China for aging the Transboundary Rivers such as the Ganges and the Brahmaputra in regard to sharing water and environmental issues for mutual benefit. There is no doubt that India is one of the most powerful countries in the southwest region. But it is true that she needs the help of small countries, more particularly her neighbors like Bangladesh. Bangladesh is never hostile to India rather she desires a friendly relation with her. In fact, it is necessary that India should 'reassess its stance in the intra-regional and inter-regional issues.' Abdullah emphatically comments, SAARC has potentials and India can play a great role in strengthening and broadening mutual co-operation among its member countries. SAARC member countries are inter-related and have inter-dependent economies and these are

unified and inter-twined for generations. The success of SAARC depends mostly on India. And the time has come for India to realize this truth. (Abdullah, AYM, 2011: 4-5). In the present day world, no country, however powerful she may be, can survive alone.

Bangladesh is a small country. It survived many odds. Bangladesh believes in friendship and does not want any domination by any country. India is our best friend. She helped Bangladesh in the freedom fight and hope in our struggle for creating a better and abraveBangladesh. We should get support from India and all freedom loving countries in the world. Let culture dominate fearlessly with water shaping it. ...

Chapter

IX

Postscript

Chapter

IX

Postscript

Annexure -1

National Water Policy: Bangladesh

The Government of Bangladesh already formed a National Water Policy "to ensure progress towards fulfilling national goals of economic development, poverty alleviation, food security, public health and safety, a decent standard of living for the people and the protection of the natural environment".

National Environment Policy:

The 1992 National Environmental Policy is based on the concept of sustainable development formulated by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The main policy requirements related to the water sector are to ensure environmentally sound utilization of resources; so that developments do not create any significant adverse impacts on the environment; and that all water bodies and water resources are kept free from pollution.

The National Environment Management Action Plan (NEAMAP 1994) based on a nationwide consultation program, was intended to develop the environmental policy

and national conservation strategy into an implementable strategy. It identified the main national environmental issues, including those related to the water sector. The main environmental concerns of the people included flood damage, river bank erosion, and environmental degradation of water bodies, increased water pollution, shortage of irrigation water and drainage congestion.

Legal Framework:

Meanwhile, the Government of Bangladesh has undertaken Water Resource Management Legislation as Water Resource Planning Act, 1992. The Government also adopted a number of policies and these are now Acts: The Embankment and Drainage Act 1952, The Ground Water Management Ordinance 1985; The Inland Water Transport Authority Ordinance 1958; The Protection and Conservation of Fish Act 1950; The Government Fisheries Ordinance 1959; The Bangladesh Irrigation Water Rate Ordinance 1983; The 1995 Environmental Conservation Act; The 1997 Environmental Conservation Rules including the water quality standards; The 1997 EIA Guidelines for Industries; The Forest Act, 1997; Bangladesh Wild Life (Preservation) Order 1973 and Act 1974.

Global Water Partnership

When such is the situation the world body called for a summit and decided to have a Global Water Partnership to help reduce water crisis. As a result an organization under the name Global Water Partnership (GWP) was founded in 1996 with the support of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and financial support of the World Bank

and also of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). Initially GWP worked as a unit of SIDA. GWP became an inter-governmental organization under international law known as Global Water Partnership Organization in 2002. The Secretariat is based in Stockholm, Sweden.

The Global Water Partnership (GWP) is an international network created to foster an integrated approach to water resources management (IWRM). Its vision is for a water secure world. GWP offers practical advice for sustainably managing water resources.[1] It operates as a network, open to all organizations, including government institutions, agencies of the United Nations bi-and multi-lateral development banks, professional associations, research institutions, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector.[2]

GWP was formed because there had been dissatisfaction among countries regarding water issues for decades and it was felt by all that a more sustainable approach was needed. Several large international conferences were held and finally, with unanimous agreements, GWP came into being. Meanwhile the Government of Bangladesh has developed management of water issues in the form of National Water Policy. The following are few such steps taken by the government.

Bangladesh Water Partnership (BWP)

Bangladesh Water Partnership (BWP) was established on 30 September 1998 through an expert group meeting under the initiative of Mr. Quamrul Islam Siddique, Former Chief Engineer, and Local Government Engineering Department

(LGED). LGED is supporting BWP as the host Institution since the establishment of BWP.

Vision:

The overall Vision of Bangladesh towards 2025 is to develop a nation which is democratic, economically self-reliant, driven by coherent, secure, just and equitable principles, and consists of citizens whose capabilities and potentials are developed to a high degree.

The vision for the country's water postulates a high level of progress in management of the country's water resources for uplifting the national economy and living conditions of its people on an equitable basis and maintaining ecological and environmental harmony.

Mission:

To provide strategic support to Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) through coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources in Bangladesh by maximizing economic and social benefits without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems.

Objectives of BWP:

Help formulate and promote national policies and laws for IWRM.

Facilitate efficient, equitable and sustainable use of water resources through advocacy, research and actions.

Promote environmentally sustainable water resources development.

Disseminate information and facilitate sharing of experiences and knowledge among users, policy makers, water professionals, planners and civil societies for development and management of water resources.

Promote the increased use of an integrated planning approach.

Create neutral platforms for dialogue on IWRM.

Ensure multi-stakeholders participation for IWRM.

Establish linkages and collaboration with government agencies, international agencies, local govt. institutions (LGIs), private organizations and NGOs and other civil society groups, e.g. media and various professional groups and promote partnership.

Capacity building for IWRM

Promote women participation in water resources development and management.

Gorai Area Water Partnership (GAWP)

In view of the above, The Gorai Area Water Partnership came into being in Kushtia after a meeting with the local stakeholders and the targeted beneficiaries. Folklore Research Institute, Kushtia, Bangladesh, herein Bangladesh Folklore Research Institute (BFRI) convened a meeting in this connection and GAWP was formed in 2003 as an important component of BFRI. Since then GAWP has been working in collaboration with BWP and GWP as their members to fulfill the objectives. Many works have already

been completed. Youth Leadership, School Hand wash program for primary and secondary schools. One Village and One organization, a research project for a self reliant village organized by Folklore Research Institute, Kushtia Bangladesh at a village in Kushtia named Jugia Kadamtala under Kushtia Sadar Upozila (2005). The project solved youth unemployment problem for sixty youths and thirty girls who became self-employed. The project introduced micro-credit program for women in the village under women empowerment program and Farmers conventions were a few such works already implemented in the project area. A village development program with LGED, Kushtia has been running at a village named Jugia under Barokhada union of Kushtia Sadar Upozila.

Annexure -II

Notes on reported Arrival of Hzrath Isa (Jesus Christ) in India and Tibet and origin of Sufism

The Vaishnava influence on Christian Sufism seems to be somewhat probable following a discovery that Isa (Jesus) came to India and met a section of religious people here. A Russian author named Nicolas Notovitch first published this incident in his book, 'The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ.' Later, the said book was translated into English by J.H. Connelly and L. Landsberg and was reprinted in 1981. The Indian copy of the book was published in 2000 A.D. from Calcutta. We learned from this book that Jesus Christ came to Thibet (Tibet) and Ladak. Nicolas claims that he had discovered the original manuscript which he found in a monastery in Thibet. In his book, Nicolas thus writes: "In his fourteenth year, young Issa, the blessed one, came to this side of Sindh and settled among the Aryans, in

the country beloved by God. Fame spread the name of the marvelous youth along the Northern Sindh and when he came through the country of the five streams and Radjipoutan, the devotees of the god Djaine asked him to stay among them. But he left the deluded worshippers of Djaine and went to Djagguernat in the country of Orsis, where reposed the mortal remains of Vyassa-Krishna, and where the white priests of Brahma welcomed him joyfully" (Nicholus, N. 2000:85). This is conjured by many if Jesus was influenced by Indian Yogi a Vaishnavite.

The 'Sannyasi' or (rejection of world by the saints) concept which was developed among a section of Christian saints was not acceptable to Allah (Sura Hadid, 59:27). The concept of ashique (lover) and mashuque (beloved) was developed in Persia or Iran. India and Iran had close relationship and contact with India for a long time in matters of trade and also in culture (Rahim.M.A. 1967 and Ali. M. Mohor, 1985). Buddhism also flourished in Persia and Afghanistan (Rhys Davids TW, 1950; Chatterji, S.K., 1960). Baal, a fertility cult was developed during the periods of Solomon and Eliza (Dictionary of Bible and Encyclopedia Britannica). Eliza took steps to kill the followers of Baal cult for not accepting God as the Supreme Being and also for immoral activities. The cult was spread all over Mesopotamia. The Qur'an had also a reference of Baal cult (Sura as-Saffat 37: 125). Tantrism was also developed alongside. Baul cult in Bangladesh and West Bengal is both esoteric and erotic and it has become very popular and has taken the role of folk cult. All these cults are water based. The Bauls also perform as Ojha or Shaman in rural areas (Karim. A, 1980. Chilson and Knecht, 2003). Water works as an agent in their activities and is a necessity when one is inducted to the cult; he or

she needs ceremonial bathing. They have certain rituals, particularly at the time of 'diksha' ceremony, water plays vital role. In the holy Quran, there is a story of Yusuf and Zulekha. Zulekha was madly in love with Yusuf who did not respond to her love. In Persia, lot of stories came out in the name of Yusuf –Zulekha, the chief author being Firdausi. Popular stories on the aforesaid concept were also developed in 'Laily-Maznu', 'Shiri – Farhad'. The idea was borrowed by Bengali authors of Medieval period such as Shah Muhammad Saghira (Yusuf –Zulekha), Daulat Uzir Bahram Khan (Laily-Maznu) and many others. Sufism thus cannot be taken as purely Islamic. Meanwhile Vaishnavism (Cult of Radha- Krishna) was also not unknown in Persia or Iran in those days. The Sufis came to India much ahead of the Mughols but they got prominence during the Mughol period. These Sufis preached liberal Islam. They greatly influenced the Mughol Prince DaraShikoh who wrote a book entitled, Mazma-ul-Bahrain, the Mingling of the two oceans (In 1065 AH (after Hijra). Two years before he also completed another monumental work, the Surr-i-Akbar or the Great Secret, a Persian Translation of the Upanishads of the Aryans. Dara Shikoh was well conversant of the Vedic and the Vedanta as well as Tantric and the Sanskrit literature. He was later killed by his own men. Here, Dara tried to show the points of similarity and identity between Hinduism and Islam and indicating the points where the two oceans of religious thought meet. Dara had good knowledge of the Sanskrit.

Annexure -III

Research Methodology and Literature Review

My experience suggests that the present system of interview through a prepared questionnaire does not always hold water as the target persons might get scared and would feel uncomfortable, giving the right type of answer.

Therefore, an empirical approach is considered a right type of method that may go a long way in finding the truth. In my study I always take pleasure in talking to the people visiting their houses and sharing their experiences. In our country I came across a number of persons who had expertise and specialization. My association with Bangladesh Water Partnership (BWP) helped me a lot in this regard. I also used university and public library for study.

As I worked on it, I found the topic very interesting. I collected things from everywhere to satisfy my thirst for knowledge. I used books of related scholars and interviewed people, made field visits and used the internet. I made occasional visits to rural areas and met local people and could learn things from them as they narrated the history of the area. The young people have no knowledge and are also not interested in all these things. The old people over of 80 years in the localities, told me that the bridges and culverts found on a plain land without water, were the indicators that once the rivers had flowed through it. My age is now around 79 and I personally had seen many rivers which once moved majestically, but lately, these were totally dried up and there had been no traces of any such river now. The present generation cannot even guess the impact of the vast sea of river water that flew past between Gualando and Daulatdia during 50's and 60's.

Many places in villages still bear the names of rivers but these are now plain lands and are being used for agricultural production. Water logging caused by heavy rain in low-lying areas, also indicate that these were once rivers. I noticed such type of water-logging in Jessore and Khulna districts. Local people had knowledge that these were once big canals.

The senior members of Bangladesh Water Partnership (BWP) also helped me a lot in providing necessary information and understanding about the topic for my study.

Literature Review

It appears that there has been a very limited study on water and cultural issues. Thanks to the formation of the Country Water Partnership in Bangladesh and elsewhere which came into being after the world people met in Sweden and formed Global Water Partnership to look into the problems of each country, and, in fact, this paved the way for a proper study of water and cultural issues.

I am happy to note that Sri Lanka Country Water Partnership already published a book, entitled, *Water and Culture: The Sri Lankan Heritage*. The book was authored by J. B. Disanayaka. It was published in 1992 by the Ministry of Environment and Parliamentary Affairs, Sri Lanka. Professor Disanayaka worked as head of the Department of Sinhala, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. The book is of crown size and has 142 pages including appendix with bibliography and acknowledgement. A good number of photographs are attached as reference. It has six chapters. These are: 1) Introduction; 2) Water And Its

Functions; 3) Rain And Rain-Makers; 4) A Hydraulic Civilization; 5) Waterways and Folkways; 6) Water Across Religions. These broad division of chapters have a number of topics. The book is descriptive and provides first-hand information about Sri Lankan cultural heritage based on water. Sri Lanka is encircled by seas, but all its rivers are named Ganga. The Ganges, however, never did flow through Sri-Lanka. The majority people of Sri-Lanka are Hindu and Buddhists. Few are Muslims and Christians. The Hindus and the Buddhists of Sri-Lanka consider the Ganges as the sacred river and out of deep reverence all the rivers of Sri-Lanka have been named as Ganga. Hinduism is the oldest religion in Sri Lanka. Almost all Hindus are Tamils. They constitute 16 percent of its population. A major part of Tamils are also of Indian origin. The British brought them to Sri Lanka in the 19th century to work for their tea estates. Hinduism and Buddhism are of Indian origin. Both Hindu and Buddhists consider water very sacred and holy. The Veda is also their religious book. So there is no difference between Indian Hindu and Sri-Lankan Hindu. The same is true in regard to Buddhism. Muslims and Christians are other groups who form part of the total population. In this book Disanayaka gave a brief overview of religious and general approach to water and culture as practiced in Sri Lanka by different communities.

Nepal also published a book, entitled, *Water and Culture* in 2006. It is written by Shaphalya Amatya and is published by Jalsrot Vikas Sanstha (JVS), Nepal. The Table of contents includes: 1) Water and Culture; 2) River and Nepalese culture; 3) Ponds, Lakes and Kunda in Nepali culture; 4) Stone Spout, Spring and well in Nepali culture; 5) Water related structures; 6) Our Festivals, Fair, Custom and Water; 7) Folk Culture and Water; 8) Royal Institution

and Water; 9) Traditional Water resources Management and Its Uses; 10) Conclusion; 11) Bibliography and Glossary. The total pages are 140 (7+133). The first seven pages dealt with a Foreword by Bhubaneshwor, Secretary General, JVS and Preface by the Author. In Nepal, the majority of the people are Buddhists. Few are Muslims. The major part of the book made elaborate discussion on water from a religious point of view. The author has discussed matters regarding common use of water, such as, traditional use of water resources and its management. The book provides information about the use of water in Nepali culture. These two attempts, one by Sri Lanka and the other by Nepal, are worth mentioning because, for the first time, such initiatives have been taken to present the use of water in cultural issues among different communities.

Actually, water is the fundamental element in human life and it forms the basis of the socio-economic and cultural life of the people. The authors of these two books on water and culture, deserve our praise and congratulations. We are indeed grateful to them for unfolding many unknown events to the general readers.

As I went through these books, I felt that these should contain more information about the historical background of the use of water and culture. This is true that Sri Lanka and Nepal have limited resources in relation to India and Bangladesh.

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