

# BANGLADESH

NATIONAL CULTURE AND HERITAGE

An Introductory Reader

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UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

*Edited by*

A F SALAHUDDIN AHMED  
BAZLUL MOBIN CHOWDHURY

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Edited by : A F Salahuddin Ahmed & Bazlul Mobin Chowdhury

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## PREFACE

This book aims at giving the general reader an overview of the different aspects of history, society and culture of Bangladesh. It is especially designed for students of Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) who are required to take a six credit compulsory course on National Culture and Heritage (NCH). This course was conceived by Dr A Majeed Khan, founder president of IUB, who believed that a broad-based liberal education which would promote intellectual and moral development was essential for every student aspiring for a university degree. Though meant as a textbook for students, general readers may also find it useful.

In preparing this volume, we have received unstinted help and cooperation from many persons. We are deeply grateful to the distinguished scholars whose contributions have enriched this publication. Our profound thanks are due to Professor Kamal de Abrew, Visiting Scholar at IUB, who very kindly went through the text and made useful suggestions. We are thankful to Professor Zillur Rahman Siddiqui for his valuable comments and Mr Nurul Islam, media specialist, for providing necessary technical assistance in the publication of this book. Our thanks are also due to Mr Hasan Saimum Wahab, editorial assistant of this volume, who undertook the task of maintaining liaison with the contributors and also providing editorial support. We also thank Mr Feda Hossain for secretarial help.

16 December 2003  
Dhaka

A F Salahuddin Ahmed  
Bazlul Mobin Chowdhury

## LIST OF MAPS, ILLUSTRATIONS

### **List of Maps**

Map 1: Tropic of Cancer	16
Map 2 : Different Tracts	17
Map 3 : Shows the shift of course of the river Brahmaputra	18
Map 4 : Route of ancient migration	19

### **List of Illustrations**

1. Megalithic monuments at Jaintiapur, Sylhet	45
2. Exposed remains of the massive rampart on north Mahasthan Garh	45
3. Lakshindarer Medh, Gokul, Mahasthan Garh	46
4. Kutila Mura, 'Triratna Stupa', Mainamati, Comilla	46
5. Paharpur Buddhist Vihara, Naogaon	47
6. General view of Kantaji Temple, Dinajpur	47
7. Terracotta pictorial art of Kantaji Temple, Dinajpur	48
8. A Terracotta rich column of Kantaji Temple	48
9. A Mihrab of Kusumba mosque, Rajshahi	49
10. Kusumba Masjid, Rajshahi	49
11. Chota Sona Masjid, Ferozpur, Gaur	50
12. Shait Gumbad Masjid, Bagerhat	50
13. General view of the Lalbagh Fort, Dhaka	51
14. Sonakanda Fort, Narayanganj	51
15. Jor-Bangla Temple, Pabna	52
16. Surya from Sukhabaspur, Dhaka, Black Chlorite, Sculpture, Early Hindu Period	351
17. Terracota panel from Kantaji Mandir, Dinajpur, 18 <sup>th</sup> Century	351
18. Zainul Abedin, Famine Sketch, Ink, 1943	352
19. Quamrul Hasan, Three Women, Oil, 1983	353
20. Safiuddin Ahmed, In Memory of 1971, Copper Engraving, 1984	354
21. Abdur Razzaque, Composition, Steel, 1980	354
22. Mohammed Kibria, Painting, Oil, 1993	355
23. Qayyum Chowdhury, River at Noon, Oil, 2000	355
24. Abu Taher, Composition with Red, Oil, 2000	356
25. Mansur ul Karim, A Source, Oil, 1992	356
26. Hashem Khan, Uprise, Oil, 1999	357
27. Monirul Islam, Prisoner of Liberty, Water Colour, 2001	357
28. Farida Zaman, 25 <sup>th</sup> March 1971, Plastic, 1990	358
29. Rokeya Sultana, Earth, Water and Air, Tempera, 2002	358

# CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh: History and Culture – An overview

1

*A F Salabuddin Ahmed*

## PART I

### CHAPTER ONE

*Land and People*

(a) Physical and Anthropological Geography

*Haroun Er Rashid*

9

(b) Archaeological Sites and Monuments in Bangladesh

20

*Nazimuddin Ahmed*

### CHAPTER TWO

*Ancient Bengal*

(a) Hindu – Buddhist Dynasties

*Abdul Momin Chowdhury*

53

(b) Society and Culture

*Shahanara Husain*

66

### CHAPTER THREE

Muslim Conquest: Bengal Sultanate : Society and Culture

95

*K M Mohsin*

### CHAPTER FOUR

Bengal under the Mughals : Politics, Society and Culture

108

*Abdul Karim*

### CHAPTER FIVE

Bengal under British Colonial Rule : Politics and Society

125

*Zaheda Ahmad*

### CHAPTER SIX

Religious and Social Reform Movements in the Nineteenth Century

144

*A F Salabuddin Ahmed*

### CHAPTER SEVEN

Evolution of Political Ideas and Movements in the Nineteenth Century

161

*A F Salabuddin Ahmed*

### CHAPTER EIGHT

Bengali Nationalism and the Emergence of Bangladesh

186

*A R Mallick and Syed Anwar Husain*

### CHAPTER NINE

Peasants and Politics in East Bengal, 1914-1947

205

*Tajul Islam Hashmi*

## **CHAPTER TEN**

### *Economic Development*

(a) Bangladesh Agriculture: Historical and Current Perspectives <i>M Mufakharul Islam</i>	226
(b) Industrialization of Bangladesh in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries <i>Wahidul Haque</i>	241
(c) Changing Class and Social Structure in Bangladesh: 1793-1980 <i>Bazlul Mobin Chowdhury</i>	253

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN**

Education in Bangladesh: Historical Overview <i>A F Salabuddin Ahmed and A Majeed Khan</i>	267
---	-----

## **PART II**

### **CHAPTER TWELVE**

(a) Islam: Religion and Philosophy <i>Azizun Nahar Islam and Kazi Nurul Islam</i>	287
(b) Hinduism: Religion and Philosophy <i>Jaysankar L Shaw</i>	311
(c) Christianity: Religion and Philosophy <i>Pierluigi Pizzamiglio</i>	316
(d) Buddhism: Religion and Philosophy <i>Niru Kumar Chakma</i>	322

### **CHAPTER THIRTEEN**

(a) Bengal Architecture Through the Ages <i>A B M Husain</i>	330
(b) Painting and Sculpture in Bangladesh <i>Nazrul Islam</i>	342

### **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

Bengali Language and Literature <i>Anisuzzaman</i>	359
---	-----

### **CHAPTER FIFTEEN**

Bengali Music <i>Karunamaya Goswami</i>	384
--	-----

### **CHAPTER SIXTEEN**

Folk-Arts, Crafts, Festivals and Games <i>Kazi Ibtesham</i>	412
--	-----

Contributors	435
Glossary	437
Index	441

## INTRODUCTION

### Bangladesh: History and Culture - An Overview

A F Salahuddin Ahmed

Compared to many other states of the modern world Bangladesh is a young state but is the home of an old civilization. Geography and history have marked Bengal<sup>1</sup> as a distinct region and the Bengali-speaking people as a distinct community. This distinctiveness, however, was recognized long ago. Since ancient times this land has drawn invaders and immigrants belonging to various races and tribes who had come from different parts of the world. Many of them settled here permanently and in course of time were assimilated with the local population. The varied cultural elements which they brought with them from outside were blended with those of indigenous origin and through this process society and culture of Bengal has acquired richness and variety and has undergone transformation through the ages.

Till the early part of the eighth century Hinduism held sway over Bengal, which was first part of the Maurya Empire and later was incorporated into the empire of the imperial Guptas. After the collapse of Hindu central authority around the sixth century A.D. the region was ruled by successive local Hindu dynasties. Between the middle of the eighth and twelfth centuries Bengal was under the rule of the kings of the Pala dynasty. The Pala rulers were Buddhists and were great patrons of Buddhist learning. The famous Bengali Buddhist monk Atisha Dipankara Sree Jnana who lived in the reign of the tenth Pala King Nayapala, was a great scholar. He traveled widely and visited Sri Lanka, Burma, Nepal and Tibet. Atisha's reputation as a Buddhist scholar had spread far and wide. In response to an earnest invitation from the King of Tibet he undertook the hazardous journey through Nepal. Atisha lived and taught in Tibet for many years and composed many books on Buddhism in the Tibetan and Sanskrit languages. After his death his body was buried with royal honours in the monastery of Ne-Tuang. The Tibetans venerated him as *Bodhisathva*<sup>2</sup>.

Bengal was under the rule of the Buddhist kings of the Pala dynasty for nearly four hundred years. Thereafter a ruling dynasty from the South Indian region known as the 'Senas' established its supremacy in Bengal. The Sena rulers were zealous Hindus. In order to establish the Brahmanical religion firmly in this land a considerable number of Brahmin pundits, well-versed in Hindu religious scriptures, were brought from upper India and were settled in this country. But traditional Hinduism did not gain a firm foothold in Bengal. Till the time of Muslim conquest at the beginning of the thirteenth century the influence of *tantrik* Buddhist elements, which represented a somewhat corrupt form of Buddhism, could be noticed in the religious life of the common people of this region. The comparatively easy manner in which the Turkish adventurer Ikhtiyaruddin Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khilji was able to subdue Bengal with a handful of soldiers was due to the fact that traditional Hinduism did not have firm social roots in this country.

It is generally believed that Islam came to Bengal long before the Muslim conquest of the region in the thirteenth century. Some Arab Muslim traders who had arrived in Bengal around the eighth and ninth centuries are said to have established settlements in the coastal regions of Bengal particularly in the surroundings of Noakhali and Chittagong. The Muslim conquest of Bengal in the thirteenth century facilitated the spread of Islam. People particularly belonging to the lower order of society, who had been suffering from the evils of the Hindu caste system and other prejudices, seemed ready to accept Islam, being drawn by its somewhat simple religious creed and egalitarian social system. But despite conversion to an alien religion they did not forsake their indigenous cultural identity.

It is commonly known that the inhabitants of Bengal have sprung from varied racial backgrounds such as proto-Australoid, Mongoloid, Dravidian, Aryan, Arab and Turko-Afghan. Besides these elements there was yet another element which came from East Africa. For quite a number of years Bengal was ruled by five or six Abyssinian Sultans. There was a practice of keeping Abyssinian guards at royal palaces. Traces of this Abyssinian descent are still noticeable in the facial feature of both Bengali Hindus and Muslims. Again, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the coastal areas of Bengal were infested by Portuguese-Arakanese pirates known as *maghs*. Traces of this element can also be found in the physical appearances of some inhabitants of the coastal region.<sup>3</sup>

According to the famous sixteenth century Mughal historian Abul Fazl, the name of Bangal or Bangala was derived by suffixing the word *al* to Banga or *Vanga* which was the ancient name of the major part of this region. The word *al* meant not only the boundary of farm-land; it also meant embankment. The low lands of this region had so many of these *als* that this land Banga eventually came to be known Bangala or Bengal or Bangladesh that is, the country of *Bangala*<sup>4</sup>. In ancient times Bengal was divided into a number of human settlements. Each settlement

grew up with people belonging to a particular clan. Generally, each settlement carried the name of the clan which settled there, for instance, Banga or Vanga, Gauda, Pundra and Rarha. Without going into further details it may be said that by the eleventh century A.D. there was an independent settlement which was known as Bangala and whose eastern frontier was the river Bhagirathi, that is, the southern part of the Ganges. At that time the country of Bangala embraced the whole of the eastern and the coastal region of southern Bengal.<sup>5</sup> This area roughly coincides with the present territory of Bangladesh. It may, however, be said with some certainty that the efforts made by king Sasanka in the seventh century and by the subsequent rulers of the Pala and Sena dynasties to bring the whole region of Bengal under the unified supremacy of Gauda did not succeed. It was only during the middle of the fourteenth century that the independent Afghan (Pathan) sultans Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah and Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah were able to conquer almost the whole region of Bengal and unite it under one rule. The Bengal Sultans earned the title of *Shah-i-Bangala*. For the next two hundred years the Pathan Sultans ruled over this independent kingdom. Though outsiders, these Pathan rulers identified themselves with the people of this land. They won the respect and admiration of their subjects by their liberal patronage of literature and culture of this region. During the age of the Hussain Shahi Sultans, Bengal experienced a remarkable religious and intellectual ferment. The spiritual humanism of the Vaishnava *bhakti* cult propagated by Sri Caitanya (1448-1553) and the humanist mysticism of the Muslim *sufi* saints laid the foundation of a composite culture of harmonious co-existence. This was reflected in the contemporary Bengali literature particularly of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Mention may be made, for example, of poet Abul Hakim's *Nur-nama*. In a beautiful verse the Bengali Muslim poet thus expressed his syncretistic devotion.

*Allah Khoda Gosain Sakal tar naam,  
Sarba goone niranjan pravu goonadham.*<sup>6</sup>

(Allah Khuda Gosain all bear the same name of the Great Lord who is the repository of all noble virtues).

It was also the golden age for the development of Bengali literature. Under the patronage of the Muslim Sultans the *Mahabharata* and *Bhagvat Gita* were for the first time translated from Sanskrit into Bengali. Sultan Hussain Shah was so pleased with the Bengali translation of the *Bhagvat Gita* that he honoured the poet Maladhar Basu who had translated it with the title Gunaraj Khan. For his patronage of Bengali literature the Sultan was described by a contemporary Hindu poet Vijay Gupta, the celebrated author of the Bengali classic *Padma Puran*, as *Nripati Tilak* (the king supreme)<sup>7</sup>.

As the beginning of the seventeenth century Bengal was conquered by the Mughals and became a province of the Mughal empire. It then came to be known

as *Subah Bangala*. But when the Mughal empire broke up in the eighteenth century Bengal again emerged as an independent kingdom<sup>8</sup>.

With the establishment of British colonial rule in the later part of the eighteenth century Bengal came in contact with modern Western civilization. Political, economic and social changes of far reaching importance took place under British rule. These were reflected in the various facets of life, thought and culture of this region. In fact, three distinct elements have contributed to the making of the cultural heritage of the Bengali-speaking people, namely: (a) pre-Aryan and Hindu-Buddhist; (b) the Islamic; and (c) Western or European. Each of these has been inextricably woven into the cultural fabric of this region contributing to its many-sided splendour.

During British rule the great majority of the Muslims of India for a variety of reasons came under the spell of separatist Muslim nationalism. They seemed to believe that the special interests and aspirations of their community would be fulfilled if they could establish a separate state of their own. This was the prime idea behind the Pakistan movement. Of course, it cannot be denied that the caste prejudices of the neighbouring Hindu community and, particularly, the anti-Muslim, exclusive and communal attitude of the upper and middle class Hindu *bhadralok*, also generated anti-Hindu feelings among the Muslims.

The Bengali Muslims constituted more than half of the Muslim population of India. They were the most vocal champions of the Pakistan movement. In fact, the creation of Pakistan would not have been possible without the support of the Bengali Muslims. But soon after the creation of Pakistan the Bengali Muslims began to be concerned regarding their future within the framework of Pakistan which came to be dominated by the non-Bengali, Muslims mostly Punjabis and Urdu-speaking immigrants from India particularly of the Uttar Pradesh and Bihar regions. These elements began systematically to exploit the resources of the eastern region of Pakistan solely for the benefit of West Pakistan. No serious attempt was made by the non-Bengali dominated central government of Pakistan to develop the Bengali-speaking eastern region. In fact, East Pakistan was being treated as a colony of West Pakistan. The Bengali Muslims particularly resented the conspiracy of the Pakistani rulers to make Urdu the state language of Pakistan disregarding the feelings of the Bengalis who were very proud of their language and cultural heritage. In fact, in the changed situation after the creation of Pakistan the Bengali Muslims were drawn by an intense patriotic feeling and were beginning to be conscious of their distinct secular cultural identity. Out of this consciousness was born in course of time the new district Bengali nationalism of our time. The great Bengali leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1920-1975) made the most significant contribution to the awakening of this new Bengali national consciousness. Under his charismatic leadership the Awami league became the national platform of the Bengalis of this region. Through a series of historic events namely, the Six-Point movement

of 1966, the mass democratic uprising in 1969 and the general elections of 1970 Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman emerged as the undisputed national leader of Bangladesh. Under his dynamic leadership all sections of the people – Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Christians were united as they were never before. In fact, for the first time in history they became a united nation. The constitutional democratic movement which Sheikh Mujib led eventually turned out to be the war of independence of 1971. It culminated in the birth of independent sovereign Bangladesh.

There are certain peculiar traits in the religious and cultural life of the Bengali people which have marked them out as a distinct nation. The Bengalis have been drawn more by the inner spirit of religion than by its outward forms or external rituals. Hence religious orthodoxy or exclusiveness and intolerance could never influence the mind of the people of this region. In fact, if we review the history of Islam in Bengal we would find that the activities of the unorthodox *sufi saints*, *pir-fakirs*, *aul-bauls* and dervishes have been far more effective than those of the fundamentalist *mullahs*<sup>9</sup>. The religious tradition which the sufi saints had created was that of spiritual humanism and tolerance which has left an everlasting impact on the Bengali mind and character. In the Bengali intellectual and cultural tradition also the predominant trend has been not of discord or conflict but that of peaceful co-existence of different faiths and the harmonious blending of diverse creeds. In fact, the characteristic feature of Bengali life and culture is unity in diversity, that is, harmony. For various historical reasons religious antagonism and separatist feeling and discord had begun to manifest during British rule. It would appear that through their struggle for liberation the people of Bangladesh were able to resurrect their age-old humanist tradition.

## Notes

1. The historical Bengal was always known in Bengali as "Bangladesh". It included both East and West Bengal. In August 1947 East Bengal became a part of Pakistan and came to be known as "East Pakistan" while West Bengal remained a province of the Indian Republic. In December 1969, at the height of the movement for regional autonomy against the Pakistani military regime, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared that henceforth the eastern region of Pakistan would be called "Bangladesh" instead of "East Pakistan".
2. *Bodhisathva* is the name given to a Buddhist saint who had qualified himself to attain *nirvana*, that is, a state of eternal bliss, but had voluntarily foregone that state in order to help others to reach that state. The Bodhisathvas receive the same kind of veneration, respect and worship as Gautama Buddha himself. See S. Bhattacharya, *A Dictionary of Indian History*, Calcutta 1972, P. 158.
3. Nihar Ranjan Ray, *Bangaleer Itihas*, Vol. 1, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Calcutta, 1980, P. 51.
4. *Ibid.*, P. 128.
5. *Ibid.*, P. 136.

6. Razia Sultana (ed.), *Abdul Hakim: Rachanavali*, Dhaka, Bangla Academy, 1989, P. 472.
7. Tamonashchandra Dasgupta, "Aspects of Bengali Society from Old Bengali Literature", *Journal of the Department of Letters*, University of Calcutta, XIV, 1927, P.79.
8. Nihar Ranjan Ray, *Op.Cit.*, P.149.
9. Muhammad Enamul Haq, *A History of Sufism in Bengal*, Dhaka, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1975, P.260- 316.

## **PART-I**



## CHAPTER ONE

### Land and People

Haroun Er Rashid

#### (a) Physical and Anthropological Geography

##### Geography

The geography of Bangladesh is the setting in which the drama of our history has been enacted. Some idea of the geographical setting is therefore necessary for understanding the physical forces which have influenced our culture and history. It is often said that Bangladesh is a small country. This is correct if we compare with very large countries like India and China. However, we may choose to look at Sri Lanka and find that we are twice as big, or at Western Europe and find that Bangladesh is equal in size to the combined areas of Holland, Belgium and Denmark and Switzerland. Therefore size is a relative factor. The area of Bangladesh is 144,000 square kilometres (55,900 square miles). For the purpose of economic exploitation we may also add another 50,000 square kilometres in the Bay of Bengal, which is internationally recognized as our Economic Exploitation Zone (EEZ).

One of the first facts that one should recognize is that Bangladesh has a coastline and therefore an opening to the oceans of the world. This is a very big asset, especially when one considers the logistical, mercantile and geo-political problems of land-locked countries (Rashid 1991). This window to the wider world was known to our ancestors also, who used to make Bangladesh one of the major trading nations of the ancient world. We too should be fully appreciative of the fact that the 1,400 kilometres of coastline which give access to the shipping lanes of the world are one of our geographical assets.

Another major asset is our tropical climate. We are all aware that Bangladesh is a rainy country and has high temperatures most of the year. While this may make us a bit uncomfortable at times it is an asset when we consider the fact that it enables us to grow crops throughout the year and that it provides us with an abundance of water. Many countries of the world are disadvantaged either

by cold winters or lack of rainfall. Those countries, such as Japan and Germany, cannot grow crops for part of the year because of very cold winters. Other countries, such as Egypt and Mexico are constrained because of the lack of rainfall. In Bangladesh we are fortunate that we can grow different crops and trees throughout the year.

Bangladesh is in the North Hemisphere, and is bisected by the Tropic of Cancer (Map-1). The Himalaya Mountains to the north of the country shelter us from the cold, dry winds of Central Asia (Tibet, Mongolia) and therefore we have relatively mild winters. The Himalaya also helps us by blocking the flow of moist winds from the Indian Ocean, which results in copious rainfall in and around Bangladesh. These moist winds from the Indian Ocean blow from April to September and they are known as the Monsoon Winds. Annual rainfall in Bangladesh varies from 60 inches in and around Rajshahi to cover 200 inches in and around Sylhet. It may be noted that Bangladesh is drier in the west and wetter in the east. Another fact that one may note is that Bangladesh is in the Desert Belt of the Northern Hemisphere, but its climate is anomalous because it receives so much rain. The great desert such as the Thar, the Arabian, the Nubian, the Sahara and the Mexican are all in this Northern Desert Belt. We are fortunate in having the Himalayas so nearby and the annual flow of the monsoon winds. Without these fortunate factors Bangladesh could also turn into a desert, or at least a semi-arid country. It is because of this that we are afraid of losing our wetlands (*beels, haors*) or having the world climate change which could lead to a weak monsoon wind and less rainfall.

A map of the physical features of Bangladesh shows a large delta in the south, several floodplains, two areas of uplands (Barind and Madhupur Tract) and hill ranges and valleys in the east. This is the surface picture. What is underneath? In order to understand that we have to go back 200 million years. That long ago the rocks deep below the surface of our country were far to the south, as part of a continent known as Gondwanaland. When this continent broke up, part of it travelled north and collided against the Asian continent. This collision led to the formation of the Himalaya and Arakan-Chin mountain ranges. The ancient rocks beneath the surface of Bangladesh are still moving, very very slowly, towards the north-east. This movement causes earthquakes now and then. Earthquakes are a natural hazard which are infrequent but have caused major changes in our surface topography.

The main surface features of Bangladesh are the floodplains of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna, the delta formed by these three major rivers, two areas of uplands in between these rivers and the hills and valleys in the eastern part of the country (Map 2). The main channel of the Brahmaputra used to flow past Mymensing and Sonargaon towns (Map 3), though now it flows mainly along the Jamuna. This change in its course is supposed to have been set in motion by a massive earthquake in 1772, and the change was complete by 1830. Since then the river flowing past Mymensingh town is known as the Old Brahmaputra.

A look at the map will show that in earlier times there were only relatively small rivers between the ancient urban centers of Mahasthan and Savar, whereas the mighty Brahmaputra formed a significant barrier between Mainamati (Samatata) and the western urban centers. Thus large kingdoms and empires in the western part of our country often had little impact in the east, where smaller kingdoms could therefore flourish. This also had cultural significance, no doubt.

The present day topography of Bangladesh shows that there are two areas of uplands between the major rivers. The upland between the Ganges and Brahmaputra-Jamuna is known as Barind Tract (*Barendra Bhumi*) and the upland between the Jamuna and Meghna is known as the Madhupur Tract (*Bhawal Garh*). These two large areas are quite different from the floodplains, because they flood less frequently and their soil is less fertile. These areas were forested or covered in grasslands till recent times. Even at present the population density is much less there than in the floodplains. An important difference between the two upland tracts is that whereas parts of the Barind were settled and urbanized long ago Madhupur tract remained largely a forested area till very recent times.

The large rivers combine, one with the other, as they flow south towards the sea, and they branch out with Distributary Rivers. These rivers form a trelliswork of rivers in the shape of a triangle which is known as a delta. The delta of the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna is the largest delta in the world. This is an area where river flows are affected by ocean tides, and the saline water of the Bay of Bengal may even penetrate a hundred miles inland. The delta is an area of very new soils and inevitably sinks slightly every year due to compaction of these new soils. Therefore it is essential that fresh deposits of river sediment are allowed to build up this part of our country. All along the sea-face of this delta we used to have the Sunderban forest, but the Sunderban in Patuakhali district was cleared a hundred years ago, and now we have the famous Sunderban forest only in the western sea-face of the delta.

In the eastern part of our country there are many hills and valleys, beginning with a thin strip along the border at the foothills of the Meghalaya and broadening out to include the whole of the Chittagong region in the southeast. No less than 12.5 percent (one-eighth) of Bangladesh is covered with hills and valleys. In the southeast we have an area between the Muhuri River in the north and Naaf River in the south known in geographical literature as the Chittagong Region. This area faces the Bay of Bengal in the west and has a succession of hill ranges running south to north. These hill ranges rise to mountain heights of 3000 feet or more in some places. In the cultural history of Bangladesh this area is very important because it links ancient Bengal to ancient Myanmar through the Arakan kingdoms. This link was both overland and by sea, and it brought together Bengalis, Arabs, Rakhine and other people in the peaceful pursuit of artisan industries and commerce.

The city of Chittagong is important as a major urban centre, a major industrial area, the most important seaport of the country and also a very important historical place. From the ruins of Ramkot (near Ramu), which is mentioned by the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A. D. the geographer Ptolemy, the Buddhists art works from Silua near Feni, and indications that the famous Pandita Vihara may have been somewhere in the area of Chittagong city itself, we may surmise that the Chittagong Region played an important part in our ancient history. Its importance was enhanced when the manufacturers of Bangladesh, mainly textiles, became important in international trade. The growth of this trade can be traced back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century A. D., but its heyday was from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Chittagong played a key role in developing and nurturing this trade.

### **Anthropology**

A look at a map of southern Asia (Map 1); will show that Bangladesh is very strategically located. To her north are the Himalaya Mountains, the very high plateau of Tibet, the Gobi desert and then the inhospitable stretches of Mongolia and Siberia. To her south is the Bay of Bengal, which opens out in to the Indian Ocean. In this part of the world Bangladesh provides the only relatively easy land crossing between the western and eastern parts of Asia. It is said that the origin of human beings is Africa, but that some of them moved into the northern part of the Middle East and then dispersed across the world from areas in the northern part of the Middle East. In this dispersal the people who went to Southeast Asia and Australia, more than 50,000 years ago, are surmised to have traversed the country that is now Bangladesh. Some of them may have remained behind but as yet we have no evidence of that. Among the people who walked into the valleys and floodplains of Southeast Asia some developed languages which are known as Austric languages. Present-day examples of such languages are Khmer (spoken mainly in Cambodia) and Mone (spoken by some groups in Myanmar). From the evidence of a few words in Bangla (e.g. *Langal*), some artifacts (e.g. scrapers) and some agricultural crops (e.g. *Kochu* = arum) we may surmise that these people speaking Autronesian languages came from the east in to the area of Bangladesh several thousand years ago (Map 4). Certain very early finds of Bronze tools and rice seeds in northeast Thailand suggests that these people may have also introduced rice cultivation into our area. At the same time or somewhat after some other people, whom we now classify as early Mongoloid (that is, closely related to the Burmese and Thai) also entered Bangladesh and spread mainly into the uplands and hilly areas.

Bangladesh is a melting-pot of ancient peoples. They came by land routes, across mountains, down river valleys and also possibly by boats along the coast. Though some of the early groups who made a significant impact came from the east the main peopling of this land was by those who came from the southern and western parts of the South Asian subcontinent, and they are known as

Dravidians. Actually they were a physically diverse people, probably speaking different languages, which may have all belonged to the Dravidian family of languages; we do not as yet know much about them. It is said that even within historic times many people in Bangladesh spoke a language related to Telegu, which is a Dravidian language. Then again the physical features of the majority of the present day people shows an affinity with those of eastern India who have a more definite Dravidian background. It should be mentioned that the Dravidian language speakers were mostly a Caucasoid people, which means in hair form and other physical features they resemble the people of the Middle East more than they resemble the people of East Asia. However they are generally darker than the different peoples to the east and west of South Asia.

The latest arrivals were a people well known as the Aryans. They spoke a language of the Indo-European family of languages and they are said to have originated from the northern parts of the Middle East and the eastern parts of Europe. They came in to South Asia around 1200 B.C. and flourished in the area now known as Haryana 'Land of the Aryans'. Over the centuries they mixed with the Dravidians and settled in the relatively drier parts of the Ganges Valley. With the adoption and spread of rice cultivation this mixed population of Aryo-Dravidians moved in to the Bengal Basin some time after 600 B.C. and laid the foundations of urbanization in our country. They in turn mixed with the Austric and Mongoloid peoples already in Bangladesh and produced the physical types which are so common nowadays.

Bangladesh has been the focus of immigration since those times till recently. The cultivation of wet-rice (as opposed to hill-rice), where fields have to be levelled and dyked (with *ails*) and then swampland varieties of rice cultivated in watery conditions, enabled the immigrants to adapt to the wet monsoon conditions of Bangladesh and at the same time to obtain sufficient food to feed large families. They also evolved a variety of boats and fishing gear and exploited the abundant fish stocks. Whereas these resources encouraged rapid growth of population there were also severe checks in the forms of malaria, cholera and typhoid. On balance the population grew, and parts of the country became quite thickly populated. Indeed for the past one thousand years Bangladesh has been known as one of the more populated parts of the world. Bangladesh was also, to our surprise, one of the wealthiest countries of the world. The commercial opportunities attracted many immigrants, some peaceful, such as the Arab merchants along the coast, others warlike, such as the Turks and Pathans, in the urban centers between Gaur and Sonargaon. These people too added their physical stock to the melting-pot, so that today we have in Bangladesh a great variety of physical features. The Bengali ancestry includes the Austric-speakers, the Mongoloids, the Dravidians and Aryans, the Turk and the Pathan. Within the polity of Bangladesh there are also small groups of people who retain their distinctiveness and have not merged into the mainstream Bangla-speaking group.

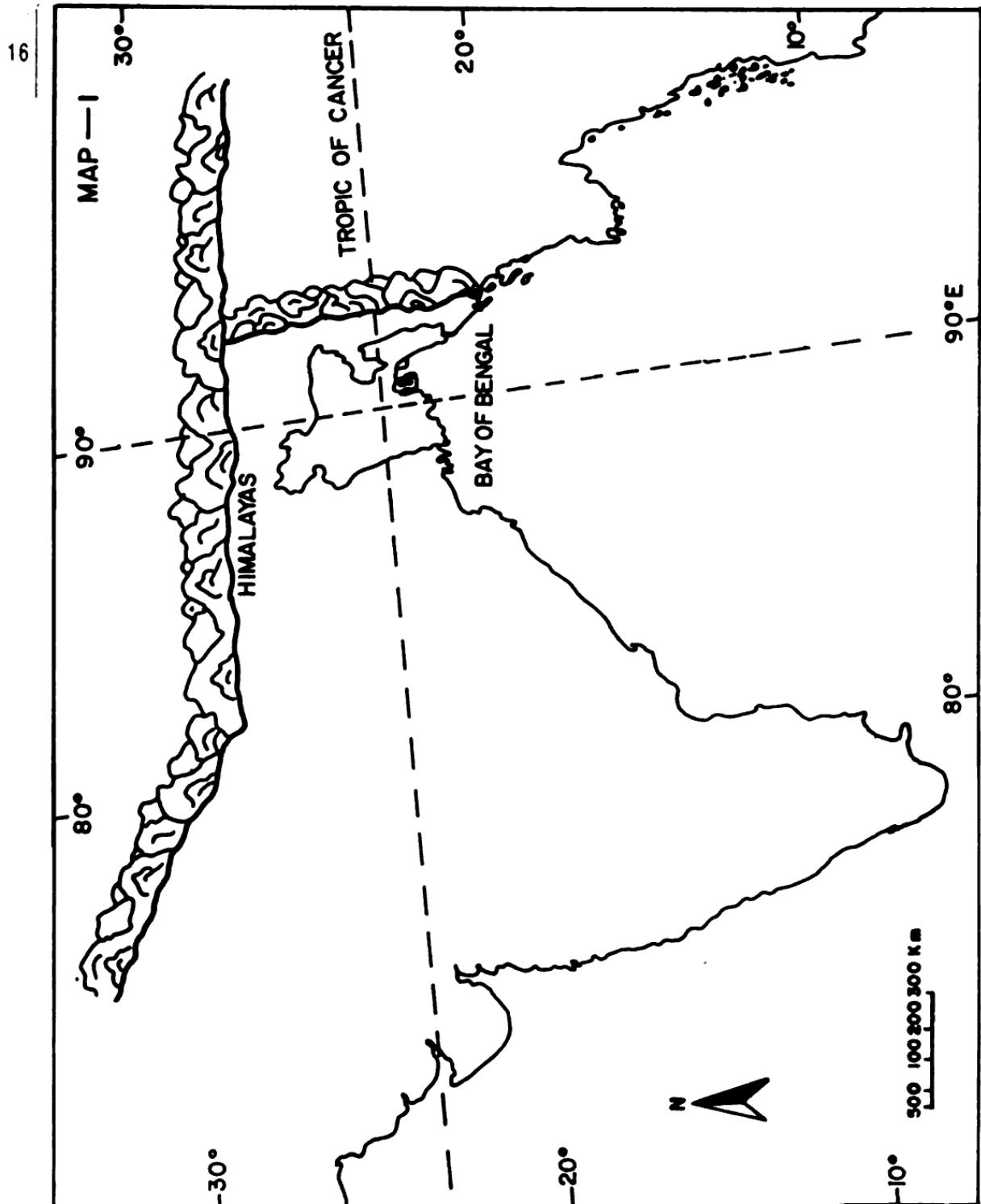
Most of these groups (often called tribes) are mainly of Mongoloid origin and they speak languages of the Tibeto-Burman family of Languages. The most widespread of these are the Koch, who may have been one of the major sources of the Bengali mixture. Then there are Polia, Mande (Garo), Hajong, Tipra, Chakma, Lushai, Mru, Tanchanga, Marma, Rakhine, and other smaller groups. There are also some groups which do not speak languages of the Tibeto-Burman family, but belong to the Austric Mone-Khmer group, such as the Khasia, or to the Dravidian group, such as the Saontal and Oraon. Some of them have been here for several thousand years, whereas others have oral traditions of having come in from Myanmar only six hundred years ago. Yet others, like the Saontals, have come only two centuries back. All these groups have, in some way or another, contributed to the present-day composition of the heterogeneous group known as Bengalis.

The anthropological situation in Bangladesh is therefore one of the great diversity producing a majority group which is very mixed both in physical features and in cultural antecedents but is united despite this diversity through the use of the mellifluous and culturally rich Bangla language. It is also of great sociological significance that despite the overwhelming presence of a majority group with a dynamic culture (the Bengalis) the relatively tiny "tribal" groups have continued as distinct cultural entities, not only along the peripheral areas but deep inside.

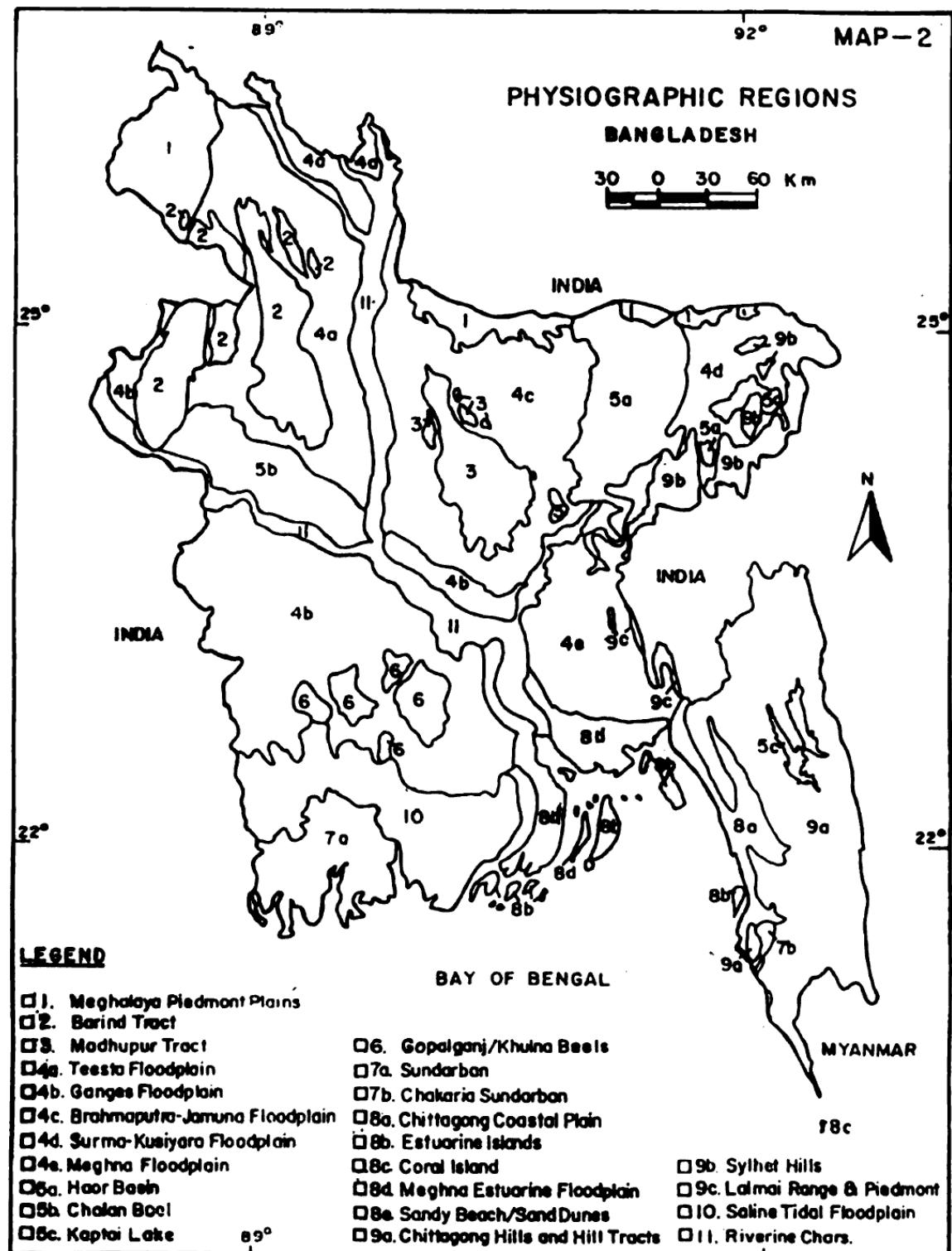
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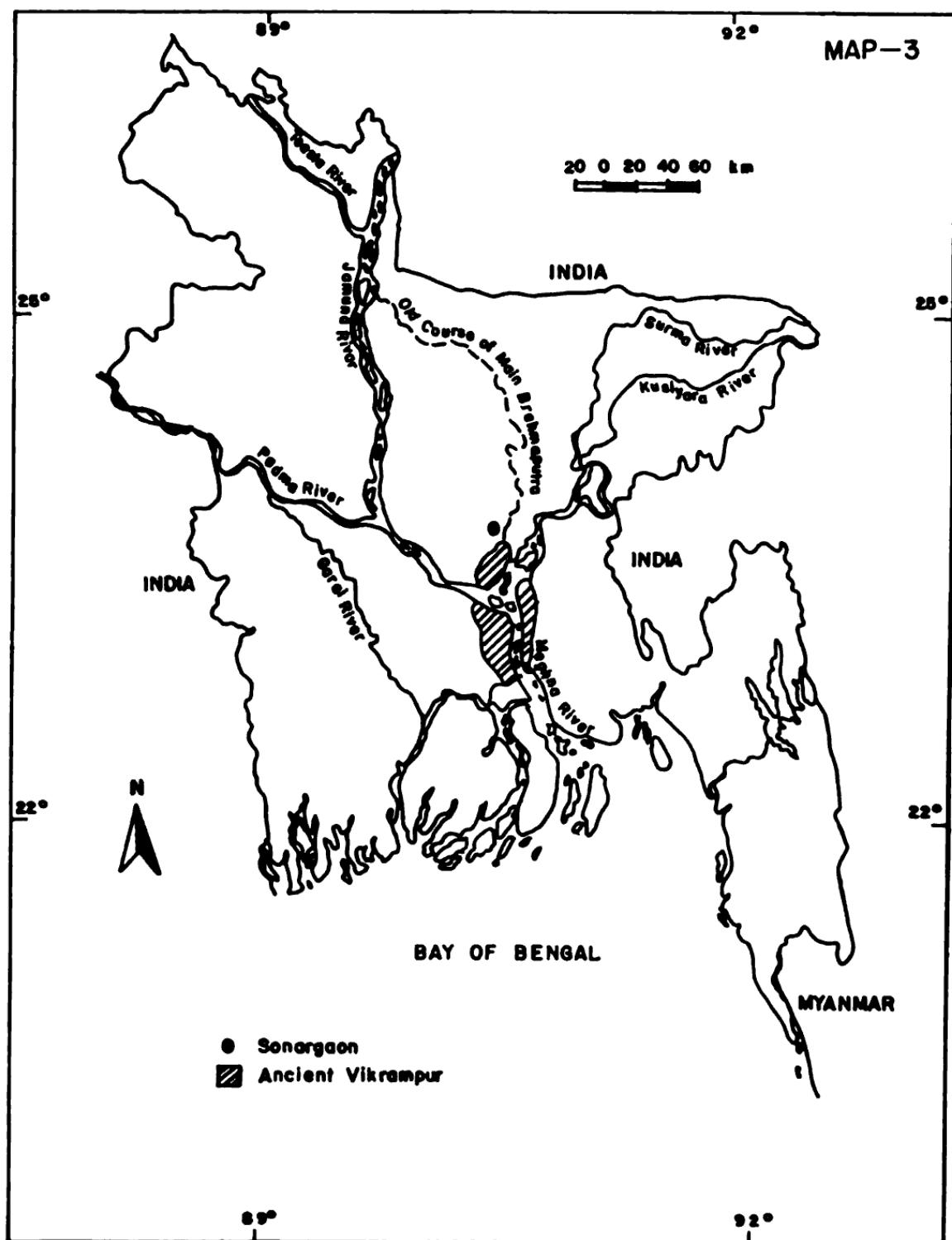


Map 1: Tropic of Cancer

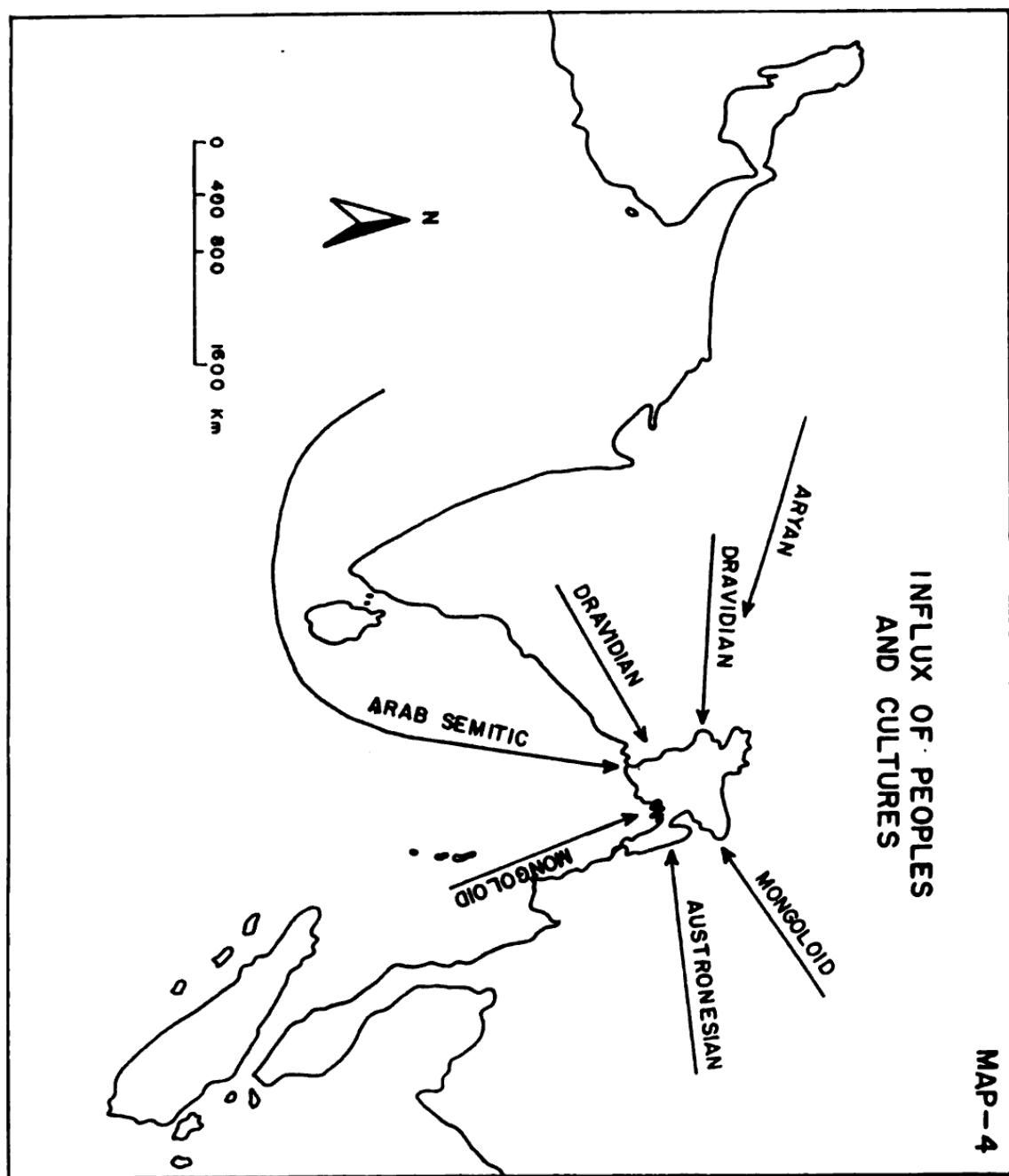


Map 2 : Different Tracts

18



Map 3 : Shows the shift of course of the river Brahmaputra



Map 4 : Route of ancient migration

## CHAPTER ONE

### Land and People

Nazimuddin Ahmed

#### (b) Archaeological Sites and Monuments in Bangladesh

**B**angladesh is one of the largest deltas of the world, formed with the fertile silt washed down from the Himalayan highlands by some of the mightiest rivers of Asia, notably, the Ganges and the Brahmaputra. These rivers together with their countless tributaries sweep across the vast basin in a bewildering tangle of channels and streams. Acting as arteries this complicated hydrography is largely responsible for shaping the destiny of the land and its people. While flowing downward from the melting snow of the Himalayan Glaciers, these streams deposit enormous volumes of fertilizing silt before spilling into the Bay of Bengal. The rich alluvium of the rivers enriches the land and sustains a teeming population. The same rivers however often change their courses on a scale unknown elsewhere and while doing so engulf many prosperous human settlements located on their yielding banks and cause untold miseries to the people during devastating flood. The rivers are therefore the sources of both joy and suffering to the people.

#### Pre-History

Pre-history of Bangladesh is extremely nebulous and its early history is at best legendary. What is known today is greatly outweighed by what is unknown. The few stray Neolithic artifacts of fossil wood accidentally picked up from time to time by amateurs in the 1950's in the hilly regions of Sitakunda, Chittagong, Rangamati and Comilla together with a dozen polished cells salvaged during regular excavation at the Salban Vihara in Mainamati hill range in late 1960 - and the discovery of a highly evolved pear-shaped acheulian hand axe from Comilla - frankly present a chaotic picture of the Stone Age in this region. However, recent reconnaissance on the Mainamati Lalmai range in Comilla by

a group of archaeologists in 1990-91 succeeded in collecting over 230 fossil artifacts of the middle and late Stone Ages. All these evidences unmistakably indicate to the faltering footsteps of the early man in this region. It is evident that systematic and more vigorous exploration of the river valleys and peripheral areas of Bangladesh is likely to unfold a clearer picture of the Stone Age, for, serious survey in neighboring west Bengal has revealed spectacular remains in stratified context.

In comparatively recent times a straggly, unpretentious but highly interesting proto and early historic site, focussed on Wari-Batesvar, Raingartek and Marjal villages of Shibpur upazilla in Narsingdi district has yielded important archaeological relics. Located about 20 miles north east of Dhaka on the western Trans-Meghna Basin, the site splays out on a large scattered area of about a mile from north to south and east to west. In fact, it is an extension of the quasi-lateritic highland of the Bhawal Tract, characterized by deep reddish soil mixed with nodules of iron ingots. This much-dissected landmass here is highly serrated and terraced - a typical configuration of the ancient Varendra, still carrying scrub and degraded forests. Deep irregular torrent - beds cut up the countryside through which monsoon water furrows through, often in great force, leaving a mosaic of highland mounds dotting the whole area.

To the north and north east of these villages there are two abandoned riverbeds of a branch of the Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers. Dr N. K. Battasali in 1931 collected from these villages over 259 silver punch marked and cast copper coins. Recently a group of archaeologists surveyed the area and collected a few hundreds of the same types of silver punch marked coins, carnelian, agate and other semi-precious stone beads, buttons and above all an astonishing assemblage of over 500 Neolithic stone axes, cleavers and so-called iron hand-axes. These late stone artifacts and early historical antiquities still continue to be reported from the site.

Among these interesting archaeological finds a rare art piece, collected from the locality is an engraved stone intaglio. It is a rectangular whitish tiny stone plaque measuring  $2\frac{1}{2}' \times 1''$ , rather crudely carved with an eye shaped low relief in the center with an unidentified deity; flanked with two female devotees on either side, decorated with floral motifs. This highly interesting amulet perhaps representing a cult of tribal archaic art occupies a significant place in the chain of somewhat tenuous sequence indicated by various types of objects discovered as stray finds from the area.

The earliest objects registered from the area are obviously the Neolithic celts stone hand-axe and chisel. These are followed by the so-called iron axes, iron plates, rings, stone mortar and pestle, string balls of stones, tentatively dated to about 800 BC and pre date the punch marked silver coins of about 400 BC. Next to these are the semi precious stone beads of various shapes.

Exploration in the area so far failed to find any substantial human settlements, even distantly approaching an urban center, except superficial cultural debris of

temporary nature. However, its favourable geographical location at the confluence of several important rivers and the discovery of so many important antiquities of the proto-historic and early historic periods significantly indicate that it was a less known inland river port in the distant past than the more famous Sonargaon, Saptagram and Tamralipti – transacting trickles of trade with the outside world.

### **Early Historic Period:**

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC Bangladesh formed part of the great Mauryan Empire. From the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC to the twelfth century AD, the northern and western parts of Bengal were ruled by the Mauryans, the Guptas, the Palas and the Sena rulers successively until the latter's rule was dramatically supplanted by the Muslims in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century. However, the southern and the eastern part of the country then known as *Samatata* – situated in the Trans-Meghna region – was ruled independently by a succession of Buddhist dynasties between 7<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, known as the Khadgas, the Devas and the Chandra kings.

Mighty Pala rulers of Varendra in the north, whose empire at times extended from the border of Assam in the east, to the confines of Kashmir to the west, were devout Buddhists as also were the contemporary Deva and Chandra rulers of *Samatata* in the south. Under their royal patronage countless Buddhist monasteries, stupas and shrines sprang up within their vast empire. The four centuries of Pala rule may rightly be regarded as a golden epoch in the history of Bengal, for it not only brought peace after a century of political anarchy in the country but also fostered various architectural and artistic activities within their kingdom. From the 8<sup>th</sup> century onwards Mahayana Buddhism under their patronage became a dynamic international force, exercising profound influence from Tibet in the north to the Malayan archipelago in the south.

Varmana kings, belonging to an alien orthodox Hindu family of Kalinga (Orissa) supplanted the Buddhist Chandra rulers form *Samatata* in the south in much the same way and at the same period as the orthodox Senas of the Deccan overthrew the Buddhist Pala rulers of Varendra.

### **Islamic Period:**

Ikhtiyaruddin Muhammed Bakhtiyar Khilji, a reckless Turkish adventurer, fired with the predatory instinct of a nomad and a free-lance captain of the Delhi Sultan Malik Qutbuddin Aibak dramatically conquered part of west and north Bengal from the aged Hindu Maharaja Lakhmana Sena in 1205 by an incredible raid on his capital. Thereafter in next two hundred years the whole of Bengal was gradually brought under the fold of the Muslim rule by various semi-independent and independent rulers. It broke away from Delhi and became independent under Sultan Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah in 1338 AD. In 1342 his

successor was ousted by Haji Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah who established an independent dynasty. Two more independent ruling houses, the Arab Hussain Shahis and the Afghan Karrains successively ruled Bengal till it was conquered by the Mughals in 1576 AD. During more than two centuries of independence it drifted in isolation from Delhi and developed strong regional individuality in art and architecture.

With the Mughal conquest of Bengal and introduction of a uniform administration, the art and architecture of the province gained a new dimension, which broke down the age-old regional isolation. It remained a rich province of the Mughal Empire until the death of the last great Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb in 1707 AD. The Mughal Empire sharply declined after this and was synchronized with the emergence of formidable foreign powers of the west- notably the French, the British, the Dutch and the Portuguese, who initially came to India as traders of Europe, but eventually ruled the country as much by economic chains as by the sword. On the fateful evening of 23 June 1757, the Muslim rule in Bengal was swept away, as dramatically as it began five and a half centuries back, by the British East India Company at the battle of Plassy. On that night the destiny of Bengal passed on from the luckless young Nawab Sirajuddaullah to the hands of the British rulers for the next two hundred years.

### **Monuments and Sites**

During more than two thousand years of its chequered history a large number of prosperous urban centers, fortified palaces, imposing temples, stupas monumental gateways, mosques, mausolea and public buildings were built by various rulers of the country most of which have perished with the passage of time and at the hands of various destructive agencies of nature or at the vandalizing hands of man.

### **Pre-Islamic Period**

*Pundranagara*, identified with the present ruins of Mahastangarh, in Bogra district, was not only the largest and the most ancient city in Bengal but it was also the focus of contemporary art and culture and a hub of inter-provincial trade. The famous Chinese pilgrim, Hiuen Tsang visiting the city in the middle of 7<sup>th</sup> century observed that its circumference was about 6 miles while Sandhyakar Nandi in his *Ramacharita* has mentioned that the city was the 'crown jewel' of Varendra. The splendors of the city's royal palaces, state secretariat, mansions, luxurious villas of the noblemen and merchants, flourishing marts, ornate temples, assembly halls, garrisons within heavily fortified city ramparts and moats as portrayed in the old literature seem to be no less brilliant than Vaisali, Rajagriha, Sravasti, Kausambi, Patalipura or any other famous cities of

*Aryavarta* during the early historic period. Sandhyakara Nandi writing in the middle of 12<sup>th</sup> century gives a glowing account of Pundranagar. He noticed luxurious mansions of the wealthy aristocrats and the streets aligned with dainty shops, ornate temples, stately palaces and costly villas within the citadel while the social workers, laborers and the dwellings of the middle class citizens were located in its extensive suburb outside the protected area of the citadel.

The extensive remains of the heavily fortified ancient city of *Pundranagara*, mentioned in the epigraphic records of the Mauryans, the Guptas and the Palas as well as in the accounts of a few Chinese Buddhist pilgrims, visiting Bengal between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, notably, Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang and I-Tsing; have now been identified with the ruins of Mahasthan, located on the picturesque bend of the old Karatoya river in the Bogra district. The city probably flourished during the Mauryan period in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC as their provincial capital as testified by the discovery of a six line Asokan Brahmi record, engraved on a limestone tablet which records an imperial order of emperor Asoka to his *Mahamatra* or governor of *Pundravardhana* purporting to ameliorate the suffering of the famine affected people by releasing food grains and money from the government store house. It is an interesting historical record.

The city ruins are spread along the north and western bank of the moribund Karatoya. As partly exposed in excavation from time to time it was found to be heavily surrounded by an irregular rampart with elaborate brick as well as stone gateways, guard vestibules and semi-circular bastions at suitable distance. It enclosed an elevated area of about a mile long and two thirds of a mile broad which was further protected by wide moats on three sides and the river on the east. Beyond the fortified citadel limited excavations revealed thickly packed dwelling houses of mainly three periods (i.e. Maurya, Gupta and the Pala) along the irregularly aligned streets, characteristic of most of the ancient Oriental cities.

Isolated mounds within the perimeter of the citadel cover the entire eastern half of the area, each bearing a local name such as *Khodar Pathar Mound*, *Mankalir Kuda*' *Parasuram* 's Palace, *Jiyat Kunda*, *Bairagi Bhita*, *Munir Ghon*, *Narasingher Dhap* etc. while the western half of the plateau apparently has no large mound except the massive defence wall.

**Govinda Bhita Temples:** The remains of this massive temple complex occupy an isolated high mound outside the northern rampart of the city. It is picturesquely perched on the double bend of the Karatoya and appears to have been a very important shrine. Great pains were taken by the builders for its safety against the annual erosion of the river. As exposed by excavation in 1928-29 it revealed a series of revetment walls of brick as well as of stone including a semi circular retaining wall built at different levels on the steep river banks in order to ward off the high flood of Karatoya which in those days was a much larger river. In fact, there are two temples: one western and the other eastern; belonging to different periods and both enclosed within a 6' thick perimeter wall.

The earlier western temple erected in about the 6<sup>th</sup> century is larger than the eastern one; the latter was built partially on the ruins of the former in about the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Both the temples seem to have been built on a high central shaft solidly filled and rammed with earth. The shaft was enclosed with three graded terraces; each buttressed by a series of blind cells, packed with earth intended to strengthen the foundation of a massive superstructure. The approach to the original western temple was from the west while that of the latter was from the east.

**Bairagi Bhita Temples:** This low mound located inside the north eastern sector of the citadel, exposed two temple remains, together with a number of highly derelict ancillary buildings belonging to the early 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. The eastern oblong temple had a central sanctum (98'6" x 112'0"). An interesting drain which probably carried the libation water into soak jars nearby, was found in the temple area partly constructed in brick but mostly formed of two scooped out massive black stone pillars of earlier buildings. The faces of the columns were beautifully carved with half lotus medallions and other floral scroll moldings in typical Gupta styles. The later rectangular temple partly built on the ruins of the northern one was found in a highly dilapidated condition.

**Khodai Pathar Mounds:** Situated about 200 yards north east of the *dargah* of Shah Sultan Balkhi, which occupies the highest point of Mahasthan Garh on south east corner, the mound derives its curious name from an enormous granite door sill lying nearby. It is carved with floral patterns and has two socket holes for door shutters. The mound was excavated in 1907 and the foundation of a Buddha temple (24' x 15'4") was exposed, facing west. Other stone pieces of the engraved (or *khodai*) temple stones were lying around. Of these, a stone block (2'3" x 8" x 7") depicts three seated Buddha images in a row.

**Mankalir Bhita:** About hundred yards north of the *Khodai Pathar* mound there is a small conical mound overlooking a shallow ditch, locally known as '*Mankalir Bhita*'. Excavation here in 1965-66 revealed the foundation of a 15-domed Sultanate period oblong mosque of 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century. Measuring 86'6" x 52' its prayer hall was divided into three aisles and five bays, separated by two rows of rectangular brick pillars. The *Qibla wall* straight accommodated five *mibrabs* decorated with terracotta foliated designs. Corresponding to the *mibrabs* it had five entrances in the eastern wall.

The most widely current legend of the Muslim occupation of Mahasthan centers round Shah Sultan Balkhi Mahisawar and the legendary Kshatriya King Parasurama. The Muslim saint with his followers, riding a fish, it is related, came to Mahasthan in some unspecified period, converted 'Chilhan' the general of Parasurama and many other local Hindus to Islam. Alarmed at this, the king attacked the saint but, betrayed by Harapala, one of his officers, was eventually defeated and killed. The saint thereafter tried to marry Sitla Devi, the daughter of the king but she is said to have committed suicide by plunging in to the

Karatoya River. The legend also relates that king Parasurama resuscitated his dead soldiers with the water of '*Jiyat kunda*' or 'well of life' during his struggle with the saint. The saint, learning about the miraculous power of the water of the well, polluted it by throwing a piece of beef with the help of a kite and thereby defeated the king.

**Parasuram's Palace Mound:** Excavated in 1961 at the so-called Parasuram's Palace mound, located about 200 yards north of the *Mankalir Kunda* mound, exposed the complete plan of a modern building of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, consisting of four blocks overlooking a small courtyard, all enclosed within a boundary wall and a gateway on east.

**Jiyat Kunda:** Close to the Palace mound to the east is the legendary 'well of life' – the *Jayat Kunda*. This masonry well (12'8" diameter) has a massive rectangular stone block, 6'10" long, engraved with floral pattern, placed astride the eastern side of the well, projecting well inside for the facility of drawing water. Contrary to popular belief, the well was constructed during the Muslim period.

**The Mazar And The Mughal Mosque:** The south eastern corner of the citadel is dotted with many tombs including the one traditionally considered as the simple tomb of Sultan Balkhi Mahisawar and a single domed square mosque, built in 1719 AD by one Khodadil during the reign of the Mughal emperor Farrukh Siyar. Now, both the tomb and the mosque have been largely renovated, extended and changed by the local Mosque and Mazar Committee to such an extent that their original features have been virtually lost.

**Northern Rampart:** Excavation at the northern fortification area in different times since 1960 onwards, have exposed virtually the entire length of the massive rampart on the north. The irregularly aligned masonry wall, mainly belonging to the Pala period appears to have been built on the earlier earthen rampart. The operation of 1989-90 is particularly noteworthy, for, near the northwest corner of the fort at about 1450' distance two elaborate gateways of the citadel were discovered for the first time. The larger and later gateway was 16'6" wide and 19' long with guardrooms and semi circular bastions on either side. The smaller and earlier gateway, located about 21'6" north of the former was found to be lined with dressed black stones. On its ruins the later brick gateway was built in later time. Both the gateways appear to have been constructed during the Pala period. During the same operation 340' long brick rampart was exposed. It was found to be built on a 13' wide base and even in its dilapidated condition rose to a height of 20' in tapering mass.

**Lakshindarer Medh Gokul:** This large mound in Gokul village, situated about a mile south east of the citadel of Mahasthan was excavated in 1929-30. It is associated with the popular folk tale of '*Behula Laksindar*' and the offended snake goddess 'Manasa'. It is, in fact, the remains of a Shiva temple built on a high

podium of about 43' high from the surrounding ground. Its striking architectural feature is its elaborate cellular construction which appears like a honey-comb of 172 blind cells of varying dimensions, arranged irregularly around a 24 sided plinth of the square shrine atop, and set on a deep central shaft. The blind cells built on graded terraces around the high podium were packed solidly with infillings of earth so as to form a massive foundation to support an imposing superstructure, which now has completely disappeared. This striking device prevalent in ancient Bengal architecture was adapted to strengthen the soft alluvial soil. Associated antiquities and the structural peculiarities in different phases of the monument indicated that, originally it was the circular base of a stupa built in 6<sup>th</sup> century but later it was replaced during the Sena period in the 12<sup>th</sup> century by a 27' square shrine, in which, a square gold medallion, embossed with the figure of a recumbent bull was found. Beneath that a circular pit (12'8", diameters) probably the base of the stupa contained a human skeleton probably of an anchorite.

**Bihar & Vasubihar:** The ruins of *Po Shi Po Vihara* (Vasu Bihar), visited by the famous Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang in 638 AD has been identified by General Cunningham with the extensive ruins of Bihar and Vasu Bihar locally known as *Narapatir Dhap* situated about four miles west of Mahasthan Garh. Excavation at the three large mounds of five, on the north west of Vasu Bihar village in 1970 exposed the remains of two medium sized Buddhist monasteries and a semi circular small shrine, together with an interesting collection of associated antiquities including a large number of inscribed terracotta seals and over one hundred bronze Buddhist statuary, dated to about 11<sup>th</sup> century AD.

The smaller of the two oblong monasteries, measures 162' × 152' with a total number of 26 uniform monastic cells in its four regular wings. A projecting gateway complex, measuring 25'6" × 75' in the middle of its eastern arm provided the only access to the monastery. There was no central temple or stupa within the inner court. A staircase built in the south east corner cell probably led to the upper floor now completely destroyed.

The second larger monastery measuring 185' × 161' is located about 25 yards north of the mound. Its ground plan is identical with the smaller one but with 33 monastic cells accommodated in the inner wing of the monastery.

A semi cruciform shrine with three levels of terraced ambulatory was exposed on the south eastern sector of the site, about 50 yards distant from the smaller monastery. Oblong in plan measuring 125' × 87' with an entrance on the north and a 15' square *mandapa* the outer surface wall of the terraced shrine was found to be beautifully decorated with terracotta plaques in uninterrupted friezes. The excavated antiquities registered here were over 700 in number and include large number of delicately fashioned bronze images of Buddha and Buddhist icons and inscribed clay tablets.

**Mongol Kot:** This small ancient mound, measuring 120' × 90' × 14' is situated about one mile west of Mahasthan Garh in village Chingaspur on the northern scarp of a dried up lagoon. Excavation here from 1981 onwards for three successive years, exposed two important temple remains of the Gupta period, together with more than one thousand large terracotta images, mostly in mutilated condition, and other minor antiquities. The main temple with its central cell measuring 12'4" × 12'8" was enclosed by two perimeter walls at three feet distance. The inner boundary wall and one of the cells of the temple complex were strangely found to be built on heaps of fragmentary terracotta images. It is indeed very curious that such a huge number of hollow cast large beautiful terracotta images mostly of women decorated the walls of this small temple. The mutilated parts of the body of the images appeared to be about 2' high and almost in the round. The figures, irrespective of sex, have well formed face, eyebrow, aquiline nose, large eyes, high cheekbones characteristic of the Gupta art. The female figures are particularly molded in delicate fashion with beautiful face, round breasts and proportionate body evincing a superior artistic creation. Some of the male figures wear crown but most of the female figures significantly have one or more expanded snake hood motifs and found wearing knotted coiffure on top of the heads. The snake hood motif on the head indicates that these images are associated with the *manasa* cult of the Hindus.

**Bhimer Jangal** (Old Embankment): This old irregular earthen embankment locally known as '*Bhimer Jangal*', is a landmark in Bogra and Rangpur districts, perhaps originally intended as a defensive *bulwark* and an ancient highway. This artificial embankment of red earth, at places attaining a height of 20' starts near the border of Sirajganj and traversing northward passes through Sherpur and thereafter, following the western bank of the Karatoya skirts Bogra town on the north west and extends further north east for about 50 miles. It is now in many places destroyed. It then runs into Rangpur, Birat and Ghoraghat. There are a number of cross-embankments near Bogra.

The construction of this conspicuous *Jangal* is ascribed to Bhima, son of the Kaivarta chief Rudraka, and nephew of Divvoka who unsurped the throne of Varendra Kingdom during the time of King Mahipala II of the Pala dynasty and ruled for a brief period. Bhima, however, was defeated and killed with his followers shortly afterwards by Rampala in 11<sup>th</sup> century.

**Paharpur Buddhist Monastery:** Situated in a sequestered agrarian setting, the most spectacular pre-Islamic monument discovered in regular excavation (1923-32) is the gigantic Buddhist temple and monastery at Paharpur in the Naogaon district. It has been identified from a set of terracotta inscribed seals as the famous *Somapuri Mahavihara*, erected by emperor Dharmapala (781-821 AD). It is the second largest single *vihara* in Asia measuring 911' × 919'. This immense quadrangular monastery with 177 monastic cells facing an extensive inner courtyard, its elaborate imposing single gateway with

guardrooms on either side, numerous votive stupas and multitude of other ancillary buildings within the 22 acre courtyard, is dominated by a lofty pyramidal temple in the center. The lofty temple, still in its ruined state, rises to a height of 73 feet above the courtyard. In plan it is a gigantic square cross with projecting angles between the arms of the cross. The temple rises in a tapering mass in the three surviving terraces. Each of the receding upper terraces has a 'procession path' around the monument, which is enclosed by a parapet wall. Access to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> terraces was originally provided by a grand staircase from the north. The whole fabric of the towering temple appears to have been built in a single period around a central brick shaft to which were added rectangular ante chambers and *mandapas* on each of the four sides. Ambulatory passages were provided at each terrace. The base of the temple is embellished with 63 stone sculptures of various gods and goddesses, mostly belonging to the Hindu pantheon. Above it runs in two lower terraces, rows of endless terracotta plaques depicting the folk art of the period. It includes a vast range of subjects, which peopled the mind of the simple rural artists: gods and goddesses, grotesque composite creatures, various flora and fauna — all portrayed in animated characters distinct from the hierarchical art of the royal court.

Historically and architecturally, *Somapuri Vihara* is a treasured heritage of the world, which in ancient Asia set for the first time a striking new style of temple building on grand scale followed later in the Far East.

**Satyapir Bhita:** The isolated ruins at the *Satyapir Bhita* are situated about 300 yards east of the Paharpur Vihara. A large number of stupas and shrines of various shapes and size and decorated with moldings, cluster around a main temple of Tara which is an oblong shrine facing south measuring 48' × 80'. The identify of the temple was ascertained from the discovery of about 50 terracotta plaques bearing the figure of an eight handed Tara image with the usual Buddhist creed stamped at the back. There are about 132 votive stupas, all erected in about 11<sup>th</sup> century AD. Some of these native shrines contained thousands of miniature votive clay stupas stamped with the usual Buddhist creed.

**Sitakot Vihara And its Ambient Ancient Sites:** Ruins of this small ancient vihara are situated about four miles north east of Charkai railway station and about two miles north west of Nawabganj p.s. in Dinajpur district. Excavation here in 1960 and 1972-73 unfolded largely the remains of this monastery, dated between 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> century. A reconnaissance in the ambient areas of the monastery revealed the existence of more than 50 ancient mounds of various sizes scattered over the flat countryside towards Nawabganj and Charkai along the Karatoya riverbank. Unfortunately, most of these ancient sites, coeval to *Sitakot Vihara* were the target of random vandalism by the neighboring villages for bricks and suspected treasure, leaving gaping ghost walls of shrines, stupas and monasteries. Amongst these disturbed mounds the Department of Archaeology partly excavated a mound near Charkai bearing the curious name

of 'Chor Chakravarty'. It exposed another small Buddhist establishment. In its vicinity innumerable other ancient sites towards the south dotting the countryside are now mostly rifled of their contents which unmistakably point to identify the existence of a flourishing Buddhist urban settlement. Some scholars are inclined to identify these extensive ancient ruins with the *Panchanagari Vishaya*, referred to in the Baigram copper plate grant of Kumargupta (448 AD).

The Sitakot square monastery exposed here, had sides which measured approximately 214' with two projections in the enclosure wall, one to the north for the only gateway ( $82' \times 25'$ ), and the other to the south for an Assembly hall, *mandapa* and the main prayer sanctuary. An outer entrance hall ( $27' \times 24'$ ) is flanked on either side by two guardrooms. A corresponding inner hall like Paharpur, (measuring  $18'6'' \times 16'6''$ ) separated from the outer hall was connected by a passage doorway. Opposite to the gateway on the north a symmetrical projection in the center of the southern arm, measuring  $86' \times 16'6'$  accommodated a spacious Assembly hall. The monastery appears to have 40 uniform monastic cells arranged on four sides of the inner enclosure wall. In front of the cells a  $8'-6''$  wide *verandah* was provided. Unlike the Paharpur and Mainamati viharas, Sitakot had no central shrine in the inner courtyard. Instead, the three comparatively larger cells on the east, south and west wings each contained a rectangular brick pedestal for the icon.

**Jagaddal Vihara Mound:** The famous *Jagaddal Mahavihara*, established by emperor Rampala (1077-1120) even eclipsed the glory and fame of *Sompuri Vihara* as portrayed in old literature. It particularly attained great popularity in Tibet as the seat of a galaxy of Buddhist scholars who compiled many Buddhist manuscripts here. Its presiding deity was *Avalokitesvara*. Its remains have been identified with the fairly large ancient mound, locally known as *Jaggadal Dhibi*. The mound measuring about  $344' \times 278'$  with an average height of about 15' from the surrounding crop fields, is located about 32 miles north east of Dhamoirhat p.s. of the Naogaon district. Here, regular excavation by the Department of Archaeology in 1996 in a restricted area, has revealed the partial layout of a relatively small Buddhist Vihara. At present only seven square monastic cells on the southern wing and four on the western have been partially exposed. The roof of the Vihara probably was supported on a series of stone columns, the bases of which are still intact.

The antiquities salvaged from excavation include terracotta plaques of the Paharpur type, ornamental bricks, iron nails, semi precious stone beads, a tiny gold ingot, one Vishnu stone image, one stone Hevajra image and a headless life-size stone image of an unidentified deity.

**Buddhist Remains On The Lalmai-Mainamati Range, Comilla:** The trans Meghna region to the south east of Bangladesh, corresponding approximately

to the greater Comilla and part of Dhaka districts formed the ancient kingdom of *Samatata* – a significant name indicating a territory on the sea coast.

Hiuen Tsang visiting *Samatata* in the 7<sup>th</sup> century described it as a low moist country on the seaboard. Dominating the Meghna basin on the north and south of the Gumti River a range of low undulating mud hills, about 11 mile long, stretches from north to south through the middle of the Comilla district. This isolated picturesque range tapering towards north and splaying gradually towards south is a prominent landmark in the area, otherwise characterized by low flat plains. The highest peak of the range often attains a height of about 150' and is deeply furrowed by drainage channels on its northern and western scarps. Fragments of fossil woods are plentiful on its surface and it was once densely wooded by *Sal* and *Gajari* trees but is now virtually denuded of this forest. Its northern part, about 6 miles west of the Comilla town is now known as Mainamati which recalls the memory of Queen Mainamati, mother of King Govinda Chandra the 7<sup>th</sup> king of the Chandra dynasty who is immortalized in the local folk songs and ballads. The southern part of the hill range is known as '*Lalmai*' meaning 'red clay' because of the red color of the soil. It is likely that *Rohitagiri* and *Lalambi vana* of the Chandra copper plate grants may, in fact, indicate the Lalmai Hill Range. A large number of Buddhist stupas monasteries and shrines (about 50) are located on the slopes of the hills, dated between 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century an important copper plate grant of Ranavanka Malla Harikela Deva (1220 AD) was discovered by a person in chance digging which recorded granting of land to a Buddhist monastery in the city of *Pattikera*. Location of a Pargana, bearing the same name strongly suggests its existence in its ambient area. Burmese and Arakanese chronicles refer to this kingdom with which they had intimate cultural contact from the 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the course of the Second World War, military contractors while building barracks in the area accidentally discovered extensive ruins of a prosperous Buddhist establishment. Subsequent surveys by the Archaeology Department identified more than 50 such ancient sites of which seven have been partly or fully excavated since 1957. These are locally known as *Salban Vihara*, *Kotila Mura*, *Ananda Vihara*, *Charpatra Mura*.

**Salban Bihara:** Excavation here since 1955 onward has exposed a massively built self contained 550' square Buddhist monastery of the Paharpur type which accommodates on its inner arm 115 monastic cells around a courtyard with a cruciform central temple, facing an elaborate gateway complex on north. The monastery wall, about 16' thick accommodates the monastic cells in its inner face, which is fronted by an 8' wide verandah. Each cell, 12' square, was provided with three corbelled niches on three walls intended as receptacles of small icons or lamps. Deep digging inside the monastery, close to the temple on

the south revealed six building periods at the site but the earliest two periods were exposed in a very restricted area which offered no intelligible plan of the structural remains. Likewise, the last straggling and highly dilapidated structure also produced no understandable plan and, therefore, were removed in order to expose the next three building and rebuilding periods. The ground plan of the third period from the bottom was largely exposed beneath three more building periods. It was cruciform in plan with each arm measuring 170' long having ambulatory passages around. The entire basement wall was relieved with rows of terracotta plaques like Paharpur, now missing. There was a *mandapa* on each of the four projecting arms of the cross. A broad staircase facing the northern gateway complex gave access to the hall.

In the fourth building period, the plan of the central temple was radically changed from cruciform to oblong, measuring 168' × 110' with a 30' square pillared hall in the middle and a 5 to 11 foot wide procession path around. In the fully exposed fifth building period, the oblong form with its ambulatory passages were retained but its size was reduced. A broad flight of steps from the north led up to the entrance hall, which was connected to a *mandapa* with 12 pillars through which access could be gained to the main prayer chamber on further south. Inside the main prayer chamber on the south, a stepped brick altar was built on which a large Buddha image was presumably installed. The monastery was constructed probably at the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century by King Bhava Deva, the fourth king of the Deva dynasty.

**Kotila Mura:** Situated on a flattened hillock about three miles north of Salban Vihara inside the cantonment is a group of unique Buddhist stupas. It consists of a row of three brick built stupas, set on an oblong platform (280' × 225'). It probably represents the three jewels or 'trinity' of Buddhism, being the *Buddha*, the *Dharma*, and the *Sangha*. They were erected on a traditional square plan with circular drums and hemispherical dome. The ground plan of the central stupa is in the form of a *dharmachakra* or 'wheel of law' the hub of the *chakra* being represented by a deep shaft in the center and the spokes by eight blind chambers built in brick. From these 8 chambers a number of very interesting sculptures of soft laminated claystones, quarried locally from the surrounding hills, depicting Buddha and Bodhisathva images seated on lotus throne, were salvaged in mutilated condition. The other two flanking stupas were built solidly and each contained a sealed relic chamber preserving hundreds of clay miniature votive stupas, bearing Buddhist creed at the back.

**Charpatra Mura:** This mound is located about one and half miles northwest of the Kotila Mura stupas within the military cantonment. Perched on a flat hillock this isolated shrine was partially salvaged from the military contractor's bulldozer in 1956. It exposed an oblong Buddhist shrine, measuring 105' × 55' with an approach gateway leading to a spacious hall. Its roof was supported on four thick brick pillars. A covered entrance led to the prayer chamber on west.

Interesting finds at this salvaged site have been a bronze relic casket and four very important royal copper plate grants of the Deva and Chandra rulers of *Samatata*.

**Queen Mainamati's Palace Mound:** A flat topped large oblong mound, located at the northernmost tip of the hill range, skirting the Gumi river is popularly known as queen Mainamati's palace mound. Excavation at this site in 1966-67 partially exposed the massive remains of a brick defense wall about 11'6" wide, extending 510' from north to south and 550' east to west. A 14' broad entrance passage with a complicated series of structural remains on either side was added later roughly in the middle of the northern boundary wall. At various points within the enclosure wall, excavation revealed fragmentary pre-Muslim structural remains. Significantly, no cult object from the site was discovered which indicate that, this heavily defended building complex was of secular nature and possibly even, a palace site as echoed in the local legend.

**Ananda Vihara Mound:** Situated about a mile and a half to the north of *Salban Vihara* and a mile to the south of *Kotila Mura*, it is the largest oblong site on the ridge. Its significant name as also of the tank nearby, is probably derived from Ananda Deva, the third and the greatest ruler of the early Deva dynasty of '*Devaparvata*'. This was very badly damaged during the Second World War by the military contractors and treasure hunters. The excavations since 1977 onward have exposed remains of the largest square monastery on the hill range, measuring 624' sides with a central cruciform temple. It has recessed corners and re-entrant angles between the arms of the cross. It basement walls were relieved with ornamental bricks and bands of terracotta plaques. In the middle of the northern wing a grand portal consisting of a 100' long by 45' wide projecting front and a monumental gateway complex in it, was fully exposed. A 17'-6" long and 7'-6" wide entrance passage opens on to the interior through a 5'-0" entrance doorway which gives access to two rectangular halls, one inner and the other outer, measuring 30' x 15' and 24' x 8'6" respectively.

**Rupban Mura Mound:** This high mound (500' x 400') is situated in the middle of the hill range near the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD) and along the Comilla Kalirbazar road. Excavation here from 1983 onwards for several years exposed a medium sized Buddhist cruciform temple and a detached monastery remains belonging to three periods.

The cruciform temple had 80' long arms. Each projecting arm had an icon vestibule surrounded by an ambulatory passage and a boundary wall. The four cardinal sides contained a pedestal for the deity. From one of these cells a life-size standing Buddha image of stone was discovered while from the outer cells on three sides fragmentary bronze images were picked up.

The square detached monastery belonging to three building periods was located about 90' south east to the shrine. Initially the oblong Vihara occupied

about 100'×75' area with a courtyard but later it was extended on the south by about 37' and made a square. Like Paharpur, Rupban Mura monastery had only one elaborate gateway complex on the north with guardrooms on either side.

The ruins of an eight- sided stupa were also discovered at a distance of about 37' north of the main temple founded on a 16' square platform and enclosed by a low boundary wall. In the excavation more than five hundred antiquities of various nature were registered from the site including, besides the life size standing stone image of the Buddha, many Gupta and *Pattikera* coins, bronze statuettes and terracotta plaques.

**Itakhola Mura:** This ancient mound is situated about 200 yards north of Rupban Mura mound along the Comilla Kalirbazar road. Excavation at this mound for a number of years since 1985 exposed here a square monastery of 128'6" sides and an oblong temple, measuring 44'10" × 43'3" sides respectively. Both revealed more than one building and rebuilding periods. The monastery contained 20 living cells of different dimensions measuring on average 10'9" × 12'6" each. Here also some of the cells had built- in pedestals for icons in them. The solidly built temple was found to accommodate in the middle of its northern side a closet (8" × 5'6") containing a large sitting Buddha image made of brick, lime and surki with its upper part missing. In some later time the closet was bricked up and in its front another cell was built. All projecting cells on north and west of the shrine contained a total of 10 altars or 'vedis' inside. The shrine had a 'procession' path around.

**Bhoj Rajar Badi:** This mound is situated about half a mile south of Ananda Vihara and close to the Itakhola Mura mound on the bank of a large tank. Recent excavation at the mound unearthed a small Buddhist monastery in which a rare bronze seated image of the *Vajrasattva Dhyanibuddha* was discovered, measuring 4'7" high and 4'3" broad. Beautifully cast, this rare icon has been dated to 9<sup>th</sup> century.

### Historical importance of the archaeological finds from Mainamati excavations

Decades of excavations at different sites of the range succeeded in collecting exceptionally rich antiquities, the most important of which are the twelve copper plate grants; four of which came from Charpatra Mura (in fact, the name of this site has been given in consideration of the four or 'char' copper plates or 'patra') and the remaining eight from Salban Vihara and other sites. The copper plates from Salban Vihara have brought to light for the first time the existence of a new independent Buddhist ruling dynasty, the Devas. The names of four rulers i.e. Sri Shanti Deva, his son Sri Vira Deva, his son Sri Ananda Deva and his son Sri Bhava Deva are recorded on these royal plates. They ruled in *Samatata* during 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. Among the four Charpatra Mura copper plates three

belonged to the Chandra rulers who issued these from their capital at Vikrampur near Dhaka. These royal copper plates furnished for the first time a complete genealogy of the hitherto unknown Chandra kings. Their order of succession is as follows :

1. Purna Chandra;
2. Suvarna Chandra;
3. Troilokya Chandra;
4. Sri Chandra;
5. Kalyan Chandra;
6. Ladaha Chandra; and
7. Govinda Chandra.

These Chandra rulers ruled in *Samatata* kingdom during the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries.

A large collection of gold and silver coins in hoard and separately in excavations have been registered from Mainamati excavations. These include gold coins of Chandra Gupta II (380-414 AD) and Samudra Gupta (340-380) and a huge number of silver coins of three denominations, bearing the legend of *Pattikera* on one side and a crouching bull, the *tri-ratna* and symbols of the sun and moon on the reverse side. But, of particular interest is the discovery of one gold and one silver coin of the Abbasid Khalifas of Baghdaa inscribed with Kufic character. The gold coin was picked up from the upper level of the Kotila Mura belonging to the Al Mustasim Billah (1242-1258 AD), the last Abbasid Khalifa, while the silver coin found from the early level of a monastic cell in Salban Vihara in a highly decayed condition precluded decipherment. Likewise a silver coin of the world famous Abbasid Khalifa Harun-Ur-Rashid dated 172H/788 AD discovered at Paharpur is also interesting. The large quantity of silver coins bearing close resemblance to the contemporary Arakanese coins, are still a bone of contention as to their date and the identity of the authority issuing them.

### Medieval Hindu Temples

Myriads of medieval temples erected by the Hindu Zamindars during the Muslim rule, particularly from 16<sup>th</sup> century onward, are found all over Bangladesh. Among these the 17<sup>th</sup> century Mathurapur Deul in Faridpur district, rises in 12-sided simple spire to a height of about 70'. It is ornamented with horizontal pattern of ribbed parallel brick moldings, bearing floral tracery. Its surface also depicts *Kirtimukha*, Leographs and mythological scenes. The Kodla Math at Ayodhya near Bagerhat, also belonging to the same period, rises in a tapering tower to a height of 60' from the ground and is relieved with horizontal brick moldings. Other varieties of a single spired type are the Sarkar's Math at Mahilara

in Barisal and the Sonarang temples at Tongibari, Dhaka, belonging to the same period. Amongst the temples crowned with more than one spire or 'ratna' there are numerous beautiful examples, such as, the *pancha ratna Govinda* temple in Puthia (19<sup>th</sup> century), the *nava ratna* or nine jewelled *Kantaji* temple in Dinajpur, built in 1752 AD and the *satara ratna temple* near Comilla. The only 25-ratna temple is surviving precariously at Gopalganj between Dinajpur town and Kantanagar.

But, the most striking form of temple architecture in Bangladesh is the ingenious translation of the curvilinear thatched huts of rural areas in brick and mortar form. A single hut of this type is called '*ek bangla*' while the two together is known as '*jor bangla*' the front hut being the *mandapa* while the rear one, the sanctuary. The *jor bangla* temple in Pabna town is an extremely elegant example of the twin-hut type. Traditionally it was built by Braja Mohan Krori, a *tahsildar* under the Nawab of Bengal in the 18<sup>th</sup> century but was defiled before it was completed. Its entrance façade is enriched with intricate terracotta panels depicting floral scrolls and scenes from Hindu mythology. The Bangla design is often duplicated or triplicated by adding miniatures on top. Most of these medieval temples are fabulously embellished with terracotta plaques in continuous friezes depicting in miniature form the contemporary social life, scenes from the Hindu epics, battle scenes and various gods and goddesses.

### Monuments of the Islamic Period

During about six centuries of Muslim rule in Bengal many new urban centers were built and adorned with splendid palaces, forts, monumental gateways, victory towers, mosques, mausolea, roads and bridges, the derelict remains of some of which are still precariously surviving the ravages of time and vandalism of man. The ruins of their early capital at Lakhnawati (Gaur) and Pandua stretch between the old Ganges and Mahanana rivers for about 17 miles in unbroken spectacular array, now half buried in their own collapsed debris or stripped of their building materials by neighboring villagers. In its vastness and picturesque splendor the city ruins are unparalleled by any other city site in this subcontinent. The city ruins are now largely located in adjacent Maldah district of west Bengal and a small part of it is now located in Chapai Nawabganj district.

The historical monuments of the Muslim period in Bangladesh may broadly be classified under two phases — the pre Mughal and the Mughal. The period of its isolation and independence for well over two hundred years (from 1338-1575) is distinguished by the popularization of strong regional elements, reflected in a luxurious richness of the monument's surface decoration with this region's traditional art of terracotta and occasional use of intricate stone carving or glazed tile. Other indigenous elements, characteristic of the pre-Mughal phase are a striking curvilinear roof form drawn from the common thatched huts of

rural Bengal and the adoption of covered roof rather than open court. Monuments erected before the 14<sup>th</sup> century have all perished with the passage of time. Sultan Sikandar Shah, son of Ilyas Shah, ruling between 1358 and 1389 AD, transferred his capital from old Lakhnawati to a new site about 17 miles north, known as, Pandua where, he built a stately stone congregational mosque in 1364 AD, which became the focal point of the city. This stupendous oblong monument measuring 507' x 285' with its vast roof covered with 306 low squat domes, is known popularly as the great Adina Masjid. It is the most ambitious monument of black stone ever built in northern India by any Muslim ruler.

In the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, a definite building style, best described as the regional Islamic style, emerged, of which the earliest surviving example is the elegant *Eklakhi mausoleum* at Pandua, built over the mortal remains of Sultan Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah (1414-1431 AD), the proselyte son of Raja Ganesh. The building of the tomb is said to have cost one *lakh* rupees for which it derived its curious name. It established for the first time in Bengal a typical Bengali style, which was followed later during the Sultanate period. It is almost a square (78'6" x 74'6") building outside, octagonal inside and overlaid by a circle to serve as the base of the hemispherical dome above. It has exceptionally thick wall of 13'. The four octagonal corner turrets and the massive walls are relieved richly with terracotta floral scroll while its cornices and battlements are conspicuously curved in the shape of a curved bow. The ornamental effect of the mausoleum is further enhanced by the application of glazed coloured tiles, which came to be used in Bengal for the first time. The independent Sultans followed this distinct indigenous style of the Eklakhi tomb in succeeding years.

Among the surviving monuments of the pre Mughal period, the accredited tomb of Sultan Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah (1409) at Sonargaon, the mausoleum of Khan Jhan (1459) at Bagerhat, the Shait Gumbad Masjid in the same locality, 35-domed two very ruined mosques exposed by excavation, in Barobazar under Jhinaidaha district, locally known as Sagachia (79' x 51') mosque and the other as the Monoharpukur Mosque (74' x 53'), 6-domed Baba Adam's Mosque (1483) near Dhaka, Sura Mosque (1493-1519) in Dinajpur, the 15-domed Chota Sona Mosque (1494-1519) at Firozpur (Gaur) in Chapai Nawabganj, the Bagha Mosque (1523) and the 6-domed Kusumbha Mosque in the same district and the Kherua mosque (1558) at Sherpur in Bogra are excellent specimens.

In this phase a group of homogeneous monuments, erected by an obscure saint general, named Ulugh Khan Jahan in the far south, bordering the Sundarban forest in mid 15<sup>th</sup> century, is distinct from the rest. The architecture is characterized by its severe simplicity, cyclopean tapering walls and turrets, bearing close affinity to the more famous Tughlaq architecture of Delhi, built a century earlier. In this group besides his elegant simple tomb, the most magnificent brick mosque – the biggest in Bangladesh is commonly known by its misleading name of Shait Gumbad Masjid or a mosque with 60 domes, though

it is actually roofed over with 77 domes including seven *chauchala* domes in the middle row. Measuring 160' × 108' its vast prayer hall is divided by a forest of slender stone columns into seven aisles and eleven bays from which rows of endless arches spring to support the domes. The slightly battered 6'6" thick walls and almost detached huge circular turrets, resemble the bastions of a fortress. Ten *mibrabs* on the west wall and the wall surface are sparsely embellished with terracotta floral and rosette motifs. One interesting feature of this gigantic Jami mosque is an unusual provision of a small and arched doorway on the west wall near the central *mibrab*. Other mosques of the series are the single domed Bibi Bagnis mosque, the Ronvijoypur Mosque having the largest dome in Bangladesh; the Singar mosque, the Chunakhola mosque the nine domed mosque, the Zinda Pir mosque, the Reza Khoda mosque, the Mithpukur mosque, the Sonatola mosque and a ten-domed mosque (82' × 36' with 6' thick wall) are noteworthy. Besides constructing many brick paved roads, radiating to different parts of his territory, Khan Jahan also dug a large number of sweet water tanks in this highly saline belt.

**Chota Sona Masjid:** Chota Sona Masjid or small golden mosque at Ferozpur (Gaur), built by one Wali Muhammad during the Sultanate of Husain Shah is a fine specimen of the Sultanī period, roofed over with 15 gilded domes and entirely covered with beautiful carved black stones. Another example of a very elegant 10-domed mosque is situated at Bagha in Rajshahi district, built in 1523 AD. The entire body of the monument is delicately embellished with terracotta floral pattern, grapes and rosettes. Especially striking is the terracotta floral art depicted on its fabulous *mibrabs*.

Yet another fine specimen of the period is the six-domed stone mosque of Kusumbia in Rajshahi district. Built in 1558 by one Sulaiman during the reign of Sultan Ghiyasuddin Bahadur Shah, the prayer hall is divided by carved stone pillars into two aisles and three bays. Here, a highly ornate so-called 'ladies gallery' or the *Badshah Ka Takht* is located on the upper storey to the north west corner and is carried on heavy dwarf stone columns.

Some of the monuments erected in the outlying areas of Dhaka during the early Mughal period exhibit a curious blending of the Sultanate and the new imperial Mughal features. This, in fact, may be called the 'transitional phase'. This phase is well represented by the 3-domed Kherua mosque at Sherpur in Bogra, built in 1582 by Murad Khan Qaqshal, the 3-domed Atia Jami mosque, built in 1609 by Sayyid Khan Panni in Tangail, the Shah Muhammad mosque at Egarasindur in greater Mymensingh district and the Qutub mosque. All these monuments display characteristic features of both the Sultanate and the Mughal periods such as the curvilinear cornice, terracotta ornamentations of the wall surface of the Sultanate period and plaster panel decorations and straight cornice etc. of the Mughals.

**Mughal Phase:** With the conquest of Bengal by the Mughals in 1575 and establishment of Dhaka as their capital in 1608 by the stern Governor Alauddin Islam Khan Chisti it became a province of the vast Mughal empire. They introduced radical changes in the art and architecture in Bengal, which broke down the two centuries of isolation and regional art and architecture rooted to the soil. Chief elements introduced by the new masters included dominant central dome and tall central entrance, set in a projected bay for greater emphasis on the central part of the building and the entrance itself being inset in a taller half dome. But the fundamental change in embellishing their buildings was brought about by totally discarding the traditional terracotta art of the land and replacing it by reiterated plaster panels. The typical curvature of the cornice of the pre Mughal edifices were likewise abandoned in favor of straight horizontal cornice.

Important architectural legacies of the Mughal period, mainly concentrated in Dhaka the new capital and its immediate environments are Eidgah, Bara and Chota Katra, the Khwaja Shahbaz and Khan Mohammad Mridha's mosques, Kartalab Khan's mosque, the Husaini Dalan and a series of river forts at Idrakpur in Munshiganj, Hajiganj and Sonakanda in Narayanganj.

The earliest Mughal monument in Dhaka is the thoroughly renovated Eidgah in the Dhanmandi residential area, built in 1640 by Mir Abul Qasem the 'dewan' of the unfortunate Prince Shah Suja, Governor of Bengal. Originally it consisted of a free standing plastered screen wall on the west containing a semi octagonal multi cusped central *mibrab*, flanked on the either side by three more *mibrabs*, relieved with simple arched frames.

**Bara Katra, Chawk Bazar:** Two of the most imposing Mughal monuments in Dhaka are the Bara and Chota Katras, located on the north bank of the old Ganges in Chawk Bazaar. Built in 1644 by Mir Abul Qasem, the surviving remains of Bara Katra consist of an imposing river front of 233', a monumental arched gateway framed within a prominently projecting bay and huge octagonal hollow corner towers. This magnificent building originally enclosed a central quadrangle, which was overlooked by four wings with 22 rooms. In the middle of the north and south wings 3-storied gateways provided access to the inner court. It was planned on a grand scale, following the pattern of the Central Asian caravansaries.

**Chota Katra:** Situated about 200 yards east of Bara Katra and built in similar plan but on a smaller scale this was erected by Nawab Shaista Khan in 1663. Of its two gateways, the one overlooking the old Ganges was three storied with a monumental archway while the second gateway towards the city was double storied. It is now so heavily encroached by godowns and small factories of the local merchants that its original elegance cannot be visualized. Within its courtyard stands a beautiful tomb with a saucer shaped ribbed dome said to have

been built by Shaista Khan over the grave of a nebulous lady known as Bibi Champa.

**Lalbagh Fort:** Picturesquely located on the northern bank of the old Ganges, the construction of the Aurangabad Palace Fortress, popularly known as the Lalbagh fort is believed to have been started by Prince Muhammad Azam, third son of the last great Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in 1678 AD but he could not complete it on the grand scale during his short tenure of viceroyalty of only 14 months as he was transferred to the Deccan to join the war against the Marathas. He named the fort as Aurangabad fort in honour of his father. His successor Nawab Shaista Khan, the nephew of Empress Nur Jahan and brother of Mumtaj Mahal the "lady of the Taj" is believed to have continued the construction work during his second term of viceroyalty (1679-88) but discontinued it due to the sudden death of his favourite daughter, popularly known as Bibi Pari, considering it to be unlucky.

Rectangular in plan, measuring 1082' x 700', it encloses within its fortified area a number of splendid monuments surrounded by a fascinating formal Mughal garden. There are a small 3-domed mosque on the west, the unique mausoleum of Bibi Pari in the middle and the two-storied Audience Hall and 'hammam' complex on east over-looking an old tank. A defense wall on south and part of the west measuring over 2000 feet long survives to a height of about 20 feet from the surrounding ground. It was embedded with earthen pipes within for the supply of water inside, the entrance to the fortified area was provided through two graceful main gateways on north and south and a subsidiary arched gate on the north. On the southern rampart five-semi octagonal bastions project beyond the outer wall.

The two storied Audience Hall and *hammam* accommodates on the ground floor a central hall with two flanking square apartments. A massive half domed passage through the central rectangular hall on west gives access to an elaborate *hammam* and toilet complex, flagged with glazed tiles and provided with water heating closets and changing rooms. The upper floor similarly has three corresponding apartments and is roofed over with a graceful curvilinear roof in imitation of the common thatched rural huts. At present the building after careful restorations of its original architectural features, has been converted into a fort museum.

The tomb of *Bibi Pari* is a unique monument in Bengal, for it is the only monument in this region where black stone from Rajmahal, white marble from Rajputana and glazed tiles have been used to decorate the interior of its nine chambers. The central tomb chamber is entirely covered with white marble including the simple tombstone. Curiously all the chambers have been spanned by overlapping course of huge black stone blocks in the pre Islamic archaic corbel fashion while the roof of the mortuary chamber is covered with a false copper dome.

High ground on the south, opposite Bibi Pari's tomb has an ornamental tank and a fountain. Recent excavation has exposed a very interesting underground covered masonry drain with regularly spaced inspection pits for disposal of wastewater towards the western rampart.

The small 3-domed mosque on the west stands on the back of an elevated oblong platform. Its domes are fluted and its northern facade tastefully relieved with plaster panels.

**Sat Masjid:** Located in the Jafarabad area to the north and western outskirts of Dhaka this imposing mosque is a fine example of the provincial Mughal style introduced in Bangladesh. Probably built by Nawab Shaista Khan, its prayer hall (58' x 27') is surmounted by three bulbous domes and four hollow octagonal corner towers each capped by a smaller dome, thereby giving the mosque its name of *Sat Gumbad Masjid* or a mosque with 7 domes. The whole outer surface of the monument is profusely embellished with arched niches in plaster.

Of the other Mughal monuments in Dhaka Khan Muhammad Mridha's mosque, located close to the north-west corner of the Lalbagh fort, erected in 1704 is a two storied structure, - the ground floor accommodating a series of vaulted chambers while the mosque on the upper floor is spanned by three shouldered domes.

**5-domed Kartalab Khan's mosque:** This mosque is situated at Begum Bazar area near the central jail. It was built by Nawab Murshid Quli Khan (alias, Kartalab Khan) between 1700-1704 AD. This two- storied mosque, in addition, has a graceful do chala hut shaped room on the north. Close to it is the only known *Baoli* or stepped well in Bangladesh.

Among a number of Mughal bridges the *Paglapul*, located half way between Dhaka and Narayanganj, spanning the Qadamtali stream, is in an advanced state of ruins, while the two bridges at Sonargaon and Abdullaipur have been renovated. However, the Tongi Bridge built by Mughal governor Mir Jumla is now in ruins, the remnants of which can still be seen in the riverbed during dry season.

**Tahkhana at Firozpur, Gaur:** This interesting large two storied brick building is said to have been built by Prince Suja, Governor of Bengal as his summer house where he used to stay when visiting his spiritual guide Shah Niamatullah Wali of Karnaul (died 1664). The summerhouse or the so-called Tahkhana (116' x 38') stands close to the single domed tomb and the 3-domed mosque of Shah Niamatullah Wali, overlooking a large tank. The ground floor of the building accommodated an unspecified number of cells while the upper floor has 17 apartments including the two octagonal chambers on the north east and south east corners. A *hammam* complex is located to the south. A strip of 14' wide covered 'verandah' on east gave access to the living apartments. It is the only Mughal monument in Gaur where a flat roof has been constructed over

timber beams and earthen water pipes, embedded in the walls, supplied hot and cold water to the building.

Among the buildings erected during the Mughal period outside Dhaka, the only octagonal tomb in Bangladesh located at Rohonpur in Rajshahi district belongs to some unknown person, the oblong 3-domed mosque at Jhaudia in Jessore is believed to have been erected during emperor Jahangir's time; the Jami Masjid at '*andher qila*' in Chittagong, built by, Bazurg Umed Khan, son of Shaista Khan, commemorating the reconquest of Chittagong in 1666 from the Arakanese, are good specimens. Chittagong mosque has now been completely renovated by local Mosque Committee by demolishing the domes and extending or altering it extensively to such an extent that nothing much remains of its original features.

### River Forts Around Dhaka

**Idrakpur Fort, Munsiganj:** An interesting group of fortresses, built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century for guarding the river approach to Dhaka against the recurring predatory raids of the Portuguese and Magh pirates still survive today. One of these stands on the bank of the dried up Ichamati River at Idrakpur in Munshiganj, about 15 miles south east of Dhaka. Built in 1660 by Subadar Mir Jumla, it consists of an oblong 270' × 240' area, enclosed by battlemented high rampart with a simple arched gateway on the north and a circular bastion at each corner, of which the one towards the river side is of exceptional proportions (108' diameter) for mounting high caliber cannon.

The other river forts of similar nature built for the same purpose during the Mughal period are the Hajiganj fort and Sonakanda forts in Narayanganj, perched on either bank of River Sitalakhya about a mile apart. Hajiganj or Khizirpur fort, as it is also known, consists of a hexagonal (the ruined riverside corner is now occupied by the local fire brigade) fortification wall with round bastions at the angles and a small gateway to the north. Sonakanda fort is situated on the northern bank of the same river. It is rectangular in plan with round bastions at each corner and in addition, has a huge round drum (bastion) facing the river for mounting large caliber cannons. These river forts built for a particular purpose presents an interesting element of the defense system of the Mughals.

**Zinjira fort:** Nawab Ibrahim Khan II, Subadar of Bengal (1689-97) succeeding Nawab Shaista Khan, constructed the infamous fort at Zinjira on the southern bank of the *Buriganga* river, opposite Bara Katra. The vestige of the fort has now been virtually obliterated by the encroaching local people, leaving only few derelict walls, an octagonal ruined building and a detached group of very interesting and elaborate *hammam* complex. The surviving octagonal structure with guardrooms seems to have been one of the entrance gateways to the palace.

The *hammam* which is located on the southern corner of the palace complex was originally a two storied building (53'8" x 31') with nine surviving rectangular chambers, each covered with a dome and each having a circular aperture at the top for admitting and light. These chambers were used as changing rooms, bath, boiler rooms, storage, toilets etc. and were fitted with earthen pipes embedded into the walls for the supply of hot and cold water. An old octagonal well close by apparently supplied water to the *hammam* with the help of a Persian wheel. Today the whole area is littered with garbage and encroached by squatters.

**Megalithic Monuments:** Jaintiapur in Sylhet situated about 26 miles north of the town near Tamabil, bordering the Khasi hills of Meghalaya in medieval times was the residence of the Khasi kings of the Jaintia kingdom. The Khasis, belonging to a matriarchal tribe established a small hill kingdom in remote antiquity, which in early 17<sup>th</sup> century came under the baneful influence of Tantric Hinduism. King Jaso Manik (1606-41) under this influence installed an image of Kali in a temple within the Jaintiapur Rajbari, which soon became a place of human sacrifice. In 1835 the British government annexed this kingdom after issuing a succession of warnings against the practices of such horrible sacrifices at different times.

Today, virtually nothing remains of the *Khasi* palace or *Rajbari* at Jainatiapur except the highly ruinous palace and the dreaded kali temple walls. However, in their immediate vicinity stands a series of striking stone monoliths, which are a prominent landmark in the area. These 'menhirs' are usually grouped in odd numbers: three, five, seven, nine etc. A single horizontal massive stone block of oval shaped capstone, propped on smaller uprights, has a large upright headstone on one side. There are over two score of such stone monuments in and around the 'Rajbari' at Jaintiapur. Numerous such menhirs are dotted about the hills of Meghalaya and Assam. In fact, these Megalithic monuments are memorials erected in honor of some of their deceased ancestors or in commemoration of some important event of the Khasi tribe. Some of these are often erected on the roadside or near the market place as resting-places for weary travellers. These groups are however merely cenotaphs to ancestors. The unique megaliths of Jaintiapur in Bangladesh have however, remarkable affinity to the menhirs of certain Ho and Manda villages in Clotanagpur and also to similar megaliths in England, Ireland, Denmark and Scandinavian countries.

Because of the natural fertility of the land, friendly climate and fabulous riches Bengal in her more than two thousand years of variegated history has always attracted new conquerors, settlers, traders and missionaries of various races, mostly from the west who have left their distinct cultural marks behind in the shape of magnificent cities, palaces, and noble monuments. As Bradley-Birt, a romantic writer, has mused in a melancholy note, "at the whim of kings and conquerors, eager to perpetuate their fame, new cities have arisen with

startling rapidly, often to be deserted in their turn well nigh before the last stones have crowned the minarets and pinnacles of their mosques and palaces"<sup>1</sup>. Most of these monuments and archaeological treasures have disappeared with the ravages of time. But still Bangladesh is heir to a rich archaeological heritage which cries out for protection and preservation. For, whatever survives today, are the variable pages of the land's history.

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<sup>1</sup> Bradley, Birt F..B. — *The Romance of an Eastern Capital* (London 1906).



1. Megalithic monuments at Jaintiapur, Sylhet



2. Exposed remains of the massive rampart on north Mahasthan Garh



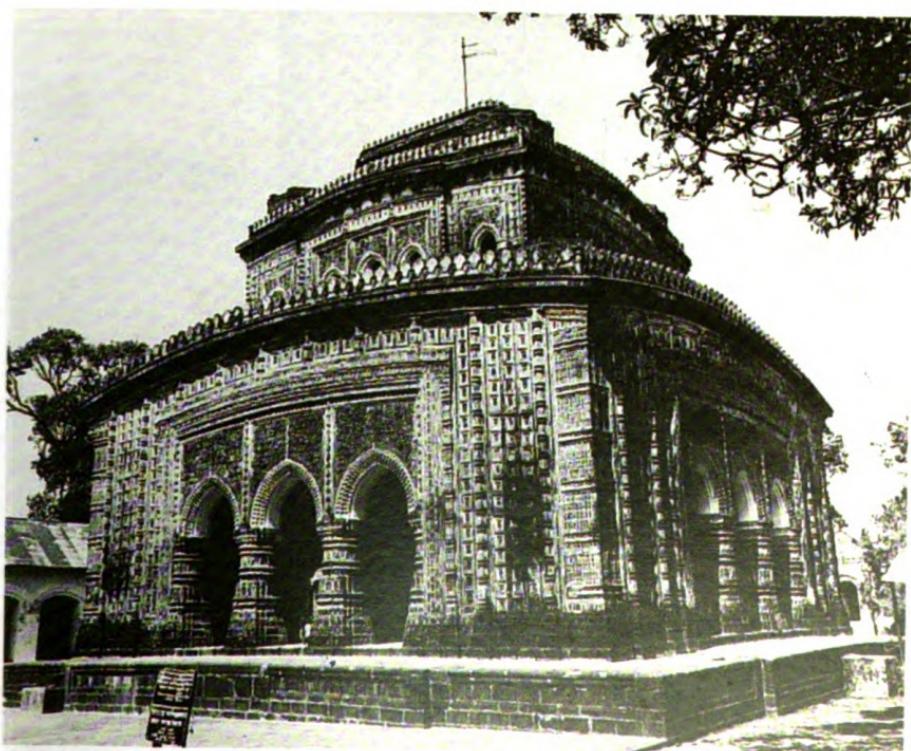
3. Lakshindarer Medh, Gokul, Mahasthan Garh



4. Kutila Mura, 'Triratna Stupa', Mainamati, Comilla



5. Paharpur Buddhist Vihara, Naogaon, Rajshahi



6. General view of Kantaji Temple, Dinajpur



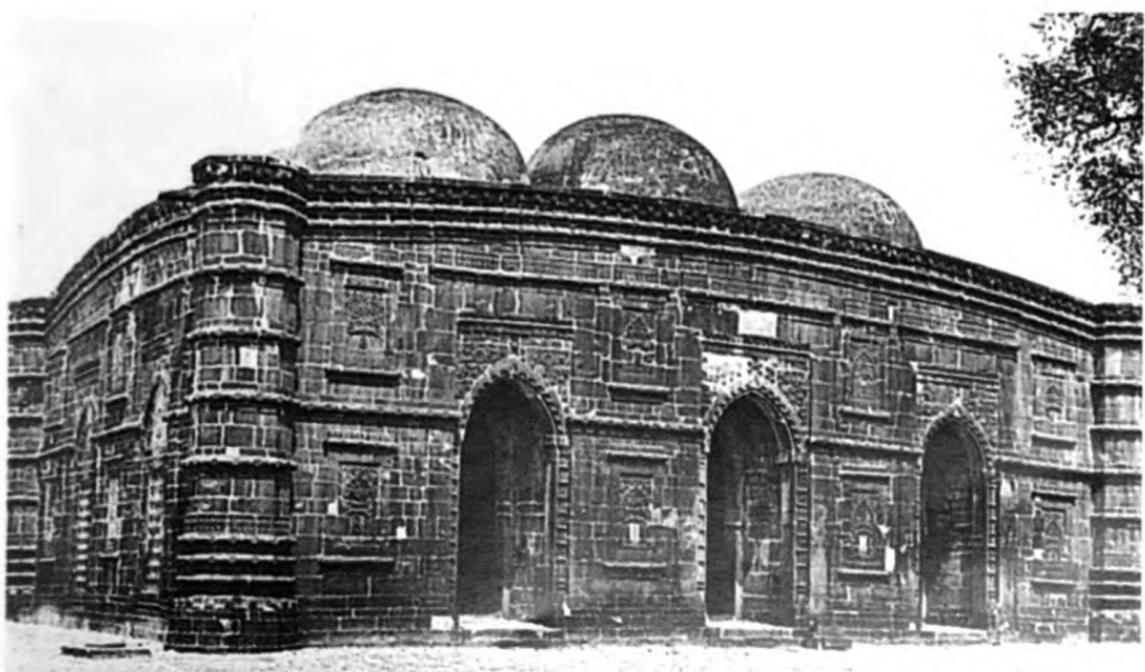
7. Terracotta pictorial art of Kantaji Temple, Dinajpur



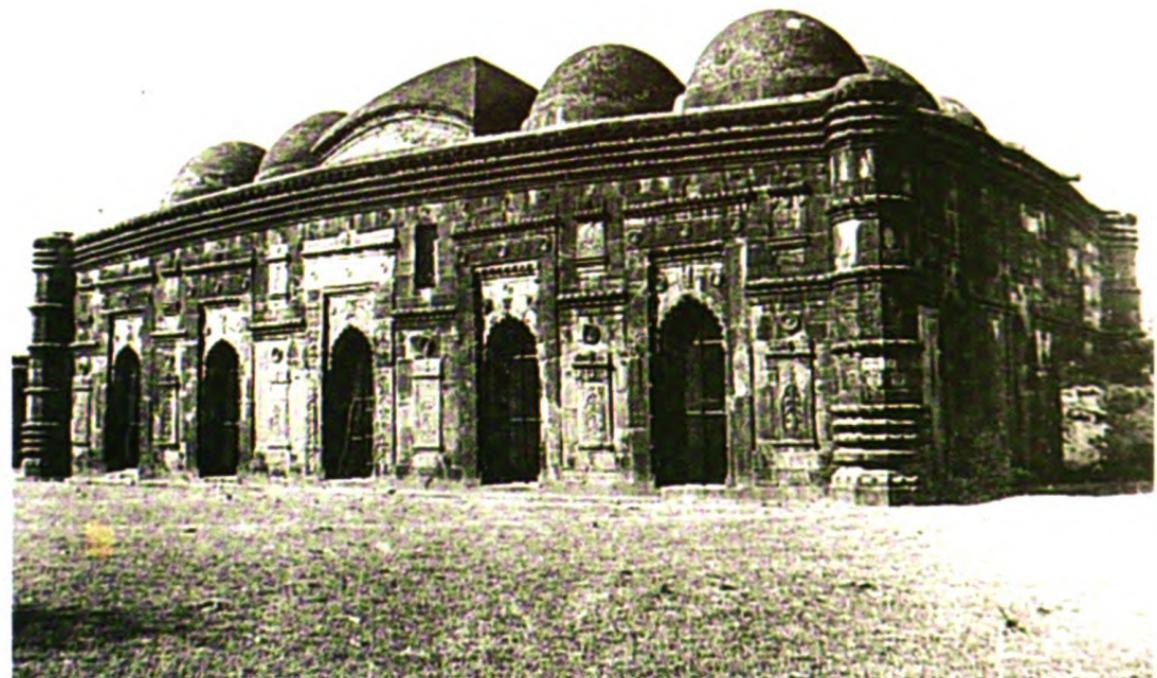
8. A Terracotta rich column of Kantaji Temple



9. A Mihrab of Kusumba mosque, Rajshahi



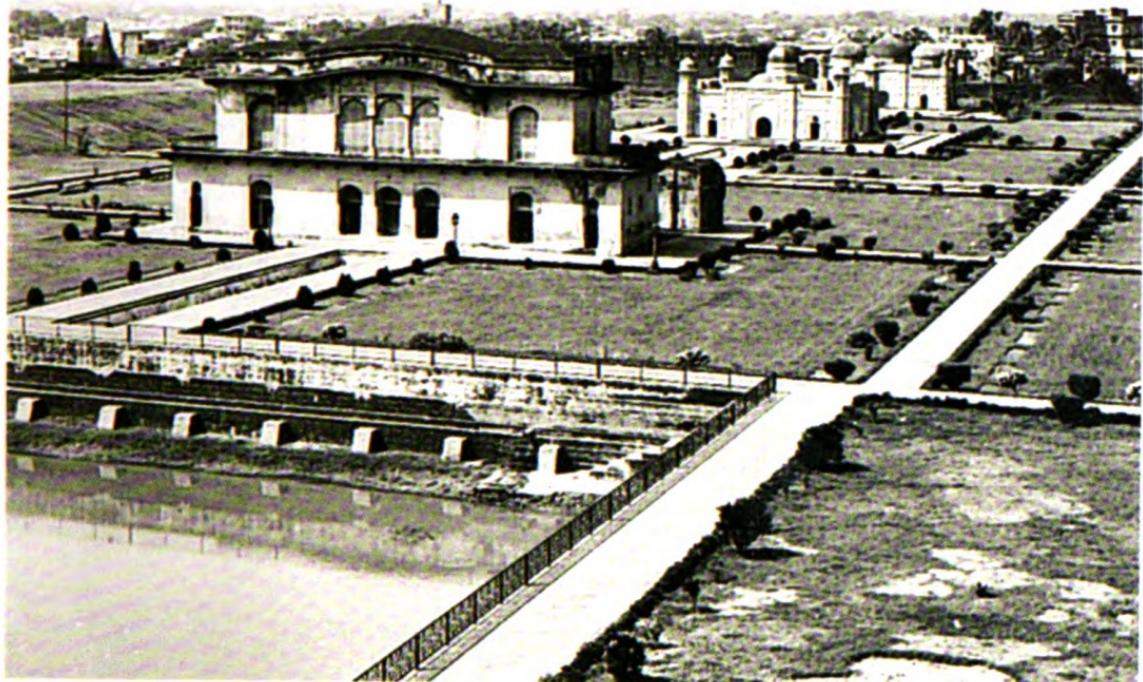
10. Kusumba mosque, Rajshahi



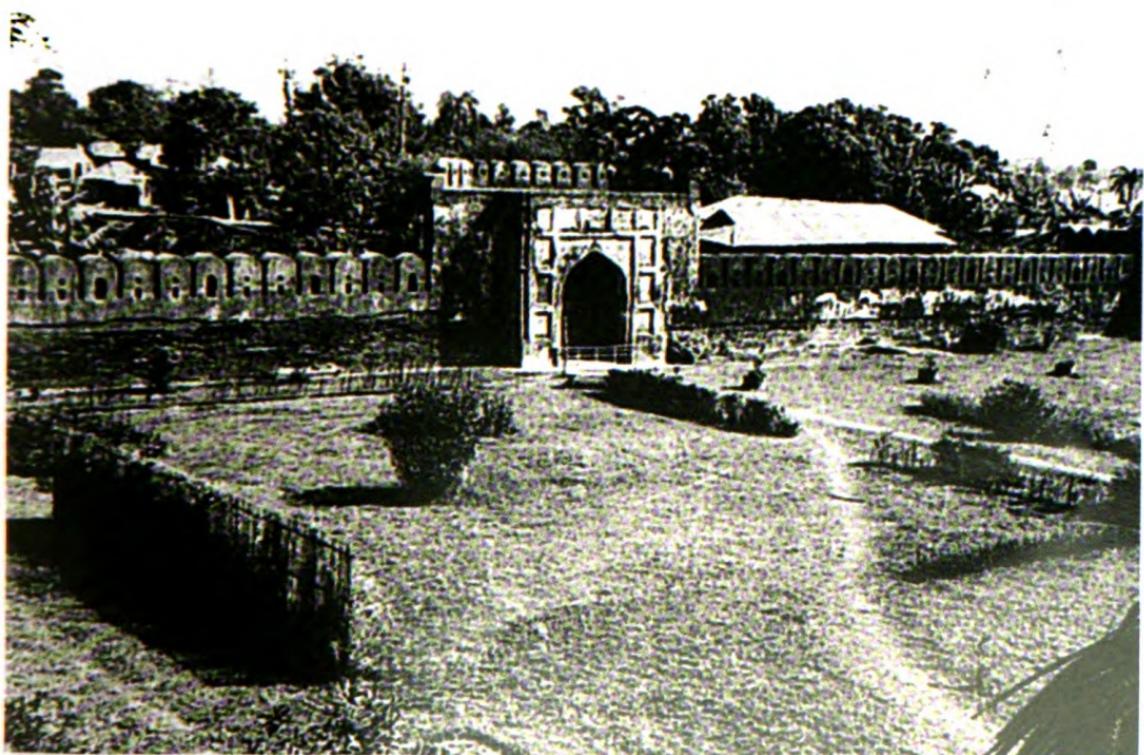
11. Chota Sona Masjid, Ferozpur, Gaur



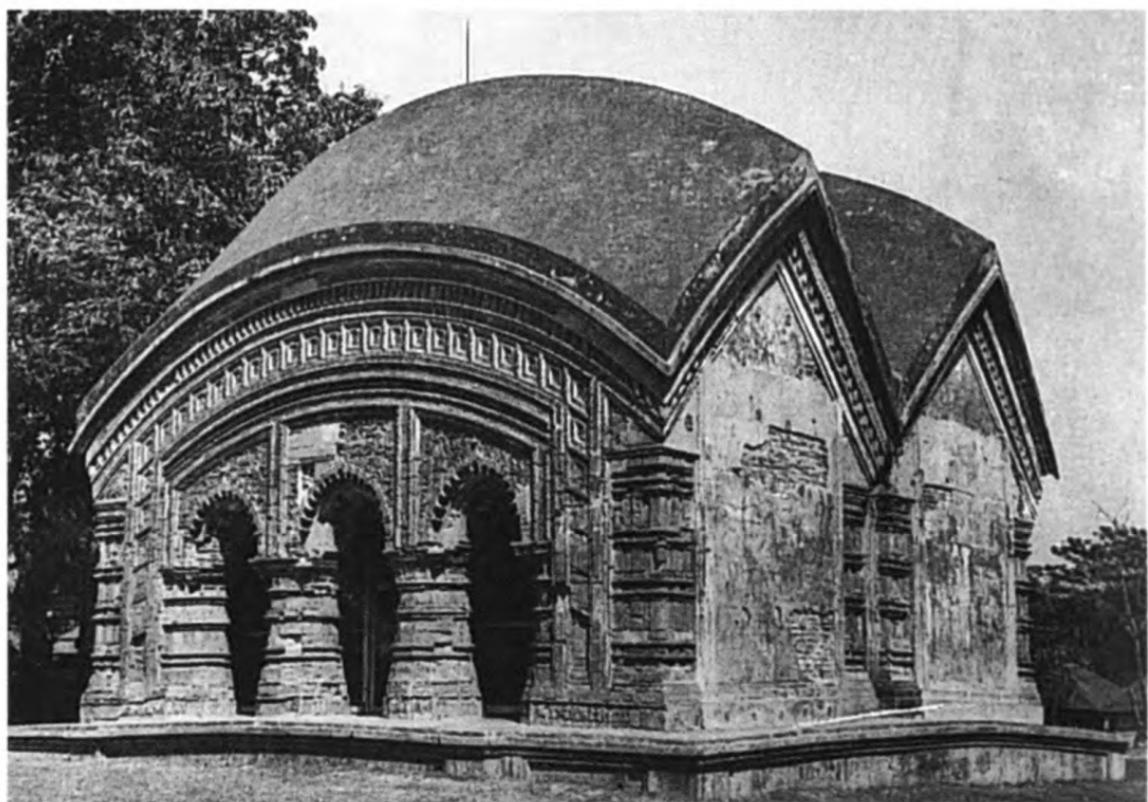
12. Shait Gumbad Masjid, Bagerhat



13. General view of the Lalbagh Fort, Dhaka



14. Sonakanda Fort, Narayanganj



15. Jor-Bangla Temple, Pabna

## CHAPTER TWO

### Ancient Bengal

Abdul Momin Chowdhury

#### (a) Hindu-Buddhist Dynasties

The reconstruction of the history of Bengal in the pre-Muslim period is difficult due to paucity of sources. The difficulty is felt more acutely for the earlier period from the earliest time to the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D., when Bengal came under the Imperial Guptas. From then onwards we get written records in the form of epigraphs and literature which contain information on the history of the region of Bengal. For the earlier period we have to depend on very scanty references in the Vedic, Epic and Puranic literature as well as on the available archaeological evidence.

It must be made clear at the very outset that by the region of Bengal we include the territories of present-day Bangladesh and the province of West Bengal of India. It must be realised that the history of the region in the ancient period had an unitary trend and it is difficult to bring out the history of present day Bangladesh separately. So, for the ancient period, we would consider the history of the whole region of Bengal as a whole.

#### Background

In the earliest period Bengal was known to be inhabited by different groups of people, whose names came to be associated with the area inhabited by them. Thus the ancient *janapadas* of Vanga, Pundra, Radha and Gauda came to be recognised as inhabited by non-Aryan ethnic groups bearing those names. Pundra roughly comprised the territories of northern Bangladesh and parts of north Bengal of the Indian province of West Bengal, whereas Gauda denoted parts of mid-West Bengal. Radha included the southern part of present West Bengal. Vanga denoted the major portion of present Bangladesh— its southern and south-eastern districts. Samatata was an important *janapada* in the

trans-Meghna region of Bangladesh in its south-eastern part (Comilla – Noakhali area). The name of this *janapada* was purely descriptive and had no ethnic connection. The Chittagong area with its adjacent areas was known by the name of Harikela. The existence of these *janapadas* is known from the later Vedic literature, as areas inhabited by non-Aryan people.

Aryan Influence in ancient India came to be felt in the north-western parts in the middle of the second millennium B.C. and it took a long time for the Aryans to reach the eastern limits of the subcontinent. Thus the people of Bengal felt the tide of *Aryanisation* quite late. From about 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. it pushed into Bengal from the western side and it took about one thousand years to Aryanise the whole of Bengal. By the time Aryan influence reached Bengal, it had become feeble during its long march through the entire area of northern India. Thus the pre-Aryan elements in the culture of the people of Bengal got time to be rooted deeply and even under Aryan influence, which was feeble, they retained many elements in their life and culture which are non-Aryan and definitely pre-Aryan.

Stone tools provide the earliest evidence of human settlements. Pre-historic stone implements have been discovered in various parts of West Bengal in the districts of Midnapur, Bankura and Burdwan. But it is difficult to determine, even approximately, the time when people using them first settled in Bengal. It might have taken place ten thousand years (or even more) ago. The original settlers were the non-Aryan ethnic groups – Nishadas or Austric or Austro-Asiatics – who are now represented by the primitive peoples known as Kola, Bhil, Santal, Sabara, Pulinda etc. At a subsequent age, peoples of two other ethnic stocks whose language was Dravidian and Tibeto-Burman settled in Bengal.

The archaeological discoveries during the 1960s have furnished evidence of a comparatively much higher degree of civilisation in certain parts of Bengal even at such a remote period as the beginning of the first millennium B.C., perhaps even earlier. The discoveries at ‘Pandu Rajar Dhibi’ in the valley of the Ajay river (near Bolpur) in the Burdwan district and in several other sites on the Ajay, Kunar and Kopai rivers have thrown fresh light on Bengal’s pre-history. ‘Pandu Rajar Dhibi’ represents the ruins of a trading township, which carried on trade not only with the interior regions of India, but also with the countries of the Mediterranean world. It is evident from the Vedic literature that the Aryans regarded the peoples whom they met in Bengal as barbarians. But the evidence of the higher material culture that have come to light in West Bengal proves beyond any doubt the invalidity of the Aryan idea. At the same time it must be said that Aryan settlements, which happened gradually over a long period of time, profoundly affected its culture and the process of gradual Aryanisation forms the chief point of interest in the subsequent history of the region. The history of ancient Bengal from the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. onwards, which appears to us in more or less clear light, is the history of Aryan domination, both from the political and cultural points of view.

Greek and Latin sources (3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. - 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.) refer to an eastern Indian nation/state called 'Gangaridae (Greek) / 'Gangaridai' (Latin) which was very strong militarily. Scholars have located 'Gangaridai' in parts of southern and south-eastern Bengal, adjacent to the mouths of the Ganges (Bhagirathi and Padma).

An inscription written in the Brahmi script found in excavation in the site of the old *Pundranagar*, now represented by the ruins at Mahasthana in Bogra district, bears testimony to Maurya rule (3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.) in parts of Bengal. This inscription, the earliest epigraphic record in Bangladesh, establishes the identification of ancient Pundranagar with modern *Mahasthangarh* of Bogra district. Pundranagar is thus the earliest urban settlement in Bangladesh. Archaeological excavations prove the existence of this urban administrative and cultural centre throughout the ancient period up to the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The fragmentary Brahmi inscription refers to relief measures, such as distribution of paddy and money, to be undertaken by the administration during the time of calamities caused by nature and the collection of the distributed amount of paddy and money when good days return. Thus it proves that famines and natural calamities are very old companions of the people in this part of the world. The idea of returning the relief speaks of the mutual respect between the administration and the people.

The *Arthashastra* of Kautiliya (3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.) refers to fine cotton fabric of Vanga (south-eastern Bengal) as an important item of her trade throughout India. The Greek and Latin writers (more or less of the same period) also mention it. Thus it may be emphasized that the tradition of weaving fine cotton cloth goes back to a very early period. It was this item of southeastern Bengal, which in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. earned worldwide fame as the 'Muslin' of Bengal, and specifically of Dhaka. It may also be mentioned here that the making of terracotta plaques is also a very old art tradition in Bengal. Terracotta plaques have been found in the excavations at *Pandu Rajar Dhibi*, which prove the antiquity of this art in Bengal.

### Gupta Rule

The history of Bengal from the fall of the Mauryas (2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.) to the rise of the Guptas (4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) is obscure. The discovery of some beautiful terracotta figurines at *Mahasthana*, *Tamralipti* and *Chandraketugarh*, datable in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> centuries B.C., proves that Bengal continued to flourish in the Sunga and Kushana periods. It appears from the accounts of *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* and Ptolemy that in the first two centuries of the Christian era the whole of deltaic Bengal was organised into a powerful kingdom with its capital at Gange, a great market town on the banks of the Ganges. We have evidence of widespread trade between Bengal and China as well as other countries. The *Milinda-Panho* mentions Vanga in a list of maritime countries where ships congregated for the purpose of trade.

It is likely that on the eve of Gupta expansion under Samudragupta (4th century A.D.) Bengal remained divided into independent states. By about the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. most independent states came under Samudragupta's rule. Samatata (the trans-Meghna region comprising Comilla-Noakhali area) was outside his empire, but was reduced to the status of a tributary state. Samudragupta's son and successor, Chandragupta II consolidated their possessions in the east and had to wage wars against the Vangas. Gupta suzerainty over Samatata might have come at a later stage and by the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD this area appears to have been ruled by a king with his name ending with Gupta (Vainygupta). Several copper-plates of 5<sup>th</sup> century Gupta emperors (Kumaragupta – Budhagupta) found in northern Bengal prove the existence of a well-established Gupta rule in that area. They also testify to the existence of a well-structured local administration in which the representatives of the local people had the opportunity of playing an important part. It goes to the credit of the Gupta emperors that they established an administration in Bengal in which the participation of the local people was ensured. The set-up of the local administration, as evidenced by the Gupta copperplates, is undoubtedly the earliest instance of local self-government in Bengal and its significance cannot be overestimated.

Under Gupta rule Bengal was an important province. The period of the Imperial Guptas is generally considered to be the golden age of Indian history. During this period India was under a strong benevolent central government, which brought peace, wealth and prosperity for a considerable time. Bengal enjoyed the benefit of being a part of the All-Indian empire, in which there prevailed efficient administration and political stability. This period is remarkable for its trade and commerce, in which Bengal had her due share. *Fa-hsien*, the Chinese visitor, states that in the east Tamralipti (modern Tamluk in Midnapur district of West Bengal) was the great emporium of trade. The discovery of large number of Gupta coins and imitation Gupta coins in Bengal prove the economic prosperity of the region under the Guptas.

The period is also remarkable for religious toleration. The imperial Gupta monarchs embraced Brahmanism and styled themselves *Paramabhangavatas* or *Paramadaiavatas*, but they also patronised Buddhism and Jainism. The people of the period enjoyed an environment of religious toleration and coexistence of religious beliefs. The artistic excellence of the Gupta age is well known and it influenced the artistic tradition of Bengal. The Gupta School inspired the Bengal school of sculptural art.

### Sasanka

The break up of the Gupta empire, the invasions of the Hunas and the sudden entry and exit of Yasodharman on the political stage of northern India gave great shocks to eastern India. In the first half of the sixth century A.D. south and east

Bengal shook off the suzerainty of the Guptas and attained importance as an independent kingdom under local rulers – the kingdom of Vanga. In the central part of northern India the Maukhari rose to prominence and the later Guptas held sway over Bihar, western and northern Bengal. There was a long drawn out struggle between the Maukhari and the later Guptas for the possession of Magadha (southern Bihar) and parts of western and northern Bengal.

Towards the close of the sixth century A.D. the kingdom of Gauda emerged in parts of western and northern Bengal under the later Guptas. But by the beginning of the seventh century Gauda emerged as an independent kingdom under Sasanka and Magadha formed a part of his dominions. There is no doubt that Sasanka occupies an important place in the history of Bengal. He is the first known king of Bengal to extend his suzerainty over territories far beyond the geographical boundaries of that province. He attempted at establishing a north Indian empire and held his own as well as the independence of the Gauda empire against a very powerful adversary, Harshavardhana, who may be said to have revived the Imperial tradition of a northern Indian empire by founding a vast empire embracing practically the whole of northern India and parts of southern India. It was no mean achievement on the part of Sasanka to have preserved his own entity against such a powerful adversary. Even for a king of Bengal it was a great show of strength to have ventured into northern Indian politics.

Of the early life of Sasanka and the circumstances in which he occupied the throne of Gauda we do not have any definite evidence. But it seems very clear that he ruled over a vast territory. He made himself master of western and northern Bengal and conquered territory as far as the Chilka Lake in Orissa. Parts of Bihar (Magadha) were within his empire. He ventured as far as Kanauj in the central part of northern India by taking advantage of the contemporary political situation and in alliance with Devagupta, the ruler of Malwa in western India. His capital, *Karnasuvarma*, has been identified with Rangamati, six miles southwest of Baharampur in the Murshidabad district of Indian West Bengal.

Sasanka was a staunch Shaivite (follower of Shiva) and *Hsuen Tsang*, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, depicts him as a strong anti-Buddhist and many acts of vandalism and enmity against Buddhists are ascribed to him. Whether all these accusations made by the contemporary Buddhist author, who was a great friend of Sasanka's adversary Harshavardhana, are correct or not we are not certain. However, political reasons rather than religious enmity may have prompted the persecution of Buddhists in certain areas. Almost all that we know about this great king of Gauda comes from hostile sources. If he had a biographer like Banabhatta or a foreigner friend like *Hsuen Tsang*, his character might have been painted as attractively as that of Harshavardhana. But there can hardly be a dispute in regarding him the first important king of Bengal who could launch Bengal for the first time in her history on aggressive endeavors towards establishing supremacy over northern India. In this sense he was the forerunner

of the aggressive northern Indian policy of the later day Pala rulers like Dharmapala and Devapala.

### *Matsyanyayam*

The death of Sasanka was followed by a period of anarchy and lawlessness. For more than a century, roughly from 650 to 750 A.D., the history of Gauda is obscure in the extreme. The period was marked by political chaos and confusion caused by the death of Harshavardhana (646 or 647 A.D.), the usurpation of his kingdom by his ministers, and the adventures of the Chinese envoy *Wang-hiuen-tse*. It was followed by the invasions of the powerful king of Tibet, *Srong-tsang-Gampo*. In the second half of the seventh century A.D. Bengal saw the emergence of two new lines of kings: the later Guptas in Gauda and Magadha (western Bengal and southern Bihar) and the Khadgas in Vanga and Samatata (southern and south-eastern Bengal). Neither of these dynasties, however, appears to have succeeded in establishing a united and strong rule in Bengal.

In the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D., Bengal was overwhelmed by repeated foreign invasions, the most notable of which was the invasion of Yasovarman of Kanauj (725-752 A.D.). The glories of Yasovarman were soon eclipsed by Lalitaditya of Kashmir. The Kashmiri historian Kalhana refers to five Gauda kings defeated by Lalitaditya and this clearly indicates a state of political disintegration in Gauda, which became a field of struggle for the local chiefs who assumed independence in the absence of any central authority. The successive foreign invasions destroyed the political equilibrium and hastened the process of disintegration.

In the century following the death of Sasanka, Bengal saw very little of stable government and the whole country was torn by internal strife and disturbed by invasions from outside. The condition of Bengal towards the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D., before the rise of Gopala, found mention in one of the Pala records (Khalimpur copperplate) as a state of *matsyanyayam*. Taranatha, the Tibetan monk who wrote his *History of Buddhism in India* in 1608 A.D., confirms this and writes: "... every Ksatriya, Grandee, Brahman and merchant was a king in his own house (or in the neighbourhood) but there was no king ruling over the country." Gopala, the founder of the dynasty, emerged as the ruler out of this chaos, and as mentioned in the Pala copperplate, put an end to the state of lawlessness (*matsyanyayam*).

The Sanskrit term *matsyanyayam* has special significance. The *Kautilya Arthashastra* explains the term as follows: when the law of punishment is kept in abeyance, it gives rise to such disorder as is implied in the proverb of fishes, i.e., the larger fish swallows a small one, for in the absence of law-enforcing authority, the strong will swallow the weak. The contemporary Pala record uses this significant term to describe the prevailing political situation in Bengal. It was a

situation of complete lawlessness arising out of the absence of a strong ruling power capable of enforcing law and order. Gopala emerged to the helm of affairs in Bengal and succeeded in putting an end to the state of *matsyanyayam*.

The process of Gopala's rise to power has been a matter of controversy among historians. Some have argued that the people elected Gopala as their king and one has gone so far as to say, "About the middle of the eighth century A.D. a heroic and laudable effort was made to remedy the miserable state of things. The people at last realised that all their troubles were due to the absence of a strong central authority and this could be set up only by voluntary surrender of powers to one popular leader by the numerous chiefs exercising sovereignty in different parts of the country.... It is not every age, it is not every nation, that can show such a noble example of subordinating private interests to public welfare".

Without going into the details of the controversy it may be said that Gopala came to occupy the throne at a time when there was chaos and confusion and he must have had the support of a group of influential people or leaders and his success in putting an end to the state of *matsyanyayam* may have earned popular support for him. It is claimed in the Pala records that Gopala "attained everlasting peace after having overcome the power of those who were acting according to their own desires", or, in other words, those who had created the situation of *matsyanyayam* in Bengal.

### The Pala Dynasty

The dynasty founded by Gopala in mid-8<sup>th</sup> century A.D., ruled Bengal for about four hundred years with various vicissitudes. During this long period of eighteen generations of kings we notice ups and downs in the fortunes of the dynasty. But there can hardly be any doubt regarding the fact that the rule of the Palas formed a glorious chapter in the history of ancient Bengal. The history of the long line of Pala rulers can be viewed under different phases: (i) *Period of Ascendancy* under Dharmapala (c.781 – 821 A.D.) and Devapala (c.821 – 861 A.D.); followed by a (ii) *Period of Stagnation* (c.861 – 995 A.D.) to be rejuvenated by Mahipala I (c.995 – 1043 A.D.), who is considered to be the second founder of the dynasty; and the last phase (iii) *Period of Decline and Disintegration*, which was halted briefly by the vigorous rule of Ramapala (c.1082 – 1124 A.D.). But the Pala empire did not last long after him and the final collapse came with the rise of the Senas in the third quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

The period of ascendancy saw the vigorous rule of Dharmapala and Devapala. In this period the Palas were powerful enough to challenge the mastery of northern India. In their bid for this mastery they were involved in a tripartite struggle with the Gurjara Pratiharas of western India and the Rashtrakutas of southern India. When Bengal saw the rise of the Palas, the *Rashtrakutas* wrested power from the Chalukyas in the Deccan, and the Gurjara Pratiharas consolidated their power in Malwa and Rajasthan. In northern India there was a vacuum

after it was swept over by Yasovarman and Lalitaditya. So during the subsequent two generations northern India with its traditional central seat at Kanauj felt a rush on the part of these three powers to fill up this vacuum.

During Dharmapala's reign there were two phases of this tripartite struggle. Though he suffered reverses in the first phase of this struggle, he achieved some success in the interval between the first and the second phase. He succeeded in advancing his influence up to Kanauj, where he put his protege Chakrayudha to rule for some time. The Pala empire extended beyond the boundaries of Bengal and Bihar as far as Kanauj. He may have pushed his empire in other directions as well, but we are not sure about the amount of success. In the second phase of the tripartite struggle Dharmapala tasted reverses. But there is very little doubt that he succeeded in maintaining his hold outside Bengal and Bihar. Dharmapala's name stands out in the annals of the Pala dynasty as a great conqueror under whose leadership Bengal's influence came to be felt in northern India for quite some time.

Dharmapala was a devout Buddhist and a great patron of Buddhism. He is credited with the foundation of the Vikramasila monastery (at Patharghata, 6 miles to the north of Colgong and 24 miles to the east of Bhagalpur in Bihar), which was one of the most important seats of Buddhist learning in India from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. Somapura *Mahavihara* at Paharpur (in Naogaon district of Bangladesh) is another monumental architectural work of Dharmapala.

Somapura Mahavihar, included in the 'Heritage of Man' of UNESCO, is the largest Buddhist monastery in the Indian subcontinent (about 1000 feet square) and the second largest in the world. Its square plan with an open space in the middle, the centre of which is occupied by a central shrine built in gradually receding tiers having a crucified plan, set the architectural pattern for this type of monastic construction in south east Asian countries, especially Myanmar and Indonesia. The terracotta plaques decorating the wall surfaces at Paharpur are of exquisite quality and portray, besides religious subjects, scenes from the every day life of the people of Bengal. The Paharpur examples stand out as the finest specimen of this age-old art of Bengal.

Devapala, the son and successor of Dharmapala, maintained the aggressive policy of his father and during his reign the struggle for supremacy of northern India continued. He may have had some initial success, but ultimately the Gurjara Pratiharas succeeded in establishing their empire over Kanauj and adjacent territories. The Pala empire was extended in other directions also, towards the south-west into Orissa and towards the north-east into Kamarupa.

The reigns of Dharmapala and Devapala formed the period of Pala ascendancy. These two rulers consolidated their empire in northern and western Bengal and in Bihar. Under them Bengal, for the first time in her history, came to be reckoned as a powerful force in north Indian politics. Bengal could hold its own against powerful rivals. There were all round conquests. But with them

ended the period of glory, and a period of stagnation followed which gradually led to decline and disintegration to be rejuvenated by Mahipala I.

The period of stagnation continued for more than hundred years covering reigns of five generations of kings. In this period the energy and vigour, which were so manifest during the reigns of Dharmapala and Devapala, were totally absent. Hardly was there any attempt at expansion; rather the Pala kings were not powerful enough to check incursions from outside or uprisings from inside. The Kambojas rose to an independent position in parts of western and northern Bengal and for a time the Pala empire was confined to parts of Bihar only.

The reign of Mahipala I (c. 995 – 1043 A.D.) brought back some vitality and gave a second lease of life to the Pala empire. He succeeded in bringing back the lost territories in northern and western Bengal and restored the position of his dynasty to a firmer footing. But during the reigns of his successors up to that of Ramapala, the fortune of the dynasty seems to have fallen to its lowest ebb. The repeated invasions of north Indian powers (Kalachuris and Chandellas) suggest the weakness of the Pala kings. But the weakness of the Pala rulers was clearly exposed during the reign of Mahipala II (c. 1075 – 1080 A.D.) when the revolt of the *Samantas* succeeded in northern Bengal under the independent rule of Divya, the Kaivarta chief. When the central authority becomes weak it is natural that the forces of disintegration should play their part. The success of Divya in north Bengal is the most glaring example of this tendency.

The vigour and energy of Ramapala (c. 1082 - 1124 A.D.) was the last significant flicker in the life of the Pala dynasty. He succeeded in restoring Pala authority in northern Bengal and in demonstrating the vigour in expansion programs. But his success was short lived and his successors were too weak to check the gradual decline. Vijayasena, possibly a feudatory ruler in the Pala empire, found opportunity to gather strength, and by the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. the Palas were ousted from their possessions in Bengal. Bengal saw the emergence of a new power, the Senas, under the leadership of Vijayasena, whose ancestors hailed from the Karnata country in southern India.

The long rule of the Pala dynasty, spreading over about four centuries, gave to Bengal the blessings of a stable government, which bore rich fruits in the arts of peace. The Palas were able to establish a sound administrative structure. Their land-based empire was basically agrarian in nature. Trade and commerce was not that important a factor in the Pala economy. Trading activities were possibly limited to within the region or at best beyond the borders to the adjacent territories. The decline of the port of Tamralipti after the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. deprived them of the outlet to a share of the sea-borne trade of Bengal.

The long Buddhist rule of the Palas generated an environment of religious toleration in Bengal and we notice an atmosphere of Hindu-Buddhist amity and co-existence. The Palas initiated a policy of religious toleration. Their liberal patronage of Hindu gods and goddesses as well as Brahmans, who were employed

in high state posts, clearly speaks of the sagacious policy of the rulers. This also resulted in narrowing the gaps between the two religions and one merging into the other gave rise to new forms and practices which culminated in the evolution of Tantric cults and practices among the Buddhists in Bengal. The socio-religious climate of the Pala period bred a spirit of toleration and mutual co-existence and this spirit had a far-reaching impact on the history of the land.

The Pala period is also significant for various achievements in the fields of arts. The Buddhist Vihara architecture attained maturity in the Somapura *Mahavihara* at Paharpur and this form influenced the subsequent structures in Southeast Asian countries. The terracotta art of Bengal reached its high water mark during this period. The Pala School of Sculptural Art came to be recognised as a distinct phase of Eastern Indian Art. The artistic genius of the Bengal sculptors found full expression in the Pala period. Though literary works of the period have not survived in large numbers, the *Ramacharitam*, the great poetic work of the north Bengali poet Sandhyakara Nandi, is testimony to the quality of composition in a rare form of verses, each having two meanings. The anthologies of poetry, compiled in the subsequent period, contain many verses composed by poets of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. A few illustrated palm leaf manuscripts of Buddhist texts of the period depict the excellence in the art of painting. Considering all these achievements the Pala period can rightly be considered the most glorious period in the early history of Bengal.

### Dynasties of Southeastern Bengal

Southeastern Bengal seems to have preserved an independent political entity for quite some time in the ancient period. From the break-up of the Gupta empire down to the coming of the Senas the deltaic part of Bengal was never assimilated in the political system of north and western Bengal, though from time to time there were attempts to do so.

As early as the first half of the sixth century A.D. southeastern Bengal formed an independent kingdom, the kingdom of Vanga, and the names of Gopachandra, Dharmaditya and Samacharadeva are preserved in six copperplates. It cannot be ascertained whether Sasanka's empire embraced southeastern Bengal. Scholars theorise about the probable existence of a Bhadra dynasty in this region in the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. When the Later Guptas captured power in Gauda (western Bengal) southeastern Bengal saw the emergence of the Khadga kings. We know about three generations of Khadga kings ruling Samatata (Comilla - Noakhali area) with their capital at Karmanta-vasaka (identified with Badkamta near Comilla). Two semi-independent feudatory chiefs, Lokanatha and Sridharana Rata, are known to have ruled in parts of Samatata in the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

Southeastern Bengal emerged as a kingdom of considerable size and strength under the Deva dynasty in the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. with their capital at Devaparvata

(a city in the Mainamati-Lalmai area, the exact location of which is not yet settled). Four generations of rulers (Santideva, Viradeva, Anandadeva and Bhavadeva) ruled Samatata and they were contemporaries of the early Pala kings, who held sway over northern and western Bengal and Bihar. The Devas were Buddhists and under their patronage the Mainamati area rose into prominence as an important Buddhist cultural centre. The remains unearthed through archaeological excavations at Mainamati prove the existence of a few Buddhist Viharas (Buddhist religious and educational establishments) namely, Salban Vihara, Ananda Vihara and Bhoja Vihara built by the Deva rulers near their capital city of Devaparvata. The crucified plan of the central shrine, which is seen in a matured form at Paharpur, seems to have originated in the Mainamati area, where we see their earlier and smaller manifestations. Mainamati remains also contain terracotta plaques of high merit. The sculptural remains of Mainamati prove the development of this art in this region.

In the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D., southeastern Bengal saw the emergence of the kingdom of Harikela, which may have embraced the area from Chittagong to Comilla. The Chandras followed the Harikela rulers and from the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. five generations of Chandra rulers (Trailokyachandra, Srichandra, Kalyanachandra, Ladahachandra and Govindachandra) ruled for about 150 years (c. 900 – 1500 A.D.). Their empire embraced a large area (Vanga and Samatata) comprising the entire southern and southeastern Bangladesh and as far northeast as the Sylhet area. Their capital was at Vikramapur in present Munshiganj district, south of Dhaka.

The Chandras were quite powerful rulers and could match the power of the contemporary Palas of northern and western Bengal. Srichandra was the greatest ruler of the dynasty and under his vigorous rule the Chandra empire witnessed widespread expansion in the territories beyond the borders into Kamarupa (Assam).

In the last quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D. the Varman dynasty, taking advantage of the Kaivarta rebellion in the Pala empire, established their independent rule in southeastern Bengal. Five generations of the Varmans (Jatavarman, Harivarman, Samalavarman and Bhojavarman) ruled for less than a century (c. 1080 – 1150 A.D.) before they were toppled by the Senas. The Varmans were Hindus and their capital was also at Vikramapur.

The rulers of southeastern Bengal commanded sea trade through the vast coastal area of Chittagong – Comilla region and this is attested to by the find of large number of silver coins in various places of their empire. The accounts of the Arab merchants and navigators, written between 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D., contain evidence of a flourishing sea trade in the coastal area of south-eastern Bengal, specially through the port which the Arabs called 'Samandar', identified with the area near the present Chittagong port. The rulers of southeastern Bengal were able to earn the necessary bullion for the issue of

silver coins. We also have evidence of boat building industries in the records of the period. The picture of a flourishing sea-trade emerges very clearly and the resultant economic affluence of the area is beyond any doubt.

### The Sena Dynasty

Towards the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Vijayasena founded the Sena empire. His forefathers hailed from the Karnata country of the Deccan, but he emerged in the politics of Bengal as a feudatory ruler in West Bengal during the rule of the Pala emperor Ramapala. During the period of decline of the Palas after Ramapala, Vijayasena rose into prominence and gradually grabbed power. He defeated the Varmanas in southeastern Bengal and then ousted the Palas from northern and western Bengal. He also attempted to expand his empire in northern Bihar and adjacent territories. The Palas lingered on for some time in southern Bihar until the Muslim occupation of the area in the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

The Senas held sway over Bengal for more than a century (c.1097 – 1223 A.D.) in which five generations of kings (Vijayasena, Vallalasena, Laksmanasena, Visvarupasena and Kesavasena) ruled. But it must be noted that the invasion of Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji put an end to Sena rule in parts of western and northern Bengal (in 1204 A.D.) and Laksmanasena had to fall back on his possessions in southeastern Bengal where, after him, his two sons ruled for some time. It should also be noted that Vijayasena, after having ousted the Varmanas and the Palas, succeeded in bringing the whole of Bengal under one unified rule which continued up to 1204 A.D. So in a sense, it can be said that it was only under the Senas that the whole of Bengal came under a single rule. The separate political entity of southeastern Bengal in the preceding four centuries must have had deep-rooted socio-cultural consequences in the history of Bengal. Vikramapura, which was the capital of the Chandras and the Varmanas, continued to be the capital of the Senas as well.

The first three kings of the dynasty – Vijayasena (c.1097 – 1160 A.D.), Vallalasena (c.1160 – 1178 A.D.) and Laksmanasena (c.1178 – 1206 A.D.) – were important figures of the dynasty. The last two held on to power in a very limited empire in southeastern Bengal. The Sena rulers were Hindus and their rule is considered to be a period of revival of Hinduism in Bengal. Vallalasena is known to have attempted the establishment of orthodox Hindu social order with caste rigidity. It was an attempt to bring back Hindu orthodoxy in a society that had long lived in a social milieu of religious toleration and Hindu-Buddhist amity. The decline of Buddhism in Bengal may be ascribed to this change in social order. It is not unlikely that Buddhism received a rude shock from this revival of orthodox Hinduism by the Senas and it is rightly said that “it was not Islam which overcame Buddhism, but a more jealous rival of nearer origin” and it is

clear that "Buddhism had already been severely crippled before the Muslims reached Bengal ". This scenario of Hindu-Buddhist enmity in Bengal and the attempt at bringing back Hindu orthodoxy in the Sena period may be said to have had a far-reaching impact on the history of Bengal. The scenario may have indirectly helped the cause of Islam in Bengal.

The Sena period is significant from another point of view. The period saw the development of Sanskrit literature in Bengal. It was partly the direct patronage of the Sena Kings and partly to the environment created by them; that literary activities in Sanskrit are distinctly visible in this period. By far the most important contribution of Bengal to the poetic literature in Sanskrit is the *Gitagovinda* of Jayadeva, who was one of the ornaments of the court of Laksmanasena. Other luminaries of his court were poets *Dhoyi* (author of *Pavanaduta*), Umapatidhara, Govardhana (author of *Arya-Sapta-Sati*) and Sarana, and these five may be regarded as the five *ratnas* (jewels) of the court of Laksmanasena.

One anthology (*Sadukti Karnamrita*) compiled by Sridharadasa during this period stands out as a treasure house of poetical works of the period as also of earlier periods. It contains 2370 poems composed by 485 poets whose dates range from the 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Bhavadeva Bhatta and Jimutavahana, two great writers of Dharmashastra, belong to this period. Vallalasena and Laksmanasena were royal authors of no mean merit. Halayudha's *Brahmanasaruvasva* was also written in this period. Mention of other works and authors would only make this list longer. It is really noteworthy that 12<sup>th</sup> century Bengal under the Senas witnessed unprecedented flourishing of literary activities in Sanskrit.

Another arena of the artistic achievements of the period was in the field of sculptural art. The Bengal school of sculptural art reached its high water mark in the Sena period and in this phase its regional character marked by individualistic traits became manifest.

### Suggested Readings:

1. R.C. Majumdar (ed.) *History of Bengal*, D.U. Publication, 1943.
2. R.C. Majumdar; *History of Ancient Bengal*, Calcutta, 1972.
3. A.M. Chowdhury; *Dynastic History of Bengal*, Dhaka, 1967.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Ancient Bengal

Shahanara Husain

#### (b) Society and Culture

No contemporary historical work of the ancient period depicting the society and culture of ancient Bengal has yet been discovered. Due to this lacuna historians have had to depend on such primary sources as contemporary inscriptions, foreign accounts, secular and religious literature and materials unearthed in ancient archaeological sites. On the basis of materials gathered from the aforementioned sources we may attempt to derive some knowledge about the society and culture of ancient Bengal.

The beginning of the ancient period of the history of Bengal may be traced to the culture unearthed in *Pandu Rajar Dhibi* situated on the south bank of the river *Ajaya*, in the district of Burdwan in West Bengal, India. This culture of the Chalcolithic period seems to have flourished approximately from the second millennium B.C. The epoch-making event which closed the ancient period of Bengal's history was the conquest of Nadiya in West Bengal by Ikhtiyaruddin Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji in 1204 A.D. and the establishment of a Muslim kingdom in west and north Bengal.

While we discuss the history of Bengal the geographical area in our mind is the region which comprised the province of Bengal on the eve of partition of the subcontinent of India into two independent states: India and Pakistan in 1947. The natural frontier of the Bengal region has made it an area of relative isolation where penetration of new culture and new people is somewhat difficult and the local culture and pattern of life always retain a distinct identity. Bengal is a plain formed by the alluvial deposits of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, Meghna and their tributaries. Its area is about 80,000 square miles. On the north of Bengal lies the plateau of Shillong and the Tarai region of Nepal. The Bay of Bengal is

its southern frontier. On its eastern side area the Tripura, Garo and Lusai hills are situated. On its west lie the highland of Rajmahal and the Chota Nagpur hill.

The most important feature of Bengal's geography is its rivers. The main river is the Ganges, which enters Bengal through the passes of Teligarh and Sikrigali situated north west of the Rajmahal hills. In Bengal there are two courses of the Ganges: the Padma running from east to south and the Bhagirathi running straight in southern direction. Another main river Brahmaputra flows through the north-east and eastern areas. The Meghna is the important river of East Bengal. The two famous rivers of North Bengal are the Tista and the Karatoya. There are many other rivers flowing in Bengal. These rivers shifted their courses many times specially in the lower deltaic area. Shifting of their courses often led to the growth of new towns, river ports and other settlements and at the same time resulted in the shifting of old settlements and the decline of the heydays of towns and trading centers. By intersecting the land of Bengal in a variety of directions the rivers of Bengal formed a complete and easy system of navigation thereby providing remarkable facilities for interregional communications as well as communications with the outer world. On the other hand by dividing the region into so many divisions, by forming the boundaries between different districts the rivers of Bengal, to some extent have isolated one part of the country from the other which from time immemorial has been influencing its history, society and culture.

The region of Bengal came to be known as Bengal or *Vangla* during the medieval period. In ancient times there was no single name denoting this region. Ancient Bengal was divided into some *janapadas* such as *Pundravardhana*, *Vanga*, *Vangala*, *Samatata*, *Sumha*, *Radha* and *Gauda*. These *janapadas* were named after tribes who were the original settlers of these regions. The whole of North Bengal was generally known as *Pundravardhana*. The center of this *janapada* was *Varendri* or Varendra. The geographical area of the *Vanga janapada* comprised some parts of east and south Bengal. The *Vangala janapada* was South Bengal and *Samatata* geographically connoted the area of East Bengal. The geographical area of *Sumha*, *Radha* and *Gauda* was West Bengal. From the eighth century A.D., the three *janapadas* *Pundra* or *Pundravardhana*, *Gauda* and *Vanga* eclipsed the other *janapadas* and geographically they seem to have become synonymous with the region of the British province of Bengal. Emperors of Bengal often held the titles *Gaudesara* or lord of *Gauda*, *Vangadhipati* or ruler of *Vanga*.

The society and culture of ancient Bengal was greatly influenced by the *Brahmanical* religion of the *Aryans* who most probably started to settle in northern India sometime around 1500 B.C. Their expansion towards the east was slow and the non-Aryan *Austric* and *Dravida* group of peoples who lived in Bengal were looked down upon by the Aryans as *asuras*, *mlecchas*, *dasyus* and sinners. Before the establishment of the Aryan rule in Eastern India the tribes

living in Bengal are referred to in the contemporary Aryan literature as *Pundra*, *Subma*, *Vanga*, *Radha*, *Sabara*, *Pulinda* etc. These tribes followed restrictions on interdining and intermarriage between different tribes. Their language was different from that of the Aryans due to which their speech was compared with bird's speech by the latter. Gradually the Aryans expanded their domination towards the east, references to which we find in the great epics and Buddhist and Jaina literature. Then there were wars between the Aryans and non Aryan tribes. In the *Ramayana* we find reference to the allegiance of the people of *Vanga* to *Rama*. The heroes *Karna*, *Krsna*, and *Bhima* conquered tribes of Bengal like *Pundra* and *Vanga*. The tribal rulers of Bengal even took sides in the Great War between the *Pandavas* and *Kauravas* and they did not accept the domination of the Aryan language and culture without resistance. But gradually the more advanced system of production, weapons, war strategy, language and culture of the Aryans won victory over the non- Aryan tribes of Bengal. But it took centuries to win this victory. Even then in the society and culture of ancient Bengal many non-Aryan elements remained and a synthesis of non-Aryan and Aryan cultural elements and social customs took place. That is why the society and culture of ancient Bengal even when they became *Aryanised* maintained their distinct identity and characteristics which distinguished them from the Aryan culture of northern and central India.

The pre-Aryan society of Bengal was tribal in nature though in course of time the tribal system of rule became a monarchy. The injunctions about interdining and intermarriages between tribes persisted. Though agriculture was their main livelihood, town life was not unknown to them as evidenced by the ruins in *Pandu Rajar Dhibi* situated in the Burdwan district of West Bengal which, according to some scholars represent a trading township. Four strata of culture have been laid bare in this site by archaeologists. People living in this site built houses with reeds, mud, pellets of laterite and terracotta tiles. They ate rice, domesticated animals and were acquainted with modes of agricultural cultivation. They made various types of pottery some of which were painted with red slip. Copper was in use for making ornaments and other interesting things such as collyrium sticks. The settlement unearthed in *Pandu Rajar Dhibi* depicts the dawn of the historical period in Bengal. The inhabitants of the *Pandu Rajar Dhibi* first used copper and bronze along with stone to make weapons and implements. We find the use of iron as metal for making implements and weapons from around 700 to 600 B.C. to which belonged the third stratum of the *Pandu Rajar Dhibi* culture. The introduction of iron was probably done by a new people who continued to live there after a disaster like fire or war drove the original settlers away from this place. A seal of Minoan type has been discovered in this stratum which according to some scholars is an indication that people of this place had trade contacts with the Mediterranean region. There was much difference between the earthenware, iron implements, weapons of

the newcomers and those of the original settlers. There are also indications that the soil of the 4th stratum was much disturbed. The date of the beginning of the period of *Pandu Rajar Dhibi* culture seems to be 1250/1200 B.C. The date of the last stratum's probably ranged from 500 B.C. to -100/250 B.C. It may be mentioned here that similar sorts of material remains have been unearthed in *Mahishdal* situated on the bank of the *Kopai* river adjacent to *Bolpur*. Another site where such material remains have been unearthed is *Banesvar Danga* situated 28/29 km north of Burdwan town. The relics of culture of this site are similar to those of *Pandu Rajar Dhibi*. In the third stratum of this culture we find the use of iron. From the fourth stratum started the historical period. These sites of Birbhum and Burdwan districts contain relics of the early history of Bengal, when people first used copper and bronze along with stone. They lived a settled life, knew the method of cultivation, lived in houses made of mud, pellets of laterite, terracotta tiles and reeds. They ate rice, meat and fish. In the last stage of this period of human settlement of Bengal they learnt the use of iron.

From 800 B.C. or a little later the Aryans started to come into Bengal as adventurers, preachers and conquerors. Two preachers of new religious ideas challenging the dominance of the *Brahmanas* and *Brahmanical* rituals namely *Gautama Buddha* and *Mahavira Vardhamana* came to Bengal to preach their religions, *Buddhism* and *Jainism* respectively, sometime in 600 B. C. They preached doctrines of non-violence, and *samsara*. According to Buddhist legend the Buddha spent six months in *Pundranagara* identical with the ruins of *Mahasthangarh* in the Bagura district of Bangladesh. In *Jaina* literature *Mahavira Vardhamana* and his followers are stated to have travelled and stayed in the *Radha* area of West Bengal where they were not well treated by the people. The contemporary Brahmanical literature also depicts of the gradual acceptance of the non-Aryans and Bengalis in the fold of the Aryan culture. There were conflicts and confrontation between the non-Aryans and Aryans which in the long run ended in the victory of the stronger Aryan culture though this happened after many centuries passed and not before a synthesis of Aryan and non-Aryan cultures had taken place. In this synthetic pattern of society and culture there were many non-Aryan elements though the Aryan elements were more dominant. Secondly, in this new society and culture the *Brahmanas* were at the top and their language *Samskrita* was the language of royalty and the scholars. In their social life even the lay *Buddhists* and *Jainas* followed the social ideas and injunctions of the *Brahmana* class. But unlike other Aryanised areas of the subcontinent, in Bengal excepting the *Brahmanas* all other castes were *sankara* or mixed castes. In the society of ancient Bengal out of the *Caturvarnas* or four castes of the Aryan society we only find the *Brahmana* caste as a pure one. During the Gupta Period (c. 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. to 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) the *Brahmanas* started to come from North India to Bengal in groups to settle here and their dominance was established in the society by the patronage of ruling dynasties and wealthy

people. The evidence of the contemporary inscriptions shows that in this period many *Brahmanas* obtained land to settle permanently and many *Brahmanical* temples were built. From the information derived from epigraphs it is also known that these *Brahmanas* who belonged to different *Vedic* branches were well known for their proficiency in *Vedic* sacrifices and other rituals. Generally they hold the surnames *Sarma* and *Svami*. Perhaps some of them were also known as holding titles like *Catta*, *Bhatta* and *Vandy*a. Most probably from 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century the custom of identification of the *Brahmanas* with the villages where they first settled after coming to Bengal from northern India was also in vogue.

It seems from the inscriptions of the 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century that the *non-Brahmins* used surnames like *Datta*, *Pala*, *Mitra*, *Varmana*, *Dasa*, *Bhadra*, *Sena*, *Deva*, *Ghosha*, *Kunda*, *Palita*, *Naga*, *Candra*, *Dama*, *Bhuti*, *Visnu*, *Yasa*, *Siva*, *Rudra*, etc. In modern times these surnames are used by *Kayasthas* and other castes. In the Gupta period there was no separate caste called *Kayasthas*. But in the inscriptions a class of royal officials are mentioned as *Kayasthas*. That is why we can not determine as to which castes or sub castes people who held the aforementioned surnames belonged. Epigraphic and other sources also seem to indicate that in Bengal *Ksatriya* and *Vaisya* as separate and distinct castes were never formed and recognized.

The social system of the *Pala* period (c. 750-1150 period) was similar to that of the Gupta age. The *Brahmanas* had honour and dominating position in all fields of the *Pala* state and society. Several *Brahmana* families held the posts of ministers hereditarily. Royal patronage made them wealthy and powerful. The contemporary copper plates are evidences that the Buddhist *Pala* and *Candra* rulers made many land endowments to the *Brahmanas* and *Brahmanical* temples. In the *Pala* period the state itself was the upholder and defender of the *Brahmanical* social system. The state was also the protector and maintainer of the *Varnasrama* system. During this period the lay followers of Buddhism used to observe the prevailing caste rules like the believers in the *Brahmanical* religion. They had no social difference with the followers of the *Brahmanical* faith. But the ideal of the *Brahmanical* caste orders during the *Pala* period was of a broad nature characterised by flexibility. The main reason behind this was that in Bengal no *Smrti* rules developed during that time and the writing of *Smritisutra* did not even begin. Moreover the rulers of the *Pala* period were Buddhists. Though they were patrons, upholders and maintainers of the *Brahmanical* social system their social outlook was broad. There is no evidence that any step was taken by the state to string all people of Bengali society on the thread of the caste system.

The evidences of contemporary inscriptions and literary works seem to indicate the existence and formation of the separate entity of the *Karana-Kayasthas* as a distinct class. Another caste known as the *Kaivartas* emerged as a powerful class during the *Pala* period. The rebellion of the *Kaivarta* chief *Divya*

and the history of the rule of *Varendri* by the Kaivartas for some time are indications of the influence, power and heroism of the Kaivarta people in North Bengal during the eleventh century A.D. The land grant inscriptions of the *Palas* throw important light on the contemporary social system. In the inscriptions, the land endowment notification portion first gives a list of royal officials and then mention is made of the *Brahmanas*, *Prativasis* (neighbours), *Ksetrakaras* (peasants) and *Kutumbas* (householders), the leading families such as big and petty landholders. In these inscriptions mention is also made of the *Meda*, *Andhra* and *Candalas* who belonged to the lowest strata of the social system. This is indicative of the state policy of recognising that these lowly born peoples had also some importance and place in the society and state. It is significant that *Vaisyas* and *Ksatriyas* are not mentioned in the inscriptions of the *Pala* period which seems to prove the non-existence of these castes in contemporary society.

In the *Caryapada* which contains allegorical songs on esoteric Buddhism we find many references to lower classes of people such as the *Domas* or *Domba*, *Candala*, *Sabaras* and *Kapalikas*. The *Domas* lived in huts situated outside the area of the village or town. The *Brahmanas* regarded them as untouchables. The *Kapalikas* roamed about wearing garlands of human skulls. The *Sabaras* lived in hills and jungles. They wore dresses of peacock feathers, strings made of gunjaseeds nothing else round the neck and on the ears ornaments called *vajrakundalas*. Towards the end of the *Pala* rule began the *Brahmanical* control of the society in Bengal. This control was firmly established and consolidated during the *Sena* period (c. 1098-1200 A.D.). Many *Dharmashastra* and *Smrti* books were written mainly during the 12<sup>th</sup> century and these texts of instructions on morals and law and religious literature comprising law books, epics and *Puranas* were the foundation of the *Brahmanical* predominance in Bengal. *Aniruddha*, *Bhavadeva*, *Bhatta*, *Halayudha* - all these famous *Brahmana* scholars flourished during the *Sena* rule. On top of the *Brahmanical* theocracy of this was the *Brahmanas* themselves. *Sena* king *Vallalasena* himself wrote books on *Smrti* and the legend still persists that this *Sena* king introduced *Kulinism* in Bengal. The classification of the *Brahmanas* according to their village home became more clear cut. In addition to this classification, the *Brahmanas* were also classified according to the regions where they lived, such as the *Radhiya* and *Varendra* classes of *Brahmanas*. Again *Brahmanas* were classified as *Mukhya Kulin*, minor or *Gauna Kulin* and *Srotriya* or *non Kulins*. There can be no doubt that during the rule of the *Senas* attempts were made by the rulers as well as the *Brahmanas* to establish *Brahmanical* theocracy. During the *Sena* period we find officials with titles like *Purohita*, *Maha-Purohita*, *Mahatantradhikrti*, *Raja Pandita*. This is no doubt an indication of the influence and dominance of the priestly class in the state administration.

The accounts of the caste structure of Bengal society found in the *Brhaddharma* and *Brahmavaivarta Puranas* written between twelfth and

fourteenth centuries seem to be a reflection of the Bengali caste system prevailing towards the close of the ancient period. According to *Brhaddharma Purana* excepting the *Brahmana* caste all other castes of Bengal were *Sudras* and *Sankaras* or mixed castes. These mixed castes arose from the unions of males with females belonging to *varnas* differing from their own.

The establishment of the predominance of the *Brahmanas* began even before the *Senas* started to rule in Bengal. The mighty *Candra* ruler of *Vanga* or southeast Bengal *Sricandra* (c. 930-975 A.D.) granted by charter a vast area of land in the *mandala* of *Srihatta* or Sylhet region to the *Brahman* *Upadhyayas* or professors of grammar and *Vedic Sastras* in educational institutions called *mathas*. Endowments of land were also made to people of other castes and classes whose services were essential for the growth of a human settlement. Even the students of the *mathas* were granted rent-free land for their maintenance and educational expenses.

These land grants by the Buddhist king *Sricandra*, the royal emblem of whose dynasty was *Dharmacakra* or Wheel of Law inaugurated by *Gautama Buddha*, seem to indicate on the one hand the fusion of *Buddhism* with *Brahmanism*, and on the other, the pre-eminent position of *Brahmanism* and *Brahmanas* in the society and culture of ancient Bengal. The pattern of society as depicted in the *Brhaddharma Purana* and *Brahmavaivarta Purana* was also in the process of evolution even in the tenth century when the principal royal dynasties of Bengal were all Buddhists. This process of the development of the Bengali society into a caste ridden society with fixed vocations must have started centuries ago. The famous *Dharmashastra* writer *Brahmana Bhavadeva Bhatta* who flourished from the last decades of the 11<sup>th</sup> to the first quarter of the twelfth century mentions some of the castes and sub castes referred to in the *Brhaddharma Purana* and *Brahmavaivarta Purana* and from his *Dharmashastra* works we gain some knowledge about the relations and nature of contacts between different castes and sub castes. Almost all restrictions mentioned by him were regarding marriage and food and these restrictions were mainly applicable to marriages and dining between the *Brahmanas* and other castes-sub castes. A *Brahmana* was forbidden to eat food touched by the *Antyajas*, *Candalas*, *Pukkasa*, *Kapalika*, *Nata Nartaka*, *Taksana*, *Carmakara*, *Suvarnakara*, *Saundika* and *Brahmans* following forbidden vocations. If a *Brahmana* acted contrary to this injunction he had to perform penance. If a *Brahmana* took food cooked by any other caste he had also to perform expiatory rites. On the other hand *Bhavadeva* prescribes that in times of danger a *Brahmana* can take food in the house of a *Sudra* and he is redeemed from this sin only by regretting. There were restrictions regarding interdining between other castes also. The *Antyajas* and *Candalas* were regarded as untouchables.

There were many restrictions regarding intermarriage between different castes. The general practice was to marry within one's own caste. But sometimes

intermarriage took place between different castes. But marriage between a high caste woman and a low caste man was forbidden, whereas marriage between a bridegroom of high caste and a bride of low caste was considered as a condemnable act. As per the religious prescription the status of *Patni* was given to the wife of the same caste as that of the husband, which means that it was she who had the right to take part in the religious rites performed by her husband.

In the social structure of ancient Bengal *Vanikas* or merchants and artisan classes held a position of prominence till the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. They lost their prominent position in society gradually. The cause of this degradation was most probably the fact that from the eighth century Bengal had no direct participation in the external trade of the subcontinent and the direct result of this was the greater dependence of Bengal's economy on agriculture, which indirectly affected the prestige and power as well as social position of the merchant classes and the subcastes who were the artisan classes like *Sutradhara*, *Taksan*, *Citrakara* and *Attalikakara*.

As at present in the ancient period also people of Bengal mostly lived in villages. These villages were situated near the banks of rivers, canals, ditches, tanks and marshes. Epigraphic evidences show that two main parts of a village were habitation land (*Vastubhumi*) and land for cultivation (*ksetrabhumi*). Besides most of the villages had barren and cattle grazing land, cattle track, cart track and sometimes canals excavated for irrigation and embankments. In some villages there existed marts, shops, temples of gods and goddesses and *Viharas* or monasteries. Some villages were situated near public roads (*rajapatha*). Some villages had forests, groves of bamboos and large trees like the *Mahua* tree. From these forests villagers collected wood fuel and from groves of bamboos they gathered bamboos and posts for constructing houses. The wood of the large trees was also used for dwelling house construction and for making furniture for everyday use.

The basis of the rural society's economy was agriculture. The main crops produced in ancient Bengal were paddy, mustard, sugarcane, vegetables like beans, fruits such as bananas, pomegranates, date palms, cocoanuts, mangoes, jackfruits, myrobalan, oranges and melons. Wheat, barley, millet, pulses of different kinds and betel leaves and betel nuts were also produced. Among other agricultural products mention may be made of cotton and spices like coriander, pepper, bay leaves, cardamon. People of ancient Bengal produced salt; fish and salt were their two most important resources. Along with agriculture there were also industries like the cane industry, wood industry, pottery, cotton and other textile industries, and the iron industry. All wares and implements necessary for agriculture, materials for building dwelling houses, boats, spades, axes and textiles and other implements for everyday use were made in villages. The agricultural products not only provided food, clothing and other necessities

for the village people. The paddy and other food crops, spices and salt of Bengal together with fine cotton textiles were items of export trade from very early times. Among the inhabitants of the villages of ancient Bengal were large and small land holders, ordinary dwellers, cultivators, the artisan class, *Barajivis* or vine planters, landless peasants; weavers, potters, ironsmiths, florists or gardeners, painters, oilgrinders (*tailakara*), carpenters etc.; small businessmen like oil sellers (*taulika*), sweetmeat makers, vine leaf sellers, vintners, fishermen; social service providers, like cowherds (*Gopa, Abhira*), barbers, washer men, dancers. *Antyajas* like leather workers, palanquin bearers, snake charmers, butchers, candalas and aboriginal peoples like *Kola, Bhilla, Savara, Pulinda* lived at one end of the village. In some villages we find as dwellers a rich merchant class who were called *Sresthis*.

In villages people built dwelling places in the area marked for habitation called *Vastu*. Dwelling houses are generally built of mud, thatch, bamboo and wood. The roof was constructed with thatch, for walls lath of bamboo was used. Posts of the houses were of wood or bamboo. In East Bengal walls were made by weaving bamboo lath. In West and North Bengal walls of houses were made of mud. The poor cultivators lived in grass cottages.

Though most of ancient Bengal consisted of rural areas there seems to have existed towns even on the eve of the dawn of the historic period. According to some scholars *Pandu Rajar Dhibi* situated in the right bank of the river *Ajyoti*, district Burdwan, West Bengal was a trading township. Excavations have revealed in this site remains of a culture which began in the chalcolithic period and its last two strata indicate the beginning of the Iron Age in this region. This very ancient settlement seems to cover a period from c. thirteenth century B.C. to 250 B.C. In the last phase of this settlement iron was used. It seems to have been a trading township well-planned with pavements and streets. The people lived in rectangular-to-square or round houses or huts built of unfired clay reinforced with reeds and having mud plastered walls and floors of beaten peletty laterite or of terracotta nodules or of clay mixed with cow dung. These houses or huts were framed with thick wooden or bamboo posts and sometimes the roof tiles of these houses were made of terracotta.

Ruins of some ancient cities and towns of the historic period such as *Banngarh-Kotivarsha* and *Chandraketugarh* in West Bengal and *Pundravardhana, Mahasthangarh, Devaparvata-Mainamati* in Bangladesh throw much light on the town plans and life of the people who lived in those cities. About cities and towns of Bengal we also find evidences in contemporary literary works, inscriptions and terracotta plaques. These cities and towns grew and developed due to several factors. Most of these had military importance. But some developed as centers of religion and culture and some as port towns though to some extent all urban settlements had importance as centers of trade and commerce, religion and culture. It is significant that almost every city and town

was situated on the junction of land and water routes. There were some cities which are called camp of victory or *jayaskandhabvara* such as one situated in *Vikramapura*. From the dawn of the historical period or even earlier there seems to have existed in Bengal trading townships as is evidenced by the ruins of *Pandu Rajar Dhibi*. Remains of two seaports are also unearthed in *Tamluk* on the banks of the *Rup Narayan* river and *Berachapa* (on the banks of the river *Yamuna*). These are situated in the districts of *Medinipur* and *24 Parganas* respectively. The ruins discovered in *Tamluk* are identified as the remains of the port city of *Tamralipti* and the extant ruins of *Berachapa* are the remains of the seaport known as *Chandraketugarh*. *Tamralipti* famous in Buddhist, Greek and Chinese accounts started to decline after the seventh century. *Chandraketugarh* was famous as a port town from the first century A.D. to 5th century A.D. Here trading communities from North and North-west of the Indian subcontinent settled. The main commodity they imported were horses and among commodities exported were paddy and other food crops. The terracotta art of *Chandraketugarh* the evidences influence of Graeco-Roman art.

From the description of *Ramavati* given in *Sandhyakaranandi's Ramacarita*, a historical work written in the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D., we find that cities like *Ramavati* had rows of palaces where lived royal people and wealthy classes. In the fortified portion of the cities there existed royal palaces, state office buildings, palaces of feudal lords, high officials and wealthy merchants, market places, assembly halls and dwelling houses of the army. In the suburb an area of the cities lived small merchants, artisans, the social service renders, ordinary householders and labour classes. On the outskirts of the cities religious centres like monasteries and temples were sometimes situated as is evidenced by the ruins of *Mahasthangarh*.

Cities were usually founded on the banks of rivers or high up in the hills for the purpose of defence. The fort area also had walls and moats with gateways leading to the suburb an area. In the cities royalty, feudal lords, high officials, and wealthy merchants lived in palaces which had sometimes lotus pools, and garden houses where peacocks danced. In some cases the palaces had also balconies and stairways. On the rooftops of palaces royal women loitered to spend their leisure time. From contemporary literary evidence it seems houses of well-to-do classes had several rooms and a courtyard where sometimes stood a budding mango tree. In the roof tops of some buildings there were one or more rooms which were screened by mats against rain. From one verse quoted in the anthologies *Subhasitaranakosa* and *Saduktikarnamrta* we can form some idea about the house plans of well to do classes.

"She comes to the centre of the house  
and then to the front hall.  
At last she steps out in the courtyard ..."

But people of the low income group lived in two roomed houses. The compound of these houses was walled. For water supply urban people depended on rivers, tanks and ring wells. They also knew the use of bathrooms.

The ladies of the royal household lived in a harem or inner apartments meant specially for them and sometimes an officer called *Vasagarika* was in charge of the *Vasagara* or the inner part of the bedchamber of the king's palace. Following royalty the upper class people most probably kept a separate apartment for women in their dwelling houses. In the villages as at present people with means used to keep outhouses or rooms called *varagrha*. But the *krsakas* who lived in leaf or grass or thatched houses over the firm room of which pumpkin vines sometimes grew could not possibly provide any separate rooms for women, though they might have divided their respective small huts into two by partition, as is done in Bangladesh even today. But the poor people residing in village or town who led a hand to mouth existence could not keep any apartment separate for their women as the whole family lived in one single room which served as bedroom as well as kitchen and husking shed. In rainy season houses built of mud and thatched with hay sometimes became dilapidated with walls of mud collapsing and the hay of the roof getting scattered.

Rice, fish, meat, vegetables, green leaves, fruits were eaten by the ancient Bengalis. Taking of lentil or pulse currie does not seem to have been common practice though lentils of different kinds were cultivated in ancient Bengal. *Carakadatta*, the famous physician of ancient Bengal, recommends juices of pulses as drinks for medication purposes. Rice was the main cereal taken by Bengalis from time immemorial and we find in contemporary anthologies of *Sanskrit* verses references to the peasant house happy in the first harvest of the winter rice and women singing charming songs while husking rice with a pounder. Rice was generally eaten with cooked green leaves and fish or vegetable curries. Rice with green leaves and vegetable seems to have been the usual food of the poor people. In the rural areas rice was eaten with cooked green leaves, vegetables and fish; beans, pumpkins, eggplant, various edible roots or kandas, patalos were common vegetables. The practice of eating fish and meat was very common in Bengal and the *Dharmashastra* writers like *Bhatta Bhavadeva* defended this practice by lengthy arguments. But the *Brahmanas* were allowed by religious prescriptions to eat fish which are white and having scales such as *robita*, *sakula*, *saphara* etc. Hilsha fish seems to have been very popular in ancient Bengal and people also used its fat for various purposes. Though eating of rotten fish was discouraged by *sastrik* injunctions people of *Vanga* or East Bengal were fond of taking dried fish. The riverine land of Bengal abounded with fishes of various kinds from time immemorial and archaeological and literary evidences show that people used to catch fishes by net or angling. In the preparation of fish and other curries mustard or sesamum oil, and spices like peeper, coriander and orach seems to have been used.

With the ancient Bengalis goat meat and flesh of deer were most popular. The *smrti* works did not recommend the eating of flesh of animals like snails, crabs, fowls, cranes, ducks, datyuha birds, camels, boars, cows etc. But these forbidden fleshes of animals were no doubt eaten by low caste and aboriginal people as eating of meat was very common among them.

Scenes of hunting by aborigines like the *Sabaras* are depicted in the ancient terracotta plaques and descriptions of hunting are found in the contemporary literary works like the *Caryapada* and *Subhasitaratnakosa*.

Among cereals rice, barley and wheat were taken as food by the ancient Bengalis though like present days boiled rice was their most common staple food. The other two well known preparations of rice grain were *cipitaka* or flattened rice and *khai* or parched rice. Barley grits and millet seem to have been consumed by the poor people. As cooking fuel cow dung and wood were used.

From the contemporary inscriptions, literary works and terracotta plaques it is evident that fruits like mangoes, jackfruits, sugarcane, jujubes, plantains, palms, *palmyras*, *betelpalms*, *datepalms*, *pomegranaes*, wood apple and bananas were commonly taken by the ancient Bengalis. Fruit trees were considered very valuable and were cultivated in orchards. As in present days jujubes were liked by children and picking jujubes from the bending branch of the tree in late winter was a source of great joy for them.

Like Bengalis of the present day ancient Bengalis also ate sweetmeats prepared with ghee and milk and rice pudding prepared with milk, sugar and rice. During festivals like *kundacaturthika* or jasmine festival celebrated in January women prepared cakes. Juice of sugarcane seems to have been a popular drink. Molasses was also prepared bringing out juice of *Pundra* sugarcanes crushed by a hand turned press. The coconut fruit kernel, green as well as ripe was eaten as a delicacy. The water of the coconut was considered a nourishing drink. Drinking of goat milk was also a food habit. Honey was used as sweetener of foods and for medicinal purposes. The practice of chewing betel with betel nuts, ceteches and a small quantity of dissolved liquid lime was also prevalent.

The wife served food to the husband. But in accordance with the injunctions laid down by Manu and other *Dharmashastra* writers a householder ordinarily did not eat in the company of his wife.

*Dharmashastra* writers like Manu, Kulluka and others prohibit drinking of wine or *sura* by the highborn. Bhavadeva Bhatta disapproves taking of intoxicating drinks by everybody whether he is a twice born or of low caste. But in spite of strict religious injunctions drinking of wine seems to have been a well known practice all over the country. The Vintner's wife fermented and sold wine in the alehouse which probably had a signboard fixed at the door. In inscriptions we even find references to the officer in charge of drink houses who held the title *Sanikapaniyagarika*. The uncultured and lower class of people sometimes made animal sacrifices in honour of the goddess *Durga* of the forest

then at the close of the day men and women indulged in merriment with songs and wine.

Contemporary sculptures, terracotta plaques and paintings are evidences that males of ancient Bengal generally wore *dhoti* usually in the *kaccha* mode. The aristocratic and wealthy men's lower garment was *dhoti* of fine texture coming down to the ankles. The common people used to wear short *dhoti* which generally came up to the knees and were no doubt of coarse cotton. *Lungi* and trousers were also worn. Ascetics and poor common people sometimes wore *langotis*. The upper garments of ancient Bengali males were scarves and also tunics. But scarves were worn more for decorative purposes than for covering the body as the mode of wearing depicted in plaques and sculpture show that these were thrown over the shoulders without covering the body. *Sabaras* and other aboriginal males wore girdle of leaves which barely covered their privy parts. Sometimes they also seem to have worn short *dhoti* and full sleeved jackets. Warriors wore short *dhotis* or shorts as their lower garments. They also appear to have worn tunics on the upper person. Often they wore boots.

Males of all classes and professions wore ornaments on the ear, neck, arms, waist and sometimes anklets on the legs. Males of the upper classes wore elaborate ornaments like crowns or diadems on the head, big round *kundalas*, *makara*-shaped earrings, necklaces of pearls and other precious stones and gold, armlets, bracelets, anklets and girdles of various designs. These ornaments were sometimes inlaid with jewels. But the common people wore ornaments of terracotta, glass, bronze, copper and conchs shells. Those who could afford it wore ornaments of semiprecious stones. The sites of *Mahasthangarh*, *Bangarh* and *Mainamati* abound with beads of terracotta, glass, bronze, copper, and conch which seems to be evidence of their use by common people as ornaments. Beads of semiprecious stones are also unearthed in these sites and we can easily presume that ornaments made of beads of semiprecious stones were worn by the males of well-to-do classes. People also used leaves and flowers as ornaments of the body.

Males in general kept their hair long which were sometimes arranged in topknots. Wearing of headdress like helmets, turbans and other types was not a common custom. But archaeological evidence in the form of terracotta plaques and terracotta objects found in *Tamluk*, *Candraketugarh*, and *Mangalkot* seems to indicate that headdress was sometimes worn by men from c. 100 B.C. to 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. probably due to the intrusion of *Greek*, *Kusana* and *Roman* fashions. Archaeological evidence also indicates that men sometimes kept moustache and beard.

Women of ancient Bengal generally wore saris either in the *kaccha* or *vikaccha* fashion. Sometimes they wore sari in the modern way with one end falling on the back with their bosom not fully covered. Women also seem to have worn skirts similar to the *dhotis* now worn by Indian women. Sometimes shorts and trousers were also worn by them. As upper garments they wore stoles, scarves,

bodices and something like blouses. But the women of common people used to wear only one dress, most probably a *sari* for the obvious reason that their economic condition was poor. Archaeological evidence and literary works give glimpses of women as wearing coloured transparent and fine dresses with patterns all over them. In the illustrated manuscripts goddesses are depicted as wearing dresses of red, blue and yellow colours with beautiful patterns which were either printed or embroidered. In contemporary literary works we find references to *Ksauma* or *Kayseya*, *dukula* or *patrorna* clothes and Bengal was famous as an exporter of fine textiles even to Rome from as early as 1st century A.D. But all fine clothes were out of the reach of women of the common classes and the only garments they could afford were those of coarse cotton and sometimes they had to darn their tattered clothes with needles.

Women of good families used to cover their head presumably with the end of their sari or scarf. Sometimes they also used a veil. The dress of the female dancers consisted of tight trousers, drawers, shorts, a narrow scarf and sometimes a cap on the head. *Sabara*, *Nisada*, and *Pulinda* women usually wore scanty dresses which were garlands of leaves, breast cloth made of leaves and sometimes bodices. They also appear to have worn saris, scarves and adorned their garments with peacock feathers.

Ancient Bengali women arranged their long hair in different styles. Archaeological evidence seems to indicate that fashionable women of rich families, who probably lived in cities, arranged their hair in elaborate coiffure using hair pins, ornaments and headdress during the period 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. to 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. Gradually these modes of fabulous decoration and elaborate hair coiffure gave way to simple and elegant hair styles such as arranging hair in topknots or buns falling on the back, braiding hair and tying it round the head or arranging the braids in chignon. Sometimes the maidens kept their hair loose. The aboriginal *Sabara*, *Nisada* and *Pulinda* women also arranged their hair in topknots or buns on the back with the help of fillets.

Archaeological materials and literary references are evidence that women of the royal families bedecked themselves with ornaments such as crowns or diadems and tiaras as ornaments on the head and forehead, necklaces of gold or pearls, beaded collars and necklace, pendants of gold, ear ornaments, armlets, bangles, girdles, anklets which were sometimes jewelled, finger rings and toe rings. The ornaments were no doubt made of gold and sometimes inlaid with jewels. Archaeological evidence in the form of sculptures, terracotta plaques and paintings indicate that ornaments worn by both men and women of rich classes were heavy and very elaborate during the period 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. to 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. But after that period ornaments of ancient Bengalis became less elaborate, less heavy but at the same time elegant and beautiful.

The women of the common folk beautified themselves with ornaments made of terracotta, copper or glass beads, bronze and conch shells. In the terracotta

plaques from *Mainamati* and *Paharpur* women of common classes are depicted wearing big round *kundalas*, necklaces of what look like large beads, plain bangles and sometimes girdle belts. Especially village beauties used flowers and palm leaves as soft as the new digit of the moon and other green leaves to decorate themselves. From literary as well as archaeological evidences it seems that the aboriginal women used to wear garlands of *gunjari* and big round *kundalas*.

Among the cosmetics used by women were vermillion, *collyrium*, *kumkum*, musk, saffron, sandal, aloe and lac. From time immemorial women used Vermilion or *Sindura* in the parting of the hair, this being the sign of a Hindu woman's marital status. Vermilion was also used by women to give a spot on the forehead. Collyrium or *Kajjala* was used to beautify the eyes. In contemporary literature like the *Aryasaptasati* we find reference to tears of the heroine stained with collyrium. Women put *Kajjala* on the eyes and forehead with copper sticks from as early as chaleolithic period. Containers of collyrium were also used. Musk and saffron were used to paint the body and face and aloe was used to decorate the cheek. Lac was used as lipstick by women. They chewed betel with betel nuts and lime to make their lips reddish. Painting women's feet with lac were a very common practice. Before performing in an evening ballet at royal court the dancing girls applied painting as make up. Scented oil was used by wealthy women to keep their hair healthy and well groomed. But the village women used hair oil of sesamum or oil made of some kind of sour fruit called *karanja*. Women are depicted in the terracotta plaques of *Candraketugarh* and *Mainamati* using mirrors for dressing.

Children used to wear shorts and their hair was generally arranged in tufts or sometimes allowed to fall on the shoulders. They also wore necklaces of medallions like the children of present day Bangladesh villages. The children of the wealthy people often wore round *kundalas* and occasionally ornaments on different parts of the body. They sometimes wore *dhotis* coming down to the knees.

Royalty and upper class males like feudal lords, high royal officials the main pastime was hunting or *mrgaya*. In the *Caryapada* and Sanskrit verses of the contemporary period we find many references to the hunting of deer. They also played dice and chess sometimes at high stakes. In the royal courts courtesans entertained royal males and their companions by dancing and singing. The courtesans also entertained wealthy people by singing songs and dancing. The popularity and familiarity of the art of dance has been testified by the ancient art remains in the form of sculptures, terracotta plaques and contemporary inscriptions and literary works. The dancing females depicted in some terracotta plaques and sculptures seem to be representations of courtesans. The custom of dedicating young damsels to temples was prevalent. They were not only beautiful but also highly proficient in fine arts like music and dance. They entertained people with dance and music and they gratified the passions and desires of upper

class males. In contemporary inscriptions they are described as "the prison houses of the passionate and the meeting hall of Music, Dalliance and Beauty". The prevalence of this custom of keeping *devadasis* may be first traced in the 8th century A.D. in the story of the dancer Kamala narrated in *Kalhana's Rajatarangini*, a work on the history of Kashmir written in the 12th century. The common people also went to temples to watch their dances and listen to their songs. Some terracotta plaques found in *Paharpur* seem to depict dancing males and females belonging to common class. The aboriginal men and women danced together to the accompanying music of gourd lyre. Playing flutes also seems to have been a pastime of the common people. They played dice and chess and watched bullfights and cockfights. The performance of acrobats was also a source of recreation for all people. In the villages snake charmers entertained people by showing snake play. The people of ancient Bengal seems to have been acquainted with the performing art of drama and open air opera. Some kinds of drama based on the life of Buddha called *Buddhanataka* in the *Carya* song and open-air opera based most likely on the life and *Krsna* seem to have been performed. Hunting seems to have been the main pastime of the aboriginal tribes and it provided them food as well as a recreation highly satisfying to their manly vigour.

Women of royal families and wealthy classes played dice and chess and sometimes husband and wife played dice together with wager. In the contemporary literary works and inscriptions women are described as taking baths and swimming in the tanks which seems to indicate that water sports was a favourite pastime of women. Another pastime of wealthy women was gardening. Ladies of well- to -do families kept pet parrots or *mynas* and they took much care of their birds as is evidenced by literary as well as by terracotta art remains. Women also had *sakhis* or friends with whom they talked about their marital problems, joys and sorrows and received advice, consolation and mental support. In leisure time women of the upper class sometimes wrote love letters or painted the portrait of their lovers. The common women lived a busy life and they had neither the time nor the means to keep pet birds. They were uneducated and did not know how to paint. Their recreations could have been talking with *sakhis*, swimming in tanks together and singing charming songs while husking rice and chewing betel leaves with betel nuts. In the *Saduktikarnamrta* there are verses which refer to common village women singing songs of their own composition and playing the *vina* and singing charming songs while husking rice. In the *Paharpur* terracotta plaques common women are depicted in different postures some of which seem to be dancing poses. Descriptions in the contemporary literary works and depictions in the contemporary art are evidences that the bold and free aboriginal women participated with their males in the game of hunting animals.

Children passed their times by playing in streets in midday or fishing in ponds or rainwaters during the rainy season. They also played with toys like terracotta birds, animals, rattles, marbles, carts, missiles. In the archaeological sites of *Chandraketugarh* and *Bangarh* many toys of terracotta have been found.

In Bengal, the land of rivers and canals, boats were the common transport for going from one place to another from time immemorial. In the ancient art of Bengal we find depictions of boats from as early as 1st century B.C. Epigraphic evidence also indicates the use of boats and the existence of landing stages of ferries. There were also ship building harbours and ship anchorages in ancient Bengal. Boats and their different parts are frequently referred to in the contemporary literary works like the *Caryapada* and *Aryasaptasati*. Low caste women like *Dombis* used to operate ferries from one side to another and they were paid in cowries. Among riding animals there were buffaloes, horses and elephants. Buffalo carts were also used as vehicles by people. But the royal families, feudal lords, warriors and wealthy people used horses and elephants as conveyances. Sometimes upper class people used carriages drawn by horses. Their women were taken from one place to another in covered litters or palanquins which had handles made of elephant tusks. Sometimes royal women rode on elephants accompanied by male guardians. But the common people when they used land routes moved from one place to another on foot. In rural areas there were tracks for the plying of bullock carts and wagons. In villages and urban settlements there were paths and roads. We also find reference to public roads in inscriptions. Ruins of towns and cities found in *Pandu Rajar Dhibi*, *Mahasthangarh* and *Bangarh* also indicate the existence of well-kept streets which sometimes had pavements.

The arts of music, both instrumental and vocal, were cultivated in ancient Bengal by all classes of people. The *Ramacarita* of *Sandhyakaranandi* speaks of different musical instruments, the pleasing notes of which were sonorous, deep and sweet and which produced a full effect through their association with the vocal music excelling the performances of the celestial musician *Tumburu*. Tabors of many varieties were played in *Varendri* and the city of *Ramavati* was resonant with the music of these tabors. Among other musical instruments of ancient Bengal there were flute, vina, gongs, drums, kettledrum, conches and cymbals. Pitchers were used for beating time.

The art of vocal music was extensively cultivated in ancient Bengal, and we find development of classical, folk and devotional songs. The songs in the *Caryapada* and *Gita Govinda* and the names of ragas and talas mentioned in these works and *Locana's Ragatarangini* are evidence of the high development of classical music and its close relations and contact with the Indian classical styles. The *Caryapadas* music modes show the influence of the north Indian school of music whereas the ragas and talas mentioned in the *Gita Govinda* and *Ragatarangini* evidence the influence of Karnatic School of music. *Gita Govinda*

and *Ragatarangini* were works written during the reign of *Laksmanasena* when southern Karnatic influence in the culture of Bengal was an important factor as the Sena kings were of Karnatic region.

In contemporary literature we find references to charming songs sung by village girls some of which were their own compositions. Songs sung during bullfights or to keep the grazing cows quiet seem to show that a tradition of folk songs also developed in rural areas of ancient Bengal together with classical music. Songs about the love of *Radha* and *Krsna* may also be traced in Bengal as early as 8th to 9th century A.D. and these devotional songs or *Kirtana* reached their apogee in the *Gita Govinda* of *Jayadeva*.

Like music, the art of dancing seems to have been cultivated in Bengal from very early times. Ancient terracotta torsos and plaques found in *Pandu Rajar Dhibi*, *Chandraketugarh*, *Haroa*, *Tamluk*, *Paharpur* and *Mainamati* depict dancing men and women. The art of dancing was cultivated by the patrician as well as common class of people. *Bararamas* or courtesans and *devadasis* or women dedicated to temples were highly proficient in dancing and music and contemporary literary works and epigraphs refer to their performances. In the royal courts pleasing notes emanated from the anklets of courtesans who, putting on make up, danced in the evening to give pleasure to the distinguished audience of royalty. Low caste women like the *Dombis* were attractive to all people for their proficiency in dance and music. According to *Kalhana's Rajtarangini* rules of *Bharata's Natyasastra*, the earliest Indian authority on the arts of drama, music and dancing, were followed by the musicians and dancers in north Bengal. It may be noted that *Bharata's Natyasastra* is still the guideline of Indian classical dance and music.

The people of ancient Bengal seem to have been well acquainted with the performing art of drama. One song of the *Caryapada* refers to some kind of drama based on the life of the Buddha which was performed with song and dance.

*Vajradhara* is dancing, the Goddess is singing  
Thus is enacted the *Buddhadrama*.

Dramatic performances by dancing woman, enactment of comedy, the use of curtain and grease paints for such performances seem to have been a part of the cultural life in ancient Bengal. The common village women also sometimes performed playing *vina* and singing songs of their own composition. The art of open theatre or opera was also cultivated by the ancient Bengalis.

The literary as well as archaeological evidence indicate that in ancient Bengal earthenware was in general use and remains of pottery of different types are plentiful in the archaeological sites of Bengal. In the literary works like the *Aryasaptasati* and *Subhasitaratnakosa* we find references to earthenware, pitchers, lamps, jewelled lamps, couches. The village people used utensils of bell metals.

The *Ramacarita* mentions ornamented and golden furniture which no doubt were used by royal families and very wealthy people. According to *Tabakat-i-Nasiri* in the palace of *Lakshmanasena* dinner ware of gold and silver were in use. In contemporary inscriptions we find references to vessels of iron and gold.

The language of learning and knowledge was usually Sanskrit or *Samskrta*, meaning perfected or refined as opposed to the *Prakrtas* or unrefined, the latter being the popular dialects which had developed naturally. *Panini's* great grammar, the *Astadhyayi* (Eight Chapters), probably composed towards the end of the 4th century B.C., effectively stabilized the Sanskrit language and gave the language its classical form.

It was from the time of *Panini* onwards that the language began to be called *Samskrta* as opposed to the popular dialects or *Prakrtas*. Sanskrit was also the language of administration and excepting one or two the languages of all the royal and private inscriptions of ancient Bengal is Sanskrit. From *Prakrtas* or everyday speech of the people we find the growth and development of the Bengali language sometime between the 10th to 12th centuries A.D. The earliest specimen of Bengali literature was the *Caryapada*, a collection of 51 songs or *Caryas*. It was first discovered by Haraprasad Sastri in the royal library of Nepal in 1907. The songs are written in an allegorical style on *Sahajayana*, a form of tantrik Buddhism, by Buddhist *Siddhacaryas* like *Kanhupada*, *Sabarahapada* and *Luipada*. Some *dohas* were also written by the Buddhist *Siddhacaryas* *Kanhupa* and *Sarahapada* in degenerate *Prakrti* called *Apabrama* (Falling away) or *Abhattha*.

Buddhist monasteries were centers of education and learning. Here the monks and lay students studied and cultivated not only religious learning but also other branches of knowledge like philosophy, four *vedas*, *Yogasastra*, logic, astrology, grammar, phonetics, medicine, painting, music and literature. Among the famous Buddhist monasteries of ancient Bengal were *Somapura Vibara*, *Sri Bhavadeva Mathavihara*, *Pattikeraka Vibara*, *Devikota* and *Jagaddala Mahaviharas*. Remains of the *Somapura Mahavihara* have been unearthed in *Paharpur* situated in the greater Rajshahi district. Remains of the *Sri Bhavadeva Mahavihara* have been discovered in the *Mainamati Lalmai* ridge of Comilla where was situated the city of *Devaparvata* and where as many as seven monasteries with two associated water-storage tanks have been laid bare by excavations. Though in some periods of its long history it sometimes served as center of administration and even as capital city the city of *Devaparvata* was a center of Buddhist monasticism and a university town. *Pattikeraka vibara* was situated somewhere near *Devaparvata* in the *Mainamati* and *Lalmai* ridge. *Devikota* monastery was situated in the city of *Kotivarsa-Bangarh*. *Jagaddala Mahavihara*'s exact location is not yet definitely known. In Tibetan traditions recorded by *Lama Taranatha* and others we find references to other *Viharas* such

as *Traikutaka Vihara*, *Pandita Vihara* and *Sannagara Vihara*. *Traikutaka Vihara* was probably situated in West Bengal and *Pandita Vihara* and *Sannagara Viharas* seem to have been situated respectively in the greater Chittagong and Comilla districts of Bangladesh.

Ruins of Buddhist Viharas have also been unearthed in *Vasu-Vihar* near *Mahasthangarh* and *Sitakot* in the Dinajpur district. In these monasteries resided Buddhist *acaryas*, *sramanas* or monks and lay students. Some of the Buddhist *acaryas* were famous in the Buddhist World. The names of *Silabhadra* (7<sup>th</sup> century), the preceptor of Hiuen Tsang and Dipankara Srijnana or Atisa (c. 980-1053) still evoke the memories of the glorious age of Bengal when it was the center not only of the Buddhist religion but was also a country where learning and knowledge was cultivated and where a new school of fine arts developed which influenced the art styles of the neighbouring countries like Burma, Nepal, Java and Sumatra. *Silabhadra* and Atisa Dipankara were legendary figures of their times about whom many details are narrated in the Chinese and Tibetan accounts. *Silabhadra* was made the *Mahacarya* of *Nalanda Mahavihara* and Hiuen Tsang learnt *Yogasastra* as a pupil of *Silabhadra* along with a *Brahmanava* student. Dipankara Srijnana preached Mahayana Buddhism in Tibet for about 13 years. These Buddhist *acaryas* wrote many books on various subjects and some of them also contributed to the evolution of Mahayana Buddhism into *tantrik* schools like *Vajrayana*. It is interesting to note that in the *Devikota Vihara* lived *Bhiksuni* or nuns *Mekhala*. In the Chinese and Tibetan accounts and traditions we find mention of many monasteries to which came Buddhists from south east Asia and Far East to learn not only about Buddhism but also to acquire knowledge in other branches of learning and these monasteries may be taken as centers from where Buddhism spread in Tibet, Nepal and Arakan.

In the Chinese accounts and inscriptions of ancient Bengal we find references to royal patronage of Brahmanas and Brahmanical temples and *mathas* or academies. In 10<sup>th</sup> century a large area of land was given to Brahmanas by the Buddhist king *Sricandra* for the settlement of thousands of Brahmanas and for the establishment and maintenance of *mathas* in the *Srihattamandala* or the region of Sylhet. The Brahmanas were by profession scholars of religion and other subjects. The policy of settling Brahmanas in Bengal started from very early times. The Brahmanical temples and *mathas* or academies were centers of cultivation of Brahmanical religious learning. But in these places other branches of knowledge and learning like philosophy, logic, grammar, law, medicine were also cultivated and taught to students. The great scholars of ancient Bengal like *Aniruddha*, *Halayudha*, *Bhatta Bhavadeva*, *Jimutavahana* were all Brahmanas. Even the famous poets *Jayadeva*, *Govardhana Acarya*, *Umapatidhara* belonged to the Brahmana caste. Because of their scholarship and learning they usually became the chief ministers or ministers of the kings. Apart from the Brahmanas there were two other educated classes: the *Karana-Kayasthas* and the *Vaidyas*.

During the rule of the Senas some famous works on *Dharmashastra* were written by Brahmana scholars. *Bhavadeva Bhatta's Prayascittaprakaranam*, *Halayudha's Brahmanasarvasva*, *Kulluka Bhatta's commentary on Manusamhita*, *Jimutavahana's Dayabhaga* and *Kalaviveka* have had an ever-lasting influence on the socio-religious life of the Bengali Hindus. The main basis of the Hindu law of inheritance prevalent in Bangladesh is still the famous work of *Jimutavahana* entitled the *Dayabhaga*. The Sanskrit secular literature was a nice one. The *Kdvyas* of *Govardhanacarya* and *Jayadeva* entitled the *Aryasaptasati* and *Gita Govinda* respectively have contributed to the richness of Sanskrit literature. Specially *Gita Govinda* has an important place in the classical Sanskrit literature of the Indian subcontinent. Two anthologies of Sanskrit verses, one compiled in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and the other compiled in the first decade of the 13<sup>th</sup> century during the reign of *Laksmanasena* are extant remains of poetry written mostly in ancient Bengal. The title of the first anthology is *Subhasitaratnakosa* and the name of its compiler is *Vidyakara* who was an abbot of *Jagaddala Mahavihara*. The title of another anthology is *Saduktikarnamrta*. It was compiled by *Sridharadasa*, son of king *Laksmanasena*'s friend and official *Sri Vatudasa*. Both the anthologies contain common verses. In these works we find verses of poets like *Kalidasa*, *Bhavabhuti* along with verses of many other poets most of whom were Bengalis. The verses of *Yogesvara*, *Sarana*, *Vangala*, *Satananda*, *Abhinanda* and other poets give glimpses of ancient Bengal's socioeconomic life, its different seasons, flora and fauna, village fields, common people, in a manner which may be compared with the panoramic depictions in the terracotta plaques of Paharpur and Mainamati. Ancient Bengalis also wrote works on Sanskrit grammar among which mention may be made of *Candravyakarana* and its commentary by *Candragomi*, and *Sarvananda's Tikasarvasva*. Another branch of knowledge to which ancient Bengali scholars made much contribution was medicine. The most famous ancient Bengali writers on medicine were *Cakrapanidatta*, *Suresvara*, *Vangasena*.

The extant remains of architecture, sculpture and painting are mostly of religious nature. About secular architecture we have little knowledge due to a paucity of materials. We have no material evidence in the ruins of ancient cities of Bengal throwing light on palace architecture. But there was great development in the fine art of architecture in the form of monasteries, temples and also *stupas*. Excavations have unearthed in Mainamati and Paharpur large monasteries with massive outer walls and rows of monastic cells arranged in wings, round the central shrine of cruciform plan built in the center of their large open courtyards. These central shrines of cruciform plan influenced the subsequent Buddhist architectural development in Burma, Indonesia and Indochina. The facades of the central shrines were ornamented with horizontal lines of simple and moulded bricks extended outwardly with an inset band between the two for pasting terracottas in boxes. The most important feature of the ornamentation of these

shrines are terracotta plaques. Sometimes, as in the Paharpur central temple, rows of terracotta plaques decorate the facade along with sculptures in the basement.

Remains of Stupas which contain holy relics of Buddhism have also been unearthed in Bengal. They were round, square, octagonal and rectangular in shape. The *Stupas* of ancient Bengal were usually built within the area of the monastic establishment and no *Stupa* with carved railings, terraces and gateways like that of *Sanchi* have yet been unearthed. Chinese pilgrims have mentioned *Stupas* some of which were built by *Asoka*.

In ancient Bengal many temples were constructed but the extant remains of these structures are very few in number and they belonged mostly to the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. An idea about temple architecture of ancient Bengal may be formed from illustrations in Buddhist manuscripts and from several stone reliefs. The temples of ancient Bengal belonged to the northern style of Indian architecture and have been classified by scholars into four distinct types: (i) The *bhadra*, *pida* or tiered type; (ii) The *rekha* or the *sikhara* type, exhibiting the *nagara* style in the Indian *Silpasastras* and had much in common with the *rekha* temples of Orissa; (iii) The tiered type surmounted by a *Stupa*; and (iv) The tiered type surmounted by a *sikhara*. The tiered types of Bengal temples influenced the temple architecture of Burma. Of the extant remains of ancient temples mention may be made of temples at *Eketeswar* and *Debar*, district. *Bankura* and temples at *Barakar*, district *Burdwan*, the *Charpatra Mura* temple, *Mainamati*, *Comilla*. The last mentioned temple belongs to 10th century A.D. and differs both from the typical Buddhist and classical Hindu temple architecture. *Telakupi*, situated in the *Purulia* district of West Bengal, was an ancient temple city containing more than 25 temples of *Rekha* type. Unfortunately these are all submerged under the *Damodar* river due to the construction of the *Damodar* dam.

In ancient Bengal the beginnings of the art of sculpture may be traced from the second century B.C. and by 9th century its development reached such excellence that a new school of sculpture called the eastern school or *Pala* school arose. The *Sunga*, *Kusana*, and *Gupta* idioms influenced the art traditions of Bengal and a number of sculptural art remains in the form of terracotta art pieces and images of stone have been discovered here which reflect the features of the aforementioned idioms. From the 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century we find two distinct trends in the sculptural art of Bengal. One trend may be seen in the sculptures decorating the basement of the central shrine in the *Somapuri Vihara*, *Paharpur*. The 63 stone sculptures of Paharpur reflect different traditions. In some sculptures we find the influence of the Gupta idiom. Again some other sculptures of Paharpur seem to indicate a transition stage. The third group of sculptures, though they have not the fine qualities of the Gupta idiom, are expressive of dynamism, vitality and movement which are the characteristics of the terracotta

plaque art of ancient Bengal from 8th century A.D. The other trend is reflected in the Mainamati sculptures which seem to be a local variation of Gupta school of art. The artists of these sculptures followed the norms laid down by the texts on iconography. From the 9<sup>th</sup> century we find sculptures made of black basalt. In these sculptures we find gods and goddesses depicted as human figures but the modes of depiction reflect a wonderful synthesis of mundane and divine ideas and imaginations. These modes of depictions of divinities are sanctioned by religious texts. Many Buddhist images of bronze have also been discovered. These are mostly miniature sculptures though a few Buddhist sculptures of colossal size are found in Mainamati and Paharpur. All these bronze images are prototypes of contemporary stone sculptures.

The terracotta art of Bengal is a very important part of the cultural heritage of ancient Bengal. The beginning of the Bengal terracotta art may be traced in the few specimens discovered in *Pandu Rajar Dhibi*. The next stage in the development of the teracotta art are exemplified by terracottas found at *Chandraketugarh* and *Tamralipti*. From the art styles of the specimens found in these two sites, it seems that these terracotta art pieces belonged to a period ranging from 300 B.C. to 500 A.D. But most of these were made during *Sunga-Saka-Kusana* period specially during 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. when *Chandraketugarh* and *Tamralipti* were seaports having flourishing trade relations with North and North western regions of India and Rome and the concomitant urban influence of these relations had deep impact on the life of the inhabitants of these ports of Bengal. These terracottas are mostly plaques made by moulding, though a few of these were hand-made. From the holes on the top or back of many of these plaques it is evident that these were used to decorate the walls or niches of the rooms of the citizens and the themes, ornamentations, dress and coiffure depicted in these plaques are depictions of urban culture which in some cases reveal Graeco-Roman influence. But the terracotta plaques of *Paharpur*, *Mahasthangarh* and *Mainamati* used as ornamentations of Buddhist *Viharas* and temples were specimens of folk art depicting everyday life of people. Some of the terracotta plaques found at *Chandraketugarh* and *Tamralipti* may be regarded as excellent pieces of art from the point of view of art style, delineation of human form, expressionism and themes.

Examples of the art of painting are at least 60 in number and excepting one these are all illustrated manuscripts of Buddhist texts and their dates mostly range from 10th to 12th century A.D. Two or three illustrated manuscripts are those of paper. The materials of all other illustrated manuscripts are palm leaves. The figures of gods and goddesses were first drawn, then with brush these were painted with colour. The colours commonly used are white, yellow, red, blue and black. Mixed colours are also used. The artists followed the norms of iconography and texts on *silpa*. The themes of these paintings are the life of Buddha and Buddhist, *Tantrik* gods and goddesses. Illustrations are made either

in the manuscripts pages or on the boards of the manuscripts. All these paintings found in the illustrated manuscripts belonged to the eastern style of art which evolved from the Gupta School of art prevalent in eastern India.

The nature of any society and culture is only half revealed if the position and status of the women of that society is not taken into account. Many questions are related to this theme: Did the women have any political role? What was their position in marital relationship? How much right could the women enjoy in the prevalent law of inheritance? What were the religious prescriptions and social norms which determined the position and status of women?

Politics was the domain of the males and political power was in the hands of the royal dynasties and military leaders during the ancient period in the whole of the Indian subcontinent. But women of royal families of *Kashmir* and South India sometimes played political roles usually as queen regents. But there is no direct evidence to show that the queens or princesses of ancient Bengal ever took part in politics. In the folklore and legends we find the name of queen *Mainamati* or *Madanavati* who influenced her son King *Gopicandra* to abdicate from the throne and who fought battles with a king called *Hariscandra*. Was *Mainamati* a historical figure? The *Mainamati* hill at Comilla and the archaeological site in the *Mainamati* region which is known as *Mainamati's* palace may make us ponder as to whether in ancient Bengal there was really a queen named *Mainamati* who did exert some influence in politics and whether *Gopicandra* was identical with *Govindacandra*, the last known ruler of the mighty *Candra* dynasty of South East Bengal, about the final phase of whose life and reign we do not know anything.

The queens of ancient Bengal are depicted in royal inscriptions as having the qualities and beauty of goddesses. But no queen of Bengal ever issued any charter, though there are instances of the king issuing charters to record and notify land grants made by kings as fees to Brahmins for performing priestly functions on the occasions of religious ceremonies observed by the queen-consorts or queen mothers. Again, the declared object of all the royal grants of land was the enhancement of the merit and name of the donor and his parents.

Polygamy was the general practice in the royal families and it was also commonly prevalent in other classes of the society. It is ordained by *Manu* that, "In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent." Again *Manu* lays down that, "Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure (elsewhere), or devoid of good qualities, (yet) a husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife." In epigraphic records an ideal wife is depicted as being a replica of her husband's will. And in contemporary literature a hospitable and pure-minded wife is stated to be the ideal of a happy man.

Though religious precepts and social customs made the women of ancient Bengal accept co-wives in the family, still the elder wife suffered from jealousy and agonies. If she had a son or sons she felt her position to be secure but still as an ordinary human being she suffered from pangs of jealousy and to get love from her husband she showed blind devotion and love towards her husband, the lord of the household. Contemporary literary works like the *Aryasaptasati* are replete with references to jealousies between co-wives.

As per the laws of *Manu* "women must be honoured and adorned by their fathers, brothers, husbands, and brothers-in-law, who desire (their own) welfare." Women of ancient Bengal, if they followed the rigid norms of a patriarchal society, where they had no independent status, were much honoured as wife, mother or daughter. In the epigraphs of the kings, names of queens are mentioned with respect and honour and especially as the mother of a male she holds the most prominent status. To be the mother of a male child was the earnest wish of all Bengali women because on it depended her position in the family and society. *Manu* and *Kulluka* even lay down, the rule that, a wife who has not given birth to a son is to be superceded.

Hindu *Dharmashastra* writers like Manu hold the view that a marriage can never be dissolved. According to Manu neither by sale nor by repudiation is a wife released from her husband and mutual fidelity is the highest law for the husband and wife. *Kulluka*, the Bengali commentator of *Manu*, holds the same views. In *Jimutavahana*'s text on the law of inheritance, the *Dayabhaga*, nowhere is the institution of divorce mentioned.

Marrying within one's own caste was the general rule followed in ancient Bengal as per *Dharmashastra* injunctions. But though intermarriage between castes were also not unknown marriages were not allowed with women of higher castes and were blameable with women of lower castes. Though a Brahmin may have wives who belong to other castes a wife of his own caste held the rank of *Patni* who alone had the privilege of participating in the religious rites of her husband. From the views expressed by *Bhavadeva*, *Jimutavahana* and *Kulluka* it is evident that girls of ancient Bengal had to be married before they reached the age of puberty, and that they were often married several years before this time. The girl, if she remained at her father's house as an unmarried girl and reached the age of puberty, should be regarded as a degraded *Sudra*. The guardians of a girl in marriage in order of preference were: (i) father; (ii) paternal grand father; (iii) brother; (iv) other paternal relations; and (v) mother.

Unquestioned obedience and devotion to the husband was the religious precept to be followed by a wife in ancient Bengal. According to *Manu*, the wife who, "controlling her thoughts, speech and acts, violates not her duty toward her lord, dwells with him (after death) in heaven, and in this world is called by the virtuous a faithful wife, (*sadbvi*)."  
According to *Kulluka* the only means of a woman's salvation is service to her husband and only through it she

can go to heaven. Similar ideals of womanhood are depicted in the inscriptions and literature of ancient Bengal. According to the celebrated poet *Umapatidhara* a devoted wife cares for her husband more than her wealthy and meritorious father and even her own son.

In Brahmanical religion women generally observed religious rites together with their husbands and if they wanted to observe religious rites alone they had to obtain the consent of husbands. For a woman of ancient Bengal the husband was the sun around which revolved her life. Her happiness in this world as well as salvation in the next world depended on her husband. Therefore, it is not surprising that widowhood was regarded as the direst calamity in the woman's life. Her remarriage was not permitted. She had to live a life of austerity, celibacy cherishing the memory of her husband; she had to perform religious ceremonies for the peace of her husband. In royal epigraphs mighty kings boast that water of rivers like *Laubitya* have been redoubled by the tears of women whose husbands have been killed. But the practice of burning of the widows widely prevalent in different parts of ancient India was not in vogue in Bengal during the ancient period.

*Jimutavahana* lays down the rule that if the husband does not give the wife her food, raiment, and the like, these may be exacted from him by her. Consent of the mother was required after the death of the father before the parental property was divided. Wives had shares in the property of their husbands but the portion of a wife's share depended on her caste and it was determined by the order of the four castes. *Jimutavahana* lays down the precept that unmarried daughters are also inheritors of their parental property. In contradiction to *Medhatithi*, *Jimutavahana* asserts the right of the *Patni* to inherit the property of her husband who dies without male issue. *Jimutavahana* further lays down that if there is no widow then a daughter inherits and he cites the views of *Manu* and *Narada* in support of his assertion. Preference should be given to an unmarried daughter, in the absence of a married daughter who has male issue, followed by one who is likely to have, such issue. But the daughter must be married to a man of the same caste as that of her father and must not be a widow. A daughter, who has been appointed *putrika* so that her male issue can perform his funeral rites and through her continues the male line, has a preferred claim. In default of a daughter whose husband is alive and is of the same caste as that of the deceased or who has been appointed as *putrika*, the daughter's son is the inheritor of the property of the sonless man. But the guardian of the widow who would inherit the property of a sonless man would be her husband's family, with whom she should live and be subservient to them in respect of the disposal of her property, and shall have no right to the sale, mortgage, or gift of the property. She must live a life of chaste widow and in the absence of any male relation of her husband, down to *sapinda*, her guardians would be her father's family. So the widow's inheritance does not give her any real rights over her

husband's property. The daughter's right depended on her having a male issue who can perform the funeral rites of the deceased person. So women, as individual human beings, had no proprietary rights as they had to live a life under the male guardianship and they could never be independent. In this connexion a few lines may be said about the institution of *Stridhana* or women's special property which included ornaments, jewellery, costly apparels, etc., received as wedding gifts or gifts given by husband subsequent to the wedding over which her full rights was recognised by the society from a very early date. But as in the society she had no status as an individual and she had to pass her life under male guardianship it is doubtful whether she could exercise her full rights over her *Stridhana* independently. Moreover, very few women had the necessary educational background to understand what her rights were and how to exert her rights. Even now, the percentage of women who are conscious of their legal rights is very, very low, in the whole region of South Asia.

As a girl was married before she reached the age of puberty we can easily presume that she had little opportunities to be educated, though in contemporary literature we find references to women writing letters to lovers and in the two compilation of verses, the *Subhasitaratnakosa* and the *Saduktikarnamrita*, we find verses of poetesses like *Vikatanitamba*, *Jaghanacapala*, *Bhavakadevi* or *Bhavaddevi*, *Narayanalacchi*, *Vidya*. But it is difficult to say with certainty that they were Bengali women.

It is interesting to note that in *Vatsyayana's Kama Sutra* it is stated that, "There are however certain women such as courtesans, princesses and daughters of some nobleman, who have their intellect sharpened by a direct study of the *sastras*. ... For these reasons a woman may learn *sastras* as well as application of their principles..." Again the 10th century A.D. poet *Rajassekhara* says,

women also can be poets like men. Genius is inherent in persons irrespective of sex differences between men and women. It is heard and seen that princesses, daughters of courtesans and concubines are possessed of the extensive knowledge of the *Sastras* and poetic genius.

The Buddhist Viharas of Bengal were centers of learning and culture, like their counterparts in the other parts of the sub-continent. Chinese pilgrims I-tsing and Sheng-chi in their accounts describe life in the Buddhist *Viharas* of Bengal where resided *bhiksus* and *bhiksunis*. They observed all the strict rules laid down in *Vinaya Texts*. Most celebrated among the *bhiksunis* of Bengal in ancient period was *Mekhala*, a resident of the famous *Devikota Vihara* of North Bengal. In the succession lists of gurus and disciples of Buddhism we find names of three women famous for their exposition of *Tantric Buddhism* in writings. Their names are *Sahajayogini Cinta*, *Laksminkara* and *Lilavajra*. All of them seem to have been Bengali women who were famous for their learning and knowledge of *Tantric Buddhism*. It is to be noted here that Buddhist nuns held inferior position in comparison to the monks and the Order of Nuns never

became very popular and the number of nuns was very small in the sub-continent of India.

The royal ladies and women of the upper class families lived in seclusion in inner apartments. Epigraphic evidence points to the existence of an officer in charge of a king's *Vasagara* or the inner part or harem. This officer had the designation *Vasagarika*. Women of the upper class families also lived in seclusion. They put a veil over their face or covered their head with the end of their sari. But the women of the common poor people who had to work hard at home and outside and who lived in a single room with the whole family could not afford to observe the custom of seclusion which was a sign of aristocracy and prestigious position of the family. Whereas, royal women and upper class ladies wore costly fine garments of variegated colour and ornaments inlaid with jewels, spent time in gardening or swimming in tanks the women of poor classes wore tattered clothes, worked from dawn to dusk and even at night they could not sleep thinking about what they would serve as food to the family the next day. The low caste women and women of aboriginal tribes enjoyed much freer life.

The arts of music and dancing were cultivated by the women of ancient Bengal. Specially courtesans and damsels dedicated to the temples who were called *devadasis* practised these fine arts. The courtesans gave pleasure by their performances in the royal courts and *devadasis* were a source of pleasure for all. There was no social stigma if a king patronised courtesans or if any man went to the place of a courtesan for pleasure. It was also no vice if any one watched the performances of *devadasis* or courted them. The well-to-do classes also kept female slaves for enjoyment. Males of ancient Bengal could marry several wives, seek pleasure in the places of courtesans or women dedicated for the service of temples or keep female slaves for enjoyment. Chastity and monogamous life were prescribed for women only.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### Muslim Conquest: Bengal Sultanate

K M Mohsin

#### Society and Culture

Ikhtiyaruddin Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji conquered Bengal in 1204 A.D. and established Muslim rule with *Lakhnawati* as his capital. The extension of Muslim power in Bengal may be regarded as a consequence of the establishment of the Muslim domination in northern India by Muhammad Ghori. The Arabs, however, had established commercial contact with Bengal, particularly, with coastal areas long before the territorial conquest by the Muslim rulers. In fact there are three distinct stages in the expansion of Muslim political power in the Indian subcontinent. First, during the eighth and ninth centuries the Arabs became the foremost maritime people in the world. Their external trade as well as the Arab conquest of *Sind* and *Multan* (now within Pakistan) in 712 A.D. and their settlement in the region not only expanded Arab trade in the area but also brought the Muslims of Arabia into direct contact with the Indus valley. It opened the gates for the gradual expansion of the religion of Islam and subsequent establishment of Muslim political power in the subcontinent. Secondly, Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni invaded as far as *Kanauj* in the east and *Somnath* in *Gujarat* in the course of his seventeen expeditions; but he was not very keen on consolidating his position in the areas he invaded except a small portion in the north-west of India. In the final phase, Muhammad Ghori established the sultanate in Delhi and laid the basis of the expansion of Muslim rule through the subcontinent. Following Ghori's establishment of the Muslim sultanate in Delhi Bakhtiyar Khalji led an expedition to Bengal from his base in south Bihar.

Ikhtiyaruddin Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji was a Turkish adventurer and came to Delhi in search of a job in the army. While his effort to obtain employment at Delhi failed, he came to *Baduan* and from there he moved to

Oudh. The ruler of Oudh Husamuddin offered him jaigir of two Parganas (*Bhagwat* and *Vhuili*) in the south-west of *Mirzapur*. He created a sizable army with the money obtained from his jaigirs and established his power-base there. He then invaded the neighbouring Hindu Kingdoms and further strengthened his position. At one stage, he occupied *Odantapuri Vihar*, a Buddhist monastery. The Muslims called it Bihar or *Biharsharif* and the Indian state of Bihar still bears this name.

From Bihar Bakhtiyar marched towards Bengal with his army. He avoided the traditional *Teliaghbarh* pass (in Rajmahal) to enter Bengal and advanced through *Jharkhand*, the forest belt. Only eighteen of his horsemen could keep pace with him, when he reached Nadia where Laksman Sen, the last of the Sena Kings of Bengal was staying while the main army was following him. Bakhtiyar and his eighteen horsemen were taken as horse dealers from upper India and as such were not stopped by the city guards at any points. He went straight to the gate of the King's palace and suddenly attacked the palace security forces and killed them. At that time the old King was having his mid-day meal. When Laksman Sen heard this news he thought that the city had already been overpowered by the invaders. He hurriedly left the palace through the back door, took a boat and arrived at his capital *Vikrampur* in East Bengal. Bakhtiyar's main army soon joined him and captured the city.

The Muslim army kept the city of *Nadia* under seige for a couple of days. Bakhtiyar then moved towards *Lakhnawati* (Gaur) and established his capital there. He further advanced eastward and extended his principality to *Varendra* area in North Bengal. The whole tract of land comprising the greater portion of Northern and Western Bengal seems to have been brought under Muslim dominion. Bakhtiyar's territory, therefore, besides his original *Jaigirs* in the Mirzapur district, southern Bihar and the portion North of the Ganges, included in Bengal proper the districts of *Rajmahal* (now in Bihar), *Maldah*, *Dinajpur*, *Rajshahi*, *Rangpur* and *Bogura* in the North. The river system formed by the *Tista-Brahmaputra-Korotoa* set the eastern limit of the *Lakhnawati* principality. He soon consolidated his new conquests and established military outposts in the border areas. In his administrative arrangements he assigned different areas of his territory to the charge of his principal nobles and military chiefs for maintenance of law and order and collection of revenues. It was also their duty to look after the well-being of the people under their charge. In his effort to establish a Muslim society Bakhtiyar constructed Mosques, *Madrasas* (Muslim religious schools) and *khanqas* (shelter for the *sufis* and saints). This practice was also followed by his subordinate officers.

The last important event in Bakhtiyar's career was his expedition to Tibet. It is difficult to ascertain his motive behind this hazardous expedition through unconventional route while the largest portion of East Bengal remained outside his domain. Whatever might have been his motives it seems that he took adequate

preparation for Tibet expedition and marched at the head of a large army of ten thousand strong cavalry through the strongholds of various tribes at the foot of the Himalayas. This expedition met with disaster as most of his soldiers were lost in the journey facing a hostile army on the way. The main body of his army was drowned on its return journey while attempting to cross the river *Baranadi* near *Gauhati* in North Assam. Bakhtiyar somehow managed to cross the river with about one hundred of his soldiers. The fiasco of the Tibet expedition shattered him both mentally and physically and he died of a consuming fever or was killed by his ambitious general Ali Mardan Khalji within three months of his return to *Devkot* (Dinajpur) in 1206 A.D.

It is difficult to state Bakhtiyar's relations with the sultans of Delhi. It is not also definitely known in whose name he struck coins or addressed Friday sermon nor the nature of his allegiance to Delhi but there is hardly any doubt that he conquered Bengal on his own and conducted administration in the occupied territory freely and independently.

Bakhtiyar's conquest of Bengal proved momentous as he founded a Muslim dominion in eastern India at a time when unrest and political turmoil in central Asia and the dynastic changes at Delhi led to the immigration of Muslim chieftains, nobles, *ulemas* (persons learned in religious matters) and other people in the deltaic Bengal. With the arrival of the new rulers, new people, and a new faith, the stage was set for the subsequent changes in the society and the body politic of the country as a whole. More significant was the foundation of the Bengal Sultanate which lasted for more than three centuries and the independent sultans contributed enormously to the growth of an enlightened and prosperous Bengal during the mediaeval period.

### Bengal Sultanate

Muhammad Bakhtiyar's death in 1206 A.D. was marked by a period of confusion and disputed succession. His companions competed with one another for power at *Lakhnawti*. This internal dispute gave an opportunity to the rulers of Delhi to exert their influence in Bengal. The rivalry between the two close associates of Bakhtiyar, namely Ali Mardan Khalji and Shiran Khalji continued till Shiran was killed either by a noble or by the Hindu Zamindars. Meanwhile *Devkot* became the centre of activities by the successors of Bakhtiyar Khalji, specially during Husam Uddin Iwaj Khalji (1208- 120A.D.). But Ali Mardan supported by Kutubuddin Aibak of Delhi soon returned to Bengal and without any serious opposition captured power. After Kutubuddin Aibak's death at Delhi Ali Mardan declared himself an independent sultan of Bengal and assumed the title Sultan Alauddin.

Alauddin's oppression of the Khalji nobles and his high-handed actions as an independent Sultan alienated most of his courtiers who were united under the

leadership of Husamuddin Iwaj Khalji. They killed Sultan Ali Mardan in 1212 A.D. and offered the throne of *Lakhnawti* to Husamuddin who assumed the title of Sultan Ghyasuddin Iwaj Khalji. His rule for fifteen years was important in the history of the early Sultanate as he firmly established Muslim rule in Bengal, expanded its territory and succeeded in overcoming the internal power politics. He moved his administrative headquarters from *Devkot* to *Lakhnawti* and built a naval power to strengthen his position in riverine Bengal. His public works included construction of roads and wide canals which saved the agricultural land, and dwelling houses from floods. According to Minhaj, liwaj Khalji extended his territory to the South as far as the northern river and the rulers of *Kamrup*, *Orissa*, *Tirhut* and eastern Bengal paid tribute to him. After consolidating his position liwaj Khalji turned to south-eastern Bengal. But the Sultan of Delhi did not allow the status of full independence to the ruler of Bengal. After overcoming his initial problems he sent his eldest son Nasiruddin Mahmud with a large army to conquer Bengal. Nasiruddin Mahmud conquered Lakhnawti and killed liwaj Khalji with many of his courtiers. But fortunately before his death liwaj Khalji put the Muslim sultanate of Bengal on a strong footing. After the defeat of sultan Ghyasuddin liwaj Khalji the Muslim Kingdom of Bengal became a province of the Delhi Sultanate. The long distance from Delhi and the weakness of the central government encouraged the rulers of *Lakhnawti* to declare independence or to rule free from Delhi's intervention. For the rebellions actions of the local rulers, Ziauddin Barani, author of *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi* mentioned that Delhi regarded Bengal as *Balgakpur* or the city of mutineers or defiant. This state of affairs continued for nearly half a century until Guyasuddin Balban of Delhi succeeded in conquering the rebellious governor of Bengal in 1281. He appointed his son Bogra Khan as the ruler of Bengal and established the rule of the Balbans in the province.

Among the fifteen governors who had ruled Bengal from 1227 to 1281, at least ten belonged to the slaves who rose to high position by their merit. As they were Turks, their period has been called as the Turkish period of the Bengal Sultanate. Balban's invasion and conquest of *Lakhnawti* for a time put an end to the internal conflicts and paved the way for the extension of the Muslim Kingdom hitherto limited to north and north-west Bengal to south-west and south-east Bengal.

It has been stated that Ghyasuddin Balban left the administration of *Lakhnawti* to his son Bogra Khan who ruled from 1281 to 1291. He was assisted by two advisors nominated by his father. After his father's death in 1287, Bogra Khan rejected the offer of the Delhi Sultanate and became virtually independent in Bengal. At one point, he handed over the administration to his son Rokunuddin Kaikaus and retired from public life. Rokunuddin Kaikaus ruled for nine years from 1291 to 1300 A.D. He had hardly any contact with Delhi as the Delhi administration passed to the Khaljis. The coins issued by

Rokunuddin and the royal title *Sikandar-us-Sani* assumed by him were perhaps the indication of his independence from Delhi. He was succeeded by Shamsuddin Firoz Shah who ruled for about two decades as the Sultan of Bengal. From the testimony of coins and inscriptions it is known that during his time he brought *Sonargaon* (South-east Bengal) and *Satgaon* (South-west Bengal), *Mymensingh* and *Sylhet* areas under his rule. During his time the famous sufi-saint, Shah Jalal and the sultan's general Nasiruddin conquered *Sylhet*. Shah Jalal and his more than three hundred disciples settled in *Sylhet* and preached Islam in the rural areas.

After the death of Sultan Shamsuddin Firoz his son Ghyasuddin Bahadur captured the throne of *Lakhnawti*. His unilateral action caused discontent among his brothers, particularly the youngest Nasiruddin Ibrahim who sought help from Ghyasuddin Tughlaq of Delhi, who found an opportunity to invade *Lakhnawti*. He defeated Ghyasuddin Bahadur and established his authority in Bengal. Ghyasuddin Tughlaq divided Bengal into three administrative regions - north and north-west Bengal administered from *Lakhnawti*, south-west division from *Satgaon* and east and south-east from *Sonargaon* and placed them under his nominees. Ghyasuddin Tughlaq died on his way back to Delhi and his successor Muhammad -bin -Tughlaq changed the three rulers of Bengal. At this the governor of *Sonargaon* revolted against Delhi. In 1338 on Bahram Khan's death at *Sonargaon* his armour bearer and close associate Fakhruddin captured power and proclaimed independence under the title of Sultan Fakhruddin Mobarak Shah. This was the beginning of the independent Sultanate in Bengal. After initial set-backs Fakhruddin continued his rule in *Sonargaon* and extended his territory up to Chittagong in the east. The independence declared in 1338 A.D. was retained for the subsequent two centuries. During Fakhruddin's reign the famous traveller Ibn Batuta of Morocco visited Bengal. He left an eyewitness account of Bengal and listed the prices of various items of daily necessity.

In 1342 A.D., Haji Ilias killed Alauddin Ali Shah the ruler of *Lakhnawti* assumed the title of Sultan Shamsuddin Ilias Shah. For the first time he united (by 1332A.D) the three regions of Bengal under his independent sultanate. He was able to win over the local people to his side, gave a distinct character to his administration and earned the well deserved title of *Shahi Bangalah*. Encouraged by his initial successes Ilias Shah also sent expeditions to *Tirhut*, Nepal, Orissa and Bihar. In Bihar he occupied *Kashi* and *Gorakpur* from the Sultan of Delhi. At this Firoz Shah Tughluq became annoyed and to curb Ilias Shah's power invaded Bengal. After several encounters both parties agreed to conclude a peace treaty. Ilias Shah also subdued *Tripura* and part of *Kamrup*. Ilias Shah's ability and courage were proved by his overwhelming authority over Bengal and his influence in the neighbouring territories. He displayed foresight in maintaining friendly relation with the rulers of Delhi and thus strengthened the foundation of the independent Sultanate of Bengal. He maintained peace all over his

territory. He was a pious ruler and highly respected the sufis and saints. He built a beautiful mosque in honour of Alaul Haq, the famous saint of his time.

After Ilyas Shah's death, his son Sikandar Shah succeeded him. During his time, Firoz Shah Tughlaq invaded Bengal for the second time. In the encounters with Sikandar Shah, no decisive result was achieved. At last, both the parties agreed to establish peace and exchanged valuable gifts. Shikandar Shah was recognized as an independent ruler. He was a great patron of architecture. The *Adina Masjid* of *Pandua* built in the latter half of the fourteenth century bears testimony to this. He also seems to have given leadership in matters of religion. This is also evident from the use of the title of Imam-ul-Azam (the chief leader) by him. During his long thirty-three years rule he maintained the unity of his territory and firmly ruled the whole country. His son Ghyasuddin Azam Shah succeeded him. After overcoming his initial problems, he devoted himself to the material and cultural development of his kingdom. Ghyasuddin Azam Shah's patronage of poets and the learned, his devotion to the sufi-saints and Islamic culture and his foreign relations earned for him a distinct place in the history of medieval Bengal. His correspondence with the famous Iranian poet Hafiz, establishment of *madrasa* at Mecca and a rest house at Madina, exchange of gifts and ambassadors between China and Bengal are very well-known. During his reign a Hindu Zamindar Raja Ganesh became powerful and in the end he captured power in 1415 probably by successive conspiratorial killings of Azam Shah, his son and successor Saifuddin Hamza Shah and subsequently usurper to the throne Shihab-uddin Baizid (a slave to his master Saifuddin Hamza Shah) and lastly Alauddin Feroz Shah.

Raja Ganesh and his family dominated the history of Bengal for about three decades. From the scanty information at our disposal, it is difficult to give a correct picture of Raja Ganesh though it is known that he was a landholder and a courtier during the Ilias Shahi Sultanate. Through manipulation and conspiracy, he captured the throne of Bengal. The leading Muslim saint Nur-Kutub-al-Alam invited Sultan Ibrahim Sharki of *Jaunpur* to invade Bengal. Ibrahim Sharki came and compelled Raja Ganesh to abdicate and converted his son Jadu to Islam and placed the latter on the throne of Bengal with the name Jalaluddin Muhammad. Some sources have indicated that Raja Ganesh made another attempt to regain the throne for the second time and held it for a brief period. But no concrete evidence could be found in favour of this statement. During Jalaluddin Muhammad's time several mint towns including *Firozabad*, *Sonargaon*, *Satgaon*, *Chittagong* and *Fatehabad* flourished. This shows that the major portions of Bengal were controlled by him. He transferred his capital from *Pandua* to Gaur where he and his family members were buried at the *Ekdala* mausoleum which is a unique design of Muslim architecture in Bengal. After a brief interval of quick successions, the courtiers and generals placed Nasir Khan, a descendant of Ilias Shah on the throne. Thus, the Ilias Shahi dynasty

was revived. Nasir Khan assumed the title of Nasiruddin Mahmud. He and his descendants ruled for about forty-five years. The latter Ilias Shahi rulers established peace throughout the country. This is evident from a number of building activities during this period including mosques, *khanqas*, gates, palaces and tombs.

Ilias Shahi rulers made distinct contributions to the history of the Bengal sultanate. They firmly established Muslim rule in Bengal and their independent status forced them to pursue an enlightened and liberal policy to gain support of the local people. Appointment of non-Muslims to high positions, veneration of vernacular languages and patronage of local scholars gave a distinct character to the Ilias Shahi rule. Apart from the development of art and architecture, promotion of religion and Muslim culture led to the expansion of Islam in rural areas of Bengal. Bengal was also linked with Muslim countries as well as with far eastern China. It seems that the Muslim military victory in Bengal combined with cultural liberalism gave rise, for the first time, to a new kind of society that ultimately shaped the real identity of Bengal.

During the reign of Barbak Shah and his son Yasuf Shah, the Habshis (slaves brought mostly from Abyssinia) became prominent by virtue of their number and position they held over the past years. Taking advantage of the weakness of the last Ilias Shahi ruler Jalaluddin Fateh Shah, his palace guard Sultan Shahjada killed him and captured the throne in 1486 under the title Barbak Shah. Thus ended the Ilias Shahi rule and in its place the Habshi rule began in Bengal. The Habshi rule lasted for six years from 1487 to 1493. Their rule constituted one of the darkest period of Bengal as it was marked by conspiracies, rebellions, murder and usurpation of power.

The last of the Habshi rulers Shamsuddin Muzzaffar Shah became unpopular for his cruelty and oppression. Anarchy reigned supreme everywhere in Bengal. Amidst these unsettled conditions, the nobles and courtiers revolted and killed him. With his death the Habshi rule came to an end.

A powerful courtier Syed Husain established himself as the sultan with the title Alauddin Husain Shah. On his assumption to power the Husain Shahi period in Bengal history began and four sultans of this dynasty ruled Bengal from 1493 to 1538. It is known that Husain Shah's family originated from Arabia and settled in *Murshidabad* (West Bengal). He worked under Muzaffar Shah at Gaur and gradually rose to the position of a minister. At the very out-set, he suppressed the rebellious elements in the army and created a new security force in place of the *paiks* who participated in the killing of earlier sultans. The Habshis were driven out of the country. He appointed the Muslim noble-men coming from Turkey, Arabia and Afghanistan and the local Hindus to high government posts.

Husain Shah also extended his territory in the north and south Bihar and to *Kamta-Kamrup*. From *Kamrup* he seems to have sent an expedition to Assam

and occupied the plain land for sometime in the dry season. It is also known that he conquered part of *Assam*, *Tripura* and *Chittagaon* in the early years of the sixteenth century. Husain Shah's military successes were remarkable. For his administrative ability and successes he was known as *Nripati Tilak* (Jewel of Kings). He died after twenty-six years of his rule. His son Nusat Shah ascended the throne after him. One of the significant aspects of his reign was his relation with the rulers of Delhi. In 1526, Mughal rule was established in Delhi. Nusrat Shah maintained good relations with the founder of the Mughal Empire *emperor Babar* who suspected his association with the retreating Afghan leaders. In the face of Afghan resistance in the east Babar was forced to advance as far as Gogra river but he abstained from attacking Bengal. Thus Nusrat Shah's territory was saved from the Mughal hands. After his death in 1532 his son Firoz occupied the throne with the help of a section of *amirs*; but soon he was killed by his uncle Mahmud Shah. During Mahmud Shah's rule the Afghans regained their strength under the leadership of Sher Khan Sur and captured power in Bengal in 1538. This put an end to the two centuries of independent sultanate in Bengal.

Alauddin Husain Shah and his successors ruled Bengal for four and half decades. This period formed the most glorious chapter in the history of medieval Bengal. Allegiance of all sections of the Bengal population and the happy combination of local and foreign talents gave a distinct force to the Husain Shahi dynasty.

Alauddin Husain Shah was the greatest sultan of his dynasty. He brought internal peace and stability by suppressing the Habshis. He expanded his territory by conquering neighbouring kingdoms. He was an efficient ruler. He introduced a welfare administration and led Bengal to prosperity. He treated all his subjects equally, irrespective of religious faiths and appointed local Hindus to high positions including those of his ministers, personal physicians, mint masters and advisers.

Husain Shah was a great patron of learning. Under his liberal patronage many books were written in the Bengali Language. *Mahabharata* and *Bagabata Gita* were also translated into Bengali. Various literary works of his period earned distinct fame for the country. He erected many buildings including mosques, *madrasas*, *khanqas* and tombs. *Choto Sona Masjid* of Gaur and other buildings constructed during his period bear testimony to his love of architecture. He created a mosque in *Pandua* in honour of Sufi Nur Kutub-Alam and contributed land and money for his *darga*. His tolerance for other religions earned him the respect of *Sri Chaitanya Dev*, the founder of *Vaishnavism*. Worship of 'Satty Pir' in his time is another example of his liberal views. He wanted to bring the Hindus and the Muslims closer. Thus the glories of Husain Shahi Bengal included territorial expansion, administrative stability and development of economy, literature, religion and architecture. The rulers needed local support and allegiance against foreign invasion. To create a popular base

they appointed local people to high administrative positions. The political stability thus created led to the success of the rulers in all fields. The military success resulted in the inclusion within Bengal of the countries up to the confluence of the Ganges in the West, *Chittagong* in the east and *Kamrup* (Assam) in the north. It was this period which witnessed the beginning of significant forces deeply affecting the political and economic history of Bengal. Between the first advent of the Europeans and end of Mughal rule, this period saw the historical processes, which shaped the life of the country for centuries to come. "Mughal rule touched only the outer fringe of Bengal politics and the European trade was yet to have a proper beginning. But the period in question showed the signs of a new Bengal to be brought into existence through the working of those forces". (M.R.Tarafdar :*Hussain Shahi Bengal, 1494-1538 A.D.*, Dhaka-1965, P-351).

Within less than a century of the foundation of Muslim rule the principality of *Lakhnawti* expanded to include the regions on either side of the *Bhagirathi* river. But as a result of the disintegration of the *Tughlaq* rule, independent kingdoms came into being in different parts of the subcontinent including Bengal. The first phase of independence in Bengal was represented by the Ilyas Shahi rule. The rulers who had to depend upon regional patriotism in the process of countering the authority of Delhi adopted a secular policy in the administration. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it is noticed that a considerable number of non-Muslims held high posts under Muslim rulers and formed the landed aristocracy of the country. Thus the sultans made significant contributions to the growth of a Hindu middle class "with all its economic and cultural paraphernalia".

With the foundation of the independent sultanate ports like *Satgaon*, *Sonargaon* and *Chittagong* came into prominence. These together with a number of mint towns greatly encouraged Bengal's maritime trade with the outside world. Thus the Muslim rule brought Bengal "from rural to urban phase of civilisation based on the introduction of money economy". (M. R. Tarafdar: *Hussain Shahi Bengal, 1497-1538 A.D.*, P. 30).

### Society and Culture

Bakhtyar Khalji's conquest of Bengal and establishment of the Muslim Kingdom led to the growth of a Muslim Society in this country. Before Muslim rule population of Bengal was composed mainly of the Hindus, the Buddhists, aborigines, and a few Jains. Subsequently new elements like Parsees, the Portuguese and the Armenians were added to the existing population. The aborigines though constituting a seizable population were not considered as belonging to the mainstream of the society. The Jain population gradually declined. (Jainism accepted the Brahmanical doctrine of 'karma' and 'rebirth' but rejected the authority of the vedas, the caste system and the practice of animal

sacrifice. They by and large considered themselves as Hindus, differing from them only in certain philosophical and theological aspects). With the fall of the Buddhist Pala rule and the ascendancy of the Senas with aggressive *Brahmanical* domination Buddhism fast declined and eventually it is said that it disappeared from the land of its birth. It still counts one third of population of the world as its followers. The Hindus outnumbered the other religious communities and were also politically and economically advanced. The caste system dominated their social life including their manners, morals and thoughts. The four hereditary occupational groups namely, the *Brahmans* (the priestly class), *Khatriyas* (the political and military groups), the *Vaishas* (in charge of trade, agriculture and commerce) and *Sudras* (service groups) had existed for a long time. Each class was separated from the other by its obligatory rules and social contacts in any form were prohibited. The oppression of the lower castes by the Brahmins had a demoralising effect on the existing society.

Under these circumstances after the conquest of Bengal by Bakhtiyar Khalji in the early thirteenth century the Muslim population began to grow. It was composed of local converts as well as the Muslims who came from outside and settled in Bengal. The Muslim rulers, their relatives, officials and the thousands of soldiers who came in the wake of Muslim invasion ultimately settled in this land. Soon many other immigrants from Turkey, Iran, Abyssinia, Central Asia, Arabia, Afghanistan and upper India joined them. They all formed the immigrant Muslims along with the hundreds of *sufis* who arrived in Bengal with their followers.

The Muslim rulers played a significant part in building the Muslim society in Bengal. The aim of the Sultans was not only to continue Muslim rule but also build institutions and initiate works that helped Muslim society and culture. One of their first acts was the creation of Mosques. Mosques formed the most important feature of Muslim society and culture as the places of prayer— one of the fundamental pillars of Muslim faith. They were built in such locations as were convenient for the people to perform their religious duties. *Adina Mosque* of Pandua, *Khan Jahan Mosque* at Bagerhat, *Jafar Khan Mosque* at Tribeni are examples. The sultans also established *Maktab*s and *Madrasas* for imparting religious education. *Madrasas* were also established by private initiations with or without government assistance. Many of them maintained residential accommodation providing food and lodgings for both teachers and students. The sultans also offered facilities to pilgrims to visit Makka and Madina during Haj. Some of the sultans and their officers were famous for their learning and proficiency in the Quran, Hadith (tradition of the prophet) and the Islamic law. They in turn encouraged similar education for their subjects. The benevolent activities of the sultans in the form of constructions of wells, excavation of tank and grant of lands to maintain *almshouses* were aimed at easing the distress of the common people.

The learned people *Ulama* occupied a high position in the Muslim society. They imparted religious education in many ways including lessons on Islamic sciences namely, *Fiqh* and *Hadith* and upheld the Muslim religious tradition by their activities. They were paid in a number of ways for their works through stipends, land grants or facilities to visit the holy places.

A large number of *sufis* came to Bengal. According to local tradition some of them had come even before the Muslim conquest. There is hardly any town or locality where a sufi had not come and settled. Their contributions in the preaching and expansion of Islam in rural Bengal were very great. They helped in the following ways; First, they extended help to expand Muslim political power when needed, Secondly, their influence over the ruling classes was an additional attraction to the people, Thirdly, they gave religious instructions to everybody who gathered round their *Khanqas*; Finally, their influence over society as spiritual leaders and comforters of people in distress spread among the masses who were gradually attracted to the new faith.

The sultans, the Muslim scholars and the sufi-saints who came and settled contributed enormously to the formation and growth of the Muslim society and culture in medieval Bengal. The main tenets of Islam - its unqualified faith in one universal God, the brotherhood of Muslims and equal status of men, accountability and duties to God as well as to creation attracted many local people who became suspicious of their own religion or were oppressed under the strict regulations and practices of the caste system.

The spread of Islam and the formation of the Muslim society under the Bengal sultanate did not however go unchallenged. There were reactions which took different forms: first, people accepted the new faith as they thought it would be their conversion to faith with a manifest ideology of equity; secondly, the orthodox section adhered to their own faith, right or wrong; lastly, the establishment of Islam created an urge among a section of enlightened people to reform their own religion taking good things of Islam and shunning bad things from their own religion.) The best example in the early sixteenth century is the preaching of *Vaishnavism* by Chaitanya Dev who ignored the caste rules and advocated equality of all worshippers and emphasized the importance of *Bhakti* or ardent love and devotion to one God.

Action and reaction between Islam and local Hinduism continued all through the Muslim rule in Bengal, caused on occasion by liberal patronage of some Muslim rulers. Alauddin Husain Shahi's liberal policy encouraged the social and religious reform movements as the one pioneered by Sri Chaitanya. Years of association with non-Muslims who far out-numbered them, and living with 'half converts' from Hinduism Muslims also deviated from their original faith and became Bengalised by bringing Islamic elements near local practices as well as by accepting some local elements directly. The preparation of *Tazia* to observe Moharram festival in the way of *Durga* sacrifice and *Rathjatra*, worship of

*Panchpir, Satya pir, Saint Worship* and *Tirtha* or visits to the shrines of sufis are some of the examples of liberalization of the society. The Caste system was also unconsciously imitated by the Muslims and this created a sense of aristocracy among the upper class Muslims ignoring the Islamic idea of brotherhood and equality.

The sultans of Bengal attached great importance to education as it was considered part of their religious duties. As a result there was a remarkable progress of learning and knowledge in medieval Bengal in which the Muslim and the Hindu scholars greatly contributed. Translation of Sanskrit works into Bengali added significance to literary life. *Lakhnawati, Sonargaon, Nagor, Mandaram, Rangpur* and *Chittagong* became centres of Islamic learning whereas *Navadhip, Sylhet, and Vishnupore* were developed as the centres of Sanskrit and Hindu religious studies. Development of Bengali language and literature was more significant during the sultanate period. It helped the integration of the Bengali speaking territory and population. Bangla language was given a respectable place at the court as well as in the civil society. Sultan Ghyasuddin Azam Shah and Alauddin Husain liberally patronized the Bengali poets and literature in his effort to promote Bangla language. A large body of literature grew up round the life and teachings of Chaitanya. This brought forth a new social and cultural understanding between the Hindus and the Muslims in building a common platform of the two communities of Bengal.

The Bengali society under the sultanate was by and large divided into a number of classes. The ruling class was at the top and the slaves lay at the bottom. Between these two classes there were the aristocrats consisting of high officials, big landlords and members of the nobility. The landed gentry generally known as the Zamindar formed the common landed aristocracy. There was also a sizeable middle class which included teachers, clerks, traders, officers, and other professional groups earning a living by their physical and intellectual work. Below them there was the large group of commoners consisting of cultivators, small manufactures, shopkeeper, agricultural and industrial labour and other lower class employees. Slaves were drawn from several sources: first, prisoners of war were generally converted into slaves; secondly, there are also evidences of the sale of children by poor parents or guardians from extreme pecuniary distress. Besides the above, a large number of slaves were imported from foreign countries such as Abyssinia, Central and West Asia, Armenia and Georgia. The Hindu social structure was mostly caste ridden, though the policy pursued by the independent sultans had some liberalising effect on Hindu Society. Educated Hindus other than the Bramhans could also be appointed to the higher administrative positions and by their influence could cross the caste barrier. In the Muslim social structure the sultans and their family formed the upper class; the Sheikhs, Syeds, Mughals and the Pathans formed the traditional aristocrat groups. The Ulama, Mashaikh, and the Professional groups like Mufti, Muhtasib

and other officials belonged to the enlightened group and below them there were the common people, servants and slaves. According to Islamic principles Muslim society cannot be structured like this. Yet it seems that there was the influence of the Hindu caste system prevailing all over the country.

During the Bengal sultanate Muslim society expanded and this period was the formative phase of the political and socio-cultural life of Bengal. The real identity of Bengal and Bengali people began with the establishment of the independent sultanate in Bengal. It also contributed to the growth of distinctive characteristic and institutions of the Bengali people. The interaction of Islam and Hinduism in practical life led to 'syncretistic tradition' in the Bengal society. Bengali Language brought about a unique sense of unity among the people. There was also economic prosperity due to internal stability and extension of external trade based on indigenous manufacture and agricultural products. The unity that was achieved under the independent sultanate provided the basis for the strength of the people of Bengal. The Bengal sultanate, therefore, formed the most constructive period of the history of Bengal. Independence and unity of Bengal together with the strong civil and military administration with popular support, economic and educational development, overwhelming influence of Bengali language, international relations, and secular policy based on religious tolerance thus left a precious legacy for posterity.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### Bengal Under the Mughals: Politics, Society and Culture

Abdul Karim

The Muslim rule in Bengal continued for about five centuries and a half, from Bakhtyar Khalji's conquest in 1204-05 to the Battle of Plassey in 1757. After the battle, the English East India Company became the controlling power in Bengal's politics; the administration, however, was carried on in the name of the puppet Nawabs for some years more. The period of Muslim rule is divided into two phases – Sultanate and Mughal, the Sultanate rule ending in 1576, when in the battle of Rajmahal on 12<sup>th</sup> July, the last Afghan Sultan Daud Khan Karrani was defeated by Khan Jahan, the general of the great Mughal emperor Akbar. Daud Karrani was beheaded and the capital Tanda was occupied. It meant the end of the Sultan and the Sultanate, but the Mughal conquest of Bengal was far off. The Mughal army controlled and established authority over a small portion surrounding the capital city; they kept open and safe their supply and base line to Delhi, but the rest of Bengal was controlled by independent and semi-independent military Chiefs, the Afghans, and Bengali Bhuiyans and Rajas, both Muslims and Hindus. Akbar made strenuous efforts by sending general after general, to bring the whole of Bengal under his control but failed. His dream of conquering Bengal was fulfilled in the reign of his son Jahangir by a young, energetic Subahdar, Islam Khan Chishti.

Besides the chiefs and the Bhuiyans, Bengal's climate and geography also offered great resistance to the Mughal aggression in Bengal. Bengal is a country where the monsoon prevails for almost half of the year. There are many rivers and water-channels, deep and shallow. In fact one comes across a river every 25 kilometres or so. The riverine scene of Bengal is dominated by big rivers, the

Ganges and the Brahmaputra, the former coming out of the Himalayas runs through upper India into Bengal, the latter also comes out of the Himalayan ranges and coming east enters Bengal through Assam and Kamrup. The Ganges again bifurcates into two on entering Bengal, one going to the east takes the name Padma and meets with other rivers and channels before falling into the sea; the other going to the south takes the name Bhagirathi and joining with other rivers and channels falls into the sea passing through Hugli and Calcutta. The Brahmaputra was also a mighty river (now-a-days losing its former glory) and following southwards going with a labyrinth of channels including the mighty Padma and taking the name of Meghna flows down to the sea. Then in north Bengal there are Mahananda, Tista, Karatoya and Atreyi and in south Bengal the Bhairab, the Madumati and Ariyal Khan, all distributors of the Ganges. Surma, Gomati and the two Feni rivers are important waterways in eastern Bengal, the last two forming the borderline between Bengal and the Kingdom of Arakan in the Mughal period.

The natural geography of Bengal as stated above offered barriers to the Mughal conquest of Bengal, but the political geography offered no small barrier. Bengal was occupied by a large number of independent, semi-independent Bhuiyans, Rajas, and Afghan chiefs on the eve of the Mughal conquest. Taking advantage of change of government at the centre and the resultant instability during the twilight of the Afghan Sultanate, they established authority in different parts of Bengal. There were, for example, Bir Hammir of Bishnupur (Bankura-Birbhum), Shams Khan of Pachet and Salim Khan of Hijli (Medinipur area); there were Pitambar, Ananta of Chilajawar and Illah Bakhsh of Alaipur, all in north Bengal centring on Rajshahi; there were Raja Pratapaditya of Jessor, Raja Mukunda and his son Raja Satrajit of Bhushna (eastern part of Jessor); Raja Kandarpa Narayan and his son Raja Ram Chandra of Bakla (Bakerganj). There were Raja Lakshman Manikya and Ananta Manikya of Bhulna (Noakhali), Khawaja Usman Afghan and his brothers at Bukainagar (Gauripur, greater Mymensingh) and Bayazid Karrani of Sylhet; Usman and Bayazid were Afghan chiefs. Then there were the Bhuiyans of Bhati, their chief in Akbar's time was Isa Khan Masnad-i-Ala and in Jahangir's time Isa Khan's son Musa Khan Masnad-i-Ala. Of the other prominent Bhuiyans of Bhati, mention may be made of Chand Rai and his brother Kedar Rai of Bikrampur, and the Ghazis of Bhowal. Khwaja Usman and the Bara Bhuiyans proved to be the most serious obstacle to Mughal aggression in Bengal.

Khwaja Usmans were four brothers, they were sons of Isa Khan (not to be confused with Isa Khan Masnad-i-Ala of Bhati) minister of Qatlu Khan of Orissa. Usman along with his brothers and other Afghans put up stubborn resistance to the Mughals in Orissa, but being defeated were banished by the Mughals to Bengal. Solaiman was the eldest of all, and upon his death in Bengal, the leadership devolved upon the second brother Usman. Coming to Bengal, they

travelled through Satgaon and Bhushna and ultimately established authority at Bokainagar. Raja Protapaditya was the son of Sri Hari. On the occasion of Daud Karrani's fall, his ministers, both Sri Hari and his colleague Qatlu Khan sided with the Mughals and thus Sri Hari got the Zamindari of a big estate at Jessore. The Rajas of Bhushna, Bakla and Bhulua were all hereditary chiefs. They offered nominal submission to the authority at the capital and thus enjoyed undisturbed succession. But the great enemies of the Mughals were the Bara Bhuiyans, who resisted the Mughal advance to Bengal for several decades. The chief of the Bara Bhuiyans was Isa Khan in the time of Akbar and Musa Khan in the time of Jahangir. Both assumed the leadership of the Bhuiyans and took the title of Masnad-i-Ala. Isa Khan was the son of Kalidas Gajdani, a Bias Rajput, said to be a Diwan of Sultan Ghias-ud-din Mahmud Shah of Bengal (1533-38). He married the daughter of the Sultan, accepted Islam and took the name of Sulaiman Khan. During the Reign of Islam Shah Sur (Salim Shah) son of Sher Shah, Sulaiman Khan rebelled and was killed. Isa and his brother Ismail were sent to exile in Iran, but later on being allowed to return, Isa Khan took upon the management of his father's estate. He owed allegiance to the Karrani Sultans, and after the fall of the Karranis, joined with other Bhuiyans and taking leadership fought against the Mughals till his death in 1599 A.D. Masum Khan Kabuli, a Mughal military officer also joined with Isa Khan. In 1580 the Mughal captains in Bengal revolted, and set up a rebel government. Akbar suppressed the rebellion and re-established his authority, but though others submitted, Musum Khan Kabuli chose to remain a rebel. He assumed independence, but died in 1599 leaving a son, Mirza Mumin, who also joined the Bara Bhuiyans. Kedar Rai of Sripur-Bikrampur also put up a stubborn resistance to the Mughals. He fought a few hotly contested battles with Raja Mansingh, Akbar's subahdar of Bengal. Kedar Rai received mortal wounds in one such battle and died in 1602. Although the leaders were dead their successors took up the field and continued their struggle in the reign of Jahangir, when finally the Bara Bhuiyans were made to submit by Islam Khan Chishti, Jahangir's subahdar of Bengal.

Jahangir's first few years remained static in the Mughal advance to Bengal, but with the appointment of Islam Khan Chishti as subahdar in 1608 the situation was completely changed. The new subahdar claimed noble birth; he was the grandson of Shaikh Salim Chishti, a sufi saint of Fatehpur Sikri. The relation between the family of the emperor and Shaikh was most cordial. Although the subahdar was an inexperienced young fellow, the emperor's choice could not have been better. Joining his office in the then capital Rajmahal, Islam Khan Chishti drew up an accomplished plan of operation. He decided to transfer the capital from Rajmahal, situated at the western end of the subah, to a suitable eastern strategic place. He found that the greatest enemy of the Mughals were the Bara-Bhuiyans and the Afghans under Khwaja Usman; their strength lay in Eastern Bengal. So Islam Khan decided to transfer the capital to the heart of

Bhati, and ultimately chose Dhaka as capital. He also perceived that Bengal was a riverine country where Mughal cavalry was ineffective for almost half of the year. So he strengthened the Mughal navy and at his request the emperor posted Ihtimam Khan to place the navy on a sound footing. The Bara Bhuiyans were strong in river warfare, so the Mughal navy was organized in such a way to be able to annihilate the local flotilla of war boats. The Subahdar started with his numerous boats and artillery from Rajmahal towards Bhati.

On the way he subjugated the zamindars and chiefs on both sides of the Ganges. On reaching the heart of Bhati he made Dhaka, the capital and from there he subjugated the Bara Bhuiyans in about two years and defeated one by one the Rajas of Jessore, Bakla and Bhulua and also defeated Khwaja Usman Afghan and his brothers and Bayazid Karrani of Sylhet. By the end of 1612 the whole of Bengal except Chittagong was brought under Mughal control. The next year he also occupied the neighbouring kingdom of Kamrup. Formerly, if the Mughal General occupied an area, and the Rajas and Zamindars/Bhuiyans who surrendered were reinstated in their position on promise of remaining loyal and paying tribute. But as soon as the Mughal army retraced their steps, the subjugated Bhuiyans, Chiefs, Rajas shook off allegiance, gathered fresh strength and became independent.

Islam Khan examined the situation very carefully; so he did not allow the defeated chiefs to go back to their station, but they were forced into Mughal service. They were compelled to fight against their brethren. This policy of Islam Khan became extremely effective and the power of the Rajas, Bhuiyans or zamindars and chiefs was so crippled that they could never again raise their head. So the Mughal authority in Bengal was consolidated.

Ibrahim Khan Fathejang, another Subahdar of Jahangir conquered Tippera and ousted the King from his throne, but within a couple of years Tippera regained her independence. The rebel Prince Shahjahan came to Bengal and remained there for a few months. After his flight towards the Deccan, Jahangir's authority was re-established. Shahjahan's first subahdar of Bengal, Quasim Khan did an excellent service by expelling the Portuguese from Hugli in 1632 AD. The Portuguese had established a settlement at Hugli around 1580 with the permission of the Emperor Akbar, but in the guise of trade, they indulged in unlawful activities, and Hugli under them was going to be an imperium in imperio, so their power had to be curbed. Soon afterwards the Portuguese were allowed to return, but their former power and glory was gone. During the subahdari of Prince Shah Shuja, Bengal enjoyed peace for twenty years, 1639-1658, but when the emperor Shahjahan fell ill the Mughal empire was plunged into a civil war in which all the four princes - Dara, Shuja, Aurangzeb and Murad took part. Shuja enthroned himself at Rajmahal; he fought first against Dara, then against Aurangzeb, but being defeated finally in 1660, took shelter with the king of Arakan. There he was brutally murdered in 1661 A.D.

Mir Jumla, who defeated and drove Shuja out of Bengal, was appointed Subahdar. Born of a humble origin in Iran, Mir Muhammad Said, more famous in history by his surname Mir Jumla, came to Golconda in South India in the service of an Iranian merchant. Later he made a fortune for himself. He engaged himself in the diamond business and gradually rose to be a merchant of name and fame; his diamonds were counted by the sack -full and he also owned many ships. He was also appointed wazir in the Sultanate of Golconda, but later he moved to the Mughal empire in the service of Shahjahan and then of Aurangzeb. In Bengal, Mir Jumla's chief contribution was the conquest of Assam, but he fell seriously ill in the course of the campaign. He tried to return, but died on the way. His conquered possessions in Assam also went out of hands.

The next great Mughal Subahdar in Bengal was Shaista Khan. He was in Bengal for about 22 years with a short break in the middle, when Azam Khan Koka (Fidai Khan) and Prince Muhammad Azam became Subahdars. Shaista Khan came of a noble family; his father was Asaf Khan, father of Mumtaz Mahal consort of Shahjahan. Asaf Khan was the son of Itimid-ud-dawla (Mirza Ghias Beg) and brother of Nur Jahan, queen of Jahangir. Shaista Khan came to Bengal at the age of 63 with several grown-up sons and with their help and co-operation he ruled Bengal ably and with distinction. But his great fame in Bengal lay in his conquest of Chittagong. The Magh king of Arakan with the aid of Portuguese pirates used to attack Bengal and the pirates left the coastal regions desolate, burning and looting property and enslaving men, women and children. By a careful policy Shaista Khan won over the Portuguese pirates and with their help conquered Chittagong. Arakan never again dared to invade Bengal. Shaista Khan was kind and liberal. He spent for the welfare of the poor, indigent and religious persons; built mosques, bridges and sarais. In his time the price of grain was extremely low so that rice was sold at 8 maund per rupee. He was gentle, amiable and humane so much so that he was described as a pattern of excellence.

After Shaista Khan, Khan Jahan Bahadur became Subahdar for a short tenure, Ibrahim Khan followed him. In his time, Shova Singh, a zamindar of Chandrakona in Midnapur district revolted and joining with Rahim Khan, an Afghan leader of Orissa looted and plundered an extensive territory including the port of Hugli. Subahdar Ibrahim Khan was a man of scholarly disposition; he failed to take any measure against the miscreants. So Aurangzeb recalled him and appointed in his place Muhammad Azim-ud-din (entitled Azim-ush-shan), his grandson. The rebels were punished, but in his desire to amass wealth, he allowed the English East India Company to purchase from the lawful owners, the three villages of Sutanuti, Govindapur and Kalikata. Thus the English laid the foundation of Calcutta (Kalikata), which later played a very important part in the history not only of Bengal, but also of India.

After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, and with the resultant war of succession and the ambitions of Mughal princes and nobility, the central government of

the Mughals became very weak giving rise to provincial kingdoms. In Bengal, Murshid Quli Khan, a last great imperial officer was able to place himself at the head of every branch of administration. He sent the imperial revenue regularly and thus kept the emperor and his ministers happy. Murshid Quli Khan was the Subahdar of Bengal and Orissa and Diwan of Bihar. He also got the lofty title of Mustamin-ul-Mulk Ala-ud-dowla Jafar Khan Nasiri Nasir Jang. He became the de facto ruler of Bengal. But the emperor and the central government continued to repose confidence in him. Appointment of subordinate offices was made through his recommendation. He became the focus of attention in the provinces. Members of his family, his relatives and his favourites got preference in all branches of administration. That is why his period of administration in Bengal is known as *niabat* or the *nawabi* period. Another important measure of Murshid Quli Khan was to transfer the capital from Dhaka to Murshidabad.

Murshid Quli Khan died in 1727 leaving no male issue and he hoped that his grandson (son of his daughter) Asadullah entitled Sarfaraz Khan would succeed him and he recommended him to the emperor accordingly. His son-in-law (Sarfraz's father) Shuja-ud-din Muhammad Khan was holding the post of deputy subahdar of Orissa. He now forestalled his son and occupied the masnad of Murshidabad. He was also appointed Subahdar of Bihar and from this time Bengal, Bihar, Orissa came under one person, both in Nizamat and Diwani administration. Shuja-ud-din appointed Alivardi Khan his deputy in Bihar. Shuja-ud-din ruled peacefully for more than a decade until his death in 1739. For better administration he divided the three provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa into four divisions, and he also created a council of advisors consisting of Alivardi Khan (deputy subahdar of Bihar), Haji Ahmad (Alivardi's elder brother), Diwan Rai Rayan Alam Chand and the great banker Jagat Seth. The Hindus were already getting higher jobs from the time of Murshid Quli Khan, but now got entry in to the advisory council. But Alivardi Khan and Haji Ahmad, the two brothers proved to be great conspirators and they appointed Haji Ahmad's three grown-up sons into key positions like Faujdar, Diwan etc. When, after his father's death Sarfaraz Khan sat on the Masnad, Alivardi, in league with other members of the council conspired against him and marched from Patna at the head of an army. In the encounter that followed Sarfaraz Khan was killed and Alivardi occupied the Masnad of Murshidabad.

Alivardi Khan, entitled Mahabat Jang, was 64 when he sat on the masnad of Murshidbad in 1740. He died in 1756 at the age of 80. At this old age also he ruled vigorously. He had to suppress several rebellions including that of Rustam Jang (Mirza Lutfullah, Murshid Quli Khan II), son in law of Shuja-ud-din Muhammad Khan Rustom Jang did not submit to Alivardi but fought against him and was defeated. His general Mir Habib then invited the Marathas to invade Orissa. The Maratha menace became the greatest problem for Alivardi Khan, and the repeated Maratha incursions seriously damaged the prestige of the

Nawab, who ultimately had to buy peace ceding Orissa and promising to pay twelve lac rupees annually to the Marathas. Alivardi had no male issue; his three daughters were married to his three nephews, sons of Haji Ahmad. They were given higher posts: the eldest Nawazish Muhammad was entitled Shalhamat Jang and was appointed Naib Nazim of Dhaka, the second Said Ahmad Khan was appointed in Purnea with the title of Saalat Jang and the third Zain-ud-din Ahmad was appointed to Patna with the title of Khan, and they were known by their stations, Dhaka nawab, Purnea nawab and Patna nawab. All his nephews predeceased Alivardi; and bereavements, rebellions and the Maratha menace, all caused terrible depression on the mind of the Nawab. His health was seriously affected and he died in April 1756.

Alivardi Khan was survived by four grandsons, a grown-up son Shawkat Jang, and a boy Mirza Ramzani by his second daughter, two sons Siraj-ud-dowla and Mirza Mahdi by his third and youngest daughter, his eldest daughter Meherun-Nisa alias Ghasiti Begum was childless. Sirajud-dowla was Alivardi's darling, he was born in the year in which Alivardi got the deputy subahdari of Bihar, so Siraj was regarded as a bringer of good fortune. Siraj occupied the Masnad, but he soon found himself surrounded by enemies. His own aunt Ghasiti Begum, an ambitious lady, was his greatest enemy; then there was Shawkat Jang, his cousin of Purnea and he had another political enemy Mir Muhammad Jafar Ali Khan (Mir Jafar), the commander of the army. Ghasiti Begum brought-up Akram-ud-dowla, Siraj's brother from childhood, and cherished the idea of ruling the country from behind the veil through her adopted son. But Akram-ud-dowla predeceased Alivardi, so Ghasiti Begum favoured the case of Shawkat Jang. The latter was ambitious but worthless, and was defeated and killed in an encounter in the battle of Manihari against Siraj. Then there were the Hindu officers and the bankers, particularly Jagat Seth who was raised to position of influence by Alivardi Khan and his predecessors. They had nothing to lose if any of the contending parties won or lost, they knew how to manage each and every turn of events in their favour.

Siraj-ud-dowla succeeded to the masnad at the age of 23. He first paid attention to streamlining the administration and in so doing he created enemies and faced opposition from different quarters. He asked Raj Ballabh to clear the accounts of the Dhaka Niabat (deputy of the Nawab in charge of administration), because he was there the *pishkar*. When he failed to clear the accounts, he was confined, but his son Krishna Ballabh escaped to Calcutta with his family and treasures. Siraj asked the English East India Company not to give shelter to the fugitives, who were his subjects and were under trial. But the English refused to hand over the criminals to the Nawab's government. The English also committed other offences against the Nawab and began fortification of Calcutta without permission. No government could tolerate such insolence, so Siraj came out of Murshidabad and attacked Calcutta. The English were driven out, and took

shelter in ships out of Nawab's reach, but they came back with reinforcements from Madras. The Company secretly entered into a pact with the disaffected officials of the Nawab, like Mir Jafar, Raj Ballabh, Rai Durlabh and the great banker Jagat Set. According to the secret treaty the English agreed to place Mir Jafar on the masnad with their arms, and Mir Jafar agreed to grant territorial, financial and trade facilities to the English. Armed with the treaty, Robert Clive the English General marched against the Nawab and took position at the plain of Plassey. The Nawab also came out with his army, but while the Nawab's army was engaged in a hot battle, and the English were about to be defeated, Mir Jafar instead of bringing the battle to a successful conclusion, advised the Nawab to postpone the battle for the next day. Accordingly, while the Nawab ordered his army to cease hostilities for the day, Mir Jafar sent secret information to Clive to launch a vigorous attack. The Nawab's soldiers were taken aback. Many had already laid down arms for taking rest; some who turned back could not withstand the enemy attack. So the Nawab was defeated due to the treachery of Mir Jafar. He fled but was brought back captive, and later beheaded. Robert Clive took Mir Jafar by the hand and placed him on the Masnad of Murshidabad. In fact there was hardly any change, one Nawab making place for another, as happened many times before, but in practice the English became the controller of affairs, and step-by-step sovereignty passed to their hands.

### New Forces at Work

With the coming of the Mughals into Bengal, the country witnessed the working of certain new forces in the administrative, social, economic and cultural life. These forces transformed Bengal's life and thought. Unlike the previous period, when she enjoyed independence, Bengal now became a part, i.e., a province of the centralised Mughal empire under one administration, one law, one official language, uniform official cadre and uniform currency. Emperor Akbar divided the empire into several provinces called Subah. While doing so, due consideration was given to geographical feature, natural boundaries and language. Bengal became a Subah with the Bengali-speaking people enclosed by well-demarcated natural boundaries. During the Mughal conquest of Bengal, the capital was at Tanda, 15 miles south-east of Malda, now washed away by the river, but before the end of Akbar's reign, Subahdar Man Singh transferred the capital to Rajmahal renamed Akbarnagar. In the reign of Jahangir, Subahdar Islam Khan Chishti transferred the capital to Dhaka, renamed Jahangirnagar and finally in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century Murshid Quli Khan transferred the capital to Murshidabad. (After the Battle of Plassey, the East India Company transferred the capital to Calcutta, which also became the capital of India.). All these capitals were situated on the banks of rivers keeping in view the geography of the country and communication facilities, the capitals were not only the administrative headquarters but also military cantonments and trade centers. Akbar also introduced a well-defined

and efficient administrative machinery for the provinces. The head of the province was the governor, styled Sipah-Salar in the days of Akbar, Subahdar under Jahangir and Shah Jahan and Nazim under Aurangzeb and his successors. He was the vicegerent of the emperor in the province and was responsible for executive matters, defence, criminal justice and general supervision of the province. Below the Subahdar, but not subordinate to him, was the Diwan appointed by and responsible to the central government for revenue administration and civil justice. These two officers, Subahdar and Diwan shared responsibility for the whole provincial government. They were assisted by other provincial officers, bakhshi (pay master of the army), Sadr (head of religious department, charity and grant), Qazi (judge), Kotwal (superintendent of police), Mir-bahr (admiral) and the Waqianavis (news reporter). The province or Subah was divided into Sarkars and Parganas or Mahals. The sarkar was both an administrative and revenue unit, headed by a Faujdar in the executive and administrative department and amalguzar or amil or bitikchi for revenue administration. In the Parganah or mahal, Shiqdar was the executive officer and Amin was responsible for collection of revenues. Other officers were Qunungos (literary the expounders of law but in practice the keepers of land-revenue records) and Patwaris who were clerks or writers in the Parganah. Though the administrative and revenue functions were separate and well-defined, officers of one branch were made responsible to go to the aid of those of other branch in times of need, i.e. they were made to work in harmony and co-operation. The above basic principles of administration continued throughout the Mughal period.

For proper administration, Bengal (Subah Bangalah) was divided into 19 Sarkars and 682 Parganas or Mahals. Land-revenue was the main source of income, so the Mughals first paid attention to the reform of the revenue administration. The revenue system was also reformed in the reign of Akbar, when Raja Todar Mal introduced his *bandobast* or Settlement in 1582. This was, however, paper work, because at that time, the major portion of Bengal was outside Mughal control. Even Chittagong which came under the Mughal control 84 years later was included in the Settlement. It is therefore, presumed that Todar Mal copied the revenue figures prevailing in the pre-Mughal period, i.e. under the Independent Sultans. The revenues were divided into Mal and Sayer, Mal was the name given to the land-revenue, while Sayer included all kinds of revenues (like customs duties, and other sundry duties) except the land revenues. Lands were also divided into Khalsa and Jagir for the purpose of revenue collection, Khalsa lands were those which were directly administered by the government through the Diwan and his staff; the Jagir lands were those which were assigned to the officers, civil or military, for their services, i.e., they were paid in Jagirs. In the later period lands were also assigned to establishments, like the Nawwara (navy), Kheda (catching elephants), Amlah-I-Asham (or military establishment for guarding the frontier). Lands were also granted to religious persons and learned

men, as a means of subsistence they were endowed with lands for their maintenance. An important feature of the revenue administration was the existence of zamindars, who acted as middlemen between the Ryot and the Government. The Jagirdars also collected revenue through the zamindars. The collection of revenue was not a great problem for the government. The main problem was the fixing of revenue to be collected from the ryots and the amount to be paid by the collectors/zamindars to the government exchequer. The Diwan and his staff remained busy settling the issues keeping in view the condition of the lands, the loss of crops due to weather conditions and the land erosion caused by flood, change of course of the river, transformation of agricultural lands to fallow ones, or bringing fallow lands under the plough. The Diwani department also decided cases where taqvi or agricultural loans had to be provided. The Mughal revenue system was, therefore, designed to achieve the object of collecting as much revenue as possible and also keeping the ryots happy and content, so that they might prosper and bring more and more land under the plough. The Mughal revenue system was so well thought out and well planned that the system, with no great change continued through the British period.

In the early Muslim period, Bengal was designated in the court circle as Balghakpur or rebel province, because the governors of Bengal shook off the tutelage of Delhi whenever they found an opportunity. Bengal being far away from Delhi, it would take a long time to deal with them. The Sultans of Delhi tried to solve the problem by dividing Bengal into smaller units, Sher Shah, for example, divided Bengal into 19 Sarkars. They were smaller units so that they would not dare raising their head against the Sultan. There was one provincial governor (called at that time Hakim), but he was shorn of military power, he was only a co-ordinator among the Sarkars. The Mughals solved this problem by appointing as Subahdars (nazims) the royal princes, near relatives of the emperor and trusted high officials. There is no example of provincial governors revolting against the emperors. These royal princes, Shah Shuja, Shahzada Muhammad Azam and Shahzada Azim-ud-din (Azim-ush-shan) occupied the Subahdari of Bengal for nearly forty years, of the near relatives Raja Man Singh (related to Akbar through his Rajput Queen), Ibrahim Khan (Nur Jahan's brother), Azam Khan (Shuja's father-in-law), Shaista Khan (Aurangzeb's maternal uncle) ruled faithfully again for about forty years. Shaista Khan alone was in Bengal for more than twenty years. The Kokas or foster brothers of the emperors also served in Bengal faithfully. In this connection, the Chishti family of Fatehpur-Sikri, about 23 miles from Agra, deserves special mention. Akbar was very much devoted to Shaikh Salim Chishti of Fatehpur-Sikri; Prince Salim (emperor Jahangir) was born in the Khanqah of Shaikh Salim and it is believed that, the prince was born with his blessings; Prince Salim was a play-mate of the grandchildren of the saint, and Akbar built the city and the fort of Fatehpur-Sikri in his honour. Jahangir appointed three members of this family as governors

of Bengal. They were Qutbud-din Khan Koka, Islam Khan Chishti and Qasim Khan Chishti. Islam Khan Chishti made a great name for himself by subjugating Bengal.

After the death of Aurangzeb, though there was hardly any structural change, qualitative changes took place in the administration of Bengal. One of the causes, probably the chief cause of the downfall of the Mughal Empire, was the several wars of succession and rebellion of the princes against the emperor. Jahangir revolted against his father, Khusru and Shah Jahan revolted against their father, but the wars of succession among the sons of Shah Jahan (even before the latter's death) and those after the death of Aurangzeb and Shah Alam Bahadur Shah struck at the very foundation of the empire. The wars were not waged against the external foes, but they were internal warfare; brothers fought against brothers, the Mughals fought against the Mughals. The result was the loss of army, life and property and the cumulative effect was that the empire became weak and reached the verge of ruin. At last it so happened that after the death of Shah Alam Bahadur Shah (1712) there was a dearth of qualified and efficient officers, generals, army chiefs and civil servants. The later Mughal emperors being weak, there was chaos, confusion and indiscipline in every branch of the administration. The effects were also felt in the provinces. The provincial officers, the subahdar (nazim), the diwan and their lower officers were sent from the centre, but now the flow of officers from the centre stopped. The provinces began to shake off the authority of the centre one by one. In these circumstances, the Nawabi period in Bengal began. Murshid Quli Khan was the last imperial officer, coming from the center and appointed by the emperor. From his time, though nominally, Bengal was under the authority of the Mughal emperors, and the imperial revenues were being sent regularly, practically the emperor gave up interfering in provincial matters. The Nazims (as they were called then) were independent in administration, except that, for expediency's sake, they owed allegiance to the emperor and sent imperial revenues to Delhi.

There was another development in Bengal. As the flow of officers from the center was stopped, the Nazims had to promote lower officers, and in this process the efficient experienced Hindu officers went up the ladder in the administration. They learnt Persian, the official language and mastered the art of administration and working of all branches of the secretariat. In Murshid Quli Khan's time the chief Qanungos were Darpa Narayan and Krishna Narayan; the chief of the mint was Raghunandan. This last named person exerted so much influence that he grabbed zamindari of a large area in several districts in the name of his brother Ramjivan. In Murshid Quli Khan's time again, there were 16 big zamindars collecting revenues from 615 Parganahs; smaller zamindars and taluqdars collected revenues from another 1600 Parganah. Big zamindars were almost all Hindus, 75% of the smaller zamindars and taluqdars were also Hindus.

Later the Hindus also occupied the high post of Diwan and Naib-Nazim. Families and persons holding the family title of Sarkar, Bakhshi, Dastidar, Qanungo, Chakladar, Tarafdar, Laskar, Haldar etc. may trace their origin from the Nawabi period, when their forefathers used to hold those offices. In Shuja-ud-din's time Alam Chand was the Diwan. He was given the title of Rai Rayan, and was so much in the confidence of the Nawab that he was a member of the advisory council. In the time of Alivardi Khan prominent Hindu officers were Janakiram, Durlabhram, Kiritchand, Ummid Rai, Biru Dutta, Ramram Singh and Gokul Chand. In Siraj-ud-dowla's time Nand Kumar, Omi Chand came to prominence and Rajballabh not only came to prominence but also started a conspiracy against the Nawab. With the growth of trade and commerce came the Marwari banking families from upper India who started their banking houses. Fateh Chand the first holder of the title "Jagat Seth", did his money-lending business in Bengal with the patronage of Murshid Quli Khan. On his recommendation, Fateh Chand got the title of Jagat Seth from the emperor. His successor, Mahtab Chand Jagat Seth fanned the conspiracy against Siraj-ud-dowla in 1757.

The Muslim rulers of Bengal, the Sultans or the Mughals were all foreigners; they all came from Central Asia. But while the Sultans came burning their boats to stay permanently in the land of their domicile, the Mughals did not think of making Bengal their home. None of the Sultans is known to have left the country; they lie buried here. Of the Mughal emperors only Humayun came to Bengal and stayed at Gaur for about six months, the rebel prince Shah Jahan stayed at Dhaka only for about a week. Even the Mughal high officials, Subahdar, Diwan etc. are not known to have made Bengal their homes after their active service. The situation was, however, different in the Nawabi period. Whereas, in the Sultanate period Bengal's cultural contact with the outside Muslim world was limited to chiefly Makka and Madina, in the Mughal period such connections, particularly with Arabia, Iran and Turkey increased in a large way.

The Mughal emperors were learned and liberal and they possessed high moral principles. The high officers, like Wazir, Subahdar, Diwan etc. were also very learned and cultured people, they set the examples of etiquette, tradition and polished manner to be emulated by others. Some of the Subahdars of Bengal were Persian poets, Qasim Khan Juyuni and Shaista Khan were famous for the poetical compositions. The Subahdars maintained libraries in their residences, and got books on history, philosophy, science and belles lettres copied by calligraphists. Prince Azim-ud-din is known to have had discussions in learned assemblies. Masnavi of Maulana Rumi was favourite reading in such assemblies. There were poets among soldiers and officers who composed and recited poems in private gatherings to make the occasions lively. Poets also accompanied the campaigns and composed tales of victory in Persian verse.

The Muslims came to Bengal from outside from the beginning, but with the consolidation of Mughal authority, there was peace, and prospects of

employment opportunities increased. So scholarly Muslims, i.e., those who pursued peaceful life, like the Ulama, Sufis, Teachers, Poets and Physicians came to Bengal in large numbers. In the Sultanate period, the Sunni Muslims were predominant in Bengal; the Mughals were also Sunnis, but many of their officers came from Iran, so the Shiaism from Iran penetrated into Bengal. The Shias first came to Bengal in large number from the time of Jahangir, in the train of his Shia Subahdar Ibrahim Khan Fatehjang (brother of Nur Jahan) Shah Shuja was a Sunni, but his mother (Momtaz Mahal) and his wife and his father-in-law were Shia; his tutor was also a Shia. That is why we find that in his time at Dhaka and Rajmahal there were many Shia divines, teachers and physicians. Murshid Quli Khan, who is the founder of the Nizamat in Bengal, belonged to the Shia faith (though originally he was the son of a Brahmin, brought up by a Muslim, an Iarian Shia), his successor Subahdars were also Shias. So from the time of the Battle of Plassey, the Shias were prominent in the Muslim society of particularly the cities like Dhaka, Murshidabad, Hugli, and Patna. The Muslim Ulama (sunnis and shias alike), not only joined government service according to their training, but they mostly devoted themselves to teaching. Some of them were also physicians; with the prospect of good business, some physicians also came from Delhi and other parts of India to Bengal. No contemporary history for the Sultanate Period was written in Bengal (at least no such book has so far been available), but in the Mughal period there is no dearth of such history books. Abdul Latif wrote a diary of the day to day account of his sojourn from Rajmahal to Ghoraghat in the train of Subahdar Islam Khan Chishti; Mirza Nathan (Shitab Khan) wrote 'Baharistan-I-Ghaibi', giving the account of subjugation of Bengal by Islam Khan Chishti; Muhammad Masum, wrote about the war of succession between the sons of Shah Jahan; it was a contemporary account under the title "Tarik-I-Shah Shuja" and Shihab-ud-din Talish wrote his "Fathiya-i-Ibariya" or Tarikh-I-Asham' giving his account of Mir Jumla's conquest of Assam and Kamrup. Talish accompanied Mir Jumla on the campaigns. The same author also wrote an account of the conquest of Chittagong by Shaista Khan. Mirza Lutfullah, son-in-law of Shuj-ud-din Muhammad Khan (entitled successively Murshid Quli Khan and Rustam Jang), and a deputy Subahdar successively of Dhaka and Orissa, was a good poet; his poetical surname was Mukhmur. Yusuf Ali Khan, son-in-law of Nawab Sarfaraz Khan, wrote his history entitled Ahwal-i-Mahabat Jungi (affairs of Alivardi Khan). The Munshis or secretaries of the Nawabs were learned in Persian style and diction. Some of them wrote histories at the beginning of English rule.

The Persian being the official language, the Hindus in Bengal (as also in India) learnt the language to obtain state services. Persian also influenced the Bengali language and literature in a great way. Many Persian words entered the Bengali vocabulary and many such words are still found not only in literature but also in the court circle and in the day to day use of the people. Contemporary Bengali

literature composed by the Hindus was religion-based. It was written to glorify the Gods and Goddesses; non-religious or secular literature was totally absent. But being influenced by the Persian literature, poems dealing with love stories of men and women began to be theme of Bengali literature. Persian literary works, particularly romantic stories were translated into Bengali. Side by side Bengali literature was also influenced by Hindi-Awadhi poetical works. Muslims began to write Bengali poetical works from the 16 century. Poets like Sayyid Sultan, Muhammad Khan, Daulat Qazi and Alaol earned good name as Bengali poets. The last two flourished at Mrohaung, capital of Arakan in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Bengali Muslim poets also wrote Faqiri, Darveshi and Baul songs. They influenced the Hindu poets also, and the Bauls and Baul songs particularly influenced the Hindus, Marsia songs also became very popular after the coming of the Shias.

Under the Mughals, particularly in the Nawabi period, there was an enormous growth of Muslim society in Bengal. In the Sultanate period foreign Muslims, like the Arabs, the Turks and the Afghans were predominant, Iranians also came, but their number was small. They belonged mostly to the upper class society. The foreign Muslims again belonged to four main groups — the Sayyids, the Shaikhs, the Pathans (Afghans) and the Mughals. Some of the non-Muslims, Hindus or Buddhists and the worshippers of local deities accepted Islam, but the case of conversion increased largely in the Mughal period. The lower class non-Muslims accepted Islam either for mundane reasons, like gaining favours from the rulers, or getting state services, or they were attracted by the teaching of Islam. The Saints and Darvishes spread over the outlying area, their activities also helped to increase conversion. The Saints were generally very learned people, they lived a simple and unostentatious life and thus attracted the people.

Among the Hindus, the Brahmins, the Vaidyas and the Kayasthas were predominant. The Kshatriyas are not generally met with in Bengal. The caste system was very much prevalent. The Brahmins not only belonged to the superior caste, but they also controlled the society. They presided over all social and religious functions, they were the most educated, most learned people in the society. They accepted the profession of teaching and supplied *Purohits* and *Pandits* to teach religious principles and to conduct worship. They administered the temples and they taught religious scriptures like the Vedas and the Upanishads. The Brahmins were divided into various classes, they were known by Gains, i.e. places of residence. A 16<sup>th</sup> century Bengali poet, Mukunda Ram in his Chandi Mangal Kavya gives the names of 40 such Gains, such as Chatuti, Mukhti, Bindya, Kanjilal, Ganguli, Ghoshal, Putitundu, Matilal, Baral, Piplai, Paldhi and Mastak. Such titles are still used by the Bengali Brahmins, and some of the important of them are Chattapadhaya, Bandopadhyaya, Gangopadhyaya (Ganguli), Mukhopadhyaya etc. Vaidyas also belonged to the high society. They adopted various profession, but they were chiefly physicians.

They adopted titles like Sen, Gupta, Das, Datta and Kar etc. The Kayasthas were professionals and they adopted trade and business as their profession. They were also the writers or Clerks and Shopkeepers. Their prominent titles were Ghose, Basu and Mitra, but they also adopted other titles like Pal, Palit, Nandi, Singh, Sen, Dev, Datta, Das, Kar, Nag, Shome, Chanda, Bhanja, Vishnu, Raha, Bindu etc. The lowest strata of society were the Sudras, the untouchables; they had no right to enter the temple or read or touch religious texts. These untouchables entered into the fold of Islam to save themselves from the oppression of the higher castes.

The Hindus were particular in receiving education and giving education to their children. They were able to adapt themselves to new situations during the Muslim rule. They learnt the Persian language, but when the English established their authority, they began to learn the English language. But they did not neglect learning Bengali and reading their religious texts, written in Sanskrit. They had two types of educational institutions, Toll for educating boys and girls in "the 3 r's" (reading, writing and arithmetic) and Chatuspati which were institutions of higher learning, reading Smriti and Sruti literature, the Vedas, the Puranas and the Upanishads. Female education was prevalent. Muslims had their Maktabs and Madrasas, the former for elementary and the latter for higher education. The mosques also served as schools for teaching the children. Muslim family life, birth, death, marriages etc. were regulated by their religious tenets. The females were honoured in the family. They were mistresses but among both the Hindus and the Muslims polygamy was prevalent. Muslims could not marry more than four at time but among the Hindus, the Kulins had no such restrictions. Burning of the Satis (burning widows with the dead husbands) was prevalent. Sometimes they were burnt forcibly. The Caste system was prevalent. Teachers of the society (the Brahmins) enforced caste rules very strictly.

The great Vaishnava teacher Shri Chaitanya Deva was born in Nabadvipa (Nadia) and flourished in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He preached in Bengal and in the neighbouring area. He challenged caste superiority and preached the principle of equality among human beings. His teaching gained great popularity among the people in the Mughal period. Nabadvip became the center of learning and famous Sanskrit teachers devoted themselves to the study, and writing of Smriti and Sruti literature, and schools of thought grew and developed in that place. A huge literature centering round the life and teachings of Chaitanya Deva grew and developed and various authors wrote a great number of books. Literature also developed round the local deities, Manasa, Chandi, Kalika etc. and this literature came to be known as Manasa Mangal, Chandi Mangal, Kalika Mangal, etc.

Bengali language got literary status in the Sultanate period. Famous literary works, Sri Krishna Kirtana of Chandidas, Ramayana of Krittivasa Ujha, Sri Krishna Vijaya of Maladhar Vasu Gunaraj Khan, Mahabharata of Kavindr

Paremeshwar were written by Hindu poets. But towards the end of the Sultanate period, the Muslims also began to write Bengali poems. A large number of books were written in the Mughal period, books on the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Mangal Kavyas and Chaitaynna Kavyas. The Muslims under the influence of Persian literature, introduced romantic literature. Apart from these great literary works, folk poetry composed by village bards has also been collected in large numbers. These were sung in social gatherings in leisure hours, by both Hindus and Muslims. All these were romantic tales, but some of them were based on historical events.

The Mughals were foreigners. They drained Bengal's treasures to their capitals, but Mughal rule was also a blessing for Bengal. They established peace, good government and discipline, freed the people from the oppression of the pirates. The people prospered and their literary activities got momentum. As the Mughals were liberal in religious matters, the non-Muslims could also practice their religion freely without any interference. In the words of Sir Jadunath Sarkar, "The period of imperial Mughal rule over Bengal witnessed the working of certain new forces which have completely transformed Bengali life and thought and whose influence is still operating in the province."

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## List of Sipah Salars/Subahdars/Nazims of Bengal

No.	Name	Year
1.	Mumin Khan	1574 – 1575
2.	Khan Jahan	1575 – 1578
3.	Muzaffar Khan Turbati Rebel Government	1579 – 1580 1580 – 1582
4.	Khan Azam Mirza Aziz Koka	1582 – 1583
5.	Shahbaz Khan	1583 – 1585
6.	Sadiq Khan	1585 – 1586
7.	Wazir Khan	1586 – 1587

No.	Name	Year
8.	Said Khan	1587 - 1594
9.	Man Singh	1594 - 1606
10.	Qutbud-din Khan Koka	1606 - 1607
11.	Jahangir Quli Beg	1607 - 1608
12.	Islam Khan Chishti	1608 - 1613
13.	Quasim Khan Chishti	1613 - 1617
14.	Ibrahim Khan Fatehjang Rebel Prince Shahjahan's Subahdar Darab Khan	1617 - 1624
15.	Mahabat Khan	1624 - 1625
16.	Mukarram Khan	1625 - 1626
17.	Fidai Khan	1626 - 1627
18.	Quasim Khan Juynni	1627 - 1628
19.	Azam Khan	1628 - 1632
20.	Islam Khan Mashhadi	1632 - 1635
21.	Prince Muhammad Shuja	1635 - 1639
22.	Mir Jumla Muazzam Khan	1639 - 1660
23.	Shaista Khan	1660 - 1663
24.	Azam Khan Koka	1663 - 1678; 1679 - 1688
25.	Prince Muhammad Azam	1678
26.	Khan Jahan	1678 - 1679
27.	Ibrahim Khan	1688 - 1689
28.	Prince Muhammad Azim-ud-din	1689 - 1698
29.	Prince Farkhunda Suiyar (He was infant, Murshid Quli Khan was his Deputy)	1698 - 1712
30.	Mir Jumla Ubaidullah (In absentia, Murshid Quli Khan was his deputy)	1712 - 1713
31.	Murshid Quli Jafar Khan	1713 - 1716
32.	Shuja-ud-din Muhammad Khan	1716 - 1727
33.	Sarfaraz Khan	1729 - 1739
34.	Alivardi Khan (Mahabat Jang)	1739 - 1740
35.	Siraj-ud-Daula	1740 - 1756
		1756 - 1757

## CHAPTER FIVE

# Bengal Under British Colonial Rule: Politics and Society

Zaheda Ahmad

### The Beginning of British Rule

The Mughal Suba of Bengal, consisting of Bengal proper, Bihar and Orissa, had to suffer the dubious distinction of having the first full experience of British rule in India. That process, spread over a period of more than a century — taking 1633 as the innocuous starting point — was not, as some British pundits would like us to believe, the product of a mere accident of history. Momentous events of historic importance rarely take place by accident. In reality, the fabled wealth of Bengal proved irresistible to the traders of the East India Company who, in order to secure Bengal for their benefit, exploited the prevailing state of disunity and division within the decadent ruling establishment of Bengal.

Founded in England under an Elizabethan royal charter in 1600, the East India Company began its trading activities in Bengal modestly enough, establishing its first trading outpost, called factory, in 1633 at Hariharpur on the bank of the river Mahananda. Thus, the matter rested until 1651 when the Mughal Subadar of Bengal, Prince Shuja, granted the Company the right to trade freely in Bengal in return for an annual payment of three thousand rupees. A flourishing trade soon developed so much so that by 1665 the Company was able to pay 40 percent dividends to its shareholders. In the meantime, the Company's factories in Bengal also grew in number — a clear indication of the expansion of the Company's trade all over Bengal.

But this prosperity notwithstanding, the Company's grievances against what they called unwarranted interference and harassment by government functionaries led to armed confrontation between the two during 1686-89.

Next year with Job Charnock, the Company's agent founding his headquarters — the future imperial city of Calcutta (Kolkata) on the swamp-girdled site around the cluster of three villages named Sutanuti, Govindapur and Kalikata, the Company got an opportunity to create and develop, on the soil of Bengal, an urban centre of its own. In 1696, a local rebellion was used as a pretext to fortify the factory which four years later became the seat of the Presidency of Fort William (named after the then British monarch) in Bengal. By that time they had already bought the zamindary rights over this site from the Mughals for an annual revenue of twelve thousand rupees. Though it was the last of the three main centres of British trade to be established in India, it soon turned out to be the most profitable one by virtue of its links with the immensely rich, extensive hinterland of Eastern India.

In 1717, the Company crossed another milestone in its gradual, imperceptible march towards acquiring ultimate sovereign power in Bengal. That year saw the Company being granted an imperial Farman from Farrukh Shiyar, the Mughal Emperor, allowing extensive free trade and other rights (such as minting their own money) at an annual payment of Rs. 3000. The Company, armed with these powers, extended the grounds around Fort William and built up a number of other factories. While the East India Company's star in Bengal was rising that of the Mughals was going down. At the same time, the East India Company's volume of trade went on growing in volume so much so that by 1725 the Calcutta port came to handle ten thousand tons of the Company's cargo per year. Another sign of Calcutta's growing metropolitan prosperity was the steady rise of its population — by the mid-1730s it nearly touched the hundred thousand mark. These decades also witnessed yet another development of crucial importance in the socio-political history of Bengal. The trading activities of the European companies in general and of the East India Company in particular, fostered the growth of a local comprador *bania* class who often as their agents and sometimes as their junior partners came to amass huge fortunes. This commercial neo-capitalist class, numbering a handful of families and agency houses did develop, by virtue of their immense wealth, power and influence, a stranglehold on the Bengal polity. As they became one of the most important power broker groups in the land, making and unmaking of Bengal Nawbas became their favourite political pursuit ever since the death of Murshid Quli Khan.

Under the circumstances, events began to move fast. In 1740, the House of Murshid Quli Khan was replaced by that of Alivardi Khan, the Nawab's deputy in Bihar who, during his sixteen year rule, attempted with moderate success, to curb the illegal activities of the foreign trading companies. But matters really came to a head during the brief rule of Nawab Sirajuddowla (1756-1757), Alivardi's grandson and designated successor who ascended the throne on Alivardi's death on 21 April 1756.

## Palashi and Its Aftermath

Not surprisingly, the new Nawab, young, short-sighted, impulsive and irresolute, faced a very treacherous situation from the very beginning. The East India Company and its local cohorts — in order to pick up a quarrel with the Nawab — began to flout government orders on several counts. At the same time, all of them hatched a conspiracy to overthrow Siraj and share the spoils of victory among themselves. In the Nawab's capital Murshidabad, as in Caesar's Rome "there were layers of intrigue." The principal local conspirators were Mir Jafar, the Nawab's Commander-in-Chief; high officials like Rai Durlabh, Raj Ballabh, Manikchand, Yar Latif, Khadim Hossain and Nabakrishna; the most powerful bankers Jagat Sheth and Omichand; and Nanda Kumar, the Governor of Hooghly, a double agent backing all sides and taking bribes from most. There followed a treaty among the conspirators by the terms of which Mir Jafar, in return for the throne of Bengal, promised to confirm the Company's privileges; to pay 15 lakh pounds to the Company and large gifts for high Company officials. Incredibly, the Nawab, though informed of the conspiracy in advance, did not move against the conspirators; instead he pleaded with the ringleader for his help.

On 23 June 1757, at the mango orchard of the village Palashi, took place one of the most important events in the history of the world. From a military point of view this battle was little more than a skirmish. At the time it was not at all apparent to people at large that a revolutionary change had taken place but on a longer view of history that was what had happened in Bengal. The unfortunate Siraj had not only lost the battle but lost his life too. And yet victory at Palashi did not automatically confer the legal sovereignty on the English — for that they had to wait till 1765. Given honest, right leadership — particularly at the elite level — at the right moment and proper organisation it could still have been possible to turn the tide against the English even after Palashi. In that sense Palashi may not be said to have been a decisive battle.

What Palashi did immediately was to raise tremendously the image, power and prestige of the English in the eyes of their contemporaries although militarily, as we have already seen, the English did not give a good account of themselves. Still, the local powers — be it the impotent Bengal Nawab or the weak Mughal emperor — began to look up to them, by now the most dominant player on the Indian political chessboard, if and when they felt threatened. From now on the English East India Company, so long a trading organisation, started on its dazzling way up to becoming the sole, undisputed military and political power in the whole subcontinent.

Apart from these very costly benefits Palashi also exposed the descent into darkness of people whether in their public or private lives. The extremely low standard of morality, the scheming selfishness, the deceitful dishonesty had come

to afflict society in general and the upper strata in particular, and were responsible, to a large extent, for the debacle of Palashi. Ever since Palashi, the name Mir Jafar had become synonymous with high treason but in the notoriety of character he was not alone. For the British, Palashi opened up a floodgate. "Thus the light of commercial greed," Percival Spear wrote "ignited by sudden and unexpected opportunity and fanned by unbridled power divorced from responsibility, became a devouring flame..."<sup>1</sup>

In great anguish the historian Hirendranath Mukherjee commented "The foundation of British rule in this country had been associated with so much scandal, immorality and inhumanity that nothing could purify it."<sup>2</sup>

After Palashi, Bengal's new power brokers experimented with indirect rule in one form or another till 1772. Working through a number of puppet Nawabs the East India Company secured in 1765 the Diwani or the revenue collecting power from the Mughal emperor at an annual payment of 26 lakh rupees and another 53 lakhs to the Bengal Nawab for general administration. Diwani came as a great boon to the nearly bankrupt company which made a handsome profit each year. The system worked tolerably well till Robert Clive's departure in 1767 after which it began to collapse under the weight of ever increasing revenue demands, widespread malpractice and the rapacity of company employees. Enough advance warnings of the impending catastrophe were given to the Company by its highest official Reza Khan but in vain. A very severe famine struck Bengal in 1769-1770 in which a third of the population perished due to starvation and the accompanying pestilence. It took Bengal another forty years to recover from the catastrophe.

### **Administrative Reforms and Reorganisation in Bengal**

The failure of the "Dual System" under which Company enjoyed power without responsibility led the Court of Directors to ask the Company "to stand forth as diwan" and take over the collection of revenue by its own agents. In the meantime, the British Parliament intervened by passing a new Act known as the Regulating Act of 1773. The Act created the new post of Governor-General of Fort William in Bengal, and a council of four. The Governor-General was given a superintending authority over the other two presidencies and thus Calcutta became the effective capital of British India. Starting with the Regulating Act of 1773, this process continued with Pitt's India Act of 1784 and then the charter Acts of 1793, 1813, 1833 and 1853 and ended with the final Act of 1858.

Under the Regulating Act of 1773, Warren Hastings, for 22 years in the service of the Company in India and Governor of Bengal since 1772, was appointed the new Governor General. Because of the dismal state of affairs in the Company dominions, Hastings found his hands full. By a number of commercial reforms Hastings prohibited illegal private trade by Company officials, encouraged fair trading competition and reduced extortion.

Hastings thus tried to rectify with moderate success some of the greatest abuses prevailing during the early Company rule period in India but the age of Hastings also witnessed some very remarkable and much more enduring developments in the fields of Indian arts and culture. With his active support Halhed translated into English an anthology of Hindu and Muslim laws in 1776.

Two years later Halhed published in English the first grammar of the Bengali language. To his great credit Hastings also spearheaded the development and establishment of the first Bengali press by Charles Wilkins; established at his own expense the Calcutta Madrassa in 1781 and was instrumental in the founding, by William Jones, of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta in 1784. These were laudable achievements indeed but Hastings, one of the greatest empire builders of British India, had his darker sides too. His rule bears ample proofs that wherever he found it necessary he never hesitated to resort to acts of aggression, oppression and injustice against the subject people.

Lord Cornwallis, the next great successor (1786-1793) of Hastings came with the instructions to reorder the administration on a regular basis while cutting down corruption; to rearrange the system of revenue collection permanently and to reform the judiciary within the existing Indian framework while incorporating the spirit of English justice. By framing and implementing new strict rules of service — these later formed part of the Cornwallis Code — for Company officials. Cornwallis laid the foundation of the future Indian Civil Service which in due course of time earned a reputation for honesty and as they saw it a sense of responsibility. On the basis of his administrative and judicial reforms there emerged the typical Bengal district administrative pattern with its twin pillars of the collector and the judge — a system that was to remain largely unchanged throughout the British period. Cornwallis was also responsible for the creation of the modern Indian police force, with thanas under an officer in charge, districts under a Superintendent of Police and an Inspector General of Police at Calcutta.

### The Permanent Settlement — the Permanent Feather in Cornwallis' Cap

Important as those reforms were, Cornwallis' place in history rests primarily on his far reaching reform of the land revenue system that came to be known as the Permanent Settlement. As in all primarily agricultural economies, the main source of public revenue in India was land. When the British were granted the Diwani of Bengal in 1765, the system of revenue collection then in vogue was known as the zamindari under which the peasants used to pay a fixed share of their produce, usually a third (in cash or kind) to tax collectors known as zamindars (landholders). They in turn used to pay nine tenths of the collection, retaining the rest as their remuneration. Although by custom the zamindar had acquired a hereditary right paying a fee on his succession he could not dispose

of his holding without state permission. Failure to pay his full due was punishable by fine, imprisonment or even by flogging but not by confiscation. Within his area the zamindar was also responsible for maintaining public order. Thus as revenue collectors, magistrates and local men of substance the Bengal zamindars constituted the backbone of a provincial aristocracy but they were not landowners or a landed aristocracy in the European sense. Their zamindari apparently resembled the estates of the British landowners but actually in character were far removed from them. The zamindars were in practice "an official aristocracy of hereditary rent collecting and magisterial magnates."<sup>3</sup>

It was Warren Hastings who first abandoned this centuries old existing land system and began experimenting, disastrously for the government and ryots alike, with quinquennial and then annual settlements with the highest bidders. The British Parliament which attempted to find a solution was itself an assembly of landlords and Cornwallis himself was an improving landowner. Not unnaturally Cornwallis, with full parliamentary backing introduced his famous Permanent Settlement in early 1793 under which the zamindars, unlike their Mughal predecessors were given new absolute ownership rights to the lands in their possession. In return they were to pay annually, before the expiry day, a permanently fixed portion of the land revenue collected by them from the tillers of the soil. These zamindars, growing richer and more powerful became, as intended, one of the most stable pillars of British colonialism.

This new land tenure system was destined to leave its permanent mark on the socio-political and cultural landscape of Bengal. The newly emerging *bania*-comprador classes who flourished under the East India Company reaped the full benefits of the new order. As the new assessment was too high many old established Zamindars could not meet their obligations. Ruthlessly they were sold up, their places being taken by the above mentioned comprador classes from Calcutta. Within a decade almost half of the total cultivable land was acquired by these absentee landlord families who being absentee created several intermediate tiers within the land tenure system. As a result, growing subinfeudation became one of the evils of this whole blighted system. It was the new zamindars - most, if not all - who gained the most and the peasants, losing even their customary occupational rights on the lands they tilled, became the worst victims of the oppression and exploitation at the hands of this parasitical landlord class. And contrary to Cornwallis' argument in favour of his land settlement, these landlords did not become improving land managers. Instead as a direct consequence of this settlement, the agrarian economy of Bengal stagnated; growing demand for food from the rising population led to an expansion of acreage under cultivation but no improvement in methods of cultivation or other forms of technology took place. Time and again, the long simmering agrarian discontent exploded into open rebellion against this oppressive system. The greater part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century bears ample testimony

to such peasant outbursts. All told, Cornwallis' land settlement would remain as one of the most pernicious and damaging legacies of British colonialism.

### Consolidation of British Rule

Cornwallis left India in 1793. His successors, as the local overlord of the British Indian dominion as well as the chief of the Bengal Presidency, include, to name only some of the more well known ones, Lord Wellesley (1798-1805), Lord Hastings (1813-1823), Lord William Bentinck (1828-1835), Lord Auckland (1836-1842), Lord Ellenborough (1842-1844), Lord Dalhousie (1848-1856). Then with the end of the company rule in 1858 came government under the British Crown being represented in India by the Viceroy Lord Canning (1858-1862) was the first such viceroy, followed one after another by a long line of successors that came to an end with Lord Mountbatten in 1947. However, till 1853, the all India Governor-Generals also simultaneously served as the Governor of the Bengal Presidency. Next year it was placed, for the first time under a new Lieutenant Governor an arrangement that was to continue till the end of 1911 after which a full fledged Governor took over the charge of a reunited Bengal proper.

In the meantime a lot of water had flowed down the numerous rivers, streams and waterways of the huge Bengal delta. Along with this running flow of time and tide Bengal's political and socio-economic landscape had also undergone changes of momentous importance. In fact no aspect of Bengal's life could remain untouched or unaffected by colonial rule. We know that behind the seizure of political power by the company in 1757 lay far deeper economic objectives of integrating the Bengal economy (or for that matter Indian) with their expanding commercial and trading network. This crucial factor sets the English apart from all other previous foreign conquerors who, not to speak of entertaining any extraterritorial economic linkages, instead readily integrated and assimilated themselves with the broad current of local life.

This fundamental nature of British rule we have to bear in mind while taking a look into our colonial past. We have noted how early company rule wrought havoc in Bengal by destroying its economy and damaging its development potential with accompanying extreme hardship, scarcity, famine and pestilence. As a result it could not be a case of all quiet on the masses front. Economic and agrarian distress led groups of people to resort to acts of rebellion, resistance and violence against constituted authority — i.e. - the English. There were rebellions by the Faqir - Sannasis (1760-1800) — these non-Bengalis made western and northern Bengal their field of operation; rebellion by Aga Mohammad Reza (1799) in Sylhet; the Chakmas in southern Chittagong (1777-1787); the Pagalpanthi rebellion (1825-1833) in Mymensingh, the Faraizi uprising (1804-1857), Titumir's rebellion (1830-1831) in Jesore-Nadia; and the Indigo Revolt of 1855-1856 in

several Bengal districts. Of these the last three deserve special mention because of their influence on later political and social development in Bengal.

But Bengal, with its history of so many such localised "uprisings" remained for a number of reasons, totally unaffected by and uninterested in the events of 1857. Not only that, the Bengal elites took a dim view of the events and instead enthusiastically supported the British cause.

These localised and, by their very nature doomed to be unsuccessful, uprisings had their north Indian counterpart in the much larger tumultuous revolt known as the Great Mutiny of 1857.

### The First Partition of Bengal 1905

Bengal entered into the twentieth century with Lord Curzon (1898-1905) at the helm of affairs in India. This arch-imperialist of a Viceroy, embarked on a plan to partition the supposedly unwieldy province of Bengal into two provinces of almost equal size - one consisting of West Bengal and Bihar and the other of Eastern Bengal and Assam. Ostensibly undertaken to secure the declared objective of raising administrative efficiency this measure at the same time was bound to undermine the grip that the advanced Bengali Hindus, mainly Calcutta based, had come to exercise on most aspects of Bengali life. By ensuring a majority status to the long neglected and admittedly depressed Muslims in the new eastern province and to Biharis and Oriyas in the West, the British Indian government hoped "to encourage the growth of local centres of opinion".<sup>4</sup>

### Results

Faced with this challenge and provocation thrown up by the British, the Bengali Hindus responded with prolonged, countrywide anti-partition agitation. A grave consequence flowed from their open, enthusiastic resort to Hindu religious symbolism, particularly their identification of the motherland with the goddess Ma Kali, for political mobilisation. In a multireligious society like Bengal's such blatant use of religion for political purposes was bound to lead to explosive consequences.

Serious communal rioting broke out in Calcutta and in many other places in Eastern Bengal. Amid heightened communal tension Hindu-Muslim relation took a turn for the worse.

The Anti-partition movement remained, for obvious resources, almost an exclusively Hindu affair. Very few Muslims joined or supported the movement. To them and their supporters, particularly the young educated Muslim Bengalis, partition seemed to offer an opportunity for securing what they considered their rightful share in public affairs that they had been deprived of so long.

The new province, once fully operational, provided ample justification for such hopes. Under the new dispensation, the new provincial government won the hearts of Bengali Muslims by its open preference for Muslims in respect of

appointments to the large number of new posts in the provincial and subordinate services, allocating extra funds and personnel for Muslim education, and making plans for a new University and High Court for Dhaka.

Dhaka and Chittagong, the capital and port of the new province, boomed. The long neglected eastern province and its majority community were basking, so to say, in the unaccustomed sun of official favour. That apparent good luck came to a sudden and chilly end on 31 December 1911 with the announcement of annulment of partition that the British were forced to make as a result of the growing Hindu agitation.

Reunified Bengal began its journey on a new course. As already noted, the first decade of the twentieth century had witnessed the emergence of the Bengal Muslim leadership as an independent political elite consisting of great landholders, educationists and provincial officials. These leaders assumed that the British, worried by the increasingly aggressive posture of Hindu nationalists, would welcome the clientage of the Bengal Muslims as a counterpoise to Congress politicians. In return for their loyalty they expected their community to be rewarded favourably in any future constitutional or political rearrangement.

These leaders who, seeing no viable alternative to a policy of dependence on the British, tried to contain the anger of Bengal Muslims at the loss of the separate province. As for the Hindu nationalists, the moderates led by Surendranath Banerjea, having boycotted the earlier Legislative Council, returned to the one elected in December 1912. But political terrorism, dacoity and other acts of violence on the part of Bengali youths continued unabated.

The immediate post-partition years (1913-1920) with their experiments in making a modest form of a representative system work alongside the nationalists' demands for more effective advance towards self-government kept the Bengal political arena heated.

### Bengal Under Dyarchy

Under the provisions of the Act of 1919 the structure of Bengal's political system that came into being in 1921 was fundamentally different from that of the earlier period. To be sure the new system, collectively known as Dyarchy, provided for a large representative legislature responsible to an electorate that had been extended from the nine thousand registered to elect the old councils under the Act of 1909 to a little over one million. The great bulk of the voters came from the rural areas a large proportion of whom were Muslims. At the all-India level a revolutionary nationalist movement with mass support was in full swing. The advent of mass politics - whether institutional or agitational - caught the Hindu politicians organizationally unprepared to deal with a large electorate. There existed a huge communication gap between the two - a function of the

class barrier that proved rather difficult for the elites to overcome since the peasantry who made up 75 per cent of Bengal's population were mainly either Muslims or low-caste Hindus. Muslim politicians, on the other hand, were in a much more favourable position in the sense that the religious composition of their electorate, made possible under the separate electorate system established by the Act of 1909, rendered their task of mass communication much easier. While pointing this out we do not mean to overlook or underestimate the difficulties faced by them due to similar divisions of class, status, sect, region and language in their community. But unlike the voluntary associations of the Hindu elites, the local Muslim anjumans could build bridges across the dividing lines of class and status, by bringing together zamindars, professionals, traders and peasants. Other institutions and symbols of religion like the mosque, the Friday prayers, the religious festivals, even the ubiquitous mullahs - all these could and did serve as powerful means to an end.

What the Bengali Hindu elites failed to accomplish within Bengal, Gandhi set out to achieve at the all India level. His aim was to take politics to the doorsteps of ordinary Indians and by involving them in the nationalist movement, give them political education. He wanted to lead a people's movement. All these sounded distasteful to most of the Bengali Hindus who had no taste for popular politics. They were afraid because they had much to lose. This elite possessed much of Bengal's land and a large portion of its wealth. Their grip on all levels of the education system gave them a near monopoly of the learned professions and government service. Much of the public life in cities, towns and villages was shaped by their interests and taste; the press was largely their hand-maiden. Politics was their arena; Bengal's literature, music and art owe much to their creative talents. They, in short, were Bengal's social and cultural elites.

So, on the eve of 1921, as Bengal stood on the threshold of a new beginning, these elites were faced with an uncertain future full of foreboding. In the first election under the new constitution, the Moderates, led nominally by Surendranath Banerjea, emerged as the dominant faction in the new Bengal Legislative Council. Socially, despite the extension of the franchise, high caste men took most of the seats, with zamindars and lawyers predominating. Almost two-thirds of them were university educated and had experience in local government. Obviously, local influence derived from landholding, caste, family, connections, wealth or personality - was still a decisive factor in local elections. In the case of election for Muslim seats also, those factors did exercise similar influence.

Administratively, Dyarchy had two executive parts - official and popular - one taken care of by elected Indian ministers, and the other, called the Executive Council consisting of officials, dealt with the non-transferred subjects. The first ministry, under Dyarchy, had two Hindu and one Muslim member.

This experiment in a limited form of representative government during the 20s and 30s brought into sharp focus the internal social contradictions and conflicts latent in Bengali society. Under the pressure of mass politics divisive forces of class and community came into full play which ultimately led to the break up of the land of Bengal into two separate political entities. Communal relations started deteriorating. Already Hindu and Muslim members had squabbled in the council over Surendranath's Bill to reorganize the Calcutta Corporation and over appointment to government posts. These proceedings were marred by a spirit of narrow communal antagonism with each community trying to increase their gains at the expense of all others. The bitterness and suspicion that developed among the three main sections - Hindus, Muslims and Europeans - stood in the way of the smooth working of the Legislative Council and poisoned the mainstream of public life.

### **Chitta Ranjan Das and the Swarajya Party**

Against such backdrop of rising mutual antagonism the Bengali Hindus felt the need to organize themselves against what they saw as the rising power of the Muslims. This conviction led to the formation in Bengal in 1923 of a number of communalist organizations, the most prominent of which was the Hindu Sabha, supported by new vernacular newspapers which were aggressively anti-Muslim.

Tragically for Bengal, there was hardly any public figure of commanding stature, Hindu or Muslim, who could rise up to the occasion to make at least an honest attempt to hold the tide of communalism in check. History has recorded one such attempt, noble and valiant, made by a Bengali in the early 20s of this century. His name is Chitta Ranjan Das (1870-1925) on whom a grateful nation bestowed the title of "Deshbandhu" or "Friend of the Country". By birth, upbringing and profession Chitta Ranjan was a typical member of the Hindu elite. A successful barrister he took no direct part in politics until the ball of the Montague-Chelmsford reforms process was set rolling. As an active leader of the Bengal Congress, he at first, opposed Gandhi's Non-Cooperation movement but later joined it at huge personal sacrifice incurred as he willingly gave up his extremely lucrative legal practice.

But Chitta Ranjan later changed his course and decided to participate in the election for the Second Legislative Council that took place in November 1923. He left the Congress to form, with Motilal Nehru, a new party called the Swarajya Party in late 1923. Still Chitta Ranjan was re-elected President of the Bengal Provincial Congress with Subhash Bose its Secretary.

Thus secured, Chitta Ranjan took up the most memorable undertaking of his life - improvement of Hindu-Muslim relations on the basis of a mutually agreed programme of action. Unlike many Bengali Hindus he realised that the

privileged Hindus need to agree to some form of accommodation with the lower orders, Muslim as well as low caste Hindus without which political and social stability and progress in Bengal would be hard to achieve. More specifically Chitta Ranjan realized that no party could hope to command a majority in the reformed Legislative Council without Muslim support. By campaigning hard among Muslim majority areas of Eastern Bengal, C.R.Das, successfully turned a lukewarm Muslim community into more welcoming supporters of his party. His efforts to recruit Muslim candidates on Swarajya party tickets for the Council election bore fruit in the election held in November 1923 when Swarajya party candidates won half the Muslim seats. Before the year was out, a landmark but ultimately fruitless agreement, known as the Bengal Pact, was signed between the leaders of the two communities. Here also Chitta Ranjan played the catalytic role. According to the terms of the settlement, representation in the Legislative Council was to be in proportion to population and through separate electorates. In local bodies the majority community in each district was to have 60 percent of the seats and the minority community 40 percent. Fifty five percent of government posts were to be reserved for Muslims, and until that percentage was reached 80 percent of all new appointments would go to Muslims. No resolution affecting the religion of any community was to be passed by the Legislative Council without the consent of the affected community. There was to be no music in procession before mosques and cow-killing was not to be interfered with. Obviously Chitta Ranjan had paid a high price, too high in the eyes of most Hindus, for the 21 Muslim members of the Legislative Council who joined hands with him in and outside the council.

Outside the council also Chitta Ranjan was equally prepared to attempt similar rapprochement with fellow Muslims. For example, in March 1924, Chitta Ranjan's Swarajya party won a landslide victory in the Calcutta Municipal election capturing nearly three quarters of the seats. As a result Chitta Ranjan became the first elected Indian Mayor of Calcutta Corporation, one of whose first act was the recruitment of 25 Muslim employees for the corporation.

While Chitta Ranjan was busy trying to build bridges between the two communities the enemies of the Swarajya Party which included the British - both officials and non officials and the Muslim communalists who were in league with them. They were joined by Hindu communalists all three groups taken together ensured, in the end, the failure of C.R Das' attempts at communal harmony.

Sadly for all of us, Chitta Ranjan saw his dreams of achieving improved Hindu Muslim relation on the basis of an equitable, commonly agreed programme of power sharing at all levels came apart primarily due to intransigence on the part of his own community. The All-India Congress Conference at Coconada in 1923 rejected his Bengal Pact out of hand. In his own home ground of Bengal also it

required all his charisma and persuasive powers to get the Pact approved by the Bengal Congress in 1924. A broken-hearted man, Chitta Ranjan died suddenly on 16 June 1925 and his followers promptly got the Pact rescinded next year. In the meantime several communal riots during the 20s left a legacy of bitterness between the two communities.

### The Second Partition of Bengal

The stage was thus set for the partition of Bengal for the second time - the principal players being the British, the Hindus and the Muslims. The extremes of terrorism and communalism that came to characterise Bengal in the 20s and 30s had their roots in the past which we had tried to trace in the previous pages. Tragically for Bengal, the forces of Hindu and Muslim communalism in Bengal had become very powerful so much so much so that there were now too few persons in either community with the sagacity, willingness and ability necessary to fight the evil. Against this backdrop, the ruling power, the British played an equally divisive role, frequently pitting one group against the other.

Looking back it could safely be said that the second half of the 20s marked the end of an era and the beginning of another. Up to that period Bengali Hindus dominated the political institution of limited representative nature that the British had erected both at the local and national levels. Now it was the turn of the Muslims to take over. The emergence of the Bengal Muslim leadership as an independent political entity demanding their due share of power was a fact of paramount historical importance. The watershed year was 1926. In the following year the Hindus lost control of many local bodies and also of the provincial legislature. Henceforth the ministries were invariably led by Muslim politicians and supported in the Council by Muslims, low caste Hindus, Europeans, Anglo-Indians and a few 'responsivist' Hindus. Taking allies from all these groups the Muslims mounted a sustained attack - in two phases - on the bases of Hindu power at all levels - in the civil service, the legislature, the universities, the local bodies including the Calcutta Corporation, the educational boards and upon their dominance of the rural economy.

Between January 1927 and December 1936, the last year under Diarchy, Bengal had six ministries each led by a Muslim and was dependent for its survival on the support of elected Muslim and European members and other nominated officials. While regretting such action along communal lines the Europeans justified it as due to the special circumstances in Bengal where "Muslim" and "Peasant interests" coincided making "a greater equality of influence of the two classes which are broadly represented by landlords and tenants" a necessary precondition for the only genuine political advance in Bengal. Keeping that end in view the British in Bengal joined forces with the Muslim politicians in their

efforts at social engineering. These attempts - an early twentieth century version of today's affirmative action - at rearranging the structure of social and economic power in favour of the Muslims by legislation were the most enduring consequences - for the Hindus a most unwelcome result - of the Muslim domination of the legislative Council after 1926. During the first decade they selected three areas for immediate action: elementary education, local self-government and agricultural indebtedness. In 1930 against determined opposition from the Hindu Members, the Government passed the Bengal Rural Primary Education Bill providing for free compulsory primary education in Bengal to be administered by the District School Boards. This scheme was to be financed by an education cess, a considerable portion of which was to be paid for by landholders the majority of whom in Bengal happened to be Hindus. They objected to supporting a system from which they stood to gain nothing since their children were already well provided for by the existing network of private schools both state aided and unaided. Measures for the promotion of Muslim education including larger grants for scholarships and stipends were undertaken. In the local government sector communal reservation of seats on local bodies was ensured by legislation, Hindu criticism against which was comparatively less severe than was the case in respect of the Primary Education Act for two reasons. First, the former provided for joint, not separate electorates and secondly, reservation of seats was meant for whichever community was locally in the minority. This came as a relief to the Hindus in Eastern Bengal where they, apart from their numerical weakness, felt threatened from the rising strength of the Muslims (in many cases in alliance with low caste Hindus), particularly after they (the Hindus) lost the control of many local boards in the 1927 and 1931 elections. At the Calcutta Corporation also they strengthened their position - a reflection of which is to be found in the election of Fazlul Huq (1873-1962) as the first Muslim Mayor of Calcutta in 1935.

The story did not end here, there was more to come. If the earlier actions of the Muslim dominated ministries had as their target the superstructure of Hindu power, the legislative and other measures to reduce agricultural indebtedness struck at the substructure of their economic power. As we know, moneylenders in Bengal, majority of whom were Hindus, — had earned notoriety almost unsurpassed in Bengal history. To provide some relief to the long oppressed and heavily indebted Bengali peasants the government in the early thirties established, by legislation, five state land mortgage banks entrusted with the task of supplying long term capital on easy terms; curtailed the freedom of absentee money-lenders; placed ceilings on interest rates and established arbitration boards empowered to liquidate a part of the long accumulated debt of the peasantry. The Hindu middle classes, to their disgrace, lobbied hard against these measures which they rightly believed were intended to reduce the peasantry's dependence on them.

### The Communal Award (1932)

From the vantage point of a privileged minority the Hindu dominant classes were watching all these developments with grave apprehension. Alarm turned to panic when the British unfolded their proposals for the next instalment of constitutional reforms. These proposals appeared to them to be intended to ensure the ultimate domination of Bengal's polity by the Muslims. The demographic realities of Bengal meant that any extension of franchise — a necessary condition for a more democratic political structure — would inevitably swing voting power to the disadvantage of the Hindu privileged classes. To break the political deadlock that ensued in the constitutional negotiations between the two communities, the then British Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald published his Communal Award in August 1932 specifying the number of seats each community would have in the proposed new reformed legislatures in the provinces. On the basis of this Award, the Government of India Act of 1935, when applied to Bengal, enlarged the electorate by almost 600 percent, enfranchising four new Muslim voters to every three Hindus, and drastically reduced urban weightage which, under the circumstances, always worked in favour of the more advanced Hindus. Out of a total of 250 members in the new Bengal Legislative Assembly, 119 were Muslims, 58 were caste Hindus, 30 came from the Scheduled Castes and 25 were British. For the caste Hindus, it was nothing but disastrous that their share of seats in this Assembly came down to 23 percent from the previous 48 percent.

Under the Act of 1935, the first Bengal Ministry, formed with Fazlul Huq as the Chief Minister, was the product of a coalition between Huq's Krishak Praja Party and the Bengal Muslim League. In the five years of its rule — from 1937 to 1942 — Huq's ministry engaged in completing the unfinished task of limited social engineering. It appointed a Land Revenue Commission — often known as the Floud Commission — which after extensive investigation recommended the abolition of the Permanent Settlement. Further, the Government imposed severe restrictions on the zamindars' powers to raise rents, recover arrears and instituted still more limitations on money-lending. At the Calcutta Corporation, the government raised Muslim representation through separate electorate to achieve which it had to amend the Municipal Act. But in one key area — that of education — its record, because of stiff Hindu opposition, was mixed. For example, Calcutta University got its first Muslim Vice Chancellor in 75 years of its existence — from 1930-1934 — followed by a second one from 1938-1942. Also, there was repeated Hindu criticism of what they termed as official partiality in favour of Muslims in the lower stages of the education system; in the distribution of grants, stipends and scholarships; at the establishment of large number of maktabas in preference to general primary schools; and against the rewriting of school text books intended to give them a

more Islamic flavour. But Hindu criticism of these activities of the Government paled into insignificance compared to that which greeted the Government Bill on Secondary education. First attempted and then abandoned in the early 20s, this Bill sought to transfer the control of secondary education to a Board of Secondary Education consisting of elected communal representatives and government nominees. Hindu opposition to the Bill was fierce — a manifestation of the intensely bitter communal animosity that had come to vitiate all aspects of life in Bengal. Against the backdrop of the Muslim League's Lahore Resolution of March 1940, calling for separate homelands for Muslims in areas where they were in a majority — tensions rose steadily until in August 1940, serious Hindu-Muslim rioting broke out in places like Dhaka, Burdwan, Khulna which marked the beginning of widespread, intermittent violence throughout the remaining period.

In the last seven years of British rule, Bengal went through one of the most difficult, turbulent periods of its history. A series of disasters, both natural and man-made, struck the province that had already suffered more than it could reasonably cope with. First, the problem of political instability. Infighting within the Muslim League establishment in Bengal and Jinnah's persistent attempts to interfere in Bengal Provincial affairs led the Chief Minister Fazlul Huq to sever his connection with the Muslim League. Thus, freed from dependence on the communal Muslim League, Huq made an attempt to give his ministry an intercommunal face by persuading large sections of the Krishak Praja Party, and Scheduled Caste parties to rejoin him in a coalition with the Congress Forward Bloc and Hindu Mahasabha leader Shyama Prasad Mookerjee (1901-1953). This ministry, with Shyama Prasad as the Finance Minister, could not carry on beyond March 1943 because of the machination of the British bureaucracy and its Muslim League associates.

### Towards Partition

Two more Muslim League ministries, led by Khawja Nazimuddin (1894-1964) and H. S. Suhrawardy (1892-1963) held office in the last four years of the British Raj but their record in respect of restoring Hindu Muslim harmony was counter productive, to say the least. By this time, the state of Hindu-Muslim relations had reached the point of no return. For Bengal's economy and administration these years of disruption proved catastrophic. A financially impoverished administration, preoccupied with fighting political terrorism, violence and civil unrest had little time to develop the public services which in Bengal remained rudimentary even by comparison with other Indian provinces. In the midst of such a worst possible situation Bengal was ill-prepared to face and fight the calamity that befell it in 1943. It was a famine which for its ferocity, for the loss of 15 lakh lives that it caused and for the devastation that it inflicted on the very fabric of Bengal's society and economy, would rank as one of the great disasters

of the twentieth century. For the majority of Bengalis in general and the Hindus in particular, forced to witness from the sidelines the horrific deaths of several lakhs of their helpless people, the near paralysis of the state apparatus, its inaction and callousness were an indictment on the alien, unsympathetic government and its Muslim League allies.

It was in protest against such alliance, malevolent and unholy in the eyes of most Hindus that Shyama Prasad resigned from the cabinet in February 1943. Echoing the sentiments of the Bengali Hindus, Shyama Prasad accused the British Government of encouraging Hindu Muslim division and instigating Muslim separatism. In his resignation speech, he laid bare his community's frustration at their inability to influence the major decisions on Bengal's future. These decisions, they strongly felt, "were calculated to curb the rights and liberties of the Hindus of Bengal and cripple their economic strength and cultural life.<sup>5</sup>

Now, with the Muslim League Ministry firmly in the driving seat, the demand for Pakistan was becoming stronger every day. Nothing could have been more disastrous for the Hindus: the absorption of Bengal, in whole or in part, into an avowedly Muslim State. A united Bengal, defined by language and culture, had always been an article of faith with the Bengali Hindus, particularly its educated section. For an illustration one only has to look back to the period when Curzon partitioned Bengal and the fierce outburst that it caused among the Hindus. Now, the growing Muslim demand for Pakistan came to pose the greatest threat to that romantic, patriotic ideal. It was a difficult, painful dilemma that the Bengali Hindus had to face — a choice between the prospect of a united Bengal under Muslim domination or a Bengal partitioned along communal lines.

Amid such stark realities, there was no longer any ground for compromise. Bitterly resentful of their experiences under Muslim domination — their loss of political power; the sustained attacks on their social and economic position — in short the steady erosion of their privileged status, the middle class Hindus were convinced that they had had enough. A privileged minority was fighting for survival with their backs to the wall. Communal antagonism rose to a fever pitch and violent skirmishes became an almost everyday affair. There were open threats from extremists on both sides of the steep price one would have to pay if their opponents attempted to impose their will.

In such a tinderbox- like incendiary situation any spark would have been sufficient for a violent conflagration. That came with Jinnah's declaration of 16 August, 1946 as the "Direct Action Day". What followed is too well known and too horrible to describe in detail. It was another of the avoidable tragedies — often called the "Great Calcutta Killings" — that Bengal had to suffer. Starting on 16 August, 1946, there followed four months of virtual civil war in Bengal in which Hindus and Muslims butchered one another in their thousands in a

frenzy of communal hatred and violence. In hundreds of cases entire localities across towns and villages were razed to the ground. For a while it looked as though sanity had been taken leave of in Bengal and the very fabric of Bengal's society was almost in danger of coming apart. And watching the scenes of carnage from a safe distance M. A. Jinnah prescribed Pakistan as the only acceptable remedy. This time, Bengali Hindus, irrespective of their political affiliation, agreed. This second partition of Bengal was preferable to its total absorption in a Muslim state. Ironically, it was now the turn of the Muslims to plead for the ideal of a united greater Bengal.

The Bengal Legislative Assembly, sat in two separate sessions to decide Bengal's future course. At this fateful session while the Bengali Hindus unanimously voted for partition the Muslim vote went against partition. Ten days later, the Boundary Commission settled the line of demarcation between the two Bengals largely along the line of the first partition under Curzon. This time Eastern Bengal, forming a part of Pakistan, got all the Muslim majority districts except Murshidabad and part of Nadia, leaving for India only a third of Bengal's land and people and a little over half of Bengal's Hindu population. The new demarcation cut across the great waterways and the railway network of former Bengal. It took away the port and industrial complex of Hooghly from its sources of raw materials in the Eastern part which in its turn got disconnected from the educational and intellectual centre of excellence that was Calcutta. In return for all these upheavals, Bengal's Hindus, rather the educated groups, to be more precise, saved themselves from what they feared and detested: permanent Muslim domination.

History thus turned a full circle. In 1947, at the middle of the century, the long time staunch supporters and one time bitter opponents of united Bengal, came to change places. Behind this dramatic change of hearts lies, as these pages attempted to show, conflict of ideals, to a lesser extent, but far stronger was the clash of hard material interests of the dominant leadership groups of the two major communities of Bengal. Their uncompromising stand in respect of an equitable sharing of power and privileges — political and economic —had created a critical and complex situation in Bengal. And the ruling power, the British, in spite of all their loud claims to the contrary, were not the ideal, honest brokers. Hence, a divided Bengal was the product of the failures of all three principal players on the Bengal stage.

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## CHAPTER SIX

# Religious and Social Reform Movement in the Nineteenth Century

A F Salahuddin Ahmed

### Introduction

**T**he Legacy of the eighteenth century: By the end of the eighteenth century the Indian sub-continent faced a crisis of unprecedented magnitude. After the collapse of Mughal central authority the economic and social structure which that authority sustained also began to crumble. This breakdown also affected the realm of ideas. The possibilities of some revolutionary changes began to manifest themselves in this scenario. In an age of political conflict and social turmoil there was a marked propensity in the intellectual circle to re-examine or re-evaluate and even question the age-old religious beliefs and social practices.

During Mughal times social leadership was provided by a feudal military aristocracy. After the establishment of British colonial rule this leadership no longer existed. Its place was taken by a new middle class which had emerged as a result of co-operation with European mercantile interests and the patronage of British colonial rulers. This class along with the new zamindars created by the Permanent Settlement of 1793 now assumed the leadership of society. Thus was born a new class of aristocracy under British rule. One section of this class which had close links with European business interests had not only been acquainted with modern bourgeois ideas and practices; a considerable number of people belonging to this section had also come in contact with contemporary western thought. The city of Calcutta, the metropolis of the new rulers provided the ideal cosmopolitan setting for the confluence, clash and convergence of ideas of all kinds. A spirit of inquiry and toleration of different religious faiths was the characteristic feature of the age. Thus the study of comparative religion had

become popular among the intellectuals of the time. A seventeenth century Persian treatise called *Dabistan-i-Mazahib* or "discourses on religions" written by a Zoroastrian scholar had gained popularity in contemporary learned circles. According to some scholars it was this work which had inspired Rammohun Roy to write his famous tract called *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin* or a 'Gift to Deists' which was published from Murshidabad in 1804-1805.

The character of social thought in nineteenth century Bengal has to be viewed in this historical perspective. In fact, Indian society (here India denotes pre - 1947 undivided India) in the nineteenth century faced two distinct challenges: one was external, the other internal. The internal challenge grew out of the conditions resulting from the decline and disintegration of the Mughal empire during the later part of the eighteenth century. The external challenge was posed by the advent of British rule. The rise of British power in India during the later part of the eighteenth century meant much more than the establishment of foreign political domination. It brought in its train new ideas and institutions which profoundly affected Indian life and thought. While significant social changes which took place in India in the nineteenth century largely resulted from the impact of English education and British rule, the seeds of these changes are to be found in the conditions prevailing in the preceding i.e. eighteenth century. Although, as has been noted, the later part of the eighteenth century was a period of political decline, it saw the emergence of new forces which deeply affected both religion and society. In fact, the intellectual climate of the late eighteenth century was favourable for the growth of new ideas. Despite the inhibitive influence of the caste system and religious formalism, there had always existed a certain degree of flexibility and openness in Hindu religious thought and practice. This has provided Hinduism with a built-in strength and helped it to survive since time immemorial.

Islam in India also had a chequered history. Like Hinduism it has also shown the capacity for responding to the exigencies of the time. Thus Indian Islam in the late eighteenth century was in a state of ferment. Shah Waliullah of Delhi (c. 1703-1762 AD) initiated an intellectual movement which aimed at revitalizing Islamic religion and society in India in the light of contemporary challenges. Islamic religious beliefs and practices were subjected to close and critical examination. Although the Muslim mind could not emancipate itself completely from the traditional religious dogma, an element of rationality has always remained an important though not essential part of Islamic intellectual heritage. In fact, orthodoxy and heterodoxy have always co-existed in both Hinduism and Indian Islam and have formed integral parts of Indian religious and social thought. It is against this background that religious and social reform movements of the nineteenth century India have to be viewed.

**The external challenge: Christian Missionary propaganda against traditional religious and social customs:** After the English East India Company had firmly established its foothold in India by the end of eighteenth century, the English Christian missionaries had been putting pressure on the English Parliament to send out missionaries to India to propagate Christianity. The missionary attitude was reflected in Charles Grant's tract *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic subjects of Great Britain particularly with respect of Morals and on the Means of Improving it*, published in 1792 in which Grant drew a lurid picture of the degradation of Indian society and attacked Hindu and Muslim religious systems. But till 1813, the East India Company was reluctant to allow Christian missionaries to come to India because it feared that their activities might arouse Indian hostility against the English government and threaten the East India Company's interests. But by the beginning of the nineteenth century in the face of a strong evangelical movement in England the East India Company's government was forced to change its attitude towards the missionaries. They were now allowed to come to India. From 1813 onwards restrictions on the activities of the Christian missionaries were removed. The Company's government itself established an Ecclesiastical establishment in India the cost of which was paid out of the Indian revenue.

Despite many-sided activities of the Christian missionaries which included publication of newspapers and tracts and establishment of schools and colleges, very few Indians were converted to Christianity. Nevertheless, one positive though indirect result of Christian missionary propaganda was that it helped in creating awareness among many Indians regarding defects in their religious and social systems and prepared the ground for reform.

**Agitation of the European Free Traders against the monopoly of the East India Company:** During the early decades, the nineteenth century a section of British merchants who had been advocating free trade were active in India in attacking the trade monopoly of the East India Company. They demanded unrestricted freedom in utilising the growing commercial opportunities that were being opened up particularly after the Napoleonic wars (1801-1815). They also sought the support of Indian merchants in fighting against the Company's monopoly. They fully sympathized with contemporary European liberal political and social ideas and encouraged Indians to express their opinions freely. In this way the free-trade movement indirectly helped the cause of Indian reform.

**Impact of English Education:** A section of the newly emerging English educated Indian middle class fully imbibed the liberal ideas which English education conveyed and became the harbingers of the movement for social and religious reform.

**Hindu Religious Reform Movements:** Rammohun Roy (1774-1833) was the precursor of the religious and social reform movement in the nineteenth century.

Born in an orthodox Hindu Brahmin family of West Bengal he received the traditional education which was common in eighteenth century India. He became well-versed not only in Sanskrit, the sacred language of the Hindus, but also gained remarkable proficiency in Arabic and Persian, the languages patronised by the Muslim rulers. The new English rulers also patronised the Persian language. Rammohun had come in contact with Muslim scholars during the formative period of his life. This enabled him to imbibe some kind of rationalism inherent in Islamic social thought without, however, accepting the orthodoxy of Islamic religious dogma. Similarly, although he had acquired a profound knowledge of Hindu religious scriptures, the critical outlook which he had developed led him to refuse to accept what appeared to be the irrational aspects of Hindu religion. In fact, a comparative study of Islamic and Hindu religious scriptures and acquaintance with the works of the Sufi mystic poets of Persia, together with a knowledge of Aristotelian logic learnt through the Arabic medium, had enabled him at an early age to develop a somewhat revolutionary approach towards the traditional religions. In 1804-5 Rammohun published a remarkable tract entitled *Tuhfat-ul Muwahhidin* (A Gift to Deists) which was published from Murshidabad where he was probably living at that time, it was written in Persian but its preface was in Arabic; so was its title. In this work Rammohun not only denounced traditional Hindus worship of idols, but made the bold assertion that "falsehood is common to all religions without distinction". He declared that the realization of the existence of one "Supreme Being" could attain by individuals without instruction or guidance from any one.

Between 1804 and 1814 Rammohun had acquired sufficient knowledge of English, and through the medium of this language was able to be acquainted with Europeans liberal thought. He was particularly impressed by the Utilitarian philosophy of his contemporary English philosopher Jeremy Bentham who became his friend and admirer. Rammohun also came in close contact with some English officials and merchants resident in Calcutta who held liberal views and advocated free trade. Rammohun's bold and unorthodox ideas alienated him from Hindu society. Even his parents denounced him.

By the middle of 1814 Rammohun settled down in Calcutta and assumed the role of a religious and social reformer. His attitude, however, was cautious. He did not wish to break away from Hinduism but to reform it from within. Rammohun had studied the *vedas* and other ancient Hindu religious scriptures with an open mind and was convinced that ancient Hindu religion was essentially monotheistic but had been corrupted by the introduction of idolatry during subsequent ages. His mission was therefore to call upon his countrymen to discard idolatry and worship - One True God. Through various means Rammohun sought to create a climate of opinion favourable for reforms. He adopted various technique to achieve his end e.g. (i) propagating his views

though private and informal conversation and discussions for which he formed a group in 1815 called *Atmiya Sabha*; (ii) writing pamphlets or tracts on specified social and religious issues; (iii) publication of journals and newspapers; and finally; and (iv) the establishment of a religious association – the *Brahmo Sabha* (later *Samaj*) in 1828. Rammohun's unorthodox views on religion involved him in bitter controversy with Christian missionaries. Rammohun did not believe in the divinity of Christ. He believed that Jesus Christ was a great human being whose moral percepts should be followed by all mankind.

Rammohun, however, never broke away from Hinduism. His *Brahmo Samaj* only became and remained a sect of Hinduism. Rammohun was in fact, a practical reformer. He seemed to have realized that only by working from within Hindu society could he hoped to exercise some influence on the Hindu community.

As a religious reformer Rammohun sought to reconstruct the Hindu religious system in accordance with contemporary needs and in the light of contemporary criticism. The influence of Islam and Christianity on his religious thought was undeniable. As Pandit Sivnath Sastri, a noted *Brahmo Samaj* leader noted, "Rammohun derived his ideas on spiritual side from Hindu sources; but his passion far Unitarianism was derived from Muhammadanism and many of his moral ideas he got from precepts of Jesus" (*History of Brahmo Samaj* – P-49).

After the death of Rammohun Roy in England in 1833 the movement for religious reform which he had initiated received a setback. But after a few years the work was taken up by Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905) son of Rammohun's close friend and associate Dwarkanath Tagore (1794-1846). Under Debendranath's leadership the *Brahmo Samaj* movement assumed a new dimension and character. He established a society called *Tatta Bodhini Sabha* in 1839 which aimed at extensive propagation of the new creed. He also began to publish a newspaper called *Tatta bodhini Patrika* which, while propagating this new faith, also advocated the cause of social reform and denounced social injustice in any form. During this period there was a mounting Christian missionary propaganda offensive against Hinduism. The infallibility of the *Vedas* began to be questioned by the radical section of the *Brahmo samaj* amongst whom the most prominent was Akshay Kumar Datta (1820-1886). Hitherto, Vedic infallibility had been regarded as the essential part of *Brahmo* religious creed. Around 1847 the *Brahmo* leaders after a thorough scrutiny were convinced that the doctrine of Vedic infallibility was no longer tenable. Hence an attempt was made to reconstruct the *Brahmo* religious creed based on selected passages of the *Upanishads* which contained monotheistic ideas. The revised doctrines of the *Brahmo Samaj* was published in 1850 in the form of a book called *Brahmo Dharma* or Religion of the worshippers of One True God. It is to be noted that though the *Vedas* were repudiated, the essential Hindu character of the *Brahmo* movement was retained.

Debendranath Tagore infused new life into the *Brahmo Samaj*, which had become somewhat moribund after the death of Rammohun Roy. The movement

became much more broad-based under the dynamic leadership of Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-1884). He had joined the Samaj in 1857 and within a year became the right hand man of Debendranath. But differences arose between the two chiefly centring round observation of caste rules and social reforms. While Debendranath Tagore's approach was somewhat conservative, Keshab Chandra Sen advocated complete abolition of caste distinctions and actively promoted the cause of social reforms, particularly the movement for female education and emancipation. In 1868 Keshab Chandra Sen formed a new organisation called *The Brahmo Samaj of India*. The other organisation led by Debendranath came to be known as *Adi Brahmo Samaj* (original *Brahmo Samaj*). Keshab through his lecture tours of Bombay, Madras and other parts of India spread the message of the *Brahmo Samaj* throughout the greater part of India. He also strongly advocated the cause of social reform. He condemned the caste system and advocated its abolition. He also upheld, the cause of female education and emancipation. It was chiefly at his initiative that the Civil Marriage Act was passed in 1872. It provided for performance of secular marriage without religious rites. The Act also made monogamy obligatory and fixed the minimum age of bride and bridegroom at 14 and 18 respectively.

Keshab Sen redefined the *Brahmo* religious creed introducing certain new elements. He sought to imbibe the essence of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam and produce a grand synthesis. He sincerely believed that "all religions are true". He, however, inculcated the popular Hindu conception of *Bhakti* or devotional fervour in his religious practice and stressed the doctrine of 'God in conscience'. Finally, his religious ideas took some definite shape when in January 1880 he proclaimed his new religious creed called *Navavidhan* or the "New Dispensation". It advocated "faith in a living God and the several religions of the world as interpretations diverse and fragmentary, but mutually complementary rather than exclusive."

However, certain ideas and actions of Keshab Chandra Sen caused misgivings among his followers particularly the young and radical elements. They disliked his zealous profession of loyalty to British Government and also resented his conduct relating to the marriage of his daughter to the Raja of Cooch Bihar. Both the bride and bridegroom were minor and the marriage ceremony was performed by Brahmin priests according to orthodox Hindu rites. This was a flagrant violation of the profession and practice of the *Brahmo Samaj*. They also resented Keshab's authoritarian and irrational behaviour. Eventually led by Sivnath Sastri (1847-1918) and Ananda Mohan Bose (1847-1906) these radical elements broke away from Keshab Sen's Samaj and founded the *Sadharan Brahmo Samaj* in 1878. It framed a constitution based on adult franchise and proclaimed its desire to promote the creation of a universal religion. Despite its lofty pretensions the *Brahmo* movement did not make much headway and began to lose its force. This was so chiefly because renascent Hinduism of the late

nineteenth century had began to absorb most of the religious and social ideas of the *Brahmo Samaj* movement.

Inspired by the *Brahmo* movement in Bengal, some Hindu reformers established *Prarthana Samaj* in Bombay and Madras.

**Rise of Hindu Revivalist Movement:** While the above movements were to a large extent inspired by western liberal ideas and were reformist and forward-looking, a different kind of religious movement appeared in 1870s, which was practically a kind of counter-reformation and backward-looking. The most important of such a movement was the *Arya Samaj* founded in 1875 by Swami Daynanda Saraswati (1824-1883). The *Arya Samaj* like the *Brahmo Samaj* denounced idolatry and advocated the worship of one Supreme Being. It also rejected the caste system prevalent in Hindu society. But it upheld the *Vedas* as infallible. Dayananda unlike Rammohun had no understanding of western knowledge and western civilization. He was a militant champion of Hinduism and was ready to defend it in every quarter.

One important feature of the *Arya Samaj* was that it laid stress on missionary propaganda mainly directed towards those who, it believed, either themselves or their forefathers, had been forced to embrace Islam or Christianity. For such people who wished to be reconverted to Hinduism the *Arya Samaj* prescribed a simple process of *Suddhi* or purification. This was strongly resented particularly by Muslims and it greatly accentuated communal bitterness and antagonism in India. In later years some Indian Muslim religious leaders resorted to *Tabligh* and *Tanzim* movements with a view to countering the missionary work of the *Arya Samaj*. The *Arya Samaj* also took great interest in promoting social welfare and education. It endeavoured to spread English education chiefly out of material considerations. Care was taken not to allow western ideas to pollute Hindu minds; Vedic teachings were to be incorporated with English education. A number of Dayananda Anglo-Vedic (DAV) Schools and Colleges were established in different cities in western India.

During the last decade of the nineteenth century a new religious movement associated with the *Rama Krishna Mission* gave a great impetus to the cause of Hindu revivalism. The Mission was established by Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) whose former name was Narendranath Datta. Narendranath belonged to a middle class Hindu Kayastha family of Calcutta and had received a good English education. In his early youth he had come under the spell of Ramakrishna Paramahamsha (c. 1836-1886), a religious teacher whose former name was Gadadhar Chattopadhyaya and who served for sometime as a priest in the temple of the Hindu Goddess Kali at Dakshineswar near Calcutta. Ramakrishna was a strong believer in the worship of idols which he regarded as necessary symbols through which God's existence could be realized. He also preached the doctrine of unity of faiths maintaining that there were different roads to reach God. Ramakrishna did not have any formal education and was

probably illiterate, but he had a deep understanding of Hindu religious systems particularly the Vedanta. By his personal magnetism and charm he was able to win the devotion of a large number of educated Hindus who sought from him some kind of spiritual solace.

Swami Vivekananda carried the message of his master far and near. Through his speeches and writings he strongly defended the Hindu religion against attack from every quarter. In 1893 he went to the United States and attended the session of the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago. In his address to the Parliament he extolled the virtues of Hinduism and pointed out that while the spread of Christianity and Islam was accompanied by bloodshed and violence the Hindu religion was based on "the laws of love". Vivekananada decried western civilization as grossly materialistic and immoral. Nevertheless, he exhorted his countrymen to acquire western education and adopt western science and technology for material advancement. The Ramakrishna Mission which Vivekananda established in 1887 was a new monastic order. The Mission became involved not only in religious propaganda; it undertook various kinds of educational and social welfare programmes such as building and maintaining schools, colleges, orphanages and hospitals. The Ramakrishna Mission became an effective instrument of the Hindu Counter Reformation in India.

**Theosophical Society:** Paradoxical as it may appear, the cause of Hindu revivalism received a fresh impetus from a western source. At the joint initiative of a Russian lady H.P. Blavatsky (1831-91) and an American gentleman H.S. Olcott (1832-1907), the Theosophical Society was established in New York in 1875 with the following threefold object: (i) to establish a nucleus of a universal fraternity of mankind; (ii) to promote the comparative study of ancient religions, and (iii) to investigate the laws of nature and the mysteries of life. Blavatsky and Olcott were greatly influenced by Hindu and Buddhist thought. They came to India in 1882 and established their headquarters at Adyar near Madras. The Theosophical Society soon gained a number of adherents in India mostly coming from the English-educated Hindu middle class. The Society had gradually assumed a purely Hindu character particularly when in 1907 Mrs. Annie Besant (1847-1933) became its President. Born in London, Anne Besant was in her early life a free thinker and rationalist. Later, however, she was drawn to mysticism and became an ardent supporter of the theosophical cause. She came to India and became actively involved with the Theosophical Society and also with Indian National Congress. She firmly believed that India could regain her lost greatness through revival of ancient religious institutions. In fact, Annie Besant gave Hinduism a new intellectual foundation. But because of its non-Indian and non-Hindu origin, the Theosophical Society could not make much headway in India.

**Hindu Social Reform Movements:** Social reform movements in India in the nineteenth century were closely linked with the movements for religious reform and the development of education. This was particularly true of Hindu society.

Men like Rammohun Roy and Keshab Chandra Sen were not merely religious reformers and educationists; they were also great advocates of social reform. They believed that religious reform and educational development should be accompanied by removal of social abuses. There were many social evils in nineteenth century Hindu society. The work of the liberal-mind Hindu reformers was greatly facilitated by the efforts of the Christian missionaries particularly the Baptist missionaries of Serampore. These missionaries carried on incessant agitation both in England and India against such dreadful practices as *Sati* and female infanticide and urged the government to suppress these through legislation. There was another outside force which also worked in favour of social reform in India. This was the influence of English Utilitarian philosophers on the Government of the East India Company. In fact, evangelical i.e. Christian missionary, as well as Utilitarian influences were combined in formulating Lord William Bentinck's reforms both social and educational.

But no reform in India was possible unless a climate of opinion in favour of reform had been created by Indians themselves. The impact of English education and Christian missionary propaganda produced a new sense of awareness amongst many Indians regarding the necessity for change and reform in Indian society.

The most glaring and atrocious social abuse in Hindu Society was what came to be known as *Sati* or the practice of Hindu widow burning herself to death with the dead body of her husband. The custom had existed from ancient times though it was not universally practised. It would seem that there were always certain Brahmin priests who had a vested interest in perpetuating the custom. Few dared to question whether *Sati* was an integral part of Hindu religious law. Sometimes material considerations prompted the performance of *Sati*. There were cases of unfortunate widows being encouraged by unscrupulous relations to perform *Sati* so that they could get hold of their property.

Till Lord William Bentinck assumed the office of Governor General of India in 1828, the Government of the East India Company continued to tolerate *Sati* in accordance with its declared policy of non-interference with regard to Indian religion and society. But by the 1820's public opinion in both Britain and India had been aroused against the revolting practice. While the Christian missionaries through their various publications were carrying on incessant propaganda in favour of its abolition, and the English officials out of humanitarian considerations were trying to restrain it, the great Indian reformer Rammohun Roy took up the cause and began to assert boldly through his writings that Hindu religious scriptures did not recognise *Sati* as obligatory for a widow. Quoting extensively from Manu and other Hindu religious authorities he pointed out that they all recommended a widow to lead a life of abstinence and piety rather than destroy herself physically. Rammohun also emphasized the need for improving the condition of Hindu women in general.

The Governor General Lord William Bentinck, once he was convinced that the abolition of *Sati* by legislation would not cause any serious trouble and that Indian public in general would welcome it, decided to take action. In December 1829 a regulation (Registration XVII) was passed by the Governor-General-in-Council, declaring *Sati* "illegal and punishable by the criminal courts". There was, however, a mild protest from section of conservative Hindus against this legislation. But the government ignored it and there was no instance of any popular agitation against the government on this issue.

Another evil practice no less dreadful than *Sati* was female infanticide i.e. murder of infants. There was no religious sanction behind this inhuman practice. It grew out of some peculiar social and economic causes. This practice was prevalent among the poorer sections of the Hindu community. Marriage of girls involved considerable expenditure. In order to avoid this infant girls were killed secretly soon after birth. This practice existed among certain Hindu tribes in northern India. In Bengal there was a practice that if a woman did not have any child for a considerable period of time after marriage, she took the vow that if blessed with two children, one of them would be thrown into the Ganges as a present to the river-goddess. This evil practice was prohibited in British India by a legislation passed by Lord Wellesley in 1802.

While the abolition of *Sati* saved the Hindu widow from a cruel death, her lot continued to remain miserable because Hindu society would not allow a widow to re-marry. Since childhood-marriage was common in India, there were a considerable number of child widows who were forced to lead an extremely austere life at the mercy of their relatives. Christian missionaries as well as Hindu reformers like Rammohun Roy and others had sought to draw public attention to the plight of Hindu widows. A Movement was set on foot for the re-marriage of widows. By 1855 the cause of widow re-marriage was taken up in earnest by the great Sanskrit scholar, Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891). He wrote a series of pamphlets supporting the movement for the re-marriage of widows. To set an example he even permitted his son to marry a widow. Vidyasager's efforts were crowned with success. In July 1856 the Government of Lord Dalhousie passed the Hindu Widow's Re-marriage Act (Act XV of 1856). But social prejudice dies hard. While re-marriage of widows was made legal, few widows could take advantage of the new law. Hindu women also continued to suffer from certain major disabilities. They could not inherit property. Hindu marriage law also prohibited divorce.

The social evils which existed in India in the nineteenth century were mostly though not all removed through public agitation carried on by Christian missionaries and Indian reformers and finally through legislation enacted by the Government.

During the last decade of the nineteenth century with the rise of nationalism and Hindu revivalist movement, the fervour for social reform seems to have

declined. Thus the enactment of a useful legislation, namely the Age of Consent Bill of 1891 which prohibited the consummation of marriage before the wife had reached the age of twelve, was bitterly opposed by Hindu nationalist leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1857-1920). His contention was that a foreign government had no right to enact a law which would affect the social and religious practices of the Hindus.

One serious limitation or shortcoming of the nineteenth century social reform movements was that no organised attempt was made to abolish the caste system and what came to be known as untouchability. The traditional structure of Hindu society therefore remained unaltered.

**Muslim Religious reform Movements:** We have already mentioned the religious ferment in Indian Islam caused by the movement initiated by a great Muslim scholar Shah Waliullah of Delhi (c. 1703 – 1762) during the later part of the eighteenth century. The decline and disintegration of the Muslim paramountcy in India, and the emergence of such non-Muslim powers as the Marathas, the Sikhs and the British in the eighteen-century, caused dismay in the minds of Muslim theologians like Waliullah. In Islam politics and religion are closely linked. When political authority declines religious authority asserts itself to uphold Islam against its enemies. Shah Waliullah's response to the challenge which Islam in India faced in the eighteenth century was both political and intellectual. When the Marathas were about to establish themselves as the paramount power in northern India. Shah Waliullah did not hesitate to write a letter to the Afghan ruler Ahmed Shah Abdali to invade India and restore Muslim supremacy. But while the Marathas were crushed at the third battle of Panipat (1761), Muslim power could not be restored. The Sikhs emerged as the most formidable and ruthless enemy of the Muslims in the north - west, while in other parts of India British power steadily increased. The intellectual aspects of Shah Waliullah's movement were represented by a renewed emphasis on *Ijtihad* or reasoned reconstruction. This is considered as his main contribution to modernist, speculative thinking in Muslim India. Waliullah brought in "reason and argument" to redefine and reinterpret Islam in the light of the contemporary situation. In 1743 Waliullah founded a school at Delhi, where the Qur'an and Hadith were taught under his personal direction. In the face of bitter opposition of the orthodox ulama he translated the Qur'an into Persian and encouraged his son Shah Rafi al-din to translate it into Urdu. Waliullah's aims was "primarily to convey the word of God in translation to the average educated Muslim and secondarily to break the monopoly of the theologian, who had become petty minded, far too pre-occupied with the externalities of ritual, converting himself into the Muslim counterpart of the Hindu Brahmin" (*Aziz Ahmed*).

But "the speculative thinking" of Shah Waliullah did not or could not go very far. It represented rather an uneasy compromise between reason and faith, between rationality and dogma. This venture was not new in Islam. It had been

attempted earlier in the ninth century by the Arab Philosophers known as *Mutazilas*. Shah Waliullah's intellectualism may be compared with that of late medieval Christian theologian St. Thomas Aquinas, who sought to present Christian dogma in an Aristotelian framework.

The two contradictory aspects which were inherent in Shah Waliullah's thought, namely, conservative and revivalist on the one hand, and reformist and modern on the other, largely influenced Muslim religious movements in India in the nineteenth century. Thus, Sayyid Ahmed of Rae Barely (1786-1831) who was a disciple of Shah Abdul Aziz the son and spiritual successor of Shah Waliullah started a movement during the early decades of the nineteenth century for the regeneration of Islam in India. The political aspect of his movement was war against the Sikhs, who under Ranjit Singh had established a powerful kingdom in the Punjab.

After the collapse of the Maratha power by 1818, there remained two non-Muslim powers in India, namely, the Sikhs and the British. Realizing that it was not expedient to fight two enemies simultaneously Sayyid Ahmed resolved to turn against the Sikhs first. He proclaimed a *jihad* or holy war against Ranjit Singh, and sought the alliance of Muslim chiefs of Sind and Afghanistan. Sayyid Ahmed's aim was to establish an Islamic state in the north-west India, and his army of crusaders were recruited from all parts of India. But the holy war ended in a tragic failure. Sayyid Ahmed's position became greatly weakened because of dissension within his ranks. The independent spirited Pathan tribal chiefs, who had supported him in the war against the Sikhs out of motives purely mundane, strongly resented the imam's (i.e. Sayyid Ahmed's) puritanical zeal, particularly the attempt to establish an Islamic social order by doing away with tribal and local customs and prejudices. At the battle of Balakot which took place in May 1831, Sayyid Ahmed's forces were routed by the Sikhs and he along with a large number of his followers were killed. Sayyid Ahmed's adherents who came to be known as Indian *Wahhabis* were now leaderless and the entire movement was thrown out of gear. But the movement did not die out. Although the *jihad* against the Sikhs had failed, its spirit survived amongst the remaining followers of the deceased leader. After the Punjab was conquered by the British the animosity was directed against them. India under British rule was described as *Dar-ul-harb*. The Indians *Wahhabis* became implacable enemies of the British and were actively involved in the great revolt (mutiny) of 1857. This spirit survived till the early decades of the twentieth century and inspired the anti British *khilafat* movement.

The religious and social aspects of the movement of Sayyid Ahmed were to purge Indian Muslim society of elements borrowed or adapted from Hinduism, and to establish a society which would conform to the practices as they existed in the days of prophet Muhammad in Arabia. In fact, Sayyid Ahmed called the order he had founded as *Tariqa-i-Muhammadiya* or the way of Muhammad.

Sayyid Ahmed's movement for Islamic revivalism had inspired similar movements in Bengal. The Bengal movements through primarily religious, had economic and agrarian overtones because they largely grew out of the economic grievances of the Bengal peasantry against landlords and moneylenders mostly Hindu and also against European indigo planters.

Sayyid Ahmed had made several visits to Calcutta in 1820s and had many disciples among Bengali Muslims. One of these was Meer Nisar Ali, commonly known as Titu Mir an inhabitant of a village near Barasat in West Bengal. Inspired by Sayyid Ahmed's religious ideas, Titu Mir started a movement to purge Bengali Muslim society of practices which he considered un-Islamic. In dress, manners and customs the Bengali Muslims were almost indistinguishable from the Hindus. Their language was also the same. Titu's movement aimed at giving a distinctive Islamic and non-Hindu character to Bengali Muslim society. The oppression by Hindu zamindars and indigo planters led Titu and his followers to indulge in communal violence and plundering raids. In November 1831 Titu Mir's uprising was crushed in an encounter near Barasat with the East India Company's government forces, and Titu and some of his followers were killed. Many of his supporters were arrested, tried and punished. It should, however, be noted that Titu Mir's movement was confined to the lower order of Muslim society.

A similar movement on a more widespread scale stirred the rural population in Eastern Bengal. It was started by Haji Shariatullah, also a man of humble origin. Because of its predominantly religious character, it came to be known as *Faraidi* (from *fard* i.e. religious obligation) movement, a movement for restoration of Islamic practices as they had existed in the days of the Prophet. But the movement soon assumed the character of an agrarian revolt. Haji Shariatullah's disciples were mostly drawn from the lower classes, such as cultivators, weavers and oil-grinders. Under Shariatullah's son Dudu Miyan, the movement became very organized and assumed the character of a peasant war against the oppressive zamindars, indigo planters and their agents. It is, again, significant that the appeal of the Faraidis was practically ineffective in towns like Dhaka, Comilla and Chittagong where the Muslim upper class had considerable influence, and that "no man of consequence or wealth was known to have become a *Faraidi* follower" (*A.R. Mallick*).

The Muslim religious movements in upper India during the early part of the nineteenth century were led by men who came from an urban background and had connections with certain influential sections of the Muslim feudal gentry such as the *Amir of Tonk* and the Pathan chiefs. The leaders were also well-versed in Islamic theology and learning. The Bengal movements, on the other hand, were wholly confined to the rural areas and their leadership came from rural stock. Most of these leaders were not quite literate. Again, while the upper Indian movements were primarily religious and political, the Bengal movements had

both a religious and an agrarian character. They seem to have inspired latter-day peasant uprisings in Bengal.

After 1857 there was a marked change in the Muslim attitude towards British rule. There was a growing realization that the British rule had come to stay, and therefore, it would be wise policy to cultivate British patronage. The British Indians government was also anxious to conciliate the Muslim subjects who were hitherto regarded as "a persistently belligerent class" and "a permanent danger to the Indian empire" (*W.W.Hunter*). Muslim religious leaders were persuaded to issue *fatwas* (religious proclamations) in favour of British rule in India. The most effective *fatwa* was issued by Maulvi Karamat Ali of Jaunpur (d. 1873). At a meeting of the Mohammedan Literary Society held in Calcutta on 23 November 1870, he declared that British India was *Dar-ul-Islam* since the government had allowed the Muslims free exercise of their religion, and as such it would be unlawful and irreligious to preach *jihad* (holy war) against the ruling power. The Bengali Muslim leader Abdul Latif (1828-1893) who had founded the Mohammadan Literary Society in 1863 with the chief objective of promoting English education among Muslims, found his task seriously hampered because of the anti-British activities of a section of orthodox Muslims, the so-called Wahhabis. In order to neutralize their activities, Abdul Latif enlisted the support of theologians like Maulvi Keramat Ali who had considerable following in Bihar and Bengal. Karamat Ali, like Sayyid Ahmed of Rae Bereli, was a disciple of Shah Abdul Aziz, son of Shah Waliullah, and had supported the religious and social aspects of Sayyid Ahmed's puritanical movement. But he strongly differed from the *Wahhabis* regarding attitude to British rule. After the British conquest of the Punjab (1848), the followers of Sayyid Ahmed had turned against the British and were actively involved in the great uprising of 1857. Karamat Ali, however, was always loyal to the East India Company's government. He was a strong supporter of Abdul Latif's educational movement and sought to keep politics out of religion. Karamat Ali, however, was an orthodox reformer and had a considerable number of followers in the rural areas of Bengal.

While the fundamentalist and revivalist aspect of Shah Waliullah's religious thought was reflected in the movement of Sayyid Ahmed and his followers, the reformist and what may be called "modernist" aspect of Waliullah's thought found expressions in the ideas and activities of three outstanding Muslim leaders, namely, Sayyid Ahmed Khan (1817-1898), Syed Amir Ali (1847-1928) and Delwar Hussain Ahmed (1840-1913). They were not, however, religious leaders. Sayyid Ahmed Khan devoted his life to the cause of promoting Western education among the Muslim community. Syed Amir Ali's energies were directed towards the political development of the Muslims. While Delwar Hussain Ahmed's aim was to promote the intellectual and social development of the Muslims community. All of them made significant contribution towards the reinterpretation of Islam in the light of the challenge it faced in the late

nineteenth century. In an age which saw remarkable growth of scientific knowledge and the development of liberal thought, it was considered necessary to prove that Islam was not opposed to science and progress. Syed Ahmed Khan first established a Translation Society in 1869 at Ghazipur where he was posted as a government official. Through this society quite a large number of books and articles on various subjects were translated from English into Urdu, which was the vernacular of the Muslims of northern India. Later he established at Aligarh the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental School in 1874 which was turned into a College in 1878. It became the focal point of the Muslim renaissance in India. In 1878 Syed Ahmed Khan also started working on his famous Urdu commentary of the Qur'an and attempted to give a rationalistic interpretation of it. He maintained that there was no contradiction between the word of God and the work of God i.e. nature. Like Rammohun Roy, Syed Ahmed Khan believed that religious doctrines should be examined by reason and commonsense and reevaluated in the light of contemporary knowledge and requirements. Syed Ahmed's younger contemporary Syed Amir Ali, following in the of former's footsteps, sought to reinterpret Islam in accordance with the nineteenth century Western liberal and rationalist spirit. He boldly declared that Muslims should exercise their right of independent judgement (*Ijtihad*) and interpret Islam in the light of the modern situation and modern needs rather than blindly follow the interpretations and dictates of the *Imams*, who lived in the ninth century. Amir Ali also did not accept the traditional Muslim belief which held that the Qur'an should be read only in Arabic or that the prayer (*namaz*) should be offered only in that language. "The reformation of Islam", observed Amir Ali's, "will begin when once it is recognized that divine words rendered into any language retain their divine character, that devotions offered in any tongue are acceptable to God" (*The Spirit of Islam*, p. 186). Yet another Muslim leader Delwar Hussain Ahmed went a step further and emphasized the need to modify or even abolish certain institutions and practices of Islam which were not directly connected with purely religious faith. He maintained that the material needs of a changing society could not be met by static religious laws. (Sultan J. Salik ed. *Muslim modernism in Bengal: selected writings of Delawar Hossain Ahmed Meerza 1840 – 1913*, Dhaka 1980, p. 20).

Such unorthodox and radical views on Islam, while they produced a great commotion in Muslim society, did not exercise much influence upon it. Since Sayyid Ahmed Khan, Syed Amir Ali and Delwar Hussain Ahmed held high positions under the British government they were looked upon as learned heretics whose ideas might be tolerated but need not be followed. Again, Syed Amir Ali and Delwar Hossain wrote exclusively in English, a language very few Muslims were familiar with. Despite its outward modernism, Muslim society has remained basically conservative.

We may now refer to some extreme conservative movements in Islam which were reactions to Muslim modernism of late nineteenth century. A sections of

orthodox *ulama* led by Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanawtawi (d. 1880) founded a school called *Dar-ul-Ulum* at Deoband (U.P.), the chief object of which was to promote traditional Islamic learning. In their religious and political views, the teachers of the *Deoband* school were puritanical and fundamentalist, and they had imbibed the anti-British attitude of the *Wahhabis*. They opposed not only Sayyid Ahmed Khan's modernism in religious thought; they were vehemently critical of his profession of loyalty to British rule. When the Indian National Congress was established in 1885 Sayyid Ahmed Khan took a strong stand against it and advised the Muslims not to join it. But the *Deobandi Maulanas* did not hesitate to support the Congress declaring that in worldly matters cooperation with the Hindus was permissible provided it did not violate the basic principles of Islam. (Z.H.Faruqi, *The Deoband School and the Demand for Pakistan* p.23).

Yet another example of extreme reactionary movement in Indian Islam was the *Ahl-i-Hadith* (people of the apostolic tradition). Its chief exponent was Siddiq Hassan Khan who had married into princely family of Bhopal, and assumed the title of Nawab. The followers of this group rejected the four recognized schools of canon law, namely *Hanafi*, *Sha'fi*, *Maliki* and *Hanbali* (8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D.) and asserted that the Qur'an and the Tradition (*Sunnah*) associated with the life of the Prophet were the only worthy guide for the true Muslims. This sect had its followers in upper India, Bihar and Bengal.

Between the modernism of Sayyid Ahmed Khan on the one hand, and the orthodoxy and revivalism of the Deoband School and *Ahl-i-Hadith* on the other, there was yet another movement unique in character and content. This was the Ahmadiya movement founded by a Punjabi Muslim Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835?-1908) of Quadian, a small town in East Punjab (India). He belonged to a land - owning family and had received a good traditional education. In 1889 he made the startling claim that he was the *Mahdi* or Messiah whose appearance he claimed had been predicted in both the Bible and the Qur'an, for the restoration of the true religion. He regarded himself as the *Mujaddid* that is, renewer of faith and *nabi*, a God - inspired teacher, whose mission was to give a correct interpretation of Islam in the context of contemporary situation. He sought to maintain the view that Islam was a universal religion and that he himself personified this universalism by claiming that he was an *avatar*, or incarnation of Krishna and also appeared in the likeness of Jesus Christ. According to him Jesus did not die on the Cross but had escaped and traveled to India and finally died a natural death in Kashmir. He also asserted that Guru Nanak was a Muslim.

The remarkable thing about Ghulam Ahmad was that unlike other Muslim religious reformers, he sought to make a comparative study of different religions in order of course to prove that Islam, as he interpreted it, was the true universal religion. In this respect his position was different from a similar Persian reformer, Mirza Hussain Ali (1817-1892) known as Baha-Allah whose followers had broken

away from Islam to form a new eclectic religion (Bahaism). Mirza Ghulam Ahmed and his followers were determined to remain Muslim although the orthodox Muslim community disowned them and denounced them as heretics. In the Islamic Republic of Pakistan the Ahmadiyas have been declared a non-Muslim community after prolonged agitation of orthodox Muslims organized by the *Jamat-i-Islami*. Nevertheless, the *Ahmediyas* became a vigorous community and their missionaries spread Islam in Africa. They were also active in Europe and America.

**Muslim Social reform Movements:** During the nineteenth century no movement for major social reform took place in Indian Muslim society. Sayyid Ahmed of Rae Bereli's *Tariqa-i-Muhammadiya* or the so-called *Wahhabi* movement in northern India and the *Faraidi* movement in Bengal though avowedly religious, did have a programme of social reconstruction. They aimed at taking back the nineteenth century Indian Muslim society to conditions which existed in seventh century Arabia. Since most of the Indian Muslims were of indigenous origin having been converted from Hinduism. Muslim orthodox religious leaders of the nineteenth century like Sayyid Ahmed of Rae Bereli, Karamat Ali of Jaunpur and Haji Shariatullah of Faridpur, actively propagated purging Muslim society of non-Muslim social usages and customs. But their success was only partial. They did, however, promote a movement for self-identification of the Muslims as a distinct and separate community in India and encouraged the growth of religious and social communalism which later, in the twentieth century, became a powerful factor. Even "modernist" Muslim reformers like Nawab Abdul Latif and Sir Syed Ahmed Khan failed to initiate or support a movement for the abolition of *purdah* and polygamy which were the major social evils of the Muslim society. In fact, Muslim society in general has remained basically conservative.

### Recommended Reading

1. Sirajul Islam, ed. - *History of Bangladesh*, Vol. 3, Chapters 8 & 9 (Dhaka, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh 1992).
2. A F.Salahuddin Ahmed - *Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal 1818-1835* (Leiden, E.J. Brill 1965).
3. A.F.Salahuddin Ahmed - *Bangladesh: Tradition and Transformation* (Dhaka, University Press Ltd. 1987).
4. J.N. Farquhar - *Modern Religious Movements in India* (New York 1915).
5. A.R. Mallick - *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal 1757-1856* (Dhaka, Asiatic Society of Pakistan 1961).
6. Aziz Ahmad - *Studies in Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan* (Oxford 1967).
7. W.C. Smith - *Modern Islam in India* (London, Victor Gollancz 1946).
8. N.S. Base, - *The Indian Arrakening and Bengal* (Calcutta 1960).
9. David Kopf, - *British Orientation and Bengal Renaissance*.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Evolution of Political Ideas and Movements in the Nineteenth Century

A F Salahuddin Ahmed

The nineteenth century is a landmark in the history of Bengal. It was in this century that Bengal witnessed the beginning of modernization. For Bengal the nineteenth century is important for another reason. It was during this century that the concept of a distinct Bengali nation had begun to take shape. Before the nineteenth century this distinct Bengali identity was not so consciously upheld. In former times Bengal was a province of the Mughal empire. When that empire collapsed in the eighteenth century, a new independent kingdom arose in the eastern region of the subcontinent with Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and part of Assam. Those who held political power in this new kingdom were not sons of this soil. They were descendants of non-Bengali Muslim immigrants. Thus Nawabs Alivardi Khan and Sirajuddaula or Mir Jafar and Mir Qasim could not be called Bengalis. In fact, what we know as patriotism was little understood in those days nor was there any existence of what we call national feeling or nationalism.

Before the establishment of English rule in the later part of the eighteenth century the form of government which was prevalent in this country was what may be termed unrestrained despotism. It was the universally accepted form of government and no one ever questioned its legality. The modern concept of government based on public opinion was inconceivable in those days. In fact, it was only after the establishment of British rule and as an indirect result of it that what we know as political consciousness began to develop in this country. The establishment of British paramountcy in this region did not just mean the establishment of a foreign political dominion; it was through the medium of this foreign rule that this country came in contact with the Western world – a world which was itself passing through revolutionary transformation.

Some of the new ideas and institutions which had developed in Europe through a process of history were introduced into this subcontinent with the result that far reaching changes began to take place in the political, social and economic life of the people.

In fact, the development of political consciousness in this country during the nineteenth century was largely influenced by the characteristic features of the English rule. In conducting the administration of India the East India Company followed the age-old Indian tradition of despotism. The British Viceroy Lord Dufferin (1884-88) had characterised British administration in India as "strong and uncompromising despotism."<sup>1</sup> But it was a despotism of a different kind. The despotism which had existed in this country before the advent of the British rule was what may be called irresponsible despotism based largely on the whims of individual monarchs. The despotism of the East India Company's government was different in this sense that though it was not responsible to the Indian people, it was responsible to the British Parliament for all its actions both commercial and political. In 1858 the British Parliament passed an Act by which the Company's rule was terminated and sovereign authority over the whole region passed to the British crown.

The nineteenth century was an age of transition. It was during this period that the people of this region began to feel the impact of Western civilization. The process of westernisation, however, was taking place at a slow pace. It was the inevitable result of the British rule and marked the beginning of widespread and far-reaching changes. Though the English rulers of India did not make any deliberate attempt to establish a parliamentary system of government in India, English ideas and institutions began to be introduced into this country in course of time and profoundly affected the social and political outlook of the people. Due to various reasons this process was accelerated in the nineteenth century. After the establishment of British rule there was a phenomenal development of commercial activities particularly in Bengal which led to the rise of a new commercial class. Out of this class was born a new educated middle class which was deeply affected by Western civilisation. In this connection we may mention the movement of the English free-traders against the monopoly of the East India Company during the early decades of its rule. This movement indirectly promoted the growth of Western political ideas and institutions in this country. The free traders were demanding that there should not be any restrictions on the worldwide trading opportunities that had opened up after the downfall of Napoleon. A section of liberal-minded Bengali landlords who were involved in commercial activities had joined hands with the English free-traders. They believed that with their collaboration they would be able to invest larger capital in their lands and also bring in European skill and technology. This would not only lead to the development of agriculture and industry of the country but

<sup>1</sup>. See A. C. Banerjee (ed.), Indian Constitutional Documents, (Calcutta 1946), Vol. 2, 54.

would also promote their own enrichment. On the other hand, those English merchants who had been agitating against the trade monopoly of the East India Company and were advocates of free trade were also eager to win the friendship of the Indian merchants. They encouraged the people of this country to express their views publicly on the evils of the Company's rule. They were radical in their political outlook and they tried to propagate their ideas in this country.<sup>2</sup> There were two other factors which also promoted the development of political consciousness. One was the rapid spread of modern particularly English education; the second was the publication of newspapers. As a result of these factors what is known in modern times as public opinion began to be expressed and political consciousness also began to grow. It is to be noted that the earliest newspapers of Asia were published in Bengal.<sup>3</sup> These newspapers not only reflected contemporary public opinion, they also helped in moulding it.

The development of political consciousness, however, was a slow process. It began to germinate over a long period of time through peculiar historical circumstances. The growing discontent of the people against British rule helped in arousing political consciousness and encouraged them to be involved in political activities. Of course, the political process and development was to a large extent determined by the character of society and social structure. Even after the establishment of British rule the remnants of the old feudal order had survived. Land ownership was still the badge of social leadership. But the old landed aristocracy whose destiny was inseparably linked with the old Muslim political power was virtually destroyed by the Permanent Settlement (1793). A new class of aristocracy had emerged. A section of moneylenders and merchants who had acquired vast wealth by collaborating with the English had started purchasing landed property and had transformed themselves into a new landowning class. They formed the new aristocracy of the British period. During the early part of the nineteenth century this class stood at the top of the social structure of Bengal. Below them were people engaged in various professions, such as lawyers, teachers, medical practitioners, merchants, clerks employed in government offices and business establishments and small traders. They formed the core of the Bengali middle class. A great deal of social mobility was noticeable among these people coming from varied backgrounds.

It may be noted that the middle class did not occupy a respectable position in our traditional social hierarchy. In fact, this class had mainly developed during British rule and had acquired wealth and prominence through close collaboration with the British administration. A distinctive feature of its social character was that it was composed predominantly of Hindus. It could not be otherwise because the Hindus were the first to learn the English language with great enthusiasm and had accepted without much hesitation the changes that had been brought about as a result of the establishment of British rule. The Hindus were also able to take advantage of and utilise the opportunities that were being opened

up after the establishment of British rule. In comparison, the Muslim attitude was somewhat negative. After they had lost political power they generally began to look upon the British with suspicion. It should be mentioned that the economic basis of the Bengali Muslim society had always remained weak. The social leadership which the Muslims had been enjoying during the long period of Muslim rule was dependent on Muslim political power. Once that power was broken during the middle of the eighteenth century, the social structure it sustained began to crumble. Even then the policy pursued by the English rulers till the beginning of the nineteenth century was not to introduce any internal change or reform in this country and to allow the old economic and social structure to continue as long as possible. Thus the East India Company's government retained with certain modifications the old judicial system and the revenue administration of the Mughals. In fact, as late as 1837 the Mughal court language Persian was being used in judicial business and revenue administration. The East India Company's education policy during the early period of its rule was to promote Oriental learning of the Mughal times. In 1781 at the initiative of Governor-General Warren Hastings the Calcutta Madrassa was established. It was the first educational institution established by the government in this country. In founding the Madrasa Hastings was guided not solely by altruistic consideration. Since Persian was used as official language in the judicial courts and revenue administration, the Company's government needed Persian-trained natives for appointment in the lower rung of the administration. The requisite training was provided in the Calcutta Madrasa. Thus we see that till 1837 the Muslims had been occupying privileged positions under the Company's rule.

Political consciousness in this country began to develop as a result of dissatisfaction with British rule. This dissatisfaction was of various kinds and began to be expressed through various means. In those days what is known as public opinion used to be expressed through such mediums as newspapers and periodicals, associations and public meetings and petitions and prayers addressed to the government functionaries. It should, however, be understood that during the greater part of the nineteenth century public opinion generally meant the opinion of the urban-based upper and the middle classes. Since these classes alone had the capability to provide leadership to the community their influence transcended their class limits and extended throughout the country. The greater part of the population which lived mostly in the villages and largely belonged to the peasantry, were steeped in ignorance and poverty. For centuries they had suffered from oppression and exploitation and consequently had developed a somewhat fatalistic outlook. Nevertheless, they had occasionally manifested their pent up discontent through violent uprisings. Nationalism was still a far cry.

The contribution of Rammohun Roy (1774-1833) toward awakening of political consciousness in this sub-continent was significant. This great religious

and social reformer was deeply influenced by the rationalist and utilitarian ideas of the contemporary English philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1784-1832). Rammohun and his followers were staunch supporters of British rule because they believed that through close association with Britain the people of this country would, in course of time be able to enjoy the same political rights and advantages as those enjoyed by the British people at home. But at the same time they did not hesitate to criticise in strong language the British Government's discriminatory treatment towards Indians. For example, when in 1823 the Acting Governor-General John Adam passed an Act restricting the freedom of the press, Rammohan and some of his friends sent a petition to the Privy Council severely criticising this Act. Furthermore, as a mark of protest against the Governor-General's censorship law he stopped the publication of his Persian language newspaper *Mirat-ul Akhbar*. Similarly, Rammohun along with a number of Hindu and Muslim leaders of this country had through petitions protested against certain discriminatory clauses of the Indian Jury Act of 1826 and also against the Regulation relating to the resumption of rent-free lands.<sup>4</sup> These may be regarded as the early manifestations of the growth of national feeling.

In fact, during the early phase of national consciousness public protest against the discriminatory policy of the foreign rulers was expressed only through petition and prayer. In 1837 the Bengal Landholders Society was established by the zamindars of Bengal to protect their class interests. For a variety of reasons the zamindars were dissatisfied with the East India Company's government. Although the Permanent Settlement of 1793 introduced by Lord Cornwallis had promoted some kind of social stability in Bengal, it did give rise to certain new problems. Firstly, it was a settlement between the zamindars and the English Government. There was no settlement between the zamindars and the tenant-farmers or between the tenant-farmers and the Government. Consequently, there was no improvement in the condition of the tenant-farmers or the peasantry. They continued to suffer from oppression and exploitation of the landholders. As a result of the Permanent Settlement most of the old landed aristocracy was destroyed and a new class of landed interests emerged. This class consisted mostly of Hindu merchants and money-lenders who lived mostly in cities. They had little concern for the poor people particularly the peasantry living in the rural areas. Victims of oppression and exploitation at the hands of zamindars and their agents the Bengal peasantry would occasionally burst into revolt to ventilate their grievances and discontent. These uprisings of predominantly Muslim peasants against zamindars, mostly Hindu, sometimes assumed the character of a religious movement and led to communal violence. The revolt of the peasant-religious leader Titu Mir in West Bengal and the *faraizi* movement of Haji Shariatullah and Dudu Mia in East Bengal during the early decades of the nineteenth century have to be viewed against this background.

During the early years of the nineteenth century deliberations were taking place in the English ruling circles with regard to the question as to what extent the English government had benefited from the Permanent Settlement. In fact, within a few decades of the Permanent Settlement it was revealed that the zamindars had occupied many newly reclaimed lands which were outside the purview of the settlement and were enjoying benefits from them. Since these lands were outside the Permanent Settlement's jurisdiction the zamindars did not pay any rent to the Government for these newly acquired holdings. There was also a feeling in the Government regarding the need to investigate the documents relating to the special class of landed properties held by the zamindars which were known as *la-kheraj* or rent-free lands. In fact, it was suspected that many of the documents relating to these holdings were either false, forged or not in actual possession of the zamindars. Hence there was strong feeling in the official circles that the Government was incurring much loss of revenue on account of this situation. But there was no way of changing the Permanent Settlement. Holt Mackenzie, a former official of the East India Company, in his evidence before a Parliamentary Select Committee observed that if there had not been a Permanent Settlement "the amount of government rent would have been double of what it is now."<sup>5</sup>

The Government, however, was not sitting idle. In 1819 it passed an Act (Regulation II) which provided for the assessment of all lands which were not included within the estates of the zamindars at the time of the Permanent Settlement but were subsequently reclaimed from forests and brought under cultivation, and the rents of which the zamindars had been enjoying without valid or legal title. In 1825 the Government passed another law (Regulation IX), which empowered Collectors to investigate the titles under which rent-free lands were held by the zamindars. Finally, in 1828 another law (Regulation III) was passed which provided for determining cases arising from previous regulations. As a result of the proceedings which followed, a considerable amount of lands which were hitherto in the possession of the zamindars passed into the hands of the Government.<sup>6</sup>

This policy of the Government with regard to the land question severely affected the interest of the zamindars and aroused their indignation. It should be noted that at this time the zamindars were the acknowledged leaders of society. In 1829 the zamindars of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa submitted a petition to Lord William Bentinck on behalf of the inhabitants of this region in which they expressed their strong disapproval against the new land policy of the Government.

The Government, however, could not long remain indifferent to the discontent of the zamindars because its interests and those of the zamindars were identical. A rapprochement between the Government and the zamindars was, therefore, an imperative necessary in the interests of British rule. Thus, a senior official of the East India Company observed:<sup>7</sup>

Our tenure of Indian empire is the tenure of the sword. There is only one portion of public opinion in India that comes in aid of ... our military power, and that is the opinion of the Zamindars under the permanent settlement, that their interests are identified with ours. Beyond this there is no public opinion that works in our favour.

The Government had, therefore, to readjust its relations with the zamindars to the mutual advantage of both the parties. Henceforth, the zamindars came to be regarded as steady supporters of the British Raj.

In the nineteenth century what we call public opinion was largely controlled by the propertied classes many of whom were zamindars and those belonging to various professions. This kind of public opinion used to be expressed through various newspapers and public associations. As already mentioned the zamindars had already established an association of their own in 1837 called the Zamindari Association later named Bengal Landholders' Society.<sup>8</sup> Although it was claimed in contemporary journals that this society was established to protect the interest of all sections of people irrespective of caste or creed, it was, in fact, more concerned to protect the interest of the zamindars rather than the interest of the tenant-farmers and peasants.<sup>9</sup> In 1843 another association called Bengal British Indian Society was established. Its main object was to draw the attention of the Government to the need for employment of a larger number of Indians in government service. The *Tallabodhini Patrika* edited by Akshaykumar Dutta (1820-1886) was severely critical of the Government policy of discrimination towards the inhabitants of this country. Such criticism helped in arousing national feeling particularly among the highly educated Hindu youth belonging to the middle class. Akshaykumar's thought seems to have been greatly influenced by the philosophical radicalism of contemporary Europe.<sup>10</sup> In 1851 the British Indian Association was established. Conservative leader like Radhakant Deb (1783-1867) joined hands with reformist leader Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905) in establishing this association which contributed much toward awakening of national consciousness. But its greatest limitation was that it was predominantly composed of people who belonged to the upper class of Hindu society. It failed to uphold the interests of the common people and did not reflect their views or hopes and aspirations.

Though the door of the British Indian Association was open to all communities, it was predominantly an association of the Hindus. From 1859, however, it had some Muslim members and in 1864 one Mir Mohammad Ali, a Muslim zamindar of Faridpur was elected its Vice-President. But the British Indian Association was never able to reflect Muslim public opinion.<sup>11</sup> This was so because this association was established with the primary object of protecting the interests of the zamindars who happened to be mostly Hindus. On the other hand, the poor section of the Bengali population particularly the tenant-farmers and the peasantry were mostly Muslims. The British Indian

Association had not undertaken any programme for promoting their welfare. It is, therefore, not surprising that the Muslims began to feel that in order to protect their interest as a community they should organize themselves separately. It was this feeling which prompted a number of leading Muslim citizens of Calcutta to take the initiative in establishing in 1855 a separate Muslim association called *Anjuman-i-Islam* or the Mohammedan Association.<sup>12</sup> Of course, the leadership of this new association was in the hands of the Urdu-speaking Muslim elite of Calcutta. The exclusive attitude of the Hindus towards the Muslim community was largely responsible for the creating Muslim separatist feeling. As Jayanti Maitra has observed: "The most eminent Hindu political leaders ... failed to understand the real feelings and grievances of the Muslim community."<sup>13</sup>

The 'Sepoy Mutiny' of 1857 which led to massive anti-British uprising in northern India had little impact on Bengal because the upper and middle classes of Bengali society whose interest were linked with the British Raj came out in strong support of the government. However, in certain areas of Bengal the sepoys had made abortive attempts to stir up rebellion but they failed to receive any substantial support from the local people. In fact, among the sepoys of the East India Company the number of Bengali or Bengali-speaking soldiers was very insignificant. The chief beneficiaries from the economic and social structure which came to be established as a result of the Permanent Settlement were the upper and the middle classes. These classes, therefore, had a stake in the continuation of British rule. Hence although they had on occasions criticised some of the policies of the British Government, they never wished the end of British rule. Their chief aim was to obtain all kinds of benefits by putting pressure on the Government through constitutional means such as raising demands through public meetings and associations or submitting petitions.

Not long after the revolt of 1857 there took place another upheaval, though of a different kind, which greatly contributed to the awakening of national consciousness. This was the 'blue mutiny' of 1859-60. The English had introduced the cultivation of indigo in this country during the latter part of the eighteenth century. Consequent upon the Industrial Revolution in Europe there was a growing demand for indigo to meet the requirements of the European textile mills for the manufacture of cotton-yarn. The indigo planters had begun to use force to compel the peasants to cultivate indigo. By the middle of the nineteenth century when the price of indigo began to fall in the European market, the oppression of the indigo cultivators by the planters also increased. In fact, ever since the Europeans had obtained the right to own land in this country by the Act of 1833 the oppression of the English zamindars and the indigo planters showed marked increase. On the other hand, the native zamindars used to look upon the foreign indigo planters as their rivals and their clash of interest was reflected in the contemporary newspapers.<sup>14</sup> On many

occasions the English government officials were biased in favour of English indigo planters with the result that the oppression of the peasantry continued unabated. Dianabandhu Mitra in his famous drama *Neel-Darpan* drew such a vivid picture of the oppression of the Indigo planters that it aroused great excitement throughout the country and in many parts of rural Bengal the peasantry became rebellious. The government was forced to appoint a Commission in 1860 to review the situation. The commission's report was critical of the system of indigo cultivation and called for certain steps to be taken to prevent the oppression of the indigo cultivators. Later when the synthetic dye began to be manufactured in Europe, the cultivation of indigo declined rapidly. The sympathy and support which the indigo cultivators were able to draw from the educated middle classes of Bengal had greatly contributed to the development of political and national consciousness in the country.<sup>15</sup>

During the latter part of the nineteenth century a faint echo of the nationalist movements in Europe was being heard in this subcontinent. The progress of the nationalist movements in Italy, Germany, Hungary and Rumania influenced the thinking of a considerable section of the educated middle class particularly belonging to the Hindu community. Thus in 1866 at the initiative of Rajnarayan Basu the Society for the Promotion of National Feeling was established. Next year *Hindu Mela*, a community festival with a political overtone, was introduced. In 1870 the National Society was formed. All these associations were organized by educated Hindu *Bhadralok*. Their outlook, however, was somewhat exclusive and communal; the nationalism which they upheld was Hindu nationalism. The idea of composite and secular nationalism embracing all communities of this country did not occur to them.

In the history of nationalism in the Indian sub-continent the name of Surendranath Banerjee (1848-1925) deserves special mention. He had qualified in the Indian Civil Service Examination held in England in 1869 but his appointment was cancelled when a question was raised regarding his age. This event aroused great indignation in India and the British government reinstated him in service. Returning home Surendranath was appointed Assistant Magistrate and posted at Sylhet. But soon he came in conflict with his superior officer Southerland, who was then the District Magistrate of Sylhet. As a result, Surendranath was dismissed from service on a doubtful charge of neglect of duty. It was believed that Surendranath's refusal, to tolerate Southerland's racist attitude and pompous behaviour had led to the conflict between them. Surendranath's dismissal from the Indian Civil Service aroused bitter public indignation.

Subsequently, Surendranath worked as a Professor of English literature and History at several Colleges. In order to arouse national feeling amongst students he used to deliver lectures on such subjects as the study of history, life of Mazzini and so on. In 1876 chiefly at the initiative of Surendranath a new public

association called the Indian Association was established. Its principal objects included: (a) the establishment of a strong body of public opinion in the country; (b) the unification of all classes of people of India keeping in view their interest and aspirations; (c) the maintenance of friendly feelings between Hindus and Muslims; and (d) the inclusion of masses in the great public movements of the day.

In 1883 when bitter controversy was raging over the Ilbert Bill the Indian Association conceived a plan for convening an All-India National Conference to consider the situation. Accordingly, two conferences were held in Bombay and Calcutta. These events set the stage clear for the emergence of an all-India political organization. It was against this background that in 1885 the Indian National Congress was established at the initiative of a liberal-minded retired English civil servant, Allan Octavian Hume (1829-1912). The first session of the Congress was held in Bombay. It was presided over by a Bengal barrister Womesh Chandra Banerjee. In the establishment of this organization Hume had obtained encouragement and sympathy from the then Viceroy Lord Dufferin. Hume had apprehended that the growing dissatisfaction of the people particularly the poorer section against the Government had accumulated to such an extent that it could at any moment burst out into a violent upheaval. Hence according to Hume: "A safety-valve for the escape of great and growing forces, generated by our action, was urgently needed, and no more efficacious safety-valve than our Congress movement could possibly be devised."<sup>16</sup>

At the beginning, the Indian National Congress developed as a liberal and moderate political party, loyal to the Government. Most of its members came from professional upper middle classes. It had little connection with the common people nor had it any programme for ameliorating the economic grievances of the people. But then it cannot be said that the Congress was purely Hindu organisation. In fact, a considerable number of Muslims joined the Congress. The President of the Madras session of the Indian National Congress held in 1887 was the famous Muslim barrister of Bombay, Badruddin Tayabji (1844-1906). Later, however, the number of the Muslim members of the Congress began to decrease. The north Indian Muslim leader Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) was very much opposed to the Congress. Just as the Congress had obtained the support of liberal-minded Englishmen like Hume, so a section of English bureaucrats who were sympathetic to the Muslims, supported Syed Ahmed Khan.

There is some confusion in the minds of many people regarding the role of Syed Ahmed. He, in fact, did not believe in communal or separatist politics before the establishment of the Congress. Syed Ahmed's political thought can be viewed in two distinct phases. In the first phase he appears to be a bold, liberal-minded and non-communal leader. During the time of the 'mutiny' of 1857 he had supported the English side because he believed that the success of the sepoys would mean not only the end of British rule but also the restoration

of medieval autocracy and feudalism. On the other hand, he maintained that it was through English rule that the people of India would be able to march toward modernization and the prospects of unprecedented development on many sides that had opened up. Like his fore-runner Raja Rammohun Roy, Syed Ahmed believed that British rule was essential for India's progress and welfare. Again, like Rammohan he was not a blind supporter of the British Raj. He was conscious of some of the evil effects of British rule and quite boldly expressed his opinion. Soon after the 'Sepoy Mutiny' he had written a booklet in which he expressed the view that the basic cause of the great uprising was the want of communication and understanding between the British rulers and the Indian people.<sup>17</sup> According to Syed Ahmed, as a result of this situation the Government on the one hand, became totally ignorant of Indian public opinion, while on the other hand, the people of this country had no means of understanding the real intentions of the Government. Therefore, he recommended that without further delay provision should be made for inclusion of Indian representatives in the Indian Legislative Council.<sup>18</sup>

The British Government could not ignore the rationale of the arguments put forward by Syed Ahmed and decided to take steps to nominate in phases a certain number of Indians for membership of the Indian Legislative Councils in the subsequent constitutional Acts (1861 and 1892). It may, therefore, be said that Syed Ahmed Khan was the pioneer in advocating for the introduction of a representative system of government in this country. He also believed during the early phase of his career that the Hindus and Muslims of this country constituted in a real sense one nation, and exhorted them to get united. In his own words "if united, we could support each other – if not, the effect of one community arraying itself against the other would tend to the destruction of both."<sup>19</sup> In February 1884 at a meeting of the Indian Association held at Lahore Syed Ahmed, while replying to an address of welcome, highly eulogised the Bengalis and emphasised Hindu-Muslim unity. He observed:<sup>20</sup>

Even granting that the majority of those comprising the Association are Hindus, I will say that this light has been diffused by the Bengalis. I assure you they are the only people in India whom we can properly be proud of, and it is only due to them that knowledge, liberty and patriotism have progressed in this country. I can truly say that they are really the head and crown of the both Hindus and Mohammadans... With me it is not so much worth considering that their religious faiths differ, but that we inhabit the same land and are subject to the rule of the same Government. These are the grounds upon which I call both the races which inhabit India by the word "Hindu" by which I mean that they are the inhabitants of Hindustan.

It is possible that soon after Syed Ahmed had made this remarkable statement, some vested interests began to exercise such an influence over him that his whole outlook was reversed. Most probably at their bidding a new association was

established in 1888 under his leadership to counter the influence of the Indian National Congress which had been established in the previous year. This rival association was called the United Indian Patriotic Association. While the Congress was formed with educated upper middle class people, the Patriotic Association's members were mostly drawn from semi-feudal elements and landlords who were the most loyal-supporters of the British raj. An Englishman, Theodore Beck, who was the Principal of the Aligarh Muslim College which Syed Ahmed had founded, was made the Secretary of this association. In 1888 the association brought out a publication in which its aims and objects, character and activities were described in detail. It was entitled *Pamphlets Issued by the United Indian Patriotic Association Showing the Seditious Character of the Indian National Congress And the Opinions Held by Eminent Natives of India who are Opposed to the Movement.*

This booklet reveals certain interesting facts. While the Hindu members of the Patriotic Association denounced the Congress as an anti-Hindu body, the Association's Muslim members regarded it as an anti-Muslim organisation. On the other hand, the English Secretary of the Association Theodore Beck viewing the situation from an imperialist angle expressed the apprehensions that:<sup>21</sup>

As it is my firm belief that the agitation of which the National Congress is the visible head, will, if unchecked, sooner or later end in a mutiny, with its accompanying horrors and massacres, followed by a terrible retaliation on the part of the British Government, bringing absolute ruin for the Musalman, the Rajput and other brave races, and resulting the retardation of all progress. I wish to place before my countrymen the reasons which have led me to form this opinion, and to invite a refutation of the arguments adduced.

There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Syed Ahmed. He was particularly concerned for upholding the interest of the Muslim community. He believed that the demand which the Congress was making for constitutional reforms based on European democratic system by which representatives were chosen through a process of election, if implemented, would seriously harm the interests of the Muslims. Since the Hindus formed the majority of the population of this sub-continent, in any general election they would gain majority and consequently obtain power and privileges. The Muslims, on the other hand, would remain deprived and neglected. In fact, the working of the Indian Councils Act of 1892 revealed that very few Muslims were able to get themselves elected to the representative bodies. Moreover, the presence of quite a number of orthodox and communal-minded Hindu leaders in the Congress like Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1857-1920) had produced in the Muslim mind an adverse reaction against the Congress. During this time there was an upsurge of the Hindu revivalist movement and Tilak and his followers had become actively involved in it. At their initiative the Shivaji festival was observed with great fanfare. Furthermore, a Cow Protection Society had been formed to prevent

the slaughter of cows. Such kind of activities on the part of some Hindu leaders violated Muslim susceptibilities and aroused their fears. On the other hand, the provocative attitude of some die-hard imperialist-minded Englishmen like Theodore Beck and Theodore Morrison (who had succeeded Beck as Principal of Aligarh College) had resulted in the deterioration of Hindu-Muslim relations. In fact, communal riots broke out in several regions. Nevertheless, there were some Hindu and Muslim leaders who tried their best to preserve communal harmony. The famous Bengali Muslim writer Mir Mosharraf Hossain (1848-1912) in his concern for Hindu-Muslim amity went so far as to advise the Muslims to refrain from eating beef.<sup>22</sup>

It is, however, to be noted that despite the opposition of Syed Ahmed and other Muslim leaders, the Congress always retained within its fold a number of prominent Muslims who had been elected President of the Congress more than once. These Muslim members of the Congress believed that though numerically small their presence in this body ensured the all-Indian and secular character of the Congress. Nevertheless, it is a historical reality that the Indian National Congress was never able to win the support of the great majority of the Muslims particularly Bengali Muslims. In order to understand why it was so, one has to delve into the political and social thinking of the Bengali Muslims during the period 1857-1906.

The failure of the great uprising of 1857 brought about a significant change in the outlook of the Muslim community. The Muslims were generally reluctant to learn English and did not show any interest in acquiring knowledge of Western science and learning. This negative attitude had pushed them towards decline. In fact, the Bengali Muslim community before 1857 was in such a state of disarray that it was indeed difficult to determine the character of its leadership. The Muslims of Bengal were hardly conscious of their distinct identity. As it has been noted there was little communication between the Urdu-speaking urban Muslim elite who claimed to be descendants of Muslim immigrants from outside, and the general body of the Bengali-speaking Muslim population who lived in the rural areas. The city-dwellers had shown little concern for the improvement of the economic and social condition of the rural masses, who continued to remain steeped in poverty and ignorance. The illiterate rural folks, suffering from prolonged oppression at the hands of the zamindars and moneylenders had developed a somewhat fatalistic outlook. Occasionally, they had risen in revolt protesting against intolerable conditions. These sporadic uprisings were led by some strong-willed village leaders like Titu Mir and Haji Shariatullah. Possessing little education they had no understanding of the reality of the situation existing in nineteenth century colonial India. Inspired by religious fervour they sought vainly to solve contemporary economic and social problems by religious sanctions of by-gone days. Consequently, their violent movements against zamindari oppression and bureaucratic misrule ended in failure.<sup>23</sup>

During the later part of the nineteenth century a new kind of leadership emerged in Bengali Muslim society. This leadership came from the newly emergent English-educated urban elite especially belonging to the professional classes. Foremost among such leaders was Abdul Latif (1828-1892). He was born in Faridpur district in Eastern Bengal. His father Kazi Fakir Mahmud, who claimed a respectable Arab ancestry was an accomplished Persian scholar and practised law at the Sadar Diwani Adalat in Calcutta. He owned a sizeable landed property. Being a far-sighted man he had realized the importance of English education in the changed conditions of the time. Hence, although he had put his son in the Calcutta Madrasa he saw to it that the boy acquired a sound English education along with proficiency in Persian, Urdu and Arabic. After completing his education at the Madrasa Abdul Latif served for sometime as private secretary to a nobleman (*amir*) of Sind who was living as a political exile at Dum Dum near Calcutta. Later he joined government service as a teacher at Dhaka Collegiate School and subsequently as Anglo-Arabic Professor at the Calcutta Madrassa. In 1849 Abdul Latif was appointed Deputy Magistrate and retired from service in 1885 on a special pension. He was the first Muslim to be appointed a member of the Bengal Legislative Council in 1862. In 1880 the Government conferred on him the title of Nawab as a mark of personal distinction.

Despite the fact that Abdul Latif held a relatively subordinate position in the administration, he did exercise a considerable influence and was "universally acknowledged as one of the foremost leaders of Muhammadan society not only in Bengal but throughout India."<sup>24</sup>

As a Deputy Magistrate Abdul Latif was well-known for his sound judgement and integrity. While posted in the countryside he effectively checked the oppression of the European indigo planters on the peasantry. His energetic intervention was largely responsible for inducing the Government to appoint the Indigo Commission.<sup>25</sup> But Abdul Latif's greatest achievement was that he was the first Muslim leader who made a serious endeavour to promote English education among the Muslims of India. His outlook, however, was somewhat conservative. He sought to attain his objective through a gradual process of persuasion and compromise without giving serious offence to Muslim prejudices. Since upper-class Muslims were reluctant to send their children to schools run by Christian and Hindu teachers. Abdul Latif suggested to the Government the creation of an Anglo-Persian Department in the Calcutta Madrasa which would provide for teaching elementary English education along with Persian. Since Muslims did not have any institution for higher education beyond the Madrassa level, and the Hindu College would not admit Muslim students, Abdul Latif took a leading part in collaborating with the Government in the establishment of the Presidency College in Calcutta.<sup>25</sup>

In April 1863 Abdul Latif founded the Muhammadan Literary and Scientific Society. Its object was "to impart useful information to the higher and educated

classes of the Mahomedan community by means of Lectures, Addresses, and Discourses on various subjects in Literature, Science and Society.”<sup>26</sup>

Abdul Latif generally kept himself aloof from any religious controversy. But the anti-British activities of a section of orthodox Muslims who had proclaimed British India as *Dar-ul Harb* and preached the doctrine of *Jihad* against the British threatened to undo his work. To neutralise the activities of the so-called *Wahabis*. Abdul Latif obtained the support of the well-known Muslim scholar and religious preacher, Maulvi Karamat Ali of Jaunpur and some other Muslim theologians. It may be noted, however, that in matters of religious faith Karamat Ali was no less orthodox than the Wahabis. Both aimed at Islamising Bengali Muslim society which they thought had drifted away from the path of traditional Islam. Abdul Latif's ideas, however, suffered from certain inherent contradictions. While he was anxious to promote Western education for its sheer practical utility, he would have nothing to do with Western ideas. This, however, created an absurd situation. How could one learn a European language and yet take no notice of the ideas which that language conveyed? In fact, contemporary European political and social ideas were bound to influence the outlook of the rising generation of the English-educated Muslim youth of Bengal and weaken Muslim conservatism. This prospect Abdul Latif greatly abhorred. His social outlook was conservative. Unlike his great north Indian contemporary Syed Ahmed Khan he sought to conciliate Muslim prejudice and orthodoxy, not to fight them.

Abdul Latif was a typical example of the small minority of the upper-class, Urdu-speaking Muslims living in Calcutta who claimed to be the natural leaders of the Muslim community of Bengal. Although Abdul Latif knew Bangla, he never treated it as a respectable language. He was anxious to maintain the old class distinctions in Muslim society. He had no love for Bangla which was the spoken language of the great majority of Muslims of rural Bengal. Hence because of his somewhat narrow and sectarian social outlook Abdul Latif could not achieve much success in promoting education. In contrast, his north Indian contemporary Syed Ahmed had achieved spectacular success in disseminating his modern educational and social ideas through the medium of the Urdu language which was the vernacular of the Muslims of that region.

Abdul Latif's younger contemporary, Syed Amir Ali (1849-1928), represented a more advanced school of Muslim opinion. His family also claimed an Arab-Persian descent. His father, Saadat Ali, held a position of distinction under the Nawab of Oudh and had the prudence to migrate to Bengal shortly before British annexation of Oudh. At a time when it was still considered “a heresy to learn English”, Amir Ali was given a good English education.<sup>27</sup> He graduated from the Hughli College in 1867 and a year after he took the M.A. degree in History and Political Economy. He then took his Bachelor of Law degree and started

legal practice at the Calcutta High Court. Then he sailed for England on receiving a state scholarship to pursue higher studies in law. He was called to the Bar from the Inner Temple, in January 1873 and shortly afterwards returned to India<sup>28</sup>. He soon built up a lucrative practice in Calcutta High Court and gained recognition as a specialist on Muslim law. He was appointed a part-time lecturer in this subject at the Calcutta Presidency College and held this position for five years. He was also elected a fellow of the Calcutta University. His subsequent career may be briefly stated. In 1877 he was appointed Presidency Magistrate, Calcutta, and was soon elevated to the position of officiating Chief Presidency Magistrate. But in 1881 he resigned from government service and rejoined the bar. His reputation as a barrister had by now greatly increased. His activities also began to cover wider fields. He was made a member of the Bengal Legislative Council. Subsequently in 1883 Lord Ripon appointed him a member of the Imperial Legislative Council to represent the interests of Muslims. In 1884 Calcutta University appointed him 'Tagore Professor of Law. In 1890 Amir Ali was appointed a Judge of the Calcutta High Court and held this position for fourteen years. After his retirement in 1904 he left for England and settled there. In 1909 Amir Ali was sworn in as a member of the Privy Council. He was the first Indian to hold this position.

But Amir Ali's eminence did not depend on the high official position that he held. It rested on his great intellectual attainments and the new kind of leadership that he provided to the Muslim community. He was a prolific writer. He contributed innumerable articles to journals mostly published in England. His articles generally dealt with contemporary political subjects particularly those affecting the Muslims. He had gained international recognition as an authority on Islam by writing two books, namely *A Short History of the Saracens* (1889) and *The Spirit of Islam* (1891). Both the works were published in England and have since run into several editions. Following in the footsteps of Syed Ahmed Khan, Amir Ali sought to reinterpret and re-evaluate Islam in accordance with the liberal and rationalist spirit of the nineteenth century. He maintained that the Quran should be read "without the interpretations put upon it by ancient predecessors."<sup>29</sup> According to Amir Ali:

"enlightenment must precede reform; and before there can be a renovation of religious life, the mind must first escape from the bondage which centuries of literal interpretation and the doctrine of 'conformity' have imposed upon it. The formalism that does not appeal to the heart of the worshipper must be abandoned; externals must be subordinated to the inner feelings ...<sup>30</sup> Amir Ali believed that Muslims should exercise their right of independent judgement (*Ijtihad*) and interpret Islam in the light of the modern situation and modern needs rather than depending on "the interpretations of men who lived in the ninth century."<sup>31</sup>

This Islamic renaissance which Amir Ali initiated in the intellectual field followed closely on the heels of the second phase of the nineteenth century

Bengali Hindu renaissance. During its early phase, the reformist ideas of Rammohun Roy and the radical views associated with the ‘Young Bengal’ movement had greatly influenced the social outlook of the newly-emerging English-educated Hindu middle class. During the second phase, renascent Hinduism tended to be infused with the spirit of nationalism. This new spirit was represented by the Western-educated Bengali Hindu intelligentsia. This class, however, suffered from inner contradictions. Thus, on the one hand it manifested a growing interest in European liberal and rationalist thought; on the other hand, there was an increasing attachment to traditional Hindu ideas. This dichotomy in the social outlook of the Hindu middle class profoundly affected the subsequent course of the nationalist movement in India. It should be noted that the neo-Hinduism of this period was highly tinged with revivalism. Most of the Hindu leaders of the time despite their liberal education could not think in terms of what may be called composite nationalism embracing the hopes and aspirations of the different communities of India.

Amir Ali had no pretension to be a religious reformer. His chief interest lay in politics and he was one of the first Indian Muslim leaders who felt the need for a separate political organization for the Muslim community. As has been noted, before the advent of the Indian National Congress in 1885, a number of public associations had been established in Bengal. Some of these like the Bengal Landholders Society (1837) and the British Indian Association (1851) were guided by the economic interest of the zamindars, others like *Jatiya Gaurab Sampadani Sabha* (1866), the Hindu Mela (1867) and the Jatiya Sabha or the National Society (1870) were inspired by Hindu nationalist and religious feelings. The Muslims had little to do with these organisations. In fact, the Hindu leaders made no attempt to draw the support or win the sympathy of the Muslims. To most of the Hindu leaders of the age “nationalism meant unity and the basis of national unity in India, they believed, had been Hindu religion.”<sup>32</sup> As the great Bengali nationalist leader Begum Chandler Pal (1858-1932) noted that in those days Hindus regarded Muslims and Christians “as foreigners”.<sup>33</sup>

In 1877 a separate political organisation of the Muslims called the National Muhammadan Association of Calcutta was established by Syed Amir Ali with the help of Nawab Amir Ali (1810-1879), an influential zamindar of Bihar. While the Nawab was made the President of the Association. Syed Amir Ali held the position of Secretary, a position which he retained for over twenty-five years.

The National Muhammadan Association aimed at “promoting by legitimate and constitutional means the well-being of the Mussalmans of India... deriving its inspiration from the noble traditions of the past”; it proposed, “to work in harmony with Western culture and the progressive tendencies of the age.” It also aimed at “political regeneration of the Indian Muhammadans by the moral revival and by constant endeavours to obtain from Government a recognition of their just and reasonable claims”.<sup>34</sup> The Association further announced that

while working for the welfare of Muslims it would "also be able to promote the interests of their non-Muslims compatriots."<sup>35</sup>

The National Muhammadan Association had by 1888 established fifty-three branches in different provinces of India.<sup>36</sup> In 1883 the Association had been renamed the Central National Muhammadan Association in order to give it an all-India character.

In 1882 the Association had submitted a memorial to the Viceroy in which the grievances of the Muslim community were stated and remedies for their removal were suggested. Among the demands put forward were: reservation of jobs for Muslims and lowering of qualification requirements for jobs so as to enable non-graduate Muslims to apply. It was argued that because of poverty many Muslims could not acquire University degrees. The memorialists also opposed competitive examinations for the uncovenanted service maintaining that suitable Muslims should be nominated. They also disapproved of simultaneous examinations for covenanted service. In a subsequent letter addressed to the Viceroy's Secretary, Amir Ali insisted that:

"the unequal distribution of state patronage is the most important question of all; it has given rise to the greatest discontent and bitterness of feelings and will continue to do so unless Government emphatically lay down the principle that in Bengal at least one-third of the State employment should be reserved for the Mahomedans."<sup>37</sup>

The memorial of 1882 fully supported the education policy of the Government which it termed as 'progressive'. It expressed the view that "every hope for the regeneration of India depends at present upon the spread of English education and the diffusion of Western ideas through the medium of the English language,"<sup>38</sup> In the same year Amir Ali wrote an article entitled "A Cry from the Indian Mahomedans" which was published in the British journal, *The Nineteenth Century*. In this article he suggested the abolition of vernacular and purely oriental schools and maintained that "the funds allotted to their support should be applied to promote high English as well as technical education."<sup>39</sup> According to Amir Ali it was "unwise of the Government to maintain institutions for imparting a purely Oriental education, as this fosters in the people the old ideas of exclusiveness which are inconsistent with the exigencies of British rule."<sup>40</sup>

While the Government was considering some of the proposals made in the memorial of the National Muhammadan Association and in the article of Amir Ali, a memorandum was submitted to the Government by Nawab Abdul Latif on behalf of the Mahomedan Literary Society. The memorandum strongly protested against the reported move to abolish the madrasas of Hughli, Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi, and the establishment of an English College at Calcutta out of the funds with which these madrasas were maintained. Abdul Latif disputed the claims of Amir Ali and the members of the National Muhammadan Association to be regarded as representatives of the Muslim community.

Referring to Amir Ali and his friends, Abdul Latif expressed the apprehension that "in the opinion of gentlemen of the advanced school, styling themselves, 'Reformers', my advocacy of the view of the orthodox Mahomedans may appear to be too conservative, and therefore not entitled to any consideration".<sup>41</sup> But contrary to the Nawab's apprehension his views were received more favourably than those of his opponent. The madrasas were allowed to continue and the idea of establishing an English College for the Muslims was dropped for the time being.<sup>42</sup>

Thus Muslim society in Calcutta was sharply divided into two factions; one led by Amir Ali and the other by Abdul Latif. There were, however, some Muslims who wanted to remain in the middle position. One of them complained that "Amir Ali and his friends have put themselves out of the pale of Mahomedan society by their English dress and ways, while Abdul Latif and the body of Maulvis (*ulema*) are too strictly conservative."<sup>43</sup>

Toward the close of the nineteenth century a streak of modernising radicalism was noticeable in Bengali Muslim social thought. It was reflected in the writings of Delwar Hossain Ahmed (1840-1913). Born in 1840 in a middle class Muslim family of Hughli district in West Bengal, Ahmed was educated at Calcutta Madrassa and Presidency College. In 1861 he passed the B.A. Examination from the Calcutta University and was placed in the first division. He was then appointed Deputy Magistrate and Deputy Collector and for thirty-five years served in that capacity in the various districts of Bengal and Bihar. In 1895 he was appointed Inspector-General of Registration. He retired from Government service in 1898 and died in 1913.

While in Government service Delwar Hossain Ahmed had started writing on various social problems affecting the Bengali Muslims. In 1889 two volumes of his writings were published under the title *Essays on Muhammadan Social Reforms* by Thacker, Sipink and Company, Calcutta.<sup>44</sup> Henceforth, he continued to write on current social and economic problems of the Muslim community. Most of his later writings appeared in contemporary English newspapers such as *The Englishman*, *The Moslem Chronicle* and *The Mussalman*. Delwar Hossain was deeply influenced by European rationalist and liberal ideas of the nineteenth century. He was a bold and original thinker who advocated radical changes in the laws and institutions of Muslim society. He believed that the necessary pre-condition for the advancement and progress of Muslim society was the complete separation of religious laws from secular laws. He maintained that the material needs of a changing society could not be met by static religious laws. According to him.<sup>45</sup>

... union of religion with social customs and civil laws has done the most serious injury to the Mohammadans in every part of the world and unless soon and timely dissolved there is every probability of the Muhammadan name becoming a by-word and the Muhammadan races a laughing stock among civilized nations.

Delwar Hossain believed that the decline of the Muslims was mainly due to their religious exclusiveness and absence of toleration. Referring to the prevalence of autocratic rule in most of the Muslim countries during his time he noted that it was due to want of self-confidence and self-reliance among the Muslims. He observed.<sup>46</sup>

No Mohammadan nation has ever been able to provide any constitutional means of checking the immense authority and arbitrary power of kings. In the most advanced Christian countries the power of the Sovereign whether designated Emperor, King or President — is more or less limited by law; but in Mohammadan countries the sovereign is above the law and is responsible to none for what he may choose to do or not to do.

In fact, Delwar Hossain was a firm advocate of secularism. He believed that the union of religion with state was not desirable. Again, according to him Muslims had failed to make substantial contribution to modern knowledge because of lack of intellectual freedom in Muslim society. Although he himself came from elitist background. Delwar Hossain did not fail to realise that to promote the general improvement of the Muslim community, the existing communication gap between the urban elite and the rural population should be bridged. He believed that in order to achieve progress it was imperative for the Muslims to learn both English and Bengali. Like Syed Amir Ali, he was strongly opposed to the type of education that was being imparted in the Madrasas. He advocated their abolition and suggested that in their place new Colleges should be established in Calcutta and other cities for the exclusive benefit of the Muslims where English and other modern subjects would be taught. According to Delwar Hossain the education which was given in the Madrasa was "utterly unsuited to the times and it is a mere waste of means to supply people with what has no present value and will be of no future use."<sup>47</sup> He also exhorted the Muslims to learn the Bengali language. He pointed out that the neglect shown to the native language by the elite had done much harm to the Muslim community. It had widened the gulf between the educated urban elite and the illiterate rural masses.

There were, however, certain contradictions in Delwar Hossain's thought. While he upheld liberal ideas, he nourished an almost pathological dislike for the Hindus. Perhaps this was due to the growth and impact of the later nineteenth century Hindu revivalist movement which had aroused Muslim fears. The political atmosphere of the age was not conducive to Hindu-Muslim amity. It was not surprising that Delwar Hossain's radical ideas did not find favour in contemporary Muslim society. The dominant trend of the time was conservative.

During the nineteenth century the Muslim leaders of Bengal had tried to keep themselves aloof from any kind of political agitation or movement. Thus, they did not show much concern when great political excitement was aroused over the Ilbert Bill controversy. Apparently, the Muslim leaders did not wish

to embarrass the Government by taking sides. This attitude, however, was resented by nationalist Hindu leaders. Thus, Narendra Nath Sen, editor of the Calcutta newspaper, *The Indian Mirror*, complained to Blunt that the Muslim leaders of Calcutta "were timid and time-serving" and were "afraid of the Government."<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, in December 1885 the National Muhammadan Association collaborated with the British Indian Association and the Indian Association in jointly convening the Second All-India National Conference.<sup>49</sup>

When the Indian National Congress was established in 1885 and held its first meeting in Bombay, the National Muhammadan Association gave it "lukewarm support."<sup>50</sup> But in the following year when the second session of the Congress was held in Calcutta, both the National Muhammadan Association and the Mahomedan Literary Society decided not to send delegates<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, seventeen Muslim delegates from Bengal attended the Calcutta session of the Congress<sup>52</sup> In the subsequent years the number of Muslim delegates who attended the Congress sessions varied. Thus at the twelfth session of the Congress held in Calcutta in 1896 as many as thirty-nine Muslim delegates from Bengal attended; but at the fourteenth session of the Congress held in Madras in 1898 there were only thirty-three Muslim delegates from Bengal.<sup>53</sup> Most of these delegates, it should be noted, were Bengali-speaking Muslims. On the other hand, the two influential Muslim leaders of Bengal who belonged to the upper class and were Urdu-speaking, following the example of their north Indian contemporary Syed Ahmed Khan, were bitterly opposed to the Congress because they believed that the Congress would not be able to protect the interest of the Indian Muslims.

Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century the idea of a separate Muslim nationality with its separate interests and aspirations had begun to emerge. This concept of nationality was however still confined within the narrow limits of the English-educated Bengali middle class of the urban areas. By 1890s this class had begun to claim to speak for the entire Muslim community. The English weekly newspaper, *The Moslem Chronicle*, edited by Abdul Hamid of Jessor and published from Calcutta, reflected the most vocal section of Bengali Muslim opinion.<sup>54</sup>

Being now conscious of its distinct political interest, the educated Muslim middle class of Bengal was anxious to find its distinct cultural identity. In 1895 Khondkar Fazli Rabbee, the dewan of Murshidabad Nawab estate, published a book in Persian entitled *Haqiqat-i-Musalman-i-Bangala*. An English translation of this work was brought out under the title *The Origin of the Musalmans of Bengal*. In this work the dewan sought to refute the prevalent theory that Bengali Muslims were mostly converted from the lower-caste Hindus. He maintained that quite a large number of them had originally come to Bengal as soldiers, administrators and traders.<sup>55</sup> The importance of this work lies in the fact that it revealed a new awareness among Bengali Muslims regarding their identity.

Toward the close of the nineteenth century communal discord between the Hindu and the Muslim communities had manifested itself in a bitter form. This discord had arisen chiefly out of political rivalry and economic competition. Another possible reason for the growth of Hindu-Muslim antagonism was that due to the impact of the Hindu revivalist movement in the later part of the nineteenth century a section of educated Bengali Hindu *Bhadralok* (gentlemen) had begun to treat the Muslims in a somewhat vain and pompous manner. They did not view with favour the emergence of a new Muslim middle class. They feared that with the rise of this class the monopoly which the Hindus had been enjoying with regard to appointment in government service and other matters would come to an end. It was this feeling which was largely responsible for the growth of communalism which embittered the relations between the two communities. *The Moslem Chronicle*, the mouthpiece of the newly emergent Bengali Muslim middle class lamented.<sup>56</sup>

.. It is a pity that the two races who for hundreds and hundreds of years lived in peace and amity as children of the same soil should learn to fall out at the fag end of the Nineteenth Century .... When can we hope that the Indians will learn the principle of live and let live?

Although this communal discord had manifested itself for a variety of reasons in nineteenth century India, it cannot be conclusively proved that it was the product of imperialist machination. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that this discord served British imperial interest. Thus, a British official, Sir John Stretchy wiring in 1888 observed:<sup>57</sup>

The truth plainly is that the existence side by side of these hostile creeds is one of the strong points in our political position in India. The better classes of Mohammadans are already a source to us of strength and not of weakness, and a continuously wise policy might, I believe, make them strong and important supporters of our power. They constitute a small but energetic minority of the population whose political interests are identical with ours, and who, under no conceivable circumstances, would prefer Hindu dominion to our own.

This communal conflict spread in a bitter and wider scale in the twentieth century. A number of Hindu and Muslim political leaders had taken some positive steps to resolve this conflict on the basis of mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence, such as the Congress-League Pact (1916), the Bengal Pact (1923) concluded by C.R.Das with Muslim leaders, the attempt made by A.K.Fazlul Huq to form a coalition ministry with the support of the Congress after the provincial election of 1937, and finally, the United Independent Bengal Scheme of H.S. Suhrawardy and Sarat Bose in 1947. But all these moves proved abortive. The utter lack of foresight displayed by most of the political leaders, both Hindu and Muslim, and the insensible, intolerant and illiberal attitude of the general body of population had closed all avenues toward a peaceful and lasting settlement of the complex communal problem and pushed the subcontinent to the 'Great Divide' of 1947.

## Reference

183

1. A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed, *Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal 1818-1835*, (Leiden 1965), 8.
2. M. Barns, *The Indian Press*, (London 1940), 54-55.
3. During the rule of the East India Company the inhabitants of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras were placed under English criminal law, and under this system trial by jury was introduced. But till 1826 only Europeans were appointed as jurors. In 1826 the Parliament passed the Indian Jury Act by which the proposal for appointing Indians as jurors was vitiated by the clause which provided that Indians would be appointed only as petty jurors. But the grand jury was to consist wholly of Europeans. The well-to-do citizens of Calcutta sent a petition to the Parliament in which they strongly protested against this discrimination. Again in 1828 the zamindars of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa submitted a joint petition to Lord William Bentinck protesting against Regulation III of 1828 by which the Government obtained the right to resume in certain cases the rent-free lands which were in the possession of the zamindars. In these petitions the dissatisfaction of the people of this country against British raj was quite boldly expressed.
4. *Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, 1831-32*, xi, 735, iii, 221
5. For details see A. F. Salahuddin Ahmed, *Social Ideas*, 103-107.
6. Evidence of Thomas Love Peacock before the Select Committee of House of Commons on the *Calcutta Journal*, 15 July 1834, *Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, 1834*, viii, 601, 121. Also A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed, *Social Ideas*, 108.
7. B.B. Majumdar, *Indian Political Associations and Reform of Legislature 1818 - 1917*, (Calcutta 1965), 23.
8. *Ibid.* 24.
9. Sourendramohan Gangopadhyaya, *Bangalir rashtra-chinta*, (Calcutta 1969), 57.
10. Jayanti Maitra, *Muslim Politics in Bengal, 1855-1906: Collaboration and Confrontation*, (Calcutta 1984), 73.
11. *Ibid.*, 74.
12. *Ibid.*, 85.
13. *India Gazette*, Calcutta, 28 December 1829.
14. Blair King, *The Blue Mutiny*, (Calcutta 1877), 222.
15. Quoted in R.C.Majumdar (ed.) *British Paramountcy and the Indian Renaissance*, Part II, (Bombay 1956), 532.
16. The English version of the booklet bore the title *On the Causes of the Indian Revolt*: Its Urdu version was called *Asbab-i-baghawat-i-Hind*.
17. G.F.L. Graham, *The Life and Work of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan*, (second ed., London 1909), 27-28.
18. Quoted in *The Moslem Chronicle*, Calcutta, June 4, 1896.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Pamphlets Issued by the United Indian Patriotic Association Showing the Seditious Character of the Indian National Congress And the Opinions Held By Eminent Natives of India Who Are Opposed to the Movement*, Allahabad, 1888, No.2, 6
21. Mir Mosharraf Hossain, *Go-jiban*, Calcutta, 1889.
22. Nevertheless, there is no reason to belittle the historical importance of these rural uprisings.

They seemed to have provided some inspiration to revolutionaries of the succeeding generations. See Suprakash Ray, *Bharater Krishak Vidraho O Ganatantrik Sangram*, (Calcutta 1968), 220.

23. F.B. Bradley-Birt, *Twelve Men of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century* (Calcutta 1910), 118.
24. *Ibid.*, 119.
25. The Presidency College of Calcutta which was established by the government in 1855 grew out of the Hindu College which was founded in 1816 at the initiative of Hindu leaders of Calcutta. Although it existed as a private institution. It received considerable financial assistance from the government. In 1853 it was decided by the government to take over the College and admit students irrespective of their caste and creed.
26. Abstract of Proceedings of the Mahomedan Literary Society etc. M. M. Ali (ed.), *Autobiography and Other Writings of Nawab Abdul Latif Khan Bahadur*, (Chittagong 1968), 109.
27. *The Right Hon'ble Syed Amir Ali*, Eminent Indians Series, (Madras 1926), 4.
28. K.K. Aziz (ed.), *Amir Ali : His Life and Works*, (Lahore 1967), 6.
29. A Guillaume, *Islam*, 2nd ed., Middlesex, (Penguin 1956), 157.
30. Syed Amir Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, Reprint, (London 1961), 168.
31. *Ibid.*, 184.
32. N.S. Bose, *The Indian Awakening and Bengal*, (Calcutta 1960), 172.
33. *Ibid.*
34. The Rules and objects of the National Muhammadan Association with a list of the members, Calcutta, 1882, quoted in K. K. Aziz (ed.), *Amir Ali* 46
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.* 47.
37. Quoted in Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism; Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge 1958), 312.
38. Quoted in K.K. Aziz (ed.), *Amir Ali*, 38
39. *Ibid.*, 38
40. *Ibid.*
41. M.M. Ali (ed.), *Autobiography*, 198.
42. It was not before 1926 that a special English College for the Muslims called the Islamia College was established by the Government in Calcutta.
43. W.S. Blunt, *India Under Ripon*, (London 1909), 104.
44. A new edition of the Essays has been published in 1980 in Dhaka. See Sultan Jahan Salik (ed.), *Muslim Modernism in Bengal : Selected Writings of Delawar Hossain Ahmed Meerza, 1840-1913*, (Dhaka 1980).
45. Sultan J. Salik (ed.), *Ibid.*, 20.
46. *Ibid.*, 32
47. *Ibid.*, 110.
48. W.S. Blunt, *India*, 87.
49. C.H. Philips (ed.), *The Evolution of India and Pakistan: Select Documents* (Oxford 1962), 37.
50. K.K. Aziz (ed.), *Amir Ali*, 48.
51. Anil Seal, *Indian Nationalism*, 314.

52. Sufia Ahmed, *Muslim Community in Bengal 1884-1912*, (Dhaka 1974), 378.

53. *Ibid.*, 382, 388.

54. Abdul Hamid was a Bengali-speaking Muslim from Jessore in East Bengal. He was educated at the Calcutta Presidency College and took his M.A. degree in English literature from Calcutta University. He was the editor of *The Moslem Chronicle* from 1895 to 1906. He was a member of the Provincial Committee of the All-India Muslim League founded in 1906 in Dhaka. Later he was appointed Principal of Bhawalpur College in northern India.

55. Kazi Abdul Wadud, *Swasata Banga*, (Calcutta 1952), 170-171.

56. *The Moslem Chronicle*, Calcutta, 4 June 1896 (Editorial).

57. Sir John Stretchy, *India*, (London 1888), 225.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# Bengali Nationalism and the Emergence of Bangladesh

A R Mallick

Syed Anwar Husain

If nationhood is something that originates from the well-spring of nationalism, the nationhood of Bangladesh, a state that shook off its identity as a partner in the state of Pakistan in 1971, needs to be traced from as far back as the time when the Bengali Muslims had to assert their identity under colonial rule. The identity assertion that became manifest during colonial rule culminated in the achievement of Pakistan as a home of the Muslims. As will be argued later, this identity assertion, although apparently religious and communal in nature, was essentially a reaction of a marginalised community in quest for its due share in an economic and political milieu. Consequently, the socio-political demography that was thus created pitted Hindus and Muslims against each other: the former privileged and the other marginalised. A practical approach by the Hindu leadership to accommodate the identity aspirations of the Muslims would, in all probability, have averted a communal divide of the sub-continent in 1947. But shortsightedness of the Congress leadership, ulterior motives of the Muslim elite, and British policy intertwined to negate such a possibility.

On the other hand, the nationalism that emerged in the post-1947 period in East Pakistan was not only of the Muslims, but of the entire Bengali community cutting across religious differences. Thus, whereas the pre-1947 nationalism was cloaked under the religious and/or communal surplice, the post-1947 nationalism was entirely secular. Such a secular element was retained throughout myriad twists and turns through to the end of the liberation war. It was, therefore, quite natural that the constitution of the independent state of Bangladesh drafted in 1972 had to accommodate secularism as one of the major ideological foundations of the state.

Any scholarly exercise on nationalism of any group of people is bound to be multi-dimensional in intent and content, focusing on a number of sources from which such nationalism grows. The present exercise, unlike any such comprehensive one, is a limited one in that it concentrates merely on the political dimension. References are, however, made to other dimensions/elements as and when necessary. The discussion opens with a background analysis of Bengali Muslim political consciousness starting from the late nineteenth century and continues up to 1947. This section, as it is not a core one, is basically on the nature of a broad-brush sweep across a long period of history with the aim of providing a relevant perspective for the discussion. As a conceptual framework this section uses 'marginalisation' to explain the gradual growth of identity consciousness of the Muslims in an overall sub continental context, albeit with particular emphasis on Bengal. The discussion that follows contains the major thrust of analysis and puts across the facts, evidence and arguments in support of the central theme around the political basis of nationalism that lay at the root of the creation of Bangladesh. For conceptual purposes this section makes use of the paradigm that explains how and under what circumstances a dominated ethnic community within the framework of internal colonialism goes through a process of identity assertion, and to the end of eventual independence.

### Bengali Muslims and the Birth of Pakistan

The Muslims of Bengal under colonial rule were disadvantaged and thus a marginalised community. But such a characterisation of the community is not applicable to the common masses who had little or no opportunity for bettering their lot through the acquisition of modern education or sources of economic power. Hunter's much-worn cliché about the Muslims as "a race ruined under British rule"<sup>1</sup> was, however, in reference to the Muslim elites who had very little contact with the ordinary Muslims. But as political mobilisation of the Muslims of Bengal was initiated by the elites, it is necessary to draw attention to the socio-political circumstances that faced them.

Indeed, the colonial policies and actions had much to do with denting the social, political and even the economic status of upper class Muslims. The introduction of the Permanent Settlement (1793) is frequently identified as the single major factor causing the socio-economic decline of such Muslims. In fact, many traditional Hindu land-owning families shared the same fate under the new system; and even during the Mughal rule they had mostly controlled land. The one notable impact of the Permanent Settlement was to open doors of opportunity to mostly Hindu "merchants, manufacturers, agents or land-holders, or officers of Government" to gain out of the displacement of the older families; both Hindus and Muslims.<sup>2</sup> The real cause for the decline of the Muslim upper class lay in the replacement of Persian as the court language by English

(1835). This act of Bentinck displaced most of the Muslim professionals from traditional judicial service. At the same time, the Muslims shunned the new system of education, while the Hindus were found zealous to take to such education. The immediate consequence was the monopolisation of new employment opportunities by the Hindus, and the Muslims were reduced to a vast community of illiterate unemployed. This was how the basis of a communal cleavage between the Hindus and Muslims was created.<sup>3</sup>

As the upper class Muslims continued to languish under the changed circumstances a new chapter was opened in the history of lower class Muslims with the appearance of Islamic revivalist movements in the early nineteenth century. The movements like *Faraidhi* and *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya*, although addressing to the goal of purifying Islam as a step towards regeneration of the Muslims had, in reality, the common Muslims as target groups. Inspired by promises of socio-economic emancipation these Muslims were found to be eager participants in such movements. Such a lower class Muslim mobilisation makes sense when we consider that their conversion to Islam had failed to bring about the much-desired change in their livelihood. That the socio-economic condition of the lower level Muslims, not their religious situation, was the major concern of these movements can be seen from the fact that especially the *Faraidhi* movement soon turned into a powerful vehicle for challenging the oppressive landlords and moneylenders of both communities. But as events progressed we witness a coalescing of upper and lower level Muslims ostensibly with a religio-communal spirit forming a common platform against the dominant Hindus. But underneath such a change of scenario lay the phenomenon of the marginalisation of the Muslim community under the colonial situation.

The political mobilisation of the Muslim community under an elite leadership began in 1855 with the foundation of *Anjuman-i-Islam*.<sup>4</sup> Aimed at the welfare of the community the *Anjuman* adopted as a strategy the policy of not opposing the British rule. Such a policy, however, received official patronage only in the post-Mutiny days. Since 1871 government policy began to encourage the Muslim leadership to organise the community as a separate entity. As policy measures the Muslim were given concessions in education, employment, and even in representation in different bodies.

Coupled with such changes in the administrative policies of the rulers, some changes from below had been transforming the rural Bengali Muslim society by the late nineteenth century. Two specific developments contributed to such a change. First, a continuous process of sub-division and fragmentation of landholding had contributed to the decline in wealth and power of Hindu landlord and tenure holders.<sup>5</sup> Second was the rise to power of the prosperous Muslim *Jotedars* in the districts of Eastern Bengal. Consequently, the power structure underwent a change in rural Bengal, and these rich Muslim peasants became easy allies with the urban Muslim leadership. This new prosperity of a

section of the Muslim peasants was linked to two factors; general economic prosperity of rural Bengal, and, the emergence of jute and paddy as cash crops fetching hard cash. Many rich Muslim peasants acquired new tenurial rights and turned into new landed interest. The improved economic condition helped the peasants send their sons to higher educational institutions and also enabled them to make commercial investments. Thus financially well-off and socially mobile, the rich Muslim landed class by the first quarter of twentieth century appeared more powerful than many emaciated Hindu landlords.

At a time when the top and bottom of the Muslim society were passing through a crucial political transition, two acts of government contributed to the acceleration of political consciousness among the Muslims. One was the partition of Bengal in 1905. The professional Hindu middle class violently reacted to this and, launched a mass movement which in turn created reaction among sections of Muslim elite. Another act of the government was to announce the enlargement of the Indian Legislative Councils. The leading Muslims decided to use this opportunity to establish a political organisation in order to press their demand before the Government. Thus, in 1906, the All-India Muslim League was formed in Dhaka. Among the Bengalis it was especially the representatives of the Muslim landed aristocracy who joined the Muslim League and favoured the partition of Bengal. But there were some among the Muslim elite who threw in their lot against partition and formed the Indian Mohammedan Association which stressed, the common interests of Hindus and Muslims.<sup>6</sup> But on the whole, the subsequent annulment of the partition of Bengal contributed further to the politicisation of the Muslim community.

The results of elections of various local government and district bodies that were held between 1918 and 1937 are indicators of the new political awareness and strength of the Muslims. The Muslims were, in fact, in real control of most of the rural elective bodies in the districts of eastern Bengal and most of the municipalities and district boards in the same region. Some of the perceptive Congress leaders, especially C. R. Das, were able to read the significance of this rising power of the Muslims. A sense of accommodation and appeasement inspired him to take the lead in crafting the Bengal Pact in 1923 with an intent to give the Muslims a fair deal. But though it was endorsed by the Bengal Provincial Congress, the All-India Congress Central Committee rejected the *bonafide* of Das to make such a deal independent of central directive, and that came as a rude shock to the reconcilable Muslim leadership.

It may be argued that even if the Bengal Pact had been successful the widening gap between the two communities could hardly be bridged. The negative factor lay in the Hindu elite versus Muslim elite antagonism. The Muslim elite, with their new sources of strength, were no longer in a mood to remain marginalised. Whatever sense of marginalisation that rankled in the hearts of the Muslims was articulated mainly by their leaders; and the common masses tended to fall in

line. The same was also the case with the Hindus. Indeed by the thirties, the gap was widening beyond the control of those who would have liked a common force forged by both the communities against foreign domination.

Communal frenzy by one community and the reflex action from the other also contributed to the widening of this gap. As has been observed. "Issues like the prohibition of cow slaughter, controversy over Hindu Processionists" playing music in front of mosques, and illegal cesses levied by Hindu landlords for Islamic religious festivals, excited sentiments in the emotionally charged situation and created volatile conditions that could burst into flames at any moment".<sup>7</sup> The fire-brands of both the communities encouraged such religious confrontation, and provided their elite leaders a handy tool for political use. Thus in an antagonistic environment of Hindu and Muslim vested interests, the religious prejudices were blatantly exploited as 'a feeder catalyst'<sup>8</sup> to the latent communal conflict.

But it would be too facile to surmise that the top level Muslim leadership, or for that matter, the top level Hindu leadership were making common cause with their lower level compatriots. One example may be illustrative of such a statement. The 1937 Muslim League Government in Bengal under Fazlul Huq is generally credited with taking such well-meaning steps as the Bengal Tenancy (amendment) Act, the Bengal Money-Lenders Act, operation of Debt Settlement Boards etc. for ameliorating the sufferings of common peasants. In fact, all such measures benefited mainly the rich peasants. Broomfield makes the apt observation that:

... the Huq Government's achievement did not match its pre election rhetoric will come as a little surprise, particularly when we note that Huq - a lawyer and tenure holder from East Bengal - and all his influential party colleagues, were from that class of small town notables who had so much invested in the existing system. A strengthening of the position of the rural middle rung at the expense of the biggest men they would welcome but fundamental change in the system they would not.<sup>9</sup>

But it is also true that the Huq Government adopted many measures benefitting the Muslims including reserving 50 percent of the seats in the provincial services.

Boosted by such circumstances the Muslim elite further consolidated their role in articulating grievances of the Muslims against the Hindus who still dominated almost every aspect of national life. The dominant Congress leadership matched such stridency in Muslim political consciousness by remaining oblivious and anchored in their own communal interest-based perceptions. This was how the Great Divide of 1947 was foreshadowed.<sup>10</sup>

The rising political consciousness among the Muslim masses preceding decolonisation, although apparently influenced by religious sentiment, had its

roots in economic grievances. As Kamruddin Ahmad succinctly puts it "Muslim officers who could not expect any promotion in India because of senior and more efficient Hindu officers, expected to get speedier promotions in Pakistan. The Muslim traders and industrialists, who could not hope to flourish competing with the more experienced and clever Hindu traders and industrialists in India backed Pakistan movement for the same reasons"<sup>11</sup>. For the peasants it was primarily a struggle against the Hindus zamindars. Thus the overwhelming Bengali Muslim vote in favour of Pakistan in the elections of 1946 was not for creating an Islamic Pakistan, but to win economic freedom that appeared to be an impossibility in a Hindu dominated India. Religion did remain intertwined in the psyche of the Muslims at such a turning point in their history, but that was more as a consequence of the tactful use of religion by the elite leadership for mobilisation purposes.

Throughout the movement for Pakistan, especially towards the end, and for the Bengali Muslims the overarching goal remained an abode for themselves where they would go about their business untrammelled by Hindu competition. This is the psyche common to marginalised communities. No identity other than that of a marginalised community, propelled the Bengali Muslims towards the Pakistan movement.<sup>12</sup>

The post-Pakistan experience of the Bengali Muslims, however, showed that Pakistan symbolised only a superficial structural change, and the goal of economic emancipation for the people of East Pakistan would ever remain a chimera under such a structure. The disillusionment that thus set in provided the background for the creation of Bangladesh: and this is the discussion we now propose to turn to.

### Towards Bangladesh

In 1971, Bangladesh emerged with an identity emphasising its distinctiveness as against a dominant (although not a majority) one that it had been under for about two and a half decades. A politicised community is synonymous with ethno-nationalism; and such nationalism of a part within a whole group of people is a phenomenon that has numerous dimensions. Politicisation of a community is the outcome of some period of gestation through a few identifiable stages of growth of consciousness. It has been indicated that a particular community, as it becomes politicised, passes through at least six stages of varying consciousness about its identity and also about how best to retain and/or assert the same under adverse circumstances.<sup>13</sup> The stages may be as follows:

1. ethnic awareness;
2. ethnic evaluation;
3. demands for equality, fairness, and justice in various spheres of national life against perceived or real discrimination and grievances;

4. demand for a separate province, region, state or a larger share of power from the dominating elites;
5. threat of secessions to extract concessions made at the third and fourth stages
6. actual secession when the politicised community refuses to recognise the legitimacy of the larger political community and engages in a struggle for a separate state or for its merger in a neighbouring community.

Although it is posited here that the process of politicisation of a community passes through these six stages it does not necessarily follow that each and every community would meticulously follow this model. It may move gradually from one stage to the other or it may, with higher dynamism, skip over one or more stages to concentrate on the more crucial one. At the same time it may so happen that a particular community, depending on its circumstances or internal dynamics, would move up and down the ladder of these stages. For example, it is on record that a community demanding secession could settle down for autonomy within the framework of the state against which it has once threatened secession.

The first two stages are psychological, something like soul searching under certain circumstances and represent a state of mind. Pushed by a hostile environment and controlled by a dominating community this state of mind may get politicised and start asserting its distinctiveness at the third stage. A community thus politicised may turn aggressive from the fourth stage upward with an escalation in the intensity of identity assertion. At the sixth or final stage the community turns militant with its tool of a violent struggle with cross-border or even with extra-regional linkages and ramification.<sup>14</sup>

#### STAGE 1: AWARENESS

The euphoria for an economic freedom that had once fired the imagination of the Bengali Muslim elite turned out to be a sham in the post-Pakistan period. The experience of the Bengali Muslim masses was not better either. With the departure of the Hindus, the key positions in the East Bengal administration were quickly monopolised by the Punjabi and Urdu speaking Muslim elites from U.P. and other areas of India who had migrated to Pakistan. Even the decision-making process in the new state appeared to be vested in the centre and in which although comprising 54 percent of the total population, the Bengali Muslims had no share. To all intents and purposes, the creation of Pakistan symbolised for the Bengali Muslims a change of masters only and not the mode of domination and exploitation. As one author perceptively observed, "the colonisation of East Bengal was inherent in the power vacuum created by partition."<sup>15</sup> Peter Bertocci elaborated the background of such state of affairs, and stated that "differences of language and culture between Bengalis and the ethnic groups of West Pakistan

became accentuated in the context of the growing regional inequities characteristic of Pakistan's political Economy"<sup>16</sup> Little wonder that only six months after independence a Bengali member declared in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan that "a feeling is growing among the Eastern Pakistanis that eastern Pakistan is being neglected and treated merely as a colony of western Pakistan".<sup>17</sup>

Against such a background of frustration and disillusionment the first stage in the process of politicisation was initiated by the agitation against the first Draft of the Basic Principles Committee appointed by the Constituent Assembly to draw up a constitution for Pakistan<sup>18</sup>. The publication of the report (February, 1950) and the consequent reaction in East Bengal brought about the beginning of a delinkage of the Bengali Muslim psyche from the dreamland that was Pakistan. The *Pakistan Observer* captured the prevailing public mood in the following words:

The citizens of Dacca, mostly East Bengalis were rudely shocked when local dailies carried to them the full text of the Basic Principles Committee Report with regard to the future constitution of Pakistan. It came from all walks of life, high officials, professors, teachers, lawyers, students, medical men, police personnel, etc. Their first reaction was that of bewilderment<sup>19</sup>.

The report was criticised on the ground that the numerical majority of the Bengalis was not given due weightage in the draft constitution of Pakistan (but could not reach its apogee until 1952) and the anti-Basic Principles Committee Report agitation had between them created a cauldron out of which emerged two exclusive Bengali political organisations; the East Pakistan Muslim Students League (4 January 1948) and the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League (23 June 1949) both of which subsequently dropped the word "Muslim".

In the 42-point manifesto that the Awami League in 1949 hammered out as the manifestation of the new political demands of the Bengalis, the first two points demanded regional autonomy for East Bengal on the basis of the Lahore Resolution (1940) leaving Defence, Foreign Affairs, Currency and Coinage with the federal government and recognition of Bengali as one of the state languages of Pakistan. Moreover, a Grand National Convention in Dhaka (14 November 1950) drew up an alternative constitution based on a republican form of government with two autonomous regional governments for the eastern and western units and one central parliament on the basis of population with powers to deal with Foreign Affairs, Currency and Defence only.<sup>20</sup>

Alongside the Awami League and the Students League representing mostly middle class interests the formation of the Youth League (1951) a left organisation, added a new dimension to the politics in East Bengal. The Youth League was launched to mobilise a maximum number of people of all classes on the minimum programme of secularism, anti-imperialism, anti-feudalism, world

peace, unfettered democracy and employment opportunities for all people within the country.<sup>21</sup>

An awareness that the Bengali race, although subsumed under an abstract identity that the state of Pakistan stood for, was distinct with its distinctive hopes and aspirations clearly emerged during this stage. The extent of politicisation that characterised this stage was, in reality, the source out of which gradually developed Bengali nationalism in the days ahead. It is also noteworthy that at this stage a background was sufficiently prepared for throwing away the religious garb from the Bengali Muslim identity and replacing it with a secular one. This was a development very much in consonance with the syncretistic tradition in Bengal; and very much unlike the tradition in West Pakistan. If that be so, whether or not the pre-1947 hobnobbing with an Islamic identity was an aberration is a matter of soul searching that would be dealt with more extensively at the second stage.

## STAGE 2: EVALUATION

The second political manifestation of Bengali's identity awareness was over the language issue<sup>22</sup>. From the central government perspective this issue clearly demonstrated how a western model of nation-building would backfire as it did not take into account the development-culture interface. In its bid to impose Urdu, a language of a minuscule minority, who, however, happened to be the core of the ruling elite, as the state language over a 54 percent non-Urdu speaking majority (as well as over other communities in West Pakistan), the central government provided the Bengalis with a counter-point which spurred them on to look inward in order to resolve the identity crisis that thus ensued. Two representative opinions epitomise the spirit that dominated the language movement between 1948 and 1952. Badruddin Umar considers the movement a 'home-coming of Bangali Muslims'.<sup>23</sup> This was however, not a complete home-coming, rather the beginning of it; home-coming would be completed in 1971. The shibboleth of the movement was for Urdu and Bangla to be state languages. In other words, the Bengalis were perceptually within the framework of Pakistan. A definite jolt was, however, dealt to this framework by the movement and that is why the movement has relevance to the process of politicisation of the Bengalis. Another representative opinion comes from Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah. While delivering the Presidential address of the East Pakistan Literary Conference held at Dhaka on 31 December 1948, he observed. "It is a reality that we are Hindus and Muslims; but the greater reality is that we are all Bengalis. Mother Nature has put such indelible mark on our appearance and language that no camouflage of Hindu and Muslim external markings or symbols could hide this basic reality."<sup>24</sup> Perfect as this characterisation is, the language issue catalysed the renewal of the traditional

non-communal and secular psyche of the Bengalis. It was indeed a going back to the roots that had been lost for some time by the euphoria that attended the Pakistan movement.

But the crux of the question is: how far could the Language Movement be linked to Bengali nationalism? For those who have grown accustomed to hearing the movement as a precursor to the Bangladesh of 1971 such a question might appear to be a queer proposition. But reality demands that the question needs be probed and answered. The dogged obstinacy of the government matched by the growing militancy of student agitators eventually culminated in the tragic incident of 21 February. As bullets hit a few young souls, the blood of these martyrs decided the issue. By the 1956 constitution Bangla was given the status of one of the state languages, exactly as the demand had been. Moreover, the establishment of the Bangla Academy and the Central Board for the Development of Bangla gave considerable satisfaction for the Bengali intelligentsia. If the aims of the movement had thus been achieved how could it continue to serve as the well-spring of growing nationalism? In this context a recent work on the theme has the following to say:

Arguably, the Language Movement of 1948-1952 was a milestone in the growing demand for cultural self-determination of the Bengalis in Pakistan. It helped to fix their perceptions towards the immigrant north Indian and West Pakistani elite and led to the growth of an increased assertiveness among them about their cultural identity. But to suggest that a definite link existed between the Language Movement and the nationalism of 1971... Is perhaps over stretching the argument too far. Scholars, and nationalists, in search of a myth to justifying an event after it had occurred often takes recourse to such myth making, which ignores historical realities and dynamics of a movement.<sup>25</sup>

Emotive exaggerations aside, the Language Movement has a symbolic significance in the history of Bengali nationalism. That the West Pakistani ruling elite did understand such symbolic aspect of the movement properly was demonstrated when, on 26 March 1971, the *Shaheed Minar* was razed to the ground by the Pakistan army. The Language Movement helped the Bengalis evaluate their position vis-à-vis Pakistan; and this evaluation was at the root of identity consciousness and autonomy assertion — the characteristics of increasing politicisation.

### STAGE 3: DEMAND FOR EQUALITY

The above two stages prepared the background for a development that would take place in March 1954 with the first popular election to the Provincial Assembly. In the previous year a United Front was formed against the Muslim League by the Awami League and the Krishak Sramik Party. The United Front fought the election on a Twenty-one point programme which among other

demands, reiterated complete regional autonomy for East Bengal (point 19) and the acceptance of Bangla as a state language (point 1).<sup>26</sup> This programme was considered a charter of demands of the Bengalis in their struggle for equal treatment. The extent of support that this programme garnered amongst the Bengalis could be seen in the result of the election. With 300 out of 309 seats the United Front literally trounced the Muslim League which maintained bare existence with the rest 9 seats. The rejection of the Muslim League by the Bengalis was not merely the rejection of the party only: it was the rejection of all that this party represented or stood for. It was also clear that as against the West Pakistan bourgeoisie represented by the Muslim League the United Front emerged as the spokesman for the rising Bengali bourgeoisie. By now the politicisation of the Bengalis had reached the proportion of a broad based social protest movement, which would be further strengthened by the way central government reacted to political happenings in East Bengal following the election. A United Front government headed by Fazlul Huq as Chief Minister that had been formed was unseated in May; and governor's rule was imposed on the province.<sup>27</sup> Thus the mailed fist from East Bengal was to be confronted by a show of brute force (until then constitutional) by the central government to retain its hold.

#### STAGE 4: DEMAND FOR A SEPARATE PROVINCE

The events that followed this *coup de theatre* in quick succession stretching from the mid-fifties through to the late sixties moved Bengali politicisation to the fourth and crucial stage. This was the stage during which the Bengali political scenario witnessed implosions and realignments out of which the Awami League emerged as the spokesman for the rising Bengali bourgeoisie, representing moderate views as against some other political forces whose stance was more strident and militant.

The second draft of the Basic Principles Committee presented in 1952 recommended a bi-cameral system providing parity between the two wings. The reaction in West Pakistan to this draft confirmed the Bengali political perception that the only intent of the ruling elite was to impose control over East Bengal. This draft was especially resented by the Punjabi members of the constituent assembly who feared that parity might lead to Bengali dominance.<sup>28</sup> By that time Ghulam Mohammad had become Governor-General of Pakistan, and in 1954, falling in line with the Punjab sentiment, integrated all the provinces of the western wing into one single province. Consequently, West Pakistan, in its confrontation with East Bengal, should now speak as one entity.<sup>29</sup> This was resented in East Bengal as well as in other smaller provinces in West Pakistan.

The next section in the growing political consciousness of the Bengalis at this stage was related with the 1956 constitution. As it was finally framed the constitution provided for a unicameral legislature called the National Assembly,

to be elected on a basis of parity between East and West. But its provision for a strong central government was resented in East Pakistan (the constitution had renamed East Bengal as East Pakistan) where the faction of the Awami League which was under the leadership of Bhasani declared that East Pakistan might have to think in terms of secession.<sup>30</sup> Indeed a split in the Awami League was in the offing. The final split, however, came in 1957, when Suhrawardy was the Prime Minister of Pakistan. He supported the 1956 constitution on the grounds that it had guaranteed "ninety-eight percent provincial autonomy" for East Pakistan. Moreover, he had also supported the one unit scheme for West Pakistan. Both these policies, as well as his pro-Western foreign policy, were opposed by the Bhasani faction. Thus, in 1957, Bhasani, along with some leftist groups, formed the National Awami Party, which was based on socialism and anti-imperialism. However, as will be seen below Bhasani would not remain consistent in his anti-establishment stance.

Such a split within the Awami League indicated a fundamental change in the nationalist movement of the Bengalis. As Hamza Alavi points out, there were two traditions in the Bengali nationalist movement. viz, a petty bourgeois elitist tradition comprising of persons aspiring for senior posts in the bureaucracy, or to become rich businessmen; and a rural populist tradition articulating the frustrations of the poor peasantry.<sup>31</sup> With the departure of the Bhasani faction the Awami League came under the dominance of the elitist tradition.

During the Ayub regime (1958-1969) the political movement in East Pakistan changed from "movements for competitive participation in the national system to radical autonomy movements".<sup>32</sup> The 1965 Indo-Pak War and the consequent highlighting of the vulnerability of East Pakistan provided further fuel for the nationalist movement. Meanwhile, in 1963, Suhrawardy had died, and the General Secretary Sheikh Mujibur Rahman revitalised the Awami League. He was successful in synthesising the elitist tradition with that of a mass populist one. Immediately after the war he had declared that "the question of autonomy appears to be more important after the war. The time has come for making East Pakistan self-sufficient in all respects"<sup>33</sup>. And, the political programme that he had hinted at was put forward in the Six-Point programme. Essentially, a plan for regional autonomy the programme included the following demands:

1. The constitution should provide for a Federation of Pakistan in its true sense on the Lahore Resolution and the parliamentary form of government with supremacy of a Legislature directly elected on the basis of universal adult franchise.
2. The federal government should deal with only two subjects: Defence and Foreign Affairs and all other residuary subjects shall be vested in the federating states.
3. Two separate, but freely convertible currencies for two wings should be introduced: or if this is not feasible, there should be one currency for the

whole country, but effective constitutional provisions should be introduced to stop the flight of capital from East to West Pakistan. Furthermore, a separate Banking Reserve should be established and a separate fiscal and monetary policy be adopted for East Pakistan.

4. The power of taxation and revenue collection shall be vested in the federating units and the federal centre will have no such power. The federation will be entitled to a share in the state taxes to meet its expenditures.
5. There should be two separate accounts for the foreign exchange earnings of the two wings; the foreign exchange requirements of the federal government should be met by the two wings equally or in a ratio to be fixed; indigenous products should move free of duty between the two wings and the constitution should empower the units to establish trade links with foreign countries.
6. East Pakistan should have a separate militia or paramilitary force<sup>34</sup>.

Although in many respects more militant than the autonomy demands of the 1950s the Six-Point programme was to all intents and purposes, a reflection of the aspirations of the middle and upper middle class Bengalis and had nothing to do with the socio-economic transformation of the society at large. Again, despite what the Pakistani ruling elite made it out to be it was not, by any analysis, a blue-print for the break up of Pakistan. On the contrary, if implemented, the Six-Point programme could have possibly saved Pakistan at least temporarily. But, in its spirit and content, the programme, at least for the Bengali elite, replicated the political demands of the Muslims before 1947. However the charisma of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and dynamism of the student activists soon transformed the programme into a strong rallying cry for all sections of Bengalis.

The extent and nature of mass mobilisation effected by the Six-Point programme were rather unnerving for the Pakistani ruling elite and they responded with increasing repression; and in May 1966 Mujib and several other Awami League leaders were arrested. Later in December, the Ayub regime framed a conspiracy case, known as the "Agartala Conspiracy Case", against the leading Awami League politicians as well as members of the East Pakistan Civil Service and army officers. Both actions proved counter-productive and the Bengali nationalists were forced to escalate their demands.

#### STAGE 5: ROAD TO AUTONOMY

With the arrest of the Awami League leaders the nationalist movement, instead of losing any of its momentum, turned more dynamic under the younger leadership of the students. At this stage it is worth noting that a constant factor in the political evolution of Bengali nationalism has always been ideas and activities of the student community. When the elder politicians were hesitant

and more cautious, and had so many stakes to take into consideration the determination of the students decided the final outcome of the Language Movement. Ever since then while facing national issues affecting their own community, they never wavered; differing however on strategy and tactics. A brief retrospective analysis of their role over the years substantiates such a generalisation. As far back as 1962 a secret 'nucleus' was formed within the Students League under the leadership of Sirajul Alam Khan with the objective of working for an independent Bangladesh. During the Six-Point movement in 1966 this group used to publish a periodical titled *Biplobi Bangla* (Revolutionary Bengal). As will be discussed, this group exercised a crucial influence in shaping the course of events between 1969 and 1971.<sup>35</sup>

In early December, 1968, the students formed an All-Party Students Action Committee (SAC) under the leadership of the Dhaka University Central Students Union (DUCSU). This committee was headed by Tofael Ahmed, a firebrand of student politics. In no time, SAC became the main vehicle of nationalist agitation, which was galvanised with spontaneous support from masses into a national movement. Such a rapid transformation of the movement was facilitated by the programme of the students known as the Eleven-Point programme. This programme included not only the Six-Point demand for autonomy, but it also contained a socialist platform, including nationalisation of Banks, insurance companies, and big industrial units (point 5). Besides, it claimed reduction of taxes upon farmers (point 6), payment of proper wages to labourers (point 7), and the formulation of an independent foreign policy, including withdrawal from CENTO and SEATO pacts (point 10).<sup>36</sup>

A chain of events took place which eventually turned the movement into a mass upsurge. First, on 20 January 1969, Asad a pro-Bhasani NAP student leader who was killed in police firing, who was expectedly declared a martyr; and 24 January was observed as "Mass Upsurge Day" with a vow to realise the Eleven-Point demand.<sup>37</sup>

Second, on 15 February, Sergeant Zahurul Huq, an accused in the "Agartala Conspiracy Case" was killed while in military custody. Third, on 18 February, Dr. Shamsuzzoha, a teacher of Rajshahi University was killed by an army officer on the campus. The cumulative impact of all these incidents was to make the on-going movement more militant and aggressive. With the students in absolute control of the streets and offices the provincial administration literally collapsed. Student leaders would give out directions which had to be honoured both by government officers and public. But above all, the slogans chanted during this mass upsurge clearly indicate that the nationalist movement had reached the climax. The slogans were "Joy Bangla" (Long Live Bangladesh), "Tomar Amar Thikana, Padma, Meghna, Jamuna" (Your address and mine, Padma, Meghna, Jamuna), "Dhaka Na Pindi, Dhaka, Dhaka" (We are for Dhaka, not for Pindi), "Punjab Na Bangla, Bangla" (We are for Bengal, and not for the Punjab), "Amar

Desh, Tomar Desh, Bangldesh" (My country and your country, Bangladesh). A linguistic and territorial nationalism was clearly manifested in these slogans. If this was the nationalism of the Bengalis they could not longer remain tied to the Pakistani nationalism that was denominational. Such an underlying spirit of this militant nationalism was manifested in the slogan coined by the Sirajul Alam Khan nucleus: "Bir Bangali Astra Dharo, Bangladesh Swadhin Karo."<sup>38</sup>

The Mass Upsurge of 1969 secured withdrawal of the "Agartala Conspiracy Case" along with the release of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and also effected an end to the rule of Ayub Khan in March, 1969. As he came out from imprisonment Sheikh Mujibur Rahman found himself to have been overtaken by the developments, the movement had gone too far, the mood of the masses was for immediate declaration of independence.

#### STAGE 6: ACTUAL SECESSION

The 1969 political change in Pakistan witnessed a transition from a civilianised military rule to military rule. Ayub Khan went and Yahya Khan came in. In a crafty political move to stem the tide of agitational politics in both wings of Pakistan Yahya quickly announced an election schedule for October, 1970. In March 1970, a Legal Framework Order was proclaimed, according to which elections were to be held under the Martial Law Order. The Order outlined the role of the future National Assembly in framing a new constitution where "the Federal Government shall also have adequate powers to discharge its responsibilities in relation to external and internal affairs, and to preserve the independence and territorial integrity of the country".<sup>39</sup> The Legal Framework Order thus went against the spirit of the Six-Point or Eleven-Point and even against the Six-Point based draft constitution for Pakistan that the Awami League had hastily hammered out in mid-March, 1970 at the suggestion of Ayub Khan.<sup>40</sup>

The Awami League, however, went ahead preparing for the coming election which they declared to be a referendum on the Party's programme for autonomy. The result of the national elections held in December, 1970 (deferred because of a cyclone that had devastated the coastal areas of East Pakistan) was a complete victory over the Awami League, which won 160 out of the 162 seats allotted to East Pakistan, and thus got an absolute majority in the National Assembly of 300 seats.

The election results were significant in considering the location of the two streams of nationalism that Hamza Alavi has identified. With the Awami League as the decisive winner (although the voter turn-out was 58 percent only) it was clear that the pro-middle class stream held the upper hand. The other stream represented mostly by the Bhasani NAP, although an initiator of socialist and secular features in the nationalist movement, failed to read properly the underlying spirit of Bengali nationalism and had lost the leadership to the Awami League early in the sixties by siding with the Ayub regime for its supposed

pro-Chinese stance. Little did Bhasani and his camp followers realise that Ayub government's tilt towards China was not an outcome of the dictates of ideology, but of an expediency having roots in Pakistan's strained relations with the United States. In 1968, however, NAP did recover from such an illusion and awoke to the realities near at home, but it was too late. By that time Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had emerged as the sole spokesman for Bengali nationalism.

The actual succession was foreshadowed in the election results and the consequent political scenario that emerged. The Awami League did not win a single seat in West Pakistan, where the majority (81 out of 140 seat(s) went to Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party. But with majority of the seats in the National Assembly, the Awami League was in a position to dictate the new constitution, which it insisted should be on the basis of the autonomy programme as contained in the Six-Point. This was a situation not acceptable to Bhutto who had campaigned for a strong central government, a powerful army and a strong anti-Indian foreign policy. He refused to attend the opening session of the National Assembly, and on 1 March 1971, Yahya Khan announced the postponement of the session.

The announcement had a wild-fire impact on the on-going movement of Bengalis. During the non-violent non-cooperation movement that thus ensued and continued up to 25 March Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib was facing mounting pressure for an immediate declaration of Independent Bangladesh and on 7 March, a mammoth public meeting at the Race Course (now Suhrawardy Uddyan) declared "the struggle this time is for liberation, the struggle of us this time is for our independence" (Ebarer Sangram Swadhinatar Sangram). But even then he was predisposed towards a peaceful solution; and joined the negotiations with the military political representatives of West Pakistan that dragged on between 16 and 24 March with no results.

The military crackdown of 25 March was the final and decisive turning point in the history of Bengali nationalism. Until that date the nationalism that had developed and been represented by the Awami League was seeking autonomy within the framework of Pakistan. It may however be argued that the Awami League's consistent avoidance of a programme for instant and total independence was a matter of tactic, than of intent. Considering the fledgling nature of the party as well as of the movement that had grown, an early open cry for independence would have provoked a massive Pakistani reaction, which the leadership wanted to avoid until an opportune moment. But after 25 March the Pakistani attempt to impose a military solution on the simmering constitutional crisis was to be matched by resistance. With most of the nationalist leaders across the border in India (except Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who had been taken into Pakistani custody) and a government-in-exile formed to devise politico-military strategy the Bengali politicisation had reached the sixth and final stage. The declaration of independence on 26 March initiated the beginning of Bangladesh, and the end of united Pakistan.

## Conclusion

The nationalism that gave birth to Bangladesh had its primary sources in language and culture; but only to the extent of providing the Bengalis with an identity. Eventually, other sources rolled into the process of nation making. But on the whole, Bengali nationalism was an anti-thesis to the Muslim nationalism that had created Pakistan. In both cases, however, the underlying goal was economic emancipation. In the case of the Pakistan movement, political mobilisation was engineered with a massive and pervasive use of Islam, because this was the only way to fire the imagination of Muslims against the Hindus. But in the case of Bangladeshi agitation, Islamic appeal lost ground as Islamic Pakistan stood for betrayal and exploitation. Again, in both cases, the common catalysts were the elites. The interests of elites were articulated in such a way as to induce the masses into the mainstream of nationalist agitation. In the case of Bangladesh elites the task was made easier by the Pakistan military crackdown.

The main tenor of this nationalism can be illustrated from a poster that was widely used during the tumultuous days of March, 1971; it read: "Hindus of Bengal, Christians of Bengal, Buddhists of Bengal, Muslims of Bengal – we are all Bengalis".<sup>41</sup>

## Notes

1. W.W. Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans*, (London 1972), 164.
2. A.K.Nazmul Karim, *The Dynamics of Bangladesh Society*, (Delhi 1989), 117.
3. On Muslim separatism in an overall Indian context see Abdul Hamid, *Muslim Separatism in India: A Brief Survey* (Lahore 1967); and in Bengal context see Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims 1871 - 1906: A Quest for Identity*, (Delhi 1981); Amalendu De, *Roots of Separatism in Nineteenth Century Bengal*, (Calcutta 1974); and Jayanti Maitra, *Muslim Politics in Bengal 1855-1906*, (Calcutta 1984).
4. For details see Jayanti Maitra, *Ibid*, 74-75.
5. This socio-economic transformation has been investigated by Partha Chatterjee in Bengal 1920-1947; *The Land Question*, Vol. 1, (Calcutta 1984); Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social structure and Politics (1919-1947)*. (Cambridge 1986); and Rajat K. Roy, *Social Conflict and Political Unrest in Bengal 1875-1927*. (Delhi 1984).
6. Kirsten Westergaard, *State and Rural Society in Bengal*, (New Delhi 1986), 26.
7. Rafiuddin Ahmed; *Religion, Nationalism and Politics in Bangladesh*, 17; see also Shakwat Ara Husain, *Politics and Society in Bengal: A Legislative Perspective, 1921-1936* (Dhaka 1992), 31-34.
8. Jayanti Maitra, *Muslim Politics*, 8.
9. John H. Broomfield, *Peasant Mobilization in Twentieth Century Bengal* in J. Sptelberg and Whiteford (eds.), *Forging Nations: A Comparative View of Rural Ferment and Revolt* (Michigan 1976), 52.
10. For a fuller discussion on the role of the Congress in the division of the subcontinent along communal lines see Bimalananda Sasmal, *Bharat Ki Kore Bhag Holo* (vernacular) (How India was Partitioned). (Calcutta 1981).

11. Kamruddin Ahmed, *The Social History of East Pakistan*, (Dhaka 1967), 58
12. A recent study, however, suggests the existence of "Sub-nationalism" among the Bengali Muslims in that they remained "fully alive to their Bengali loyalties" throughout the Pakistan movement. In the context of what has been contended in this essay such an assertion may remain debatable. See Harun-or-Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh: Bengal Muslim League and Muslim Politics, 1936-1947*, (Dhaka 1987), 344, 346.
13. For an elaboration see Inayatullah, "Politics of Ethnicity and Separatism in South Asia", paper (unpublished) presented at the Regional Security Conference organised by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (London) and Quaid-E-Azam University in Islamabad, 6-8 June, 1988; see also Syed Anwar Husain, "Ethnicity and Security of Bangladesh", paper (unpublished) presented at the Seminar on South Asia's Security; Primary of its Internal Dimension, organized by Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, Dhaka, 5-7 January, 1992.
14. For a discussion on how external linkages influence politicisation and militarisation of a community see Inayatullah, "Internal and External Factors in the Failure of national integration in Pakistan" in Stephanic G. Newman (ed.), *Small States and Segmented Societies: National Political Integration in a Global Environment*, (New York 1976), 84-117.
15. Feroz Ahmed, "The Structural Matrix of the Struggle in Bangladesh" in K. Gough and II. P. Sharma (eds.) *Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia* (New York, 1973), 421.
16. Peter J. Bertocci, 'Bangladesh: Composite Cultural Identity and Modernization in a Muslim Majority State" in Philip II, Stoddard, et al (eds.) *Change in the Muslim World*, (Syracuse 1983), 77.
17. Cited in Khalid Bin Sayeed, *The Political System of Pakistan*, (Karachi 1967), 64. For details of the Report see Moudud Ahmed, *Bangladesh: Constitutional Quest for Autonomy*, Dhaka 1976, 1920.
18. For details of the report see Moudud Ahmed, *Bangladesh: Constitutional Quest for Autonomy*, Dhaka 1976, 1920
19. Cited in *ibid*, 22.
20. For details of the recommendations of the Grand National Convention see *ibid*, 22-28.
21. See Talukder Maniruzzaman, *Radical Politics and the Emergence of Bangladesh*, (Dhaka 1975), 6. It may be mentioned that leftist pressure for secularism forced the Awami League and the Students League to drop the word "Muslim".
22. This is one area, which despite a profusion of literature from diverse perspectives, has not yet received scholarly attention.
23. Badruddin Umar, *Sanskritic Samprudaikata* (Vernacular), (Cultural Communalism), (Dhaka 1960). 8.
24. Translation from original Bengali cited in A.F. Salahuddin Ahmed, "Historical and Cultural Background of the Emergence of Bangladesh" in Indo-British Review, Vol.XVII, No.1 & 2, September & December 1989, 160.
25. Ataur Rahman Khan, "The Language Movement and Bengali Nationalism" in Rafiuddin Ahmed (ed.), *Religion*, 174.
26. For details of twentyone points programme see Moudud Ahmed, Bangladesh, 32-33.
27. See Khalid Bin Sayeed, *Political System*, 73.
28. G.W. Choudhury, *Constitutional Development in Pakistan* (Vancouver 1969), 74.
29. Khalid Bin Sayeed, *Political System*, 73.
30. G.W. Choudhury, *Constitutional Development*, 97-98.

31. Hamza Alavi, "The State in Post-colonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh", in K. Gough and II, P.Sharma (eds.) Imperialism, 167.
32. Rounaq Jahan, *Pakistan*, (New York 1972), 159.
33. Cited in *Talukder Maniruzzaman, Radical Politics*, 36.
34. See Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, *Bangladesh, My Bangladesh: Selected Speeches and Statements*, ed. Ramendu Majumder, (Delhi 1972), 127-28, (Appendices)
35. For further discussion see Syed Anwar Husain "Ekattorer Muktijuddha", (Liberation war of 1971) in Syed Anwar Husain and Muntassir Mamoon (eds.), *Bangladeshe Sasostra Protirodh Andolon* (Vernacular), (Armed Resistance Movement in Bangladesh), (Dhaka 1986), 420.
36. For a detailed discussion of the Eleven-Point programme see Moudud Ahmed, *Bangladesh*, 136-138.
37. The "Asad Gate" at Mohammadpur stands as a mausoleum reminding us the sacrifice made by Asad.
38. See Syed Anwar Husain, *Ekattorer Muktijuddha*, 420.
39. For the text of the Legal Framework Order see Moudud Ahmed, *Bangladesh*, 194-197.
40. For the text of this draft constitution see *ibid.*, 163-187.
41. In original Bengali the poster read : "Banglar Hindu, Banglar Christian, Banglar Bouddha, Banglar Musalman - Amra Sadbai Bangali". It is worth noting that the Muslims have been mentioned last. It does show how the majority community viewed the minorities.

## CHAPTER NINE

# Peasants and Politics in East Bengal, 1914 - 1947

Tajul Islam Hashmi

### Introduction

While evaluating peasant politics in Bengal during the British period, we should bear in mind that:

1. Both violent and non-violent activities of the peasant in “power perspective” are political by nature.
2. Revolts and violent uprisings are but “extraordinary” times and that peasants mostly live in “ordinary” times when “uneventful normality” prevails in the village community;
3. In pre-capitalist (peasant) societies, masses do not always act to safeguard their economic interests but their “social standing”, “social claims” and social assets<sup>1</sup>. According to Hobsbawm class consciousness in pre-capitalist societies is “primarily non-economic”, while Gramsci has perceived that economic crises do not produce fundamental events directly, they can only create more “favourable ground for propaganda of certain ways of thinking”<sup>2</sup>.
4. As the political act is one “exercised in power perspectives” power is different from influence and authority. A priest or teacher may be influential and a court has authority. As Tawney has defined, power on the one hand, is “the capacity of an individual or group of individuals, to modify the conduct of other individuals or groups in the manner which he desires, and prevent his own conduct being modified in the manner in which he does not”<sup>3</sup>. Hobsbawm further elucidates the concepts of politics and power. According to him, peasants’ politics are activities in power perspectives “in which peasants are involved with the larger societies of

which they form part... both those which are their economic, social, and political 'superiors' or exploiters and those which are not"<sup>4</sup>.

5. Although some scholars have excluded violence from the scope of politics, as it is warlike<sup>5</sup>, one should not reject all violent rebellions, often short-lived, sporadic, confined to a small territory and "unpremeditated" as politically insignificant actions. No rebellion can be totally immune to political ramifications, even if it is aimed against individuals or groups for redress of the rebels' immediate grievances. However, one may classify violent movements, jacqueries and/or "Mafia type" acts of "social banditry" as expressions of the elementary stage of political consciousness of the illiterate peasants or "primitive rebels", to paraphrase Hobsbawm. They may be classified as "pre-political" but are not insignificant at all<sup>6</sup>. Consequently the Fakir-Sannyasi rebellions, the Faraizi revolts, the Indigo riots and the Sirajganj uprising of peasants, for example, cannot be rejected as "pre-political" acts of violence against local exploiters for immediate redress of the peasants' grievances as the hidden agenda of the rebels reflected their desire to overpower the exploiters and eliminate the exploiting system. They were, at worst, sporadic, short-lived and not so organized "political" movements. We cannot reject them as "pre-political". However, peasants at the grassroots level continued to behave as "pre-political" elements even during the broad-based nationalist political movements, such as the Faraizi, "Wahhabi", Khilafat-Non-Cooperation and the Freedom Struggle up to 1947. Peasants' isolation from the mainstream of politics led by the non-peasant urban elite and their traditional ways of paying off old scores by violent means are often responsible for their "pre-political" behaviour. Consequently instead of striving for changing the undesirable systems of *zamindari* or *mahajani* systems, for example, they took part in movements against their immediate exploiters for the redress of immediate grievances or the disappearance of particular *zamindar* or *mahajan* from the scene. This pacified the aggrieved peasants immediately. The history of peasant movements in the region during the British colonial period is replete with such examples.
6. Finally, an understanding of peasant politics requires that we understand peasants are mostly self-absorbed and parochial, busy with their day-to-day living and having a limited political horizon. Peasants' politics mostly connote the "politics" of their "family, village and caste"<sup>7</sup>. It is also important to note that peasants are basically factious and primarily loyal to their faction chiefs or patrons. Their political mobilization is primarily done through faction chiefs and the factions do not have fraternal relationships among themselves. Conflict is the norm and fraternity is rare in any peasant community. However, peasants in a region may be organized by cutting across inter-factional and inter-/intra-village conflicts when all

of them confront a common class or communal enemy. This is what happened on the eve of all broad-based peasant movements in the region throughout the period of this study.

207

### Elite-Peasant Nexus: "Pre-History" of Peasants' Politics

The advent of the British Raj in the second half of the 18th century brought misery to the average Bengali especially the Muslim masses, middle classes as well as the aristocracy. The battle of Plassey and the subsequent quick administrative, economic, cultural and political changes brought a new class of landed and professional elites (mostly Hindu) into being, and both the Muslim masses and aristocrats became impoverished, irrelevant and without government patronage. Both the pre- and post-Permanent Settlement land systems adversely affected the Muslim landed classes. The bulk of the Muslims in Bengal simply could not cope with the changes and failed to compete with the Hindu professionals (*babus* and *bhadralok*) and *zamindar-mahajan* classes. The rampant corruption and the unbridled competition for making huge fortunes among the *bania* and *mutsuddi* classes (mostly Hindu Bengalis) further impoverished the Bengali Muslim and peasant-weaver classes not long after the onset of the Company *Raj*. Consequently as these changes brought a huge mass of frustrated and downtrodden masses to the surface, the abrupt changes in the fortune of hitherto dominant classes, peasants, artisans and weavers also gave birth to numerous peasant and mass rebellions not long after a few years of the battle of Plassey. Most of these rebellions were disorganized, sporadic and millennial in nature - their targets being the immediate exploiters and aiming at the redress of the immediate grievances of the rebels.

The Fakir-Sannyasi Rebellions of the 1770s and a few other sporadic movements may be cited in this regard. This rebellion led by mendicants and hermits coincided the advent of the Great Famine of 1769-70, a by-product of the systemic looting of the countryside by the rapacious landlords and their agents. Fakir Majnu Shah was one of the famous leaders of the movement. Hindu and Muslim masses, peasant as well as non-peasant, participated in the movement. This movement by frustrated and confused *fakir-sannyasis* and their followers did not aim at capturing the state power. They hardly understood the reason of their misery and had no idea about how the big transition had been taking place in the arena of politics. How the political transformation since Plassey had been installing the Englishmen as their rulers was simply beyond their comprehension. In view of the above, the Fakir-Sannyasi rebellion can be explained as one of the major, sporadic, "pre-political" mass movements of the 18th century. Most importantly, the leaders of the movement as well as the ideology were grassroots-based, indigenous to the people.

The "Wahhabi" and Faraizi movements (1820s – 1850s) were led by local leaders with local as well as "borrowed" ideologies of Islamic puritanism and

reforms from outside Bengal (Arabian Wahhabis and North Indian Syed Ahmed Brelvi and others). Under the Wahhabi influence a local peasant, Titu Mir of 24-Parganas, started his movement against the local (Hindu) *zamindar* for imposing illegal cesses (*abwab*) including the humiliating beard tax on Muslim peasants. Local police and magistrate did not help him, so he turned violent and ultimately got killed at the hands of British troops in 1831. His movement was short-lived, sporadic and against immediate exploiters to get rid of immediate exploitation. The nature of Titu Mir's movement was not "political", with a view to capturing the state power, at least at the very beginning of the movement.

The Faraizis, on the other hand, wanted to transform British India which they regarded as "Dar ul-Harb" (abode of war), into "Dar ul-Islam" (abode of Islam) by reform and Jihad. They also advocated the non-observance of Juma and Eid prayers in (non-Muslim) British India, (mainly in the districts of Faridpur, Barisal, Dhaka and Pabna), so that they would eventually establish "Dar ul-Islam" to say Juma and Eid congregational prayers and establish an Islamic state. They also fought exacting *zamindars* (Hindu) and British indigo planters. The Faraizis also wanted the restoration of their "moral economy" or what they perceived as morally correct like the "Wahhabis", Fakir-Sannyasis and other peasant leaders.

The Sirajganj and Pabna Rebellion of 1872-73 was against arbitrary enhancement of rent by local *zamindars*. It was led by both Hindu and Muslim leaders and participated in by both Hindu and Muslim peasants. Under the leadership of local leaders, the rebellion was violent, short-lived, localized, sporadic and "pre-political" by nature as the movement did not aim at abolishing the *zamindari* system but wanted "just rent" from the *zamindars* who were very legitimate in their eyes, from the parameters of their "moral economy". This uprising later led to the enactment of the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 and eventually to the foundation of the All-India National Congress as the government wanted non-violent constitutional movements as alternatives to the violent ones and promoted better rights for the peasants to pacify them.

The *Swadeshi* Movement, 1905 – 1911: Muslim peasants had a negative correlation with the movement as their leaders (urban *ashraf* and rural *jotedar*) told them about the benefits of the Partition of Bengal from the Muslim point of view. Nawab Salimullah of Dhaka and other Muslim aristocrats, who later formed the Muslim League in 1906, inspired the Muslim peasants most. They despised the Hindu *bhadralok* who were behind the Swadeshi and terrorist movements. The so-called Ma Kali's Bomb and attacks on Muslims by Hindu "*Swadeshis*" (opponents of the Partition of Bengal) led to the rioting at Jamalpur, Comilla and elsewhere in 1907. By 1914 Muslim peasants organized by Muslim *ashraf* and *jotedar* leaders had started joining and organizing Proja Conferences. The big one took place at Kamarer Char in Mymensingh in 1914. These conferences gradually politicised the peasants and they were convinced of the

efficacy of non-violent, long-term political movements against their exploiters to get better rights over land and lesser rent and interest on loans, etc.

Although the annulment of the Partition of Bengal in 1911 disillusioned the Muslims in general and shocked their faith in the government, instead of turning anti-British they became more anti-Hindu throughout the region. Meanwhile they achieved the Separate Electorates in 1909, as well as a national Muslim organization - the Muslim League in 1906 - and elected several vocal Muslim representatives in the Legislative and Executive Councils, Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Chaudhury, Nawab Syed Shamsul Huda, A K Fazlul Huq and Nawab Khwaja Salimullah of Dacca being prominent among them.<sup>8</sup>

From 1914 onwards began the period of peasant mobilization on a larger scale - not only by the *ulama*, but also by the Western educated Muslim and Namasudra leaders of the region. The proposed amendments to the Tenancy Act in 1914, to favour the tenants<sup>9</sup>, aroused special interest among the *jotedars* and well-to-do peasants, who expected firmer rights over their holdings. 'They organized the first *proja* or tenant conference at Kamarerchar in Jamalpur (Mymensingh) in 1914, where men like Fazlul Huq, Maulana Akram Khan, Maulana Muniruzzaman Islamabadi, Maulvi Rajibuddin Tarafdar and other Muslim leaders having upper-peasant backgrounds and connections, demanded better rights for the tenantry and criticized the *zamindari* system<sup>10</sup>. Soon, under the patronage of Governor Ronaldshay, several peasant and Namasudra organizations came into being. In late 1917 Fazlul Huq and a group of Muslim lawyers and journalists founded the Calcutta Agricultural Association. In 1920 the Bengal Jotedars' and Ryots' Association was formed<sup>11</sup>.

Against this background, the introduction of the Union Board allegedly formed with "anti-Permanent Settlement" objectives<sup>12</sup>, and the extension of the franchise by the Government of India Act 1919, also known as the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, which granted 33 rural seats to the Muslims in the Bengal Legislative Council and increased the number of voters from 9,000 to 1.5 million, the majority of whom were cultivators, in the whole province, alarmed the Hindu *bhadralok* and *zainindars*,<sup>13</sup>. These Acts created great enthusiasm among the well-to-do, enfranchised peasants, who formed their own associations which, although they did not achieve anything immediately, were the precursors of the major Muslim peasant organization of the later days - the *Proja* Party, formed by Fazlul Huq in 1929<sup>14</sup>.

It is evident from different contemporary sources that the peasants were also enthusiastic about the Survey and Settlement Operations, the Co-operative Movement, Union Boards and other government measures including the formation of the Debt Settlement Boards to curtail moneylenders' power. The Settlement operations made the tenants conscious of their rights. Consequently they resisted landlords' attempts at enhancement of rent. In some districts, these Operations discouraged the practice of exacting *abwab* from

tenants<sup>15</sup>. When the Tenancy Amendment Bill was on the anvil in the mid-1920s, peasants formed their own organizations to organize themselves against the *zamindars* and tenure-holders whose rights, they anticipated, were going to be curtailed by the Act. In some districts, anticipating occupancy rights, even sharecroppers became assertive of their rights<sup>16</sup>.

The long-term impact of tenancy legislation and the extension of the franchise down to the well-to-do peasants have been well explained by a government Report in 1918:

Our rule gave them [peasants] security from the violence of robbers and the exaction of landlords, regulated by amounts of revenue or rent that they had to pay, and assured to both proprietor and cultivator - in the latter case by the device of the occupancy right - a safe title in their lands. The change was so great that they sank into a condition of lethargic content; even yet they have barely realized that Government has any other gifts to offer; as for the idea of self-government, it is simply a planet that has not yet risen above their horizon.

But there are signs of awakening. They have already learnt an important lesson — that it is legitimate to bring their troubles to the note of the government and that a good Government will listen to them with sympathy...

Hitherto, they have regarded the official as their representative in the councils of Government; and now we have to tear up that faith by the roots, to teach them that in future they must bring their troubles to the notice of an elected representative further, that they have the power to compel his attention<sup>17</sup>.

The Report also predicted the future political code of conduct of the peasant: "Eventually it will dawn upon him.... that because he has a vote he has the means of protecting himself... It will occur to him eventually that if landlords are oppressive, usurers grasping and subordinate officials corrupt, he has at his command better weapons than the *lathi* or the hatchet with which to redress his wrongs"<sup>18</sup>.

The above observations were almost prophetic as far as the political behaviour of the peasants in East Bengal in the subsequent period with which this study is concerned. Different categories of landlords and tenants, under-tenants and landless labourers fought for their respective "rights", which they believed they were entitled to. The *zamindars* wanted to get rid of the intermediaries because of the loss of income from *abwab* and *nazar* (gift), as *jotedars* in their turn collected these from their tenants. This attitude is well reflected in various memoranda of the landlords' associations to the Floud Commission in 1940<sup>19</sup>. The *jotedars* wanted the status of proprietors and called themselves *talukdars* to elevate their social position. The occupancy *ryots* wanted lower rates of rental and more assured rights over their holdings, while the non-occupancy *ryots* aspired to

permanent occupancy rights, the sharecroppers to permanent rights and two thirds of the crop, and the landless labourers to the status of *grihastas* or husbandman to get a higher social position as well as permanent tenures<sup>20</sup>. The middle and rich peasants' aspiration to become *bhadralok*<sup>21</sup> was the dominant theme in the politics of the peasants throughout the region. During 1920-47, due to several government measures and rise of political consciousness among the well-to-do peasants, the *zamindars*' power was waning and the hopes of the occupancy *ryots* and *jotedars* were increasing. Both the *zamindars* and the dominant tenants looked on the other "with considerable suspicion and jealousy"<sup>22</sup>. Some observers held that the prosperity of the rich and upper middle peasants "awakened them to a sense of their inferiority"<sup>23</sup>. The significance of the peasantry and the impact of its politics lie in the fact that most of the population in the region was agrarian, about 80.66 per cent in 1921<sup>24</sup>. There was too little land for too many peasants. Roughly the tiller-land ratio was 1:2.5 acres in 1921<sup>25</sup>. The lack of industries and job opportunities ensured that agriculture remained the only means of livelihood for almost the entire population.<sup>26</sup>

By 1921 East Bengal had a population of about 29,687,701, the average density being 660 per square mile<sup>27</sup>. The bulk of the population was Muslim, as was first realized after the census of 1872, mostly converts—from lower caste Hindus and Buddhists<sup>28</sup>.

The enfranchisement of the well-to-do peasants was followed by their appreciation of the value of their votes in electing office bearers of the Union Boards and other local self-government bodies. However, at the same time they were aggrieved because of the slump in the jute-prices and bad harvests in the wake of World War I. The issue of Non-Cooperation with the Government espoused by Gandhi in the wake of the War, championing self-rule and civil rights, soon attracted the peasantry in East Bengal. While they were being mobilized by the Congress leaders in the name of *swaraj* or self-rule, peasants in the region interpreted *swaraj* as "a golden age when prices should fall, taxation should cease, and when the state should refrain from interfering with the good pleasure of individual man"<sup>29</sup>. Meanwhile, Gandhi and other leading Hindu and Muslim leaders of the Congress Party tagged the issue of the Khilafat question along that of Non-Cooperation. The Khilafat was a religious issue. Indian Muslims did not want Britain and her allies to punish Turkey and dismember the Khilafat after the War. However, the allies, including Britain, took several punitive actions against Turkey by distributing parts of the Ottoman Empire (Syria, Palestine, Iraq and other regions) between Britain and France. Consequently Indian Muslims were aroused in their extra-territorial loyalty, enthusiasm and romantic ideas mainly by a section of the *ulama*, who organized a country-wide civil-disobedience movement against the British Government. Gandhi took the issue up as the "Muslim Cow" and supported the Khilafat

Movement with a view to strengthening Hindu-Muslim unity. In East Bengal, and elsewhere in British India, peasants and the masses had hardly any idea about what "Khilafat" was. Peasant masses joined the Khilafat Non-Cooperation Movement with a view to attaining "*Swaraj*" or a "Peasant Utopia", to paraphrase Eric Wolf<sup>30</sup>.

In the process of trying to attain their goal, the peasants resorted to violent acts of intimidation, boycott and ostracization of their immediate exploiters and adversaries in the village community. Consequently the *zamindars*' agents or *naibs*, *lathials* or clubmen, moneylenders, police and *chaukidars* (village policemen) became the target of peasants' wrath and hatred during the Movement. To a large extent their methods remained "pre-political" - violent acts against immediate exploiters for the redress of immediate grievances. "*Swaraj*" or "Khilafat", as understood by the average peasant was a means to attain these "pre-political" aims. The concept of nationalism or attaining independence (of India) from the British was simply beyond them in the 1920s.

### Communalization of the "Nationalist" Peasant, 1923-1936

The withdrawal of the Khilafat Non-Cooperation Movement by Gandhi in 1922 in the wake of the Chauri Chaura incident (peasants turned violent and burned alive several policemen at Chauri Chaura in UP) reduced the importance of nationalism or *swaraj*, as understood by the peasantry. Pan-Islam and Muslim solidarity vis-à-vis Hindus became more important politically than the elusive *swaraj*. The re-emergence of the *ulama* (*mullas*, *maulavis*, *pirs* and *sufis*) in the political arena of Bengal during the Khilafat days after a lapse of about 50 years (*ulama* played important political roles up to the last phase of the so-called Wahhabi movement in the 1870s) revived Islamic sentiment among the bulk of the peasantry in Bengal. Consequently as "lower class Islam" became "purer but more communalist"<sup>31</sup> during the Khilafat movement, Bengali Muslim peasants afterwards used Islam as a political weapon to fight their Hindu class enemies. The Movement, on the one hand, taught the peasant masses the modern ways of agitation (the politics of *hartal* and civil disobedience), instructing them how to defy authority of their superordinates (both political and socio-economic); and on the other hand, the movement led to the ascendancy of the *ulama*, representing both the "great" and "little" traditions of Islam in the arena of politics. Subsequently the *ulama* remained as important political organizers and mobilizers of the masses, long after the Partition of 1947.

The fluctuations in the price of jute, the principal cash crop, and the Great Depression (1929 - 36) were catalysts in the peasants' political behaviour during the 1920s and 1930s. While 1923 and 1924 were extremely bad years for the jute growers due to the slump in jute price, the sudden appreciation of jute price brought prosperity to them in 1925 and 1926. However, the prosperity was short-lived. The Great Depression of 1929 - 36 soon devoured the vestiges of the

so-called prosperity of the peasantry. Low price of agricultural produce and unemployment were endemic, especially in the rural areas of East Bengal. Consequently the bulk of the peasantry were no longer in a position to make payments to their landlords and moneylenders. Peasants' inability (and unwillingness) to fulfil their financial obligations led to serious conflict in the countryside. As the bulk of the *zamindars* and *mahajans* were Hindu in districts like Mymensingh, Dhaka, Faridpur, Barisal, Pabna and Rajshahi while the bulk of the peasantry were Muslims, the tenant-landlord and debtor-creditor conflicts soon took a communal colour as Hindu-Muslim conflicts. Communally motivated people under the leadership of the *ashraf-ulama-jotedar* triumvirate, who had conflicting class interests with the dominant Hindu classes, played important roles in communalizing the class conflict between the Muslim peasants and their Hindu super ordinates.

Most communal conflicts in the rural areas were agrarian and inter-class by nature. One may agree with Smith that although the so-called Wahhabi movement did not estrange the lower-class Muslims and lower-class Hindus, by using a religious ideology as a symbol of class struggle, typical of "pre-industrial" societies, it encouraged communal behaviour by turning a considerable section of Muslims "more susceptible to later communalist propaganda than they might otherwise have been"<sup>32</sup> Smith's analysis fits well in explaining the growth and sustenance of both inter- and intra-class communalism among the bulk of Muslim peasants in East Bengal in the 1920s through the 1940s.

It is noteworthy that although a large number of Bengali Muslim peasants spontaneously joined the Khilafat-Non-Cooperation movement with a view attaining *swaraj* or their "golden age" (an exploitation free social order), not long after the withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation movement a new era of peasant insurgency began, when peasants in some places showed total disregard for law and the established hierarchies in society.

To cite a Government Report: "It was not to be expected that the incessant abuse of constitutional authority which accompanied the preparations for civil disobedience would pass without manifestations of violence"<sup>33</sup>. As discussed earlier, besides the aggressive sectarian passions aroused by the Khilafat-NCO movement, there were other internal and external factors in communalizing the class struggle in the countryside of East Bengal. The short-lived prosperity due to the rise in jute-price in 1925-26 was soon followed by the slump during the Great Depression of 1929-36.

Rural bards and writers, coming from the lower peasant families and having incomplete access to the market and inadequate tenancy rights, had already begun ridiculing the peasants for jute cultivation even during the days of jute boom in 1925-26. Some of the writers presented the Hindu and Marwari merchants (along with the Hindu *zamindars* and *mahajans*) as mainly responsible for the slump and fluctuations in jute price. "In one year the Marwari millionaires

give a good price for jute only to exploit you in the next three years", held one of them. Another "rustic" poet from Mymensingh was equally vocal about the "non-Bengali" (North-West Indians) exploitation of peasants:

যেন্তে বালিকা পুরুষ দেখে গোলাহল,  
 পুরুষের জীবন কৃতি কৃতি,...  
 কুমাৰ পুরুষ কলৈ কুমাৰ পুরুষ কলৈ,  
 কুমাৰের কুমাৰ কুমাৰ কুমাৰ কুমাৰে !  
 এ কুমাৰ কুমাৰ কুমাৰ কুমাৰ কুমাৰ ;  
 কুমাৰের কুমাৰ কুমাৰ, কুমাৰ কুমাৰ কুমাৰ ;  
 এ কুমাৰ কুমাৰের কুমাৰের কুমাৰে,  
 কুমাৰ কুমাৰ কুমাৰ কুমাৰের কুমাৰে ;  
 কুমাৰের কুমাৰের কুমাৰে কুমাৰে,  
 কুমাৰ কুমাৰ কুমাৰের কুমাৰে !

[When jute came to this land, the Pashchima (North-West Indians) also came and occupied the country... Now they are the moneyed people. They do not pay any regard to the Bengalis. This alien people who once could not get *chhatu* (ground grains), look! are now eating Balam rice. The Bengalis on the other hand are not even getting coarse Rangoon rice from Burma. The Bengalis have become mute. The Pashchimas are only getting shelter in Bengal, nowhere else will they have a place]<sup>35</sup>

In short, the folk literature reflected the general feelings of the Muslims, including peasants towards their Hindu neighbours: moneylenders, shopkeepers, zamindars' employees, zamindars and others. The folk literature which early identified the Hindus as *bijati* (one belonging to another religion) and representatives of the agents of exploitation or as "great burdens" for the peasantry also indicates that the phenomenon called "communalism" was not solely a creation of the so-called organized politics from above. Communal riots in Calcutta or elsewhere in the Subcontinent added further fuel to the flame of communal hatred at the grassroots level in the countryside. Muslim rural bards often narrated the concocted and exaggerated versions of stories of the Calcutta riots (1926) to Muslim villagers and thus aroused anti-Hindu communal passion among rural Muslims. In these poems, the Government was quite often portrayed as an "impartial protector" of the Muslims<sup>36</sup>.

Though it sounds paradoxical, there was a higher intensity of peasant unrest during the period of "economic prosperity" of peasants (1925 - 26), when the jute price was very high, than in the preceding period. The post-War period also

witnessed the rise in population and substantial increase in the usurious moneylending business along with a sharp rise in the sharecropping system. Consequently the decline in the occupancy holdings by peasants (due to the population growth and landlords' pre-emptive move to obstruct the Bengal Tenancy Act Amendment Bill, introduced in 1923) and increase in indebtedness during the bullish jute market in 1925 - 26 further aggravated the situation. In 1925-26, when the jute price was exceptionally high (Rs 94 to 142 per bale against Rs 25 to 60 in 1923 - 24), the erstwhile occupancy tenants who by then had been partially or fully converted into sharecroppers (*bargadars* or *adhias*), did not want to part with half or more of the crop (jute) as the share of the *jotedar*, who in many cases acquired their land when they failed to repay their debts.

Meanwhile, realizing the potential of the peasant masses as possible allies, the colonial government had taken certain legislative and administrative measures, such as the introduction of the Bengal Tenancy Act amendment Bill in 1923 to grant occupancy rights to a large number of peasants; the widening of the franchise to include more peasant representatives in the Union Boards and legislature and the formation of the Royal Commission on Agriculture in 1926 to improve the condition of peasantry. The Hindu *zamindar-bhadralok-mahajan* triumvirate and the Hindu press in general opposed all these government measures as "anti-nationalist". The Hindu press not only opposed them tracing the essence of the "divide and rule" policy of the Government in these measures, but also considered the Tenancy Bill as communal in nature apprehending that "Muhammadan peasants will try to take advantage of this opportunity to place the *zamindars* in a tight corner"<sup>37</sup>.

However, the Tenancy Bill of 1923 was not purely a government initiated move. Many *ashraf* and *jotedar* leaders of Bengal and a handful of Hindu leaders had clamored for tenancy legislation to improve the lot of the peasantry long before 1923. No sooner had the Bill been tabled than several peasant and tenant associations, *krishak* and *proja samities* respectively, were floated throughout Bengal, some being sponsored by the Government. Although initially both *zamindars* and *talukdars/jotedars* were opposed to the Bill for proposing tenancy rights to all tenants, later on most *talukdars* and *jotedars*, the bulk of them being Muslim, started supporting the Bill after the impending threat of losing their vested interests had gone due to the assurance of the Government. Consequently up to the enactment of the Tenancy Amendment Bill in 1928, Bengali Hindus in general, representing the *zamindar-bhadralok-mahajan* triumvirate, opposed the Bill while Bengali Muslims under the leadership of the *ashraf-ulama-jotedar* triumvirate supported the Bill. It is noteworthy that many Muslim *zamindars* also supported the Bill, as Nazmul Karim has observed:

The upper strata of the Bengali Muslim community in its bid for securing the leadership of Muslim peasants sometimes even supported and led movements for land reforms and such other legislative measures,

which were as such against their class interest. The Muslim upper class could very well perceive that the advocacy for the protection of Muslim communal interest in the form of jobs, etc., would benefit them more than the protection of their narrow class interest<sup>38</sup>.

In the long run, the peasant movement in the predominantly Muslim East Bengal was communalized as under the influence of their non-peasant leaders, including their “class-enemies”, (*zamindars* and *jotedars*), Muslim peasants started considering Muslim rent-receivers (*landlords*) as part of the peasantry, while the Hindus were not so regarded. The *jotedar-zamindar* conflict or the (weaker) Muslim elite versus the Hindu elite conflict occupied a major portion of the proceedings of the Bengal Legislative Council not long after the introduction of the Tenancy Bill in 1923. The Bill eventually accelerated the gradual merger process of the *ashraf* with *jotedar* and *jotedar* with the *krishak* (lower peasant) belonging to the Muslim Community, leading to the Great Divide of 1947. While a section of the Hindu elite under the leadership of Deshbandhu Chitta Ranjan Das tried to neutralize the Muslim middle and lower middle classes by the placatory Bengal Pact (also known as the Hindu-Muslim Pact) in 1923, with the promise of granting at least 55% jobs to the Muslim community after the attainment of *swaraj* (independence), other members of the Hindu elite stubbornly resisted any such move to win over the Muslims.

While Das wanted to pacify the Muslim community in Bengal as he was apprehensive of what would happen “in another ten years”, when the majority community (Muslim) would be calling the shots, conservative Hindu leaders were not at all prepared to concede any concessions to the Muslim majority. The Hindu opposition to the Pact gave an opportunity to the Muslim conservatives to launch countrywide propaganda against the Hindus. The upshot was the development of communal consciousness at the grassroots level in the Muslim community leading to communal riots and tensions in the countryside over questions of “music before mosques”, cow slaughtering and economic issues like rent and credit in the agrarian sector<sup>39</sup>.

Peasant mobilization on communal lines was facilitated by the obdurate attitude of high caste Hindu politicians and the well-to-do classes. Many of them swelled the ranks of communal Hindu organizations like the Suddhi, Sangathan, Hindu Mahasabha and the Landlords’ Association. All attempts to differentiate the Muslim tenantry into *jotedars* under-*bargadars/ryots* did not succeed. Firstly, the Hindu upper classes hardly had any contact with the lower peasantry. Secondly, their co-religionists and patrons, the *jotedars* had greater control over lower peasantry. Last but not least, the notion prevalent among the Muslims that they were the “have-nots of the Bengali society”, belonging to an amorphous *proja* or tenant community vis-à-vis the Hindu landlords, must have absorbed their class consciousness into communalism. This facilitated the formation of a joint front of the rich, middle and poor peasants under the *ashraf-ulama-jotedar*

triumvirate against the *zamindar-bhadralok-mahajan* classes. This joint-front to some extent resembled the "third estate" of France prior to the French Revolution (1789).

The crystallization of the *jotedar-under-ryot* front against the Hindu upper classes was also possible because of the impending decline in the power of the *zamindar*, as proposed by the Tenancy Act Amendment Bill. After the overarching power structure with the *zamindar* at the top had been weakened, the *jotedars*, whom the lower peasants saw as their fortunate fellows-cum-patrons, moved into the "vacuum" left by the "retreating" *zamindars*, in the sense Wolf has used these expressions<sup>40</sup>. Eventually, this led to the overshadowing of the *jotedar-tenant* conflict by the *zamindar-jotedar* one and this was possible only after the latter had succeeded in gaining the confidence of the *ashraf* and the lower peasantry (also Muslim) in the name of Islam/Muslim solidarity. The *ulama* played a vital role in bridging the gap between the "religion of the sophisticated" and "the religion of the peasantry"<sup>41</sup>, which ultimately led to the formation of new ethics and values, having greater affinity with the religion of the "rustic" masses. This can be explained as a compromise between the scripture and popular beliefs, which is not altogether a new phenomenon in the history of peasant movements. The external element - the *ashraf* and the *ulama* - were very important in changing the outlook of the peasant. Under their influence he was first communalized. Then he was politicized.

No sooner had the peasantry been thoroughly communalized than East Bengal came under the devouring and cataclysmic influence of the Great Depression of 1929 - 1936. The low prices of crops and the mass unemployment in both the urban and rural sectors led to the mass suffering of the peasantry. Many of them simply could not repay their loans and pay their rents to their creditors and landlords respectively. Consequently the simmering discontent among the lower peasantry against rural moneylenders, landlords and their agents flared up into sporadic incidents of localized peasant movement in support of the no-rent campaign and *jacqueries*. Many Muslim peasants were led to believe by both peasant and non-peasant leaders that Hindu *zamindars* and *mahajans* were responsible for the low prices of crops and consequential misery.

The whole of Bengal and other provinces in 1930s witnessed a widespread anti-British campaign in the name of the Civil-Disobedience under the aegis of Gandhi and the Congress Party. Since most Congress leaders in East Bengal represented Hindu *bhadralok* classes having links with *zamindars* and moneylenders, they had hardly any influence on the Muslim peasant masses in the region. Meanwhile, the government had also taken several "pro-peasant" measures to immunize the masses from nationalist, communist and terrorist propaganda, even before the inception of the Civil-Disobedience. Among the legislative measures, one may mention the Bengal Tenancy Act, 1928; the Bengal Rural Primary Education Act, 1932; the Bengal Local Self-Government Bill,

1933; and the Government of India Act, 1935. The “Communal Award” by the Government in 1932 and the 1935 Act not only widened the franchise, but they also led to the “protection” of the Muslim community of the Sub-continent. The Hindu *zamindar-bhadralok-mahajan* triumvirate, because of its bitter opposition to the “pro-peasant” and “pro-Muslim” measures and its conflicting class interest with the peasantry, was not in a position to influence and lead the peasant masses any more.

Meanwhile, pro-Government Muslim leaders, irrespective of their socio-economic backgrounds, had started organizing Muslim masses throughout East Bengal on anti-Hindu, communal lines. The Depression deeply contributed to the spontaneous response of the peasant masses in organizing the anti-Hindu movements. The organizers of these movements spread wild rumours telling the peasant masses that while the Hindu *zamindars*, traders and moneylenders were responsible for the low prices of agricultural products, the British Government had granted impunity to Muslim rioters who would attack, rob and even kill their Hindu adversaries. In parts of Dhaka and Mymensingh districts, due to the machinations of some *mullas*, the peasants believed that the Government had granted *swaraj* for seven days and that the Nawab of Dhaka had established his authority with the desire of attacking Hindu well-to-do classes in East Bengal. The upshot was communal rioting in Dhaka at Ruhitpur, Matuail, Ati, Jinjira and Mirpur and in several villages in the Kishoreganj sub-division of Mymensingh district in 1930.

The Kishoreganj riots of 1930 almost totally eclipsed the inherent class conflict between peasants and their exploiting moneylenders after the Hindu-Muslim conflict had emerged as the main dividing line between the two communities. Angry Muslim peasants were very selective in classifying their enemies. They only attacked Hindu moneylenders and plundered Hindu properties sparing Muslims from their wrath. Besides Kishoreganj, Muslim peasants also attacked and killed Hindus in parts of Faridpur, Barisal, Khulna and Noakhali districts during the miserable days of the Depression. Even the Congress-sponsored country-wide Civil Disobedience movement failed to dissuade Muslim masses from attacking their Hindu neighbours<sup>42</sup>.

### Rebellion to Conciliation: The Capitulation of the *Krishak*, Eclipse of the *Proja* and Ascendancy of the *Ashraf*, 1936-47

These communal disturbances, having local roots under local leadership, influenced by pro-Government and anti-Hindu Muslim elite from Dhaka and elsewhere eventually eliminated both the nationalist Congress Party and the Communist Party of India as politically relevant forces among the peasantry. Meanwhile, Muslim *jotedar-talukadar* and even *ashraf-zamindar* classes had been organizing *krishak* or *proja* associations with a view to contesting elections and counteracting the anti-Government nationalist and communist organizations

throughout the region. It is noteworthy that the bulk of the Muslim peasantry considered Muslim landed classes as part of the peasant community while Hindu landlords to them were nothing but (exacting) rent-receivers and oppressors of the peasantry. Henceforth, Muslim *ashraf-ulama-jotedar* leaders started flirting with the Muslim peasantry more vigorously, promising radical land reform and other pro-peasant measures projecting the Hindu *zamindar-bhadralok-mahajan* triumvirate as the sole and common enemy of both the Muslim upper and lower classes of Bengal. Eventually Muslim leaders successfully mobilized Muslim peasants in the region and formed a government under the leadership of A. K. Fazlul Huq who in 1937 became the chief minister of Bengal.

Fazlul Huq and fellow Muslim politicians representing the lower middle and budding middle classes, mostly emanating from the upper peasantry (*jotedars*), joined hands with the Urdu-speaking *ashraf* leaders like M. A. Jinnah, H. S. Suhrawardy and Khwaja Nazimuddin with a view to installing themselves to power by side-tracking the dominant Hindu classes. Consequently Fazlul Huq and other leaders belonging to the Krishak Proja Party had to join the Muslim League by discarding their "proja identity" in the wake of the Legislative Assembly elections of 1937. Fazlul Huq's symbolic submission to Jinnah signalling the ascendancy of the *ashraf* and eclipse of the *proja* is very significant. While welcoming Jinnah to Calcutta in 1936, Fazlul Huq asked him "to proclaim in unambiguous language the identity of *communal and national interests*" [emphasis added]. This is reflective of Fazlul Huq's admiration for communal politics<sup>43</sup>. By 1937 the submission of the *proja* to the *ashraf* became a *fait accompli* while communalism became the most important theme in Bengal politics. This is evident from the following statement from Huq: "I submit to my leader Mr Jinnah.... I have entirely thrown myself at the disposal of Mr Jinnah"<sup>44</sup>.

Though the "unconditional surrender" of the *proja* to *ashraf* was quite dramatic, this was not altogether unexpected. The most fascinating part of the story up to the Partition of 1947 is the successful mobilization of the *under-ryots* and *bargadars* (sharecroppers) by the *ashraf* through the machination of the *proja* against the Hindu *zamindar-bhadralok-mahajan* triumvirate. It is equally interesting how the nationalists, socialists and communists failed to make much headway in the peasant front during the period.

Consequently Fazlul Huq and his Krishak Proja Party (KPP), who had commitments to the anti- *zamindar* / anti-*mahajan* economic programme, as reflected in the Election Manifesto of the KPP, soon joined hands with avowedly communal Muslim League leaders to form a coalition government in Bengal in April 1937. Despite the contradictory stories about the "failure" of the formation of the "more likely" coalition between the Congress (Hindu *bhadralok* dominated organization in Bengal) and KPP (an organization of Bengali Muslim *jotedars* and budding *bhadralok* classes), the Muslim League and KPP came to an understanding in April 1937 to form a coalition ministry with Fazlul Huq as

the chief minister of Bengal. This was possible as by 1937 the polarization of the Bengali Muslims and Hindus on communal lines had proceeded so far that a Muslim was no longer aroused by an economic programme alone as he was more true to his community than to anything else. The average Muslim peasant was God-fearing and loyal to his village headman and immediate landlord (*jotedar* or well-to-do peasant). About 60% of the successful Muslim candidates in the 1937 elections from rural areas were lawyers, 15% were land-holding people, mostly *jotedars*, and the rest were traders, doctors, teachers and others. It is noteworthy that several Muslim *zamindars*, including Nawabzada Hasan Ali Khan of Dhanbari (Tangail), espoused pro-peasant and anti-*zamindar* programme prior to the 1937 elections and afterwards<sup>45</sup>.

Meanwhile, some class-based and anti-British movements took place side-by-side with the communally motivated movements. The class-based Tanka movement of tribal (Hajong) peasants of northern Mymensingh under the leadership of Moni Singh and a few communist leaders did not attract non-tribal Muslim or *Namasudra* peasants elsewhere in the province. The nationalist and communist movements were again confined to middle-peasant dominated sub-regions of Noakhali, Comilla and Chittagong during the 1930s and 1940s. The absence of Hindu *zamindars* as principal agents of exploitation in the sub-region facilitated the mobilization of Muslim peasants on non-communal class or nationalist lines, especially in parts of Noakhali and Comilla districts. Some leading Congress and communist leaders of the sub-region, again, belonged to the Muslim community, such as Ashrafuddin Chowdhury and Asimuddin Ahmed of Comilla and Abdul Malek, Muklesur Rahman, Moqbul Mia and others belonging to the radical Krishak Samity of the Noakhali-Comilla sub-region<sup>46</sup>. However, vicious communal rioting in Dhaka in 1941 and the mass mobilization of Muslims in the name of Pakistan by the *ashraf-ulama-jotedar* triumvirate in the wake of the Lahore Resolution of 1940, thoroughly communalized the Muslim masses throughout Bengal, including the Muslim *jotedar*-dominated northern districts of Rangpur and Dinajpur and Muslim middle-peasant dominated Noakhali and Comilla districts of Bengal.

In view of the above, the *proja-ashraf* alliance was inevitable not only because both of them believed that the Hindu Congress leaders wanted to hit the British at the cost of the Muslims, but also because of their apprehension that the communists would "take over" by exploiting the agrarian unrest. Fortunately for the *ashraf* and the *proja* (especially the *jotedars*), whom Jinnah and Fazlul Huq represented respectively, by 1941 the bulk of the Muslim peasantry had been totally disenchanted with the Congress and other organizations under Hindu leadership due to the pervading influence of Muslim separatism. Jinnah and Pakistan became the catch-words everywhere in the region. By then the "anti-feudal" struggle of the peasants had been channelled into a "religious stream" and "the religious aspect of bourgeois nationalism" in Bengal<sup>47</sup>.

The marriage of convenience between the *ashraf* and *proja*, which was essential for mutual succour in the post-1937 Elections period for the formation of a viable Muslim ministry to contain Hindu dominance in Bengal, in fact, signalled the capitulation of the *proja* to the rising *ashraf*.

The wealth, influence and the growing popularity of the *ashraf* leaders (especially Jinnah) among the Muslim masses soon overshadowed the popularity of Fazlul Huq. By December 1941, Fazlul Huq further alienated himself from the bulk of the Bengali Muslims, including peasants, by forming a coalition ministry with the Hindu Mahasabha leader, Syama Prasad Mookerjee. This alliance led to the total eclipse of the *proja*. Eventually *ashraf* leaders like Khwaja Nazimuddin and H. S. Suhrawardy replaced Fazlul Huq as the Chief Minister of Bengal up to 1947, and henceforth for quite sometime, *ashraf* leaders, in collaboration with some loyal *proja* leaders like Nurul Amin, Tamizuddin Khan, Hamidul Huq Chowdhury, Fazlul Qadir Chowdhury, Abdus Sabur Khan, Wahiduzzaman (Thanda Mia), Yusuf Ali Chowdhury (Mohun Mia), Fazlur Rahman and others, remained dominant in "Muslim politics" in Bengal.

Meanwhile, the Bengal Famine of 1943 and the communal riots in Calcutta in August 1946 had further vitiated the environment. Communalism emerged as the main theme in politics and in the socio-economic discourse, even at the grassroots level. Hindu traders, hoarders and black-marketers, along with *zamindar* and *mahajans*, emerged to the average Muslim in Bengal as the main "culprits", responsible for the Famine. The Calcutta Killing of 1946, precipitated by the "Direct Action Day" of the Muslim League on August 16, made Pakistan inevitable. Bengali Muslims irrespective of their class and other differences became too vulnerable to communalism and the doctrine of Pakistan to be mobilized by any other ideology. Hindu leaders in general, *zamindars* and *bhadralok* in particular, lost their credibility with the Muslim masses. Bengali Congress leaders, by their secret hobnobbing with the avowedly communal Hindu Mahasabha, and by their public opposition to any attempt to keep Bengal united (as tried by Sarat Bose, Kiran Sankar Ray, Abul Hashim, H. S. Suhrawardy and others) in 1947 made Pakistan inevitable. For the bulk of the Bengali Muslims, including peasants, the concept of Pakistan emerged as the only choice. Meanwhile, the rejection of the Cabinet Mission proposal by Nehru and other Congress leaders in 1946 had disillusioned Jinnah and the Muslim League as well.

By early 1946 the Muslim League under Jinnah and other *ashraf* leaders had been well-entrenched in almost every East Bengal district. This was well-reflected in the elections of 1946. Muslims voted for the Muslim League with full commitment to Pakistan. It is, however, altogether a different matter what the peasants - both voters and others who were not enfranchised-understood about the implications of the "promised land" or the utopia called Pakistan. Nevertheless the fact remains that when local Muslim thugs involved themselves in orgies of killing, raping, plundering and forcibly converting their Hindu

neighbours in several villages in Noakhali district, avenging the killing of Muslims in Calcutta by destroying 372 Hindu villages and killing 220 Hindus, an elderly Muslim peasant is said to have remarked that they had achieved Pakistan as the region between Feni and Chandpur had been "liberated" from Hindus.

During the heyday of communalism in 1946-47 the Communist Party of India (CPI) in its bid to revolutionize the Indian peasantry organized class-based peasant movements in various parts of the Subcontinent. The legendary Tebhaga movement of the undivided Bengal was one such movement, mainly confined to tribals, - Rajbansis, Santals and Garos of Rangpur, Dinajpur, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts in the north. Tebhaga stands for three shares. Here it implies that the two-third of crops should go to the share-cropper or *bargadar/adhiar* and the rest one-third, should go to the landlord or *jotedar/talukdar*. Under the CPI leadership, mainly high-caste Hindu *bhadralok*, the movement turned violent as *bargadars* forcibly took their share, two-thirds of the crops, from the fields. Many landless peasants and others having no direct involvement with the sharecropping system took part in the movement. They thought that "Tebhaga today" would lead to "land tomorrow".

It is interesting that both Hindu and Muslim *bhadralok* opposed the movement as they were apprehensive of a class war beyond the parameter of the village community. Consequently a pro-Muslim League *jotedar*, Masihur Rahman (Jadu Mia) of Nilphamari, could kill a tribal *bargadar* with impunity as Congress leaders also opposed the Tebhaga movement. Muslim League leaders dissuaded Muslim peasants by telling them that after the attainment of Pakistan all land would belong to them as the Hindu landlords would be kicked out of Pakistan or "the land of pure (Muslim)". Some Muslim leaders promised "Choubhaga" (literally four shares) or all the shares of the crop to the Muslim peasants in their promised "Sonar Pakistan". Consequently to the average East Bengali Muslim peasant the "communal" concept of Pakistan was much more overpowering and persuasive than any appeal in the name of class solidarity or nationalism. The utopia of Pakistan was so devouring among the peasantry that even Hindu communist leaders of the Tebhaga movement adopted Muslim names (Barin Datta, for example, became "Abdus Salam"), attended public prayer (namaz) sessions with Muslim peasants to show their support for Islam and hoisted both the Red Flag of the communists and the Green Flag of the Muslim League at the same venues. Muslim peasants chanted slogans both in favor of Tebhaga and Pakistan in meetings organized by CPI leaders.

Gradually the demand for Pakistan emerged as the main slogan of Muslim peasants throughout the region while the demand for *tebhaga* being confined to much smaller section of the peasantry, mainly the tribals, fizzled out in no time. Tribals were more sympathetic with the CPI programme as their moral values vis-à-vis collective ownership of land more or less clicked with those of the

communists. Peasants, on the other hand, have been firm believers in private ownership of land. Hence the vacillation and withdrawal of peasant support from the communist movement. Peasant support for *tebhaga* does not indicate their support for communism. Firstly, the demand was first raised by peasants themselves, not by the CPI; and secondly, the movement did not question the concept of private ownership of land<sup>48</sup>.

In view of the gradual communalization of the agrarian class struggle in East Bengal, especially in the terminal years of the Pakistan movement, one must not lose sight of the anti-Muslim, pro-Hindu revivalist movements of the Hindu *bhadralok* and other categories. They not only opposed the pro-peasant (pro-Muslim) legislative measures - the Bengal Tenancy Act amendments, the Rural Primary Education Bill, the Moneylenders' Bill - but they also opposed the Partition of Bengal (1905 - 11) and all attempts to establish a university in Dhaka purely on narrow communal grounds.

### Conclusions

By 1947, false promises, communalism and above all, the economic dependence of the average poor peasant on the upper peasantry, blurred the sub-regional differences in the nature of the peasants' political behaviour in East Bengal. The relatively independent middle peasants of Tippera - Noakhali sub-regions (the vanguards of the anti-British Congress movements in the 1930s and 1940s), along with the Muslim lower peasants of the Muslim jotedar-dominated Rangpur-Dinajpur and Jessore-Khulna sub-regions (who took part in CPI-led class movements) succumbed to the appeals made in the name of "Islam in Danger" and radical economic reforms under "Islamic" and "golden" Pakistan by the Muslim League. Meanwhile, the bulk of the Namasudra peasants had been won over by the high-caste Hindu Congress leaders. Consequently the League was transformed into a mass organization by "channelling into a religious stream" the anti-zamindar struggle of the peasantry and reactionary aspect of bourgeois nationalism of the Bengali Muslim bourgeoisie, mainly emanating from the jotedar categories.

**This study, in short, has attempted to establish that:**

- ◆ The Peasants were not always fatalistic;
- ◆ Economic grievances alone are not the sole determinants in bringing about peasant movements;
- ◆ The Peasants' so-called "autonomous domain" (or culture), to paraphrase Ranajit Guha is often subject to elite domination and manipulation. Quite often, the latter "represents" the former with their consent;
- ◆ Strong patronage can only be broken by ideologies and charismatic leadership;

- ♦ Above all, peasants' submission to their superiors is not only due to their pragmatic considerations but also due to their normative acceptance of social inequality and peasants' own inability to lead themselves, as Marx has elaborated.

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## CHAPTER TEN

### Economic Development

M Mufakharul Islam

#### (a) Bangladesh Agriculture: Historical And Current Perspectives

This essay is an attempt to provide a descriptive account of the main features of Bangladesh agricultural society and economy since the late eighteenth century. The essay is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the period of British rule and the discussion proceeds at two levels: a) agrarian society and b) crop production. Ideally we should have been able to confine our discussion to the areas of Bengal province which later became East Bengal and then East Pakistan and, finally, Bangladesh. But the relevant data are available in a form which makes it difficult to attempt such a treatment. Therefore, our discussion on the British period concerns the whole of Bengal as it was constituted on the eve of 14 August, 1947. The second part of the essay throws some light on the post-1947 period i.e., the years during which Bangladesh was under Pakistani rule and the post-independence era.

#### British period

**Agrarian Society:** Broadly speaking, the agrarian society included two groups of people: those who, as legal proprietors of land, collected rent from the tenants (*rariyats*) without being in effective possession of their land and those who cultivated the land and were in effective possession of it. The latter group also included the agricultural labour i.e. landless section of the rural population and marginal farmers who earned their living primarily by 'selling' their labour power to others directly or indirectly engaged in agricultural operations for wages in cash/ kind. We start our discussion from 1793 when the then Governor General Lord Cornwallis introduced the Permanent Settlement of land revenue in Bengal (and certain other parts of India). This system was introduced after

considerable discussion among the British officials concerning certain issues and after experiments with quinquennial settlement, yearly settlement and, finally, decennial settlement. Under the Permanent Settlement the Zamindars or Landlords were declared as the "actual" proprietors of land and the amount to be paid by them to the government as revenue was fixed for all time to come. The Zamindars had to pay revenue at certain stipulated time failing which their land could be sold in auction. This was the famous or infamous Sunset Law. There were several motives behind the introduction of the Permanent Settlement. One of these was that since their payment to the government would remain fixed the Zamindars would be encouraged to invest in land improvement. In order to ensure the punctual collection of rent<sup>1</sup> from the tenants by the Zamindars the provisions of the original settlement of 1793 for safeguarding the rights of the tenants were amended by subsequent regulations. Firstly, in 1794 the landlords were given power to collect rent at rates imposed by the lease, whether the *raiyat* agreed or not. Secondly, the *haptum* regulation of 1799 gave the Zamindars unrestricted power of distrat and in many cases, of arrest of the defaulter's person. Thirdly, fresh regulations of 1812 further strengthened the Zamindars position. But despite such measures many of the Zamindars failed to pay revenue at the stipulated time and their land was sold in auction. It has been estimated that by 1819 about 45 percent of the landed property was transferred through default and 70 percent of these transfers belonged to only ten great landholding families of the province. At one time it was believed that during this period most of the Muslim Zamindars lost their land through the operation of the Sunset Law. But detailed research has shown that this is not a valid assumption, because in any case, there were not many Muslim Zamindars in the province at that time.

However, though many of the big Zamindars thus suffered a setback in the years immediately after 1793, as a group their economic condition vastly improved as time went on. This was due to following reasons. Firstly, for reasons to be discussed later in this essay, there was a vast expansion of cultivation in the province throughout the nineteenth century. Secondly, the regulations of 1822 and 1844 gave ample powers to auction purchasers for enhancing rent. Moreover, the Zamindars had the right to settle such lands which were being brought under cultivation on their own terms, i.e. at rates higher than those prevailing in 1793. Thirdly, under tenancy legislation enacted in 1859, 1885 and 1928 the landlords were allowed to increase the rate of rent on several grounds. Finally, the landlords collected a host of illegal cases *abwab* to meet expenditure incurred by them in collecting rent, maintaining establishment or in connection with festivals, ceremonies, weddings, entertainment. These were known by a host of names (*Darwan fee*, *Puja Kharcha*, *Punuaha nazar*, *Agomoni kharcha*). *Abwabs* were collected in all parts of the province, but the rates were higher in districts like Bakerganj, Dhaka, Pabna, Faridpur. In Nadia district most of the

bigger landlords collected between a fourth and a half of the rent as *abwab*. Thus, the income of the landlords increased from three sources: i) extension of cultivation, ii) increase in the rate of rent and iii) collection of illegal cesses. Since the land revenue paid by them was permanently fixed any extension of cultivation, by itself, meant increase in rental income even if the rate of rent remained the same. But this rate was also enhanced and the landlords increased collection of illegal cesses. According to the Rent Law Commission, by 1877 the rate of rent increased three fold. Some idea about the increases in the rental income may be had from an estimate of 1918/19. The Permanent Settlement had stipulated that of the total amount collected as rent 90 percent would go to treasury and the Zamindars would retain 10 percent. But this estimate shows that the proprietors (and the tenure-holders) intercepted as much as 76.7 percent of the gross rental of 12.85 cores, only 2.99 cores being collected as land revenue. This rental income did not, however, include collection of illegal cesses.

The rental income was not, however, enjoyed by the original proprietors and their successors alone. The original proprietary class was enlarged by the addition of new purchasers. As the gap between rent and revenue widened a section of the Bengali middle class invested their savings in proprietary rights in land which guaranteed a small but nevertheless secure rental income as also a certain social status. Secondly, in the years after 1793 a peculiar development took place in the province. For a variety of reasons many of the original landlords leased out part of their land to intermediaries under the same terms and conditions on which they were declared landlords. In other words the original landlords created a new class of landlords. In many cesses these intermediaries or tenure-holders of the second grade created tenure-holders of the third grade and this process (known as the process of sub infeudation) went on and intermediaries of several grades came into existence. As per the information available from the District Survey and Settlement Reports the number of grades of tenure-holders was as follows: Barisal-12, Dhaka- , Jessore- 6 or 7, Khulna- 8, Mymensing- 3. Thus, the rent-receiving groups were enlarged and they included the original proprietors and tenure-holders of different grades known by a variety of names in different parts of the province.

According to the Census of 1921 in British Bengal landlords constituted 4.02 percent of the total agricultural population. Thriving on the gap between the rent collected (including *abwabs*) from their tenants and the revenue they paid to the colonial government this class formed the core of an expanding status group known as the "*Bhadralok*". The early generations of successful professionals in law, journalism, medicine, teaching and the civil and judicial services belonged to this stratum of Bengal society. But though they appropriated a large part of the agricultural surplus they showed no interest in agricultural production and much less in its improvement. Indeed the whole body of landlords remained indifferent towards productive investment in land. Thus,

they belied the expectation of the authors of the Permanent Settlement that the magic of fixity of revenue demand would transform them into improving landlords.

The numerous classes of people who were in effective possession of land and involved in agricultural operations included the *raiyats* (peasants) of various categories, *bargadars* and the agricultural labourers. Together they constituted 96 percent of the total agricultural population. Under the original proclamation of 1793 no adequate provisions were made to protect the rights of the *raiyats* and, as we have seen earlier, their position was further weakened in the subsequent years when additional powers were given to the *Zamindars*. Then, beginning from the second half of the nineteenth century a series of protective legislation was passed to strengthen the position of the *raiyats*. Indeed by 1938 their position improved to such an extent that almost the entire body of *raiyats* may be said to have acquired all the rights of ownership of land, including the right of inheritance, unrestricted transfer, protection against enhancement of rent and ejection.

The first tenancy legislation was passed in 1859. This legislation divided *raiyats* into three categories: a) *raiyats* with fixed rate of rent, b) occupancy *raiyats* and c) non-occupancy *raiyats*. The rent rate of the first group of *raiyats* was not subject to any enhancement. To be qualified to enjoy this right the *raiyats* had to prove that the rent paid by them had not changed for a period of twenty years. Every *raiyat* who had cultivated or held land for a period of 12 years had a right to occupancy in the land. Specific grounds were laid down on which the rent of an occupancy *raiyat* could be enhanced, viz. (i) that the rent was below the prevailing rate at the adjacent areas paid by the same class of *raiyats* for land of similar description or advantages, and (ii) in the case of an increase in the value of the produce or productive powers of land. The rent of an occupancy *raiyat* could not be enhanced except through the court and after servicing of notice. *Rayats* holding lands from *Zamindars*/tenure-holders for less than 12 years were characterized as non-occupancy *raiyats*. These *raiyats* were required to agree to whatever rent the landlords might demand; the alternative was to vacate the land. The act abolished the *Zamindar*'s power to compel the *raiyats* to attend at their offices where tenants were often subjected to torture and intimidation for realization of dues which might have no legal basis. Further, the landlord's right to distrain was modified (but not abolished).

The Act of 1859 was amended in 1869 but even in its amended form the Act proved to be unworkable. The period from 1870 onward was marked by, on the one hand, ceaseless efforts of the landlords to obtain higher rents and *abwabs* and, on the other, by determined opposition of the tenants to these efforts. In Pabna district riots occurred in 1873. Though the revolt was put down with an iron hand, the enquiries which the government made into the cause of the outbreak convinced it of the need for drastic remedy. The result was the next

piece of legislation passed in 1885. This Act widened the definition of occupancy *raiyat* to include the settled *raiyats*. It was provided that a *raiyat* having the right of occupancy: (i) might use the land in any manner that did not materially impair the value of land or render it unfair for the purpose of the tenancy; (ii) would not be ejected by his landlord from the holding except in execution of a decree passed on certain specific grounds; (iii) the right of occupancy would be heritable according to the law of inheritance; and (iv) free transfer (by *raiyat*) would be allowed only when it was in accord with local custom and usages. In the early legislation and also in general usage of the term there was often an implicit identification of *raiyats* with direct responsibility for the cultivation of land. But it was later found that the practice of subletting by occupancy *raiyats* was widespread. The Act of 1885 allowed subletting and thus gave legal recognition to the existence of a class of under-*raiyat*. However, this Act provided that the rent of an under-*raiyat* should be limited to 50 percent of the rent payable by the *raiyat*.

Further changes were introduced by the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1928. For example, *raiyati* holdings were declared to be transferable subject to the payment of a transfer fee amounting to 20 percent of the sale price. The landlord was also given the right of pre-emption. Moreover, occupancy *raiyats* were given all rights to the trees. In order to prevent land from passing to mortgagees for infinite periods occupancy *raiyats* were allowed to give usufructuary mortgage only for a period of 15 years. The position of the under-*raiyats* was further strengthened under this Act. An attempt was made to extend some of the rights of under-*raiyats* to the *bargadars*, but this failed.

The Great Depression had a very adverse impact on the conditions of the peasantry in Bengal, as in other parts of the sub-continent. This was because of the fact that though as a result of the slump in the prices of agricultural produce their cash income drastically declined the payment they had to make in cash to the landlords and money-lenders remained more or less the same. The misery of the vast section of the peasantry was thus aggravated at a time when the franchise was going to be vastly expanded. The result was that the problems of the peasantry drew the attention of the politicians and political leaders in a more marked manner than ever before. This is clear from the Election Manifesto declared, on the eve of the provincial elections of 1937, by the major political parties, especially the *Krishak Proja Party* under the leadership of A. K. Fazlul Huq. The Manifesto issued by this party was the most radical in nature as it made a commitment to the effect that, if elected to power, it would abolish the Permanent Settlement. After the election Fazlul Huq formed a coalition ministry with the Muslim League as his principal partner. This ministry launched the operation of the Debt Settlement Boards to scale down the volume of debt to make it possible for the indebted peasantry to repay their debt; they passed the Tenancy Amendment Act (1938) and Moneylenders Act (1940). The Tenancy

Amendment Act abolished the landlord's transfer fee and the right of pre-emption, conferred right of occupancy to all categories of under-*raiyyats*, suspended all provisions regarding all enhancement of rent for a period of ten years and imposed summary penalties for collection of *abwabs*. The enactment of this legislation was followed by the appointment of a Land Revenue Commission, generally known as the Floud Commission (Sir Francis Floud was the Chairman of this Commission), to examine the existing land revenue system of the province and submit recommendations for its modification. The Commission recommended the abolition of the Permanent Settlement and its replacement by a *raiyyatwari* system under which the *raiyyats* would pay land revenue direct to the government. This recommendation was implemented in 1950.

So far we have concerned ourselves with the rights and liabilities of the Zamindars and the tenure-holders as well as their tenants (*raiyyats*) of different categories. But the agrarian society included two other groups: the sharecroppers (known as *bargadhrs*, *adhiars*, *bagchasis* in different parts of the country) and the agricultural labourers. As social groups they are not at all new, but during British colonial rule these groups became much larger in size. The former cultivated lands belonging to the *raiyyats* on sharecropping terms (normally they received 50 per cent of the produce of the land) and the latter included those who helped other cultivators for wages in cash or kind. Neither the sharecroppers nor the agricultural labourers enjoyed any legal status or protection, but the social status of the agricultural labourer was lower. The *raiyyats*<sup>2</sup> normally employed sharecroppers because they were in possession of more land than they could directly operate with or without the help of hired labour. These were the surplus or the rich farmers and their origin during the foreign rule may be traced to the fact that agricultural production became more market-oriented than in the past and land became a transferable asset. As a matter of fact the peasant society became stratified. This is clear from the findings of a survey conducted by the Land Revenue Commission in 1938-39. It is shown that while the size of the holdings of 46 percent of the rural households was less than two acres, the holding size of 25 percent of families exceeded five acres. Needless to mention, the sharecroppers and the agricultural labourers were drawn from the families with small holdings. However, despite the presence of a considerable body of people who lived entirely or primarily as sharecroppers or wage earners it must be pointed out that the predominant mode of production in the province was by the labour of the *raiyyats* (peasant) and their family members. This is once again shown by the findings of a survey conducted by the Land Revenue Commission. As per these findings 66 percent of the land was operated by family members, 21 percent by sharecroppers and 13 percent by hired labour. The same pattern is indicated by the proportion of agricultural families who earned their living by mainly or entirely as *bargadars* and wage

labourers: 22.5 percent and 12.2 percent respectively. The Bengal Land Revenue Commission recommended that the *bargadars* should receive one-third of the produce of the land cultivated by them. A movement (known as *Tebagha*) was launched in the closing years of British rule for the implementation of this recommendation, but it failed.

Thus, the picture that emerges is a complex one. There were the superior landlords and different grades of tenure-holders on the one hand and *raiyats* or tenants on the other. Below them (i.e. *raiyats*) were under-*raiyats* and *bargadars* who cultivated part of the land that belonged to the *raiyats*. The agrarian society also included a considerable group of people who worked as agricultural labourers. The *raiyats* were landlords in relation to the under-*raiyats* and *bargadars*, but tenants in relation to the tenure-holders and the original proprietors.

**Crop production:** To begin with, let us highlight some of the important features of the crop production sector. Firstly, this sector constituted the most important component of the agrarian economy and indeed, the economy of the province as a whole. This was not only in terms of the proportion of the total production which originated in this sector but also because crop production sector provided employment to the largest proportion of the population (According to 1921 Census 77.3 percent of the population of the province depended on agriculture for their living). Therefore, an analysis of the performance of this sector is obviously of vital significance. Secondly, a whole variety of crops<sup>3</sup> were grown in the province, but, taken together, the three varieties of rice- *aman* (winter rice), *aus* (autumn rice) and *boro* (summer rice) – constituted the most important ones. Indeed, towards the close of the British period these crops accounted for more than 80 percent of the total cropped area of the province. Thirdly, under British Colonial rule agricultural produce became more commercialized than in the past. This is evidenced not only by the vast expansion of acreage under jute, purely a cash crop, but increased sale of food crops (especially rice) by the producer.

Now, it is obvious that the performance of the crop production sector can best be evaluated only in quantitative terms, i. e., in terms of the percentage rates of change over time. For this purpose what is obviously needed most is the availability of reasonably reliable time-series data on the two components of crop production (area under cultivation and yield per acre). In this regard the whole period of British rule can be divided into two parts: (i) the period prior to 1891-92 and the (ii) period thereafter. For the first period we have statistics on the area under cultivation of different crops in certain districts at particular points of time, and a vast range of qualitative information about different aspects of the agrarian economy and society, but there is no time-series data (annual data over a period of time) for the province as a whole. There is no data even on the cropped area/ level of production in the province at two points of time.

For the second period we have time-series data. During the first decade of this latter period (1891/92-1900/01) production and acreage statistics were made available for the province as a whole. Then in the subsequent years statistics were reported on the area under cultivation and yields of all important crops grown in every district of the province.

However, though we are not in a position to provide any quantitative estimate it can be safely asserted that crop production increased during the first period (1793-1891). At the time of the introduction of the Permanent Settlement vast areas of Bengal (according to Lord Cornwallis's estimate about two-thirds) was cultivable but yet to be brought under cultivation. But the subsequent period witnessed considerable growth in population size and in the absence of industrial development, this meant growing pressure of population on agriculture. At the same time foreign demand for the agricultural produce of the province increased, and certain urban centres developed within the country. Consequently the prices of agricultural produce appreciated. In the circumstances there was a vast expansion of crop acreages, especially in the East Bengal districts. Crop acreage expanded to such an extent that by the turn of the present century this (crop acreage) reached its natural limits i.e. there was little scope for the further expansion of cultivation. Was there also an improvement in the yield rates of crops? As the traditional tools and implements (the most important being wooden plough driven by bullock power) continued to be used and no progress was made in the use of commercial fertilizer or improved varieties of seeds it would appear that yield per acre of crop did not improve. But it is possible that there was a certain improvement till about the turn of the century. This is suggested by the fact that most of the lands being brought under cultivation during this period were in East Bengal where land was relatively more fertile.

The growth rate in jute production during the second half of the nineteenth century was particularly impressive, area under jute increasing from 850 thousand in 1874 to about three million acres at the turn of the century. This was in response to the demand for raw jute from overseas markets and the development of the jute industry in and around Calcutta. Incidentally, most of the expansion of jute acreage took place in East Bengal districts. According to one opinion the cultivators' decision to increase jute production was not voluntary, but forced and therefore artificial. As a matter of fact these commentators have viewed the whole process of the commercialization of agricultural produce in India as forced one. These commentators have argued that the main impetus for the production of jute came from the foreign-owned export firms and the mill-owners. They were not sure that left to themselves the peasants would produce an adequate quantity of jute and therefore they advanced loans to the small traders who, in their turn made advance payments (*dadan*) to the peasant to grow jute. The importance of *dadan* or advance in jute

cultivation was examined by the Keer Commission in 1874. It was found that a section of the peasant took advances when they were in pressing need of money on the condition that they would deliver a specific quantity of jute. There was yet another section of cultivators who borrowed from moneylenders or took advance from the traders (*beparis* and *dalals*) on the condition that they would handover a certain quantity of jute at a price somewhat less than the prevailing market price. However, of the 64 traders interviewed by the Commission only 16 said that they had received advance for the cultivation of jute. There is another report pertaining to the 1920s, but from the report it is once again clear that the system of advance prevailed only to a limited extent. The jute Enquiry Committee of 1938 also came across evidence relating to the practice of paying advance to the jute growers. But once again the officials and non-official interviewees emphasized the point that the practice was not widespread. Thus, on the basis of the available evidence it is clear that the overwhelming majority of the cultivators were not forced to grow jute. True, they did not receive a fair price for their produce but even then they found jute production profitable and consequently there was the vast expansion of jute cultivation in Bengal.

Now let us turn to the performance of the crop production sector in the post- 1891 period i.e. the period for which time-series data are available. The size of the data is undoubtedly impressive but quality of the same has always been in question. There was a strong body of opinion according to which statistics on area under cultivation and yield per acre were underestimated and, therefore it was not possible to obtain reliable estimates of crop output at any particular point of time. But many commentators of the post- 1947 period have taken the view that though it would be difficult to estimate the volume of production, we can estimate the percentage rates of change (in area, yield and output) over time on the assumption that the range of error remained constant over time. On such an assumption percentage rates of changes have been estimated by several scholars including George Blyn<sup>4</sup>. Blyn's study has the advantage that it throws light on the performance of crop production not only for (British) India as a whole, but for the provinces as well. Secondly, the study also tries to estimate per capita availability of foodgrains in the different parts of the sub-continent. But Blyn treats Bengal together with Bihar and Orissa (Greater Bengal). The picture that emerges from his study is very depressing indeed. During the first four decades of the twentieth century all crop acreage declined at the rate of 0.66 percent per year. What happened to Bengal (as the province was constituted in 1947) proper? Elsewhere<sup>5</sup> I have tried to estimate the percentage rates of change in crop output (and its two determinants), but this study deals with the period 1920-46 only (i.e. not the whole period 1891-1947). The picture that emerges from my study is slightly different from Blyn's, but the overall pattern is one of stagnation. For my study shows that

both the total area under cultivation and yield per acre of all crops taken together remained constant over time (Table-1).

**Table-1**  
*Percentage Rates of changes in crop output 1920-46*

Categories	Area	Yield	Output
All crops	0.2	0.1	0.3
Food crops	0.2	-0.2	0.0
Cash crops	0.1	1.2	1.3

Source: M M Islam, *Bengal Agriculture 1920-46: A Quantitative Study* (Cambridge, 1978).

The performance of crop production has to be seen in the light of the fact that during the same period population grew at 0.8 per cent per year.

As mentioned earlier, after the first decade of the current century there was little scope for the further extension of cultivation. Therefore, the fact that all crop acreage remained stable is not surprising at all. Thus, the crux of the problem lay with the stagnation in the yield rates of food crops, particularly rice. How do we explain this phenomenon? Different commentators have offered different explanations – high incidence of sharecropping which meant inefficient cultivation, inability of the vast majority of peasantry to invest in land improvement, use of traditional tools and implements etc. But to all these we should add the fact that very little progress was achieved in the use of high-yielding varieties of seeds and the use of commercial fertilizer remained unknown. In this respect the experience in the undivided Punjab was quite different. Here the larger part of the area under the cultivation of important crops (wheat, cotton, sugarcane) was sown with high-yielding varieties of seeds and consequently Punjab achieved considerable rates of increase in crop production.

Excessive population pressure on agriculture, small size of holdings and low yield per acre meant that per capita crop output was low. This, in turn, meant that the marketable surplus of crop output and, consequently, per capita cash income of the vast majority of the peasantry remained very small. The small and marginal farmers did not even produce enough to meet their subsistence needs. In the circumstances many of the cultivators had to borrow from the professional and agricultural moneylenders at high rates of interest. Consequently the problem of agricultural indebtedness became acute. According to Bengal Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee the total amount of debt stood at 100 million Rupees in 1929-30. With the slump in agricultural prices during the Great Depression the problem of debt became more acute. The Bengal Provincial government passed the Moneylenders Act in 1933 and launched the Debt Settlement Boards to scale down the volume of debt to be repaying

capacity of the indebted families. Another Moneylenders Act was passed in 1940 to regulate the different aspects of moneylending activities. Meanwhile the operation of the Debt Settlement Boards continued in different parts of the province and by 1944 these boards reduced 50 crores of rural debt to 18 crores of rupees. Despite these efforts agricultural indebtedness in 1945 was estimated at 150 crores of rupees.

### Post-1947 period

**Agrarian Relations:** As mentioned earlier, the Floud Commission recommended the abolition of the Permanent Settlement. But this recommendation could not be implemented because of World War II and the political turmoil that accompanied the partition of the sub-continent into two independent states – Pakistan and India<sup>6</sup>. Immediately after 1947 the East Bengal Legislative Assembly took up the question of the Permanent Settlement and within three years passed the East Bengal Estate Acquisition Act. The Zamindari system was abolished by this Act (1950) and the peasants acquired proprietary rights in their lands. These rights were made permanent, heritable and transferable. The ceiling to landholding was fixed at 100 standards *bighas* (or 33.3 acres) of cultivable land per holding. The excess land acquired by the government in the process was to be settled with bona fide marginal farmers holding not more than three acres land. However, the popular belief that the acquisition of Zamindar's lands would release quite a big proportion of the aggregate cultivable area for redistribution was not substantiated by the evidence of facts. Thus, according to one calculation by 1959 a total of 163741 acres were acquired by the government under Act of 1950 and about 60 percent of this land was uncultivable or uncultivated. This is not surprising. Firstly, only a small number of Zamindars were big landlords. Secondly, lands settled with *ratiyats* under a tenure-holder could not be acquired for redistribution. Thirdly, much of the excess land, if any, could be kept within the family through deeds showing each member as a separate household or even by way of *benami* transactions. Fourthly, the bigger landlords had the option to keep the preferred plots to themselves and leave the inferior ones for government acquisition. As a result much of the acquired land was wasteland. Finally, the 1961 ordinance which enhanced the land ceiling to 275 bigas per family eliminated the possibility of acquisition of land for redistribution among marginal farmers. Thus, the great expectations of distributive justice generated by the Act of 1950 were belied.

After independence it fell upon the new government to take corrective steps. Accordingly, in 1972 the government brought down the ceiling to land holding to 100 *bighas* per family. The *khas* land with the government was to be distributed among landless peasants and marginal farmers with not more than 1.5 acres of land. It was also decided that the recovered *char* lands would be vested with the

government for redistribution among the poor and landless peasants. At the same time, it was announced that agricultural households having less than 25 *bighas* of land would be exempted from the payment of land revenue. But the government could acquire only 4.5 lakh acres for redistribution. With more than five million rural households in the category of landless and marginal peasants it could not create much impact. The failure of the measures taken in 1972 led the government to initiate changes of a more fundamental nature in agrarian relations. This was attempted in 1975 when the government declared a series of drastic measures. The ceiling on land was reduced to 70 *bighas* per family and an attempt was made to bring the whole organization of agricultural production under a system of compulsory co-operatives. But this new policy could not be implemented because of the change of government in 1975. Yet another initiative was taken in 1982. On the basis of the recommendations of a Land Reform Committee an ordinance was promulgated in 1984. Under this ordinance the: (i) ceiling to ownership of agricultural land was further reduced to 60 *bighas* per family; (ii) Excess land would be acquired by the state on the payment of compensation; (iii) A *bargadar* would be entitled to cultivate the land for a period of five years and the contract would be renewed if he satisfies the terms and conditions of cultivation; and (iv) The owner and *bargadar* shall each get one-third of the produce of the land and the remaining one-third will be received by the *bargadars* or the owner or by the both in proportion to the cost of cultivation borne by them. But the provisions of the ordinance are yet to be implemented fully.

The magnitude of the problem is such that even if the reform is fully implemented it will touch only the fringe of the issue. In 1951 landless or near landless peasants stood at 17 per cent. But according to the Census of Agriculture and Livestock of 1983/84 the figure of landless went up to 56 per cent of the rural households. Of them 8.7 per cent claimed ownership of no land at all, 19.6 per cent had claims only on homestead land and another 28.2 per cent had at most half an acre land in addition to homestead land. Thus, land reforms emphasizing only the tenurial arrangements can hardly be expected to solve the problem of access to land for these groups of people. The pattern of the distribution of the size of landholding, as it changes over time, is also indicative of an increasing rate of pauperization of peasant families in Bangladesh. Thus, in 1983/84 small farms accounted for 70.3 per cent of the total number of farm households, but in 1960 they constituted 51.6 per cent of the total. Medium and large farms constituted respectively 37.7 and 10.7 per cent in 1960. The corresponding figures for 1983/84 are 24.7 and 4.9 per cent respectively. The shares of farm areas under different categories have also changed. Area under small farms has gone up from 16.3 per cent in 1960 to 29.0 per cent 1983/84 while that under large farms has declined from 38.0 per cent to 26.0 per cent during the same period. These figures make it abundantly clear that land reform

measures are an exercise in futility. It is not likely that even one per cent of the land would be acquirable under the Land Reforms Ordinance of 1984.

### Crop Production

The stagnation in crop output which set in during the last decades of British rule continued till about the early 1960's. Then during the Ayub Khan regime the government of erstwhile East Pakistan initiated various steps to boost crop production through the adoption of seed-water-fertilizer technology. In the 1960's not much progress was achieved in the diffusion of the new technology, but a beginning was made. This programme received added momentum after the birth of Bangladesh as an independent country. Particular emphasis was put on increasing food production. But despite considerable investment in various programmes by the government, expanded research and extension activities as well as substantial foreign assistance in the field of agriculture crop production has failed to increase at a satisfactory rate. This is clear from the following discussion. During the period 1967/70-1985/88 total crop production in Bangladesh increased at the rate of 1.53 per cent per year (Table -2).

**Table-2**  
*Rates of growth of Crop Production, 1967/70-1985/88*

Crops	Growth rate	Crops	Growth rate
Food grains	1.89	Pulses	-2.42
Rice	1.66	Cash Crop	-0.08
Aus	0.15	Jute	0.15
Aman	0.96	Sugarcane	-0.49
Boro	5.63	Oilseeds	-0.72
Wheat	15.09	Spices	-1.91

Source: Musharraf Hossain, *Agriculture in Bangladesh: Performance, Problems and Prospects* (Dhaka, 1991), P.30.

But the same period witnessed a population growth of 2.4 per cent, thus implying a decline in per capita output in the crop production sector. Per capita food grains output also declined because production in this sub-sector expanded only at 1.89 per cent per annum. This was so despite the fact that among various foodgrains wheat and boro (summer rice) production increased at a rate of 15.1 and 5.6 per cent respectively. Production of jute, the most important cash crop of the country, grew only at 0.15 per cent year. On the other hand production of pulses, a major source of protein for the poor, and the major oil seeds declined during these years. This decline was due to the high rate of expansion of area under boro rice and wheat. Incidentally, the available evidence suggest that compared to boro rice, pulses and oilseeds are profitable crops.

The pace at which the use of modern inputs spread in the agriculture of Bangladesh can be seen from the relevant data in Table 3.

**Table-3**  
*Trends in Fertilizer Consumption and Percentage of Irrigated Area.*

Years	Fertilizer(000 metric tons)	AverageLbs/acre	P.C. of irrigated area
1970-71	144.6	10.0	5.6
1977-78	339.2	24.0	8.3
1978-79	331.9	23.0	9.0
1979-80	400.7	28.0	10.0
1980-81	420.0	28.0	11.3
1981-82	396.8	27.0	12.4
1982-83	458.3	31.0	14.7
1983-84	543.5	36.0	17.7

Source: Mosharraf Hossain, *Agriculture in Bangladesh: Performance, Problems and Prospects* (Dhaka, 1991), P. 213-214.

These data indicate that whereas fertilizer consumption rate accelerated from 1977/7, the proportion of area irrigated from all the sources taken together increased slowly. In this connection it may be mentioned that supply of these inputs were subsidized by the government. Secondly, agricultural inputs were delivered through a public agency - Bangladesh Agricultural Corporation. Thirdly, there was a phenomenal increase in the volume of institutional credit (credit advanced by Bangladesh Krishi Bank and the Nationalised Commercial Banks) from Tk. 865 million in 1976/77 to Tk. 5743 million in 1984/85.

Some idea about the performances of the crop production sector in Bangladesh agriculture in the recent past may be made from data presented in Table 4.

**Table-4**  
*Production Index of Selected crops (Base 1991/92 = 100)*

Items	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96
Cereals	100	101	99	94	99
Aus	100	95	85	83	78
Aman	100	104	102	93	96
Boro	100	97	100	97	107
Wheat	100	110	106	120	132
Jute	100	93	84	102	78
Oilseeds	100	81	100	105	104
Pulses	100	102	103	107	107

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Monthly Statistical Bulletin* (Dhaka, 1999), P. 48.

These data make it clear that cereal production in the country in 1995/96 has remained more or less at the level of 1991/92. On the other hand, jute production has declined by 22 per cent. Production of oilseeds and pulses has increased, but only marginally. Incidentally, these crops account for only a small part of the total cropped area of the country. Overall, therefore, it may be said that the growth performance has deteriorated in the recent past. This may be partly due to the fact that the government is no longer paying subsidies and the distribution of agricultural inputs has been privatised and the consequent price rise has led to a decline in the use of modern imputes.

To summarise, during the hundred years or so after the introduction of the Permanent Settlement agricultural production increased in Bangladesh. Then a stagnation set in and this continued till about the early 1960's. In the mid-1960's the government initiated a strategy for augmenting crop production through the adoption of a "seed-water-fertilizer" technology. This policy gathered new momentum after the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent country. As a result the crop production sector witnessed considerable growth till the late 1980's. But the rate of acceleration did not match population growth. Since then growth performance in crop production has deteriorated. But a rapid transformation of the agricultural sector is an urgent need for achieving self-sufficiency in food production, economic growth and, perhaps most important of all, poverty alleviation in the country.

### Notes and References

1. Rent was what the landlords collected from the raiyats or tenants. On the other hand what was paid by the landlords to the government was revenue.
2. A certain proportion of land in every district was recorded as Khas or in direct possession of the proprietors and tenure holders. This is the land which was not distributed to the raiyats and it included gardens or orchards or uncultivable lands. However, a part of Khas land was also cultivated, either directly with the help of hired labour or on barga arrangement.
3. These included (besides rice), jute, tobacco, sugarcane, pulses of various kinds, roupe and mustard, sesamun, linseed.
4. George Blyn, Agricultural Trends in India: 1891-1947: *Output Availability and Productivity* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966).
5. M M Islam; *Bengal Agriculture, 1920-46: A Quantitative Study* (Cambridge, 1978). If we proceed on the basis of the officially published data we get a growth rate of 0.9 per cent in total crop-out put. But my argument is that we can not accept the official statistics in their face value. So these statistics are revised and the revised data indicate that there was a stagnation in agricultural production.
6. Discussion in this section and the one that follows is mostly based on M Hossain, *Agriculture in Bangladesh: Performance, Problems and Prospects* (Dhaka, 1991). Indeed, at many points I have reproduced from the text almost verbatim.

## CHAPTER TEN

### Economic Development

Wahidul Haque

#### (b) Industrialization of Bangladesh in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

##### Introduction

In order to understand the industrialization process of Bangladesh (and its former incarnations as East Bengal and East Pakistan) during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is necessary to take stock of the status quo at the end of the eighteenth century. Historical material covering the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries and various interpretations of this material have been presented in a valuable volume entitled "*History of Bangladesh 1704-1971: Volume 2, Economic History*" edited by Sirajul Islam. I shall depend heavily on this volume for my exposition of the theme under discussion and refer to it as HB-2.

Since the interpretations just referred to do not relate, so to speak, to the economic thought, albeit European, of the two most important centuries, i.e., the seventeenth and eighteenth, I shall try to fill this gap. Specifically, I am referring to mercantilist economic thought as presented in Eli Hecksher's great work entitled "*Mercantilism*" and commented upon by J.M.Keynes in his "*Notes on Mercantilism, the Usury Laws, Stamped Money and Theory of Under consumption*" (Chapter 23, in Keynes; *the General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*).

The plan of the paper is as follows. Contrary to the title of this paper, the period under review is really the period of "de-industrialization" of Bangladesh. The industrialization of the country began at least two thousand years ago and acquired a momentum in two recent centuries – the seventeenth and the eighteenth. Section 2 is devoted to a recapitulation of the zenith of the industrialization phase- roughly the period under the Nawabs Murshid Quli Khan, Shujauddin Khan and Alivardi Kahn—culminating in the Battle of Palashi.

Section 3 deals with the British period: first under the East India Company and then the “*Raj*”. This period started with the “plunder and pillage” of Bengal by the servants of the East India Company who took over the “*diwani*” of the Suba of the Bengal Presidency in 1765- eight years after the Battle of Palashi. This Company destruction of Bengal industry continued until the arrival of Lord Cornwallis in 1786 who in essence, though not in form, ushered in the governance of Bengal, and India for that matter, by the British Imperial power.

Here began the peaceful demise of indigenous industry under the apparently well-meaning Cornwallis plan of providing ‘security’, ‘prosperity’ and ‘happiness’ to the people of Bengal by grafting the Anglo-French economic doctrine of Physiocracy on the soil of Bengal. This phase continued until what the British called the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 and the establishment of direct rule of the British government. The Raj continued until the partition of India in 1947.

During this phase Bengal’s industry was totally annihilated by “one sided” *laissez-faire* i.e. laissez faire for imports to India and mercantilism for exports from India. Section 4 deals with ‘internal colonization’ of East Bengal by the West Pakistan-based central government. This ‘Pakistan Phase’ terminated in 1971 with the emergence of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh. This final phase of our essay is discussed in section 5 Section 6 concludes the discussion.

### The Nawabi Period

Bengal in the first half of the eighteenth century, from Murshid Kuli Khan to Sirajuddowla, was known by such epithets as the “Paradise of Nations”, the “Paradise of India”, the “realm of Paradise”. It supplied a wide variety of cotton and silk products not only to the whole of the Moghul Empire but also to Europe. The goods were known for their high quality of workmanship and low supply prices. Bengal’s industrial economy was not inferior to any other nation. This industrial heritage runs way back in history. During Roman times Bengal muslin was the envy of the wealthy Romans. Pliny, a Roman writer, complained of Bengal muslin draining the Roman economy. Many a traveler through the ages were dazzled by the fineness and elegance of Bengal cotton.

Next to cotton was the silk industry. Besides modern West Bengal, mulberry cultivation was done, though to a lesser degree, in the districts of Dinajpur, Rangpur and Bogra of today’s Bangladesh. Silk products were exported to Europe besides being locally consumed. There were other industrial products such as tobacco, oil, gunnies, chunam, etc. that were destined for the domestic market mainly.

The premise just made that Bengal, and for that matter India, was inferior to none in terms of industrial development is a historical fact. Why then did Bengal fall behind, decay and degenerate while the European counterparts forged ahead? The answer would appear to lie in the manner of Bengal’s industrial

production and marketing of the produce and more generally in the relative status of the economic transition in Europe and Asia.

In ancient times Bengal's products were exported to the West through land routes by caravan traders and by boats plying by the coastline. Arab merchants were the intermediaries in this East-West trade. Long-distance trade of this sort was snuffed by the crusades and remained suspended throughout the feudal epoch in Europe. In the sixteenth century Dutch, French, English, Ostenders and other maritime people began to arrive in India to export Indian products to Europe in exchange for gold and silver obtained through Europe's trade surplus with the new Continent—America. As Sirajul Islam (HB-2, p2) says the new pattern of trade was oceanic with merchant ships sailing across the high seas manned by mariners. The Mughal government welcomed these trades sensing some initial benefits and unmindful of the likely mischief the marines, ostensibly brought for the safety of the ships and the wares carried there in, could eventually do to the political structure of India.

While the Arabs in ancient times served as the intermediary between Europe and India, this time round at the close of Feudalism the Europeans themselves came to conduct East -West trade without any intermediation. Here again, notice that it is the Europeans and not the Indians who took the initiative- the latter, we will see, would serve as henchmen to the former in the form of "*banians*". This asymmetrical trade relationship would seem to go a long way in answering our question posed above. There is no denying of the superiority of European science and maritime technology and the toughness of the mental/physical faculties and the adventurous spirit caused perhaps by the region and simultaneously invigorating power of the temperate climate that led the Europeans to go out and "conquer". On the other hand, India's relative economic superiority and the West's lack of anything useful to the Indian people except the precious metals stood in the way of India's taking the initiative and make, so to speak, the first move.

Why did India want precious metals? The answer to this question is tentatively, and I would say quite usefully and fairly originally, given by Sirajul Islam (HB-2, pp 3-4). The question before us is deep and an adequate answer requires satisfactory knowledge of the economy of Mughal feudalism. The only thing in this respect seems to be the work of Irfan Habib who has discovered "potentialities" of capitalist transition in the Mughal empire by singling out the "*karkhanas*" producing for the Mughal Court. I shall return to this theme with Cornwallis's experiment on "gentlemen farming" later on. Meanwhile, let us probe Sirajul Islam's answer. In his judgement metal was wanted for three different purposes. The Mughal Court wanted metallic money to pay the army in cash which was convenient. It also wanted land rent in the form of cash. This is use of money as an exchange medium which, contrary to Sirajul Islam, could, of course, be done efficiently only with precious metals, not by cowries,

barks, and leaves; paper money was unthinkable at that early stage of civilization. Aristocratic men and women wanted gold and silver as jewellery. Finally, European traders who participated in internal trade obtained the extraordinary profit extorted there from in the form of cash and bought Indian goods and exported them to Europe. This was again use of money as medium of exchange for repatriating trader's monopoly profits.

The cotton industry was organized as a cottage industry under the "dadni" system. A foreign company would advance money to a weaver for a certain amount of cloth within a stipulated period at a pre-established price. An intermediary, called "tagilder" i.e. over-seer would be the link between the trader and the weaver. He would get the work done by urging and pressurizing the weaver to deliver the goods to the satisfaction of the trader. For this service the agent would get a commission from the trader. This is the origin of the *banian* capital of which we will talk later. The goods would be sold in the European market by the trader. The revenue minus outlay was his profit.

If this was the nature of Indo-European trade, then the precious metals obtained from it and received in India would have to consist of the part of the export revenue that the trader brought back to India after having left a part in Europe. Out of the inflow to India, the receipt by Indians would consist of taxes, wages including the *dadni* commission and other payments to Indians; the rest will be the trader's profit for re-investment.

This is more or less the scenario at the close of the *Nawabi* period. The English East India Company would soon take over the entire country after acquiring the '*diwani*' in 1765.

### **The British Period**

From ancient times until the arrival of Cornwallis as the Governor General- in-Council of Fort William in Bengal, land was state property in a regime of what has been called "state feudalism". The 'ground' rent was collected by the state essentially with the help of a hierarchical bureaucracy. In Mughal times, the top echelon of the bureaucracy was called *Zamindars*- the *Rajas* and *Maharajas* below whom lay several layers of intermediary subzamindars; each layer collecting rents from the immediately lower layer at a stipulated rate and paying rent again at a stipulated rate to the layer immediately above it. The difference between the collections and payments were the "payment" to this layer of the bureaucracy. At the apex of the system lay the state, at the base the peasant -the *raiyat*.

In this state feudalism, occasional instances of sales of slaves were noticed here and there. But as in Japan and China, Indian feudalism was very much unlike the European. As a matter of fact, at the close of the *Nawabi* Period, the economic nature of the Mughal state was more like a socialist economy where the principal property, land, was publicly, as opposed to privately, owned.

Of course, the political system and economic organization of historically known socialist societies differed from the Mughal and their predecessors. Euro-centred Marxist categories feudalism, capitalism etc. – do not exhaust the list of possibilities of socio-economic formations.

England was the most advanced of all nations in the march towards capitalism during the period we are discussing now. Mercantilism as opposed to free trade was the principal economic opinion held by those who mattered except for some economists of the English School who championed free trade. Mercantilism believes that a favourable trade balance is always good for a country. England was precisely interested in that vis-à-vis India. Cornwallis thought that the Mughal Zamindari system needed an overhaul to this end and also supposedly for the benefit of the natives. He felt that the Mughal system should be replaced by the British system, wherein private property would be established in land. The Permanent Settlement, elegantly described by Sirajul Islam (HB-2, pp 246-271), was his solution. The old *banians* misused their capital by buying off the old *zamindars* rather than in investing it in a capitalist enterprise.

Meanwhile the English textile industry began excluding Bengal textiles not only from the European market but also from the Indian market. A tariff wall was erected against Bengal textile in England and free trade was practised for imports to India. Besides, weavers could not compete with cheap machine-made cloth from Manchester. Soon Bengal became an agrarian society specializing in new cash crops jute, tea and indigo. The De-industrialization of Bengal was the crowning achievement of Cornwallis whose Permanent Settlement, rather than becoming a replica of Britain, soon degenerated into basically the former Mughal zamindari system through an elaborate subinfeudation process. There was no gentleman farmer-no capitalist agriculture.

The *Banian* capital was concentrated in the hands of the lower rungs of Bengali society - the *Cetts*, *Basaks* and *Baniks* - from the early days of the East India Company. But in the first half of the nineteenth century upper castes – *Brahmins* and *Kayasthas*- became the leading indigenous businessmen. This upper caste category, as Bainayak Sen (HB-2, pp 440-456), says, joined with British capital in promoting joint stock companies in such activities as steam tugging, coal mining, indigo manufacturing, tea planting, river steamboat services and rail road building. The leading figure of the time Dwarakanath Tagore, who co-founded the famous agency house Carr, Tagore & Company.

This “re -industrialization” of Bengal coincided with some profound social changes in the country. First, the monopoly of the East India Company was broken. Free trade became the slogan of the day and lots of Englishmen came to India without any capital of their own. They borrowed Bengali capital and set up joint ventures. They believed in free enterprize and settling down in India as opposed to the “open-up and return” policy of the East India Company. The liberal Governors-general Warren Hastings and William Bentinck and their

officials like Charles Macaulay shook up Bengali society by reforms in education and allowing freedom of expression through a free press. Persian was replaced by English as the official language in 1837.

Unfortunately this upper-caste capital and the agency houses collapsed due partly to an international commercial crisis in 1847 and partly due to the diversion of this capital to the acquisition of *zamindaries* under the Permanent Settlement. Because of the ensuing economic difficulties and also the political situation triggered by the “Sepoy Mutiny”, the British government took direct control of India as a colony in 1858 after having dissolved the East India Company.

However, both Englishmen and Bengalis made investment in coal mining. The English built jute mills and some in the Bengalis bought shares of these mills. Meanwhile, it is the *Marwaris* rather than the Bengalis who started penetrating the jute trade and easing out the Bengalis. There were also *Swadeshi* enterprises by Bengali “*Bhadralok*” entrepreneurs in the early twentieth century such as the Bengal Chemicals of Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray, Banga Lakshmi Cotton Mills, Mohini Mills of Kushtia, Bengal Hosiery Co. and a few other small-scale cotton weaving and ginning enterprizes. Science-based industries figured permanently with the *Bhadrolok*; these include chemical and pharmaceutical, leather, mining and metallurgy, non-metal industries (such as glass, porcelain and ceramics). Capital for these industries came from middle class savings and not from large capitalists partly because such industries were set up out of a patriotic spirit and not from the profit motive per se and also partly because they were set up to promote self employment of unemployed educated youth. No wonder some of these collapsed early and others were not very successful.

During the inter-war years *Marwari* capital was the largest in large-scale entrepreneurship. They were the second in jute pressing in East Bengal next to the Europeans. The striking feature of East Bengal industry at the time of the partition of India was that apart from a few cotton mills, all other industries in East Bengal were small-scale. There were some Muslim entrepreneurs- Adamjee, Ispahani who would play a major role in Bangladesh later on.

### The Pakistan Period

Paul Baran in his famous book *The Political Economy of Growth* has said that an imperial power lets its citizens grab a foreign territory either to open it up or settle down there. It was clear that the early demise of the agency house system of the free traders pointed to the British “open-up” design and not “settle-in”. India will not be Australia or New Zealand not even South Africa or Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). Open-up and practise mercantilism to the utmost that was the motive of the colonial power.

Civil resistance to this British design ultimately led to the departure of the British from India in 1947. But before leaving, they along with the shortsighted leadership of the sub-continent created an absurd political entity – Pakistan. East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) became an unequal partner, rather an internal colony, of the dominant wing -West Pakistan (now Pakistan). A good thing, though, happened in land administration. The Permanent Settlement and the Cornwallis *zamindars* were gone and another phase of re-industrialization of Bangladesh began. The Adamjee Jute Mills, Karnaphuli Paper Mill, Chittagong Oil Refinery, Joydevpur Machine Tools Factory, etc. came up. Industrial growth was taking place. But private sector industrialization was being done with the help of a state organ, called East Pakistan Industrial Development Corporation (EPIDC) mostly for the benefit of the non-Bengali Muslim entrepreneurs from India. This community of immigrant entrepreneurs might have been of the "settle-in" type but they ran away with the fleeing Pakistanis in 1971.

Compared to the former colonial extraction, the new situation was subtle and indirect. First, the principal export, jute-the golden fiber- followed by tea, hides and skin, etc. fuelled the engine of modernization not in East Pakistan but primarily in West Pakistan. The Pakistani rupee was over-valued. The just-mentioned exports originating in East Pakistan were the principal foreign exchange earners for Pakistan. Alas, the East Pakistani growers were denied of this benefit of resource; they got paid in rupees, which were highly over-valued. This hidden transfer of foreign exchange was worse than the former colonial exploitation in the sense that the latter was transparent. Secondly, imports being restricted, East Pakistanis had to purchase highly-protected Pakistani import substitutes like cotton and woollen textiles, razor blades, etc.; the tariff burden fell on East Pakistani shoulders without offsetting reciprocities. Thirdly, the allocation of foreign aid was prejudicial to East Pakistan. An estimate showed that \$6 billion of transfer of resources took place from East Pakistan to West Pakistan. This colonial-like exploitation along with other aspects of unequal treatment led East Pakistan to cut itself off from Pakistan and emerge as independent Bangladesh after a bloody war in 1971.

### **Independent Bangladesh**

After World War many a Third World Country sponsored national development plans spearheaded by the central government. Pakistan was of this type. From the status of an agricultural hinterland of Calcutta with a few small-scale industries and a still fewer number of "large scale" cotton mills, East Pakistan posted a high industrial growth rate, natural for a near-zero base. On the eve of independence, non-Bengali owned enterprises were nationalized and a socialistic industrialization plan was adopted. No major investment was undertaken-domestic savings were near zero and no foreign aid was in sight.

Balancing, modernizing and repairing the old equipment was all that was done. Industrial growth was due to old accumulated investment and not due to new ones.

Over time jute lost its status in the world market and ready-made garments took its place. Other industries-leather, electronics, engineering works, etc. have begun to come into the picture. Industrial growth rate is high and the GNP growth rate is 5 to 6 percent currently. In July, 2001, it is reported to be in excess of 6.5 per cent.

Planned development has ceased and the "free" market economy with privatization of the state-owned enterprises has been accepted as the basic character of the economy as a virtual U-turn from the position of the socialist secular economy modelled by the founding fathers. A mixture of mercantilism and laissez-faire is the order of the day.

Historically mercantilism dominated international trade with nations vying with each other for trade surplus and accumulation of precious metals. The policy tools were trade restrictions and outright war. This system gave way to free trade for a brief period stretching from the early nineteenth century to early twentieth century. After World War II, a new system of trade, called neo-mercantilism by the late Joan Robinson, dominated world trade until the end of the Vietnam War and its aftermath. Although globalization has been going on from the sixteenth century or so, it received a new emphasis with the return of power in the seventies the conservative governments in the United States and Europe. The Economic policy of neo-mercantilism shifted from fiscal to monetary instruments in the North. An Ideological shift to the right resulted in the replacement of the strategy of planned development in the South by the policy of Structural Adjustment and Downsizing. The collapse of the socialist system in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe hastened, along with globalization, the ascendancy of the twin doctrine of the market economy on a large scale. A sort of neo-laissez-faire is the contemporary global economic system. Neo-mercantilism began to be eroded by the strain of the Vietnam War and the victory of conservatism at the political level. Given the history of laissez-faire and its tenure for less than one hundred years, one cannot predict how long neo-laissez-faire will last.

While the practice of planning and public ownership has been replaced in Bangladesh like everywhere in South Asia by market incentives and privatization, neo-laissez faire has retained the mercantilist goal of trade surplus maximization, which amounts to trade deficit minimization, in the context of South Asia. The International Monetary Fund insists on certain macroeconomic measures to be taken by South Asian countries which can be enumerated as follows.

#### a. *Systematic currency depreciation*

By nominal devaluation and price adjustment Real Effective Exchange Rate (REER) is supposed to be preserved. The object is to preserve competitive

position and reduce trade deficit. The formula, however, makes some commodities competitive and the rest uncompetitive. This fact together with the J-curve effect, may indeed increase the trade deficit rather than decrease it.

#### b. *Fiscal Policy*

Public deficit is discouraged by lowering government expenditure and raising tax revenue. Fiscal prudence of the pre-Keynesian times is reasserted.

#### c. *Interest Rate Policy*

High interest rate is encouraged on the plea of capital shortage. As Keynes would have said, this is simply confusing the marginal efficiency of capital with the interest rate.

#### d. *Monetary Approach*

The IMF uses the formula: change in high-powered money equals change in foreign exchange reserve plus change in domestic credit. With insistence on a conservative domestic credit increase, this formula maintains a tight money objective, keeps the interest rate high and discourages investment.

The conservative macroeconomic approach thrust on South Asia has resulted in a moderate growth rate of 5 percent or so. The exchange rate policy encourages the "beggar-thy-neighbour" ethic and increases exchange rate risk and hence discourages long-term capital inflow. The mercantilist philosophy of competitive struggle for trade surplus via systematic devaluation is not consistent with the ideology of free trade and laissez faire. Economic policy synchronization among trade partners as opposed to violent and unfair practices will certainly make neo-laissez faire look better than it now does. It is possible to build on the Mundell-Fleming model and determine the values of key macroeconomic tools such as exchange rate, interest rate, tax rate, money supply, government expenditure etc. that will support a higher investment programme and higher growth rate than in the contemporary scene. The current practice of devaluation does not really assure trade balance improvement; it could be very destabilizing. The Exchange rate should be determined jointly with other policy instruments from a comprehensive economic model.

The implications for the development of South Asian countries are obvious. Without a change in the macroeconomic policy regime that encourages low investment, the growth rate cannot be substantially increased. There is no economic compulsion to have a current account balance. A large current account deficit poses no threat as long as a capital account surplus keeps matching it without creating a debt crisis. An "import-led" development strategy financed by long-term capital inflow is the only way to achieve fast development of South Asian economies in the context of globalization and market economy.

In other words an economic regime wherein the North encourages trade surplus and the South matches it by selling long-term debt and shares of stock

could produce high growth rates in South Asia. When it happens South Asia could choose to remain a “branch plant” economy like Canada or buy out the shares owned by investors from outside the region.

Is this possible? The United States economy has been running at full employment and near-zero inflation. Where will American and other transnational companies make their next overseas capital outlays? China is currently attracting a lot. India a bit and Bangladesh is being considered. But this region must take the necessary measures that will attract this capital. These measures- political, social and infrastructural- are too well-known to merit recapitulation here.

South Asia may get a bad deal unless it watches out. In particular, Bangladesh must do her homework before the final negotiation. Neutral teams of advisers from overseas could be consulted. Bangladeshi experts, at home and abroad, should not continue to remain in the wilderness or stand on the wayside. This is particularly important in the contemporary context of negotiation with the gas and oil companies.

I have slipped in the phase “import-led development” above. If one country is “export-led” like the East Asian tigers, especially Taiwan, then its trade partner is “import-led” as a corollary. The “import-led” in this particular context are the over-developed countries of the North. In the South Asian context, the reverse is contemplated. The impoverished import-led South Asia is deemed to have the hyper-affluent export-led North as its opposite number. South Asia’s globalization experience has been sad. In the mercantilist era, she was export-led and acquired precious metals as payment for her trade surplus. But her people, with the “help” of her despotic rulers, made no use of it. To quote Keynes, “The history of India at all times has provided an example of a country impoverished by a preference for liquidity amounting to so strong a passion that even an enormous and chronic influx of the precious metals has been insufficient to bring down the rate of interest to a level which was compatible with the growth of real wealth” (J. M. Keynes: *The General Theory of Interest, Employment and Money*- page 337). In the free-trade period, India became import-led and paid for the deficit with the precious metals she had earlier acquired and her people were reduced to hewers of wood and drawers of water for the colonial master. In the neo-mercantile era, South Asia continued to have a deficit and paid for it by mainly borrowing from official and multilateral sources. The resultant growth rate of 5% or so is undoubtedly better than the earlier free-trade or mercantile epochs. China experienced a doubled-digit growth rate by playing its card well in the global economy. South Asia could expect a similar experience in the neo-laissez-faire regime.

### Concluding Remarks

The logic of globalization means one giant economy with one currency and one market. The trade-balance is a non-issue in such a situation. Is the world moving towards such an outcome? In the German Ideology, Marx and Engels predicted

just that. That will be possible when the last nail has been driven into the coffin of nationalism. That is a far cry from South Asian, and many other regional, political realities where the march of civilization has yet to cross many a hurdle inherited from tribalism and barbarism.

Space does not permit me to dwell more on the unfolding of globalization. There is widespread fear of American domination of the global economy. George Bush openly said during the Gulf War that the twenty first century would be the American Century - Pax Americana. If Pax Americana remotely resembles yesterday's Pax Britannica, then South Asia will, along with many other regions including Europe, have to think of a different world order which is hard to visualize at this stage of globalization.

In the meantime, however, South Asia should review her existing economic policy regime, in particular, its practice of competitive devaluation. The IMF -sponsored Purchasing Power Parity formula underlying regular devaluation in Bangladesh and India is based on a so-called long-term (equilibrium) doctrine. Under the same exchange rate doctrine, there is also an interest rate formula, namely, domestic interest rate equals foreign interest rate plus rate of depreciation of domestic currency. It tends to make the domestic interest rate high reinforcing Keynes' closed-economy thesis that competitive market tends to make the interest rate excessively high "so that a wise Government is concerned to curb it by statute and custom and even by invoking the sanctions of the moral law" (Keynes, *General Theory*, Page 351).

The above doctrine is an article of faith rather than a scientifically established theory. Indeed, there is no available proof yet of the existence of a monetary equilibrium in a closed (national) economy- not to speak of the international economy. And this fact helps explain why a floating rate occasionally becomes so destabilising. An exchange rate has to be treated as a policy tool rather than as a competitive equilibrium price of a currency. Interest rate, exchange rate, money supply and capital mobility should be treated as a package regionally - even internationally. The IMF approach is inadequate and possibly harmful for South Asia at least in as far as it discourages investment and hence growth of real wealth in South Asia.

Just as an intelligent enemy is preferable to a foolish friend, no economic policy is better than a bad economic policy. Milton Friedman and his pupils, in particular Robert Lucas, are concerned that governments tend to make bad economic policies. Discretionary policies should be avoided - they recommend. However, even US monetarism over the last two decades has systematically used discretionary policy by, in particular, "fine-tuning" the interest rate and thereby achieving full employment and near-zero inflation. Fine-tuning requires fine experts and not just experienced managers and bureaucrats. Look at the Council of Economic Advisors of the US President. Where are the South Asian Tobins and Okuns—Solows and Arrows? Couldn't they start at least a "dialogue of the deaf" with the politicians?

They can't. The reason is "... in the field of economic and political philosophy there are not many who are influenced by new theories after they are twenty-five or thirty years of age, so that the ideas which civil servants and politicians and even agitators apply to current events are not likely to be the newest" (Keynes, *General Theory*, pp. 383-384). Indeed there are not many. South Asia produced only one Jawaharlal Nehru. Thereafter only political - philosophical light-weights, at best, have come and gone.

Space does not permit me to dwell on some historiography - theory of history-of Bangladesh or South Asia for that matter. The basic factor of production, land, having been state-owned and with a fairly-developed banking system, the artisans and merchants of Mughal India could have perhaps ushered in a collectivistic capitalistic economy closer to Japan than to the West. Britain's intervention and the imposition of the extreme form of mercantilism, i.e., colonialism backed by the City of London economics, not only arrested the path of South Asia's natural evolution but the rigid adherence to what Keynes has repeatedly chastised as "classical" economics destroyed the world economy in the Great Depression that this false theory inflicted on humanity.

The Empire is gone but the Global Village of today is vitiated by the same mercantilism unequally applied world-wide. I conclude by quoting Keynes (*General Theory*, p 349).

"It is the policy of an autonomous rate of interest, unimpeded by international preoccupations, and of a national investment programme directed to an optimum level of domestic employment which is twice blessed in the sense that it helps ourselves and our neighbours at the same time. And it is the simultaneous pursuits of these policies by all countries together which is capable of restoring economic health and strength internationally, whether we measure it by the level of domestic employment or by the volume of international trade".

## CHAPTER TEN

### Economic Development

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Bazlul Mobin Chowdhury

#### (c) Changing Class and Social Structure in Bangladesh: 1793-1980

Emerging out of colonial domination on two separate occasions, first under the British (1757-1947) and then under Pakistan (1947-71), Bangladesh is now regarded as one of the poorest countries of the world. However, as colonial integration means ultimate subjugation of the colonial economy to an economy dominated by a capitalist mode of production, both colonial conditions gave specificities to the capitalist transformation of the country's agriculture. The British inherited an agricultural structure which, in many respects, resembled the one introduced by the colonial regime. But it stunted the organic growth process of the contradictions of the pre-existing mode of production in the interest of colonial capitalism. For instance, British colonialism destroyed many of the elements of a pre-capitalist mode of production (such as village self-sufficiency, simple reproduction of capital and the use of extra-economic coercion for the realization of the surplus from the actual producer), but it delayed the emergence of a fully-fledged capitalism which could be antagonistically contradictory to metropolitan capitalism<sup>1</sup>. The Pakistani colonial regime, on the other hand, formally abolished all the vestiges of feudalism, but restricted the capitalist transformation of the agriculture by re-imposing a double edifice of class and colonial exploitation in the interest of the development of an industrial capitalism in Pakistan (West). Thus, both colonial conditions contributed to a restricted capitalist transformation of the country's agriculture, which is reinforced in the post-colonial situation by neo-colonial control. The present chapter therefore attempts to reconstruct the history of capitalist under-development in Bangladesh.

It was in Bengal that the British laid the foundation of their subsequent colonial expansion in India. Historians are now almost unanimous about the fact that eighteenth-century Bengal embodied features such as proprietary rights of land, commodity production, use of money, existence of markets, mutual exchange of goods between the town and the country, a considerable degree of social stratification among the indigenous population, the organization of commercial credit, insurance and rudimentary deposit-banking. All these features, according to Habib, remind one of the conditions of Renaissance Europe<sup>2</sup>.

As far as proprietary rights over land were concerned, Mughal revenue documents were quite unambiguous about the right of ownership in Agricultural land by individual persons. The superior class of property holders were known as *zamindars*. There were both large and small *zamindari* estates. According to one source, some of the large landed aristocratic families, such as Rajas of Burdwan, Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Nadia, Birbhum, Bishnupur and Jessor, controlled more than half of the land resources in Bengal just prior to the British occupation of the country<sup>3</sup>. These *zamindars* held their estates within the territories which were conferred by the state on condition that the holders paid a fixed revenue. Failure to pay the stipulated amount could lead to their eviction<sup>4</sup>. The system of evicting *zamindars* from their land for non-payment of revenue was extensively practiced by the Mughal governor, Murshid Quli Khan. It is reported that Murshid Quli Khan deliberately pursued a policy of rewarding those *zamindars* who were able to deliver the increased sums that he demanded, and by punishing those who were not. His rewards often took the form of opportunities for successful *zamindars* to acquire the right to more land, while his punishment usually consisted either of physical harassment and sometimes imprisonment or else removal of a *zamindar* from his *zamindari*<sup>5</sup>.

The provision of reward and punishment thus opened up avenues of acquiring increased wealth through additional revenue rights, making it possible for landowners to effect a change in their official status<sup>6</sup>. The whole system thus represented a considerable amount of dynamism within the upper strata of the rural social hierarchy.

In addition to the *zamindars* having land within the territories under direct imperial control, there were those who held their land outside it. They were known as *Karad rajas* or frontier chiefs<sup>7</sup>. These *Karad rajas* retained hereditary rights over land by paying tribute to the imperial authority. The Mughal emperors never interfered with the internal affairs of the *Karad rajas* as long as they were satisfied with their loyalty<sup>8</sup>.

However, what distinguished the pre-colonial land-tenure pattern from the colonial one was the fact that almost all the peasants were occupancy *ryots*. Their holding were hereditary and they had full rights in land for the purpose of transfer, mortgage, and sale<sup>9</sup>. Thus the peasant of Bengal did not rent land on

short lease from the *zamindars*, but continuously occupied them<sup>10</sup>. However, serious restrictions were imposed upon peasant mobility by the denial of the right of free alienation. Given the fact that there were fewer peasants than the land available for cultivation, the peasant could not leave the land or refuse to cultivate it unless he could find a successor<sup>11</sup>. It was in view of this situation that Currie argued that for the Mughal peasants, 'cultivation was both a right and duty'<sup>12</sup>. The system thus represented the feudal mode of surplus extraction through the use of force<sup>13</sup>. The use of force for the purpose of surplus extraction is also exemplified by the fact that the Mughal army was stationed at important places to assist the lower-level bureaucrats in revenue collection from the reluctant peasants<sup>14</sup>. The repressive nature of the revenue collection resulted in a number of peasant revolts throughout India during the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries.

These revolts exemplify the different levels of peasant's consciousness and the expression of the same in different forms of movement, given the situation under which the peasant were living. Some of the movements took the shape of 'social banditry'<sup>15</sup>, such as the Thugee movement of the eighteenth century, whereas others remained passive, taking the form of mass escape from oppression. The abundant availability of land made the latter kind of resistance 'peasant' first answer to famine or man's oppression<sup>16</sup>. Thus, pre-colonial Bengal not only embodied private property in land and the existence of different classes of property holders, but also the conflicts based on social contradictions.

A characteristic feature of the Mughal revenue collection was that it was demanded in cash. The cash revenue demand, in turn, was a major contributory factor to the rural monetisation. Therefore, to meet the cash revenue demand, the peasants of pre-colonial Bengal not only cultivated major food crops like rice, but also commercial crops like tobacco, opium, sugar-cane and indigo<sup>17</sup>. Unlike his counterpart in the colonial era, the pre-colonial peasant was free to decide about the type of crop to be produced. The same factor also contributed to the peasant's close association with the market for the realisation of the necessary cash for revenue payment through the disposal of his own produce. There were a number of markets scattered through rural Bengal<sup>18</sup>. These markets were and are still known as *hats*. The existence of numerous rural markets and the peasant's close association with them indicates that the 'primary producer was not only concerned with exchange merely as a form of economic activity required to secure the wherewithal for the payment of revenue, but also that the process of production itself had become partly dependent on the exchange relations'<sup>19</sup>. An important aspect of rural monetisation was the total dependence of the urban area on the villages for the supply of essential raw materials for urban industries and other necessities for the urban population the rural markets were therefore frequented by urban merchants and their agents. In addition, to facilitate the cultivation of commercial crops, money-lending also developed to

a significant extent to supplement the peasant's inadequate capital. The existence of a separate category of money-lenders, locally known as *mahajans*, is evidence of this fact<sup>20</sup>. In many cases money - lending and trading were incorporated in the same person. Consequently, the peasant was not only subject to the rigid revenue demand of the state, but also to exploitation by the merchants and money- lenders. The combination of these factors inhibited the extension of rural monetisation. These three social groups (the zamindars, merchants and money-lenders) had a claim on the produce of the peasant, leaving him with little surplus to create a rural market for consumer goods. The villager sold his produce in order to pay the 'revenue, now demanded in cash, and maybe to pay the money-lender unless he preferred payment in kind. For the rest, his life was geared to a tradition based on distribution of the rural produce among agriculturist, craftsmen and village servants<sup>21</sup>.

The restriction on rural monetisation was reinforced by the nature of urban production. In pre-colonial Bengal, urban manufacturing developed to a significant extent. Bengali cotton textiles, especially the famous Bengal muslin, enjoyed a world-wide market. The manufacture of these textiles was carried out in the cottages of independent workers as well as in the factories owned by local merchants, Mughal nobles and European companies<sup>22</sup>. Of the three, the European companies could claim credit for introducing the manufacture system and wage-labour for the production of commodities in pre-colonial Bengal<sup>23</sup>. However, as production remained restricted mainly to the consumption requirements of the nobility and the international market, there was nothing that the urban areas could send to the villages. The village economy continued to produce everything that the villagers needed<sup>24</sup>. The characteristic feature of the manufacturing sector failed to undermine the self-sufficient nature of the rural economy. Therefore, the pre-colonial Indian economy in general, and the Bengali economy in particular, presented a unique picture of the coexistence of the conditions of money-economy and village self-sufficiency.

It was the presence of these two contradictory economic elements that probably accounted for the social contradiction manifest in the existence of an individualistic mode of production in agriculture, on the one hand, and the organization of the village community, on the other<sup>25</sup>. With this background Bengal was integrated to world capitalism through the colonisation of the country by the British in 1757.

Given these conditions, was India ready for an autonomous capitalist transformation prior to British colonialism? To answer this question one must remember that commodity production (that is, production for the market) was intertwined with the organisation of production in agriculture, which was clearly non-capitalist in nature, and capital remained confined mainly to the sphere of commerce. Under the circumstances, it could follow a different economic logic from that which governs exchanges between commodities or the accumulation

of capital<sup>26</sup>, or given merchant capital's failure to achieve any independent development, it could disintegrate with the collapse of the ruling class<sup>27</sup>. Whatever the case may be, to argue that eighteenth-century India in general was ready for the rise of capitalism in the 'really revolutionary way' will simply be an overstatement of the actual fact<sup>28</sup>.

The initial years of British occupation were marked by outright plunder, which illustrated the characteristic form of mercantile appropriation. The plunder resulted in a disastrous famine in 1770, which removed about one-third of the population of the country<sup>29</sup>. It was this famine which made the British East-India Company realise the importance of a more permanent method of government. With that aim in view, the Company began to reorganise the rural economy. In order to bring the pre-capitalist mode of production to the service of British capitalism, the colonial rulers initiated certain basic changes in the concept of property ownership. The new concepts of property relations were to have far-reaching consequences and marked the beginning of the process of underdevelopment. In reorganising production relations, the British East India Company entered into a permanent settlement with the former *zamindars*, known as the Permanent Settlement of 1793. The salient features of the new land-tenure policy were:

1. Permanent Settlement of the land revenue with the *zamindars*;
2. Fixation of the revenue demand at excessively high rates, only 10 percent of which was allowed to be retained by the *zamindars*;
3. Transformation of all 'waste' land into 'Crown Land';
4. Dispossession of the *zamindars* for non-payment of revenue at a stipulated time and the sale in auction of the estate to realise arrears<sup>30</sup>.

In conferring property rights over land to the *zamindars*, the colonial rulers dispossessed the former land-owning *ryots* from ownership of the land and transformed them into mere tenants-at-will of their former lords. However, as the Company rulers insisted on excessive and right revenue demands to ensure an uninterrupted transfer of resources from the colony, the new relations of production did not generate a transformation of the existing social formation. Instead, the new relations of production remained essentially based on the old mode, and 'took their point of departure from it'<sup>31</sup>.

The pressure of revenue demands and the threat of eviction for non-payment encouraged the *zamindars* to create, in turn, a hierarchy of intermediate landowners and increase the rent on land by combining many illegal cesses. They used the same right against the defaulting peasants and dislodged them from the land as the Company did against the *zamindars* for defaulting on revenue payment. Thus the land-owning classes ensured their own continuity by passing on the burden of the revenue demand in the form of increased rent to the peasants, and the dispossessed peasant were made to compete for small

plots of land at excessive rents for their own survival. According to the one report, within the first twenty-five years of the operation of the Permanent Settlement about 45 percent of landed property in Bengal in terms of the public revenue demand changed hands. Of this 45 percent, not less than one-third of all genuine transfers were purchased by the members of the established landed classes. The *zamindars* and their trusty agents were closely followed by native revenue officers and traders<sup>32</sup>.

Commercialisation of tenurial rights introduced new forces into the agrarian class structure. The process led to an enormous increase in the number of non-cultivating interests in land. By the end of the colonial rule, there were 73,000 separate estates in Bengal (West Bengal and Bangladesh) paying revenue to the Crown<sup>33</sup>. Urban professionals, such as government servants, lawyers, merchants and traders, began to acquire land and perpetrated a system based on exploitation and extraction of surplus from the peasants. None of them ventured to invest in agricultural development. The cheap supply of labour from among the dispossessed peasants and intense competition amongst them to rent land on a crop-sharing basis gave plenty of scope for the land-owning classes to obtain a large profit from underdeveloped productive forces, in addition to exorbitant rent and usurious interest. Various others means of production necessary for agriculture remained at the same level as before colonial occupation. The Census of Agricultural Implements in Bengal conducted in 1940 showed that improved agricultural implements were scarcely available in Bengal. The area under artificial irrigation, whether organised or encouraged by the government, was negligible<sup>34</sup>.

Against this general background of stagnation, the rapid expansion of commodity production under colonial control led to the emergence of a large rural proletariat. The peasant was caught in a dual process of proletarianisation. First, his rent obligation was increasing with the expansion of rent-receiving intermediaries, and secondly, he was forced to produce commercial crops, such as indigo, much against his will. The peasant was thus made increasingly vulnerable to fluctuations in world prices of commercial crops. Under these circumstances, the peasant could ensure regular production only at the expense of his own subsistence. He had to take recourse to borrowing at an increasing rate or cut down his own consumption. According to one estimate, during the first three decades of the present century, rural indebtedness in Bengal rose to 100 crores of rupees (one crore is equal to 10 million)<sup>35</sup>. Thus, rack-renting and usury became the two most profitable means of investment for the rural rich, pointing ultimately to the emergence of 'antediluvian' forms of capital, rather than capital in the sphere of production. It was an inevitable outcome in the economic climate of a country subjected to imperialist exploitation<sup>36</sup>.

These emerging relations of production were reinforced by the destruction of indigenous industries. In order to create an international division of labour,

the colonial rulers destroyed the indigenous industries, but restricted the growth of modern industrial manufacturing industries. The Bengali cotton textile industry had always existed as a challenge to the nascent British industry. Therefore, the prior destruction of the Bengal textile industry through determined colonial state intervention was a pre-condition for the rise of British industry<sup>37</sup>. The process of destruction began with the withdrawal of the export market through the high tariff wall against imports from India. The most decisive blow, however, came from the collapse of the urban upper classes and of agriculture<sup>38</sup>. Whereas the urban upper classes, together with the nobility, patronised the finer quality of cloth, the poorer section of the population consumed the coarse cloth produced by the handloom weavers. The growing impoverishment of the agriculture population had an adverse effect on the traditional handloom industry<sup>39</sup>. As the old industries were not replaced by the establishment of new industries, the dispossessed artisans were forced into agricultural occupations as their only source of employment. The new situation aggravated the already depressed condition created by the colonial land-tenure system. The extra demand for land and employment created by the dispossessed artisans made rack-renting, usury and petty leasing all the more profitable for the land-owning classes.

In the context of colonial domination, the realisation of the necessary conditions for the development of a capitalist mode of production remained incomplete. For example, a large rural proletariat was created, but these workers had to subsist on the land. They did not emerge as free labour alienated from the means of production. Similarly, generalised commodity production was imposed from outside, and the circuit of production was not completed within an integrated and balanced economy, but only by way of the linkage with the metropolitan economy, through dependence on exports and imports<sup>40</sup>. More importantly, however, the dominant classes which emerged in the rural area consequent to the introduction of bourgeois property relations remained parasitic on the system. They emerged more as indigenous allies of the metropolitan bourgeoisie, to facilitate both upward and outward extraction of surplus, than as an independent rural bourgeoisie in their own right.

Within this enforced reproduction of distorted capitalist relations of production, a contradiction between classes was also developing. Exorbitant rent, usurious interest and the coercion of the foreign planters to cultivate commercial crops like indigo generated conflicts among the peasant against both indigenous and foreign exploitation. During the middle of the nineteenth century, there were violent peasant uprisings throughout Bengal. In organising these revolts, the peasants not only brought into sharp contrast the contradictions of a 'deformed' capitalist mode of production, but also demonstrated their capacity to initiate changes in the structure of the society in their own interest. The indigo revolt of 1860 and the rent strike by the peasant

of the districts of Pabna in 1873 exemplify the peasant's resolution to resist this system of economic exploitation.

Against this background of increasing peasant violence, the colonial government was obliged to introduce some major changes in the land-tenure system. These changes included confirmation of the proprietary right on certain categories of *ryots* and imposition of rent control. However, it will not be correct to attribute the changes in the tenurial system solely to the peasant uprisings. They nevertheless provided ostensible reasons for the colonial rulers to undermine an organisation of production developed for exploitation by the merchant's capital in the interest of the latest stage of capitalist development in Britain. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, when the country was brought directly under the rule of the Crown, the colonial regime was shifting the source of income from land revenue to greater capitalist extraction of surplus value by the subordination of the peasant economy to capital<sup>41</sup>. However, the process was greatly undermined by the forms of property and of production created earlier by the merchant's capital. The hierarchy of landowners created under the Permanent Settlement appropriated a greater portion of the surplus produced by the peasants. For example, in the 1940's the *ryots* and under *ryots* paid between 120 and 200 million rupees to ensure only 26.8 million rupees to the Crown<sup>42</sup>. Therefore, even though industrial capital had no intention of building up its own counterpart in India, the disruptions caused earlier in the organization of production undermined the surety of a regular supply of the necessary means of production<sup>43</sup>. Under these circumstances, important changes in the production relations in agriculture became absolutely essential.

These new changes in bringing the direct producer under the control of the market through the transfer of ownership and the curtailment of the *zamindar*'s power over rent increases marked the beginning of a new phase in imperialist exploitation. Therefore, land legislation after the Permanent Settlement such as the Rent Acts of 1859, 1868 and 1885 sought to integrate progressively the colonial peasants to metropolitan industrial capitalism. In doing so, the new legislation did not undermine the power and position of the existing dominant classes, such as the *zamindars* and the subordinate tenurial holders called *jotedars*, as these laws ensured a regular marketable surplus through the mechanism of rent and debt. Instead, to accommodate the interest of the British indigo planters, the Rent Act of 1859 defined "cultivator" in such a manner that non-cultivator classes continued to grow, undermining the productivity of the poor peasants. In the context of the reproduction of underdevelopment, it is worth noting that, even after the formal abolition of the *zamindari system* with the end of the colonial domination, the actual tiller of the soil is still denied access to the ownership of the means of production. "The dichotomy between the ownership of land and the labour on it"<sup>44</sup> continues to pervade the rural area even today much to the detriment of agricultural development.

At the end of colonial rule, the rural class structure was characterised by the *zamindars*, and *jotedars*, the rich farmers, merchants, money-lenders, the self-sufficient *ryots*, the poor peasants, including the share-croppers (*bargadars*) and agricultural labourers<sup>45</sup>. After the departure of the British, the Pakistani colonial regime abolished the *zamindari* system and conferred the proprietary right to the former *ryots*. However, by failing to remove the inadequacies of the earlier Rent Acts, such as the recognition of the actual tiller as the owner of the land, the Land Reform Act of 1950 failed to remove all non-cultivating interests in land. Thus, the reform of the Pakistani period benefited those categories of the rural population, such as the Muslim *jotedars* (large tenurial holders) and the rich peasants, who had hoped to benefit from the communal basis of creation of the state of Pakistan. Since the last days of British colonialism, Muslim peasants came to be significantly represented in the upper and the middle-category peasants in the districts of Bengal that now constitute Bangladesh, but their independent development was frustrated by the overwhelming presence of the Hindu *zamindars* and merchant money-lenders.

It was from the Muslim *jotedars* and rich peasants that a Bengali Muslim urban middle class was gradually emerging whose frustrating experiences with British and Hindu domination brought them to the fold of the Muslim League—the political party of the Indian Muslims dominated by the big landlords of the Punjab and the trading communities of north India. It was therefore not surprising that the land reform of 1950 remained limited to the legislation of the illegal usurpation of land by the Muslim *jotedars* and rich peasants from the departing Hindu *zamindars*. However, by confiscating the surplus generated by the commercial crop for the development of an industrial bourgeoisie from amongst the immigrant non-Bengali trading communities from north India, the colonial regime of Pakistan contributed to the community of the 'antediluvian' forms of capital (usury, rack-renting and purchase of land for petty leasing)<sup>46</sup>.

In the post-colonial situation, therefore, the whole rural class structure has remained intact with the omission of the *zamindars*. The present rural class structure is composed of the following categories of rural population. The *jotedar*, who own land (ranging from twelve to more than fifteen acres of land), control about 16 per cent of the total cultivable land, but represent only 1.23 per cent of the rural households. They mainly live on rent from tenants and the exploitation of wage-labour. The *jotedars* extract usurious interest from money-lending and invest mainly in speculative trade and land purchase.

The *rich peasants* own between five and twelve acres of land. The total amount of land under their control is in excess of 26 per cent of total cultivable land, but they represent only 5 per cent of the rural households. Most of the rich peasants are owner-managers and employ wage-labour. Some of them also lease out land on a crop-sharing basis to the *bargadars* (share-croppers). The rich peasants are directly involved with the market, but also indulge in money-

lending. They dominate the rural areas and, through their linkage with the national power structure, misappropriate state-provided agricultural inputs.

The *upper-middle peasants* are the next category : approximately 8 per cent of the rural households belong to this category and control about 21 per cent of the total area. Their holding size varies from 3.01 acres to 5 acres of land. They are the self-sufficient owner-cultivators and are also able to produce marketable surplus. A part of their economic surplus is diverted to money-lending instead of productive investment. However, given the capitalist transformation of agriculture, they represent the potential 'kulaks' along with the rich peasants.

The *lower-middle peasants* is the category into which a little more than 7.5 per cent of the rural households belong, but they own less than 13 per cent of the total area. They own land between 2.01 acres and 3 acres. The inadequate amount of land under their control compels them to take land on a share-cropping basis and pursue petty trade. The lower middle peasants are the potential victims of the capitalist transformation of agriculture, since they are unable to cope with the operation of the market forces. After the poor peasants, they are the largest sellers of land in Bangladesh.

The *poor peasants* is the category into which the largest number of rural households belong; about 45 per cent of the rural households in Bangladesh are poor peasants. Only 25 per cent of the total area of land belongs to the poor peasants, whose size of holding varies from 0.01 acres to 2 acres of land. Most of the poor peasants take to share-cropping and also hire themselves out as wage-labourers. They are chronically indebted to the rural money-lenders and are therefore subjected to oppression and exploitation by rural upper classes.

The *landless workers* inevitably do not own any land. About 33 per cent of the rural households in Bangladesh are absolutely landless; they earn their livelihood as agricultural workers. The fortunate few amongst the landless population who own some other means of production, such as a pair of bullocks or a plough, also share-crop land. The average income of an agricultural worker is barely adequate for the reproduction of labour, let alone the maintenance of a family of four<sup>47</sup>.

The process of pauperisation and polarisation, which followed from the increasing involvement with the market forces in the post-colonial situation, resulted in significant variations in the size of the classes. The Land Occupancy Survey of 1977 clearly indicates the extent of differentiation and polarisation of relations between classes. According to this survey, 10 per cent of rural households own half the country's cultivable land; the other 50 per cent of the cultivable land is shared between 60 per cent of the households; and a third of the rural households own no land at all. However, the survey concludes that for all practical purposes a little less than half of the rural households are land less in Bangladesh<sup>48</sup>. Various development projects of the post-colonial government, such as

agricultural co-operatives, village government and the introduction of modern technology, have reinforced the existing class distinction.

Thus Bangladesh is not an exception to the general process of poverty and underdevelopment experienced in other Third World countries. In all these countries, the process of capitalist development under colonial and neo-colonial conditions has generated class differentiation and engendered class conflict by deepening impoverishment. What, however, distinguishes Bangladesh is the increasing poverty of 80 per cent of its population and the accumulation of wealth by the rich, despite the fall in the average national income<sup>49</sup>. The accumulation of wealth by such a minuscule stratum can hardly be justified in terms of the wealth generated by the country as a whole. The country's narrow industrial base and the virtual absence of an internal market cannot justify the increasing wealth of the Bengali upper classes. The manufacturing sector of the country's economy contributes only 10 per cent of the gross domestic production. Moreover, most of the heavy industry (shipbuilding, iron and steel, and the petro-chemical industry) is owned by the state. Under these circumstances, the accumulation of wealth by the minuscule upper classes can only be explained either in terms of the expansion of trade and commercial activities or the persistence of such dubious activities as smuggling, black marketing, hoarding and bribery. In both cases, the process of capital accumulation implies a specific situation where an underdeveloped bourgeoisie is enmeshed in a neo-colonial metropolitan economy. This specific form of relationship illustrates the various levels of integration of the local interests with foreign capital, such as incorporation of local personnel in to executive jobs in foreign firms, the financing of local politician and the provision of custom and agencies for local businessmen<sup>50</sup>. In view of its inherent weakness, the Bengali bourgeoisie is incapable of performing the role expected of it in the country's capital development.

Meanwhile, the Bengali *petite bourgeoisie*, which represent the majority of the urban population, abdicated any pretension to a revolutionary role and remained parasitic on the political system. The fact that the *petite bourgeoisie* party, The Bangladesh Awami League, was in power immediately after the liberation of the country, facilitated the 'primitive capital accumulation' by *petite bourgeoisie*. Such a parasitic existence was made all the more desirable since, by nationalising private enterprises, the state enhanced its capacity to distribute patronage<sup>51</sup>. The rural origin of the *petite bourgeoisie* contributed to the strengthening of the ties between the rich and the upper-middle peasants, who, by taking advantage of the rural-development policies of the post-colonial government, stabilised their class position in the rural area. The *petite bourgeoisie* elements developed a vested interest in the maintenance of the status quo.

The great majority of the poor peasants and workers are locked in a constant battle of survival. The political situation is extremely tense in the rural area,

where, with the intensification of the process of capital accumulation, the poor and marginal peasants are increasingly proletarianised. Increasing poverty generates social tension and discontent in the rural areas. To suppress the growing discontent that arises from the intensification of the process of pauperisation and polarisation, the state augments its repressive power, on the one hand, and introduces various development projects, on the other but ignores the causes of poverty and underdevelopment. In fact, the existing state structure is incapable of resolving the problems of poverty, since the causes lay within the existing relations of production and the underdevelopment of the productive forces.

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### Education in Bangladesh: Historical Overview

A F Salahuddin Ahmed  
A Majeed Khan

#### Historical Development of Education System Under British Colonial Rule 1800-1947

Prior to the establishment of English rule in Bengal the *Nawabs* of Murshidabad and the local *Zamindars* used to promote learning by patronising scholars. Education, however, was not a state concern and was left in the hands of private individuals. This was so not only in India but also in Europe till the end of the eighteenth century. Although there was no regular system of mass education as such, there were numerous schools some of them perhaps the oldest in the world. Each community had its own system of schools. Thus, the Hindus had their *tols* and the *pathshalas*; the former represented specialized institutions where the Sanskrit scriptures and the various branches of Sanskrit literature were taught by Brahmin *pandits*. The latter were popular elementary schools where children received the rudiments of education. The Muslim equivalent of these institutions were the *madrasa* where Islamic theology and jurisprudence and the different branches of Arabic and Persian Literature were taught by learned *maulvis*, and the *maktab*s, which were elementary schools for children. Although these institutions were supported by wealthy people out of considerations of piety and charity, the students were largely drawn from the poorer classes. This was so because it was the fashion among the rich to educate their children at home under their private tutors. The progress of education, however, was greatly handicapped for want of printed books. During the latter part of the eighteenth century political turmoil and unstable conditions had produced a very depressing effect upon education. Nevertheless, the old education system

though decaying for want of sufficient patronage was not entirely destroyed. William Adam who was appointed by Lord William Bentinck's Government in 1835 to conduct an enquiry into the state of education estimated that there were not less than 1,00,000 village elementary schools in Bengal and Bihar. According to him, there was on the average a school for every sixty-three children of the school-going age. These children included girls as well as boys as there was no separate school for girls.

During the early period of its rule, the Government of East India Company was not specially interested in education. The Company being at first a trading rather than a ruling corporation was not anxious to introduce any radical change in the old order. Notwithstanding Government apathy, however, European missionaries, philanthropic officials and merchants both in their individual capacities and through private societies, were making serious efforts to promote an improved system of education by establishing a number of schools in Calcutta and other urban areas. Their efforts were later supported by a number of public-spirited Indians themselves who were beginning to realise the importance of a new educational system to suit the needs of the time. The Hindu College of Calcutta (1816). The Calcutta School-Book Society (1817), The Calcutta School Society (1818) and the Serampur College (1818), were some examples of such non-official Indo-British endeavour to promote education in Bengal. While the Hindu College was the exclusive institution of the Hindus through which English literature and science were taught to Hindu boys, the other institutions catered to the needs of all communities. The chief object of the Calcutta School-Book Society was to supply at less than cost price, useful elementary books for schools. The Calcutta School Society was established in 1818 with the following objects: (i) to establish elementary schools in different parts of the province; (ii) to support the numerous schools already in existence; and (iii) to train competent teachers for these schools. The last object was realised by giving stipends to meritorious students to enable them to prosecute their studies so that they might eventually serve as efficient teachers. In the management of these two societies Hindus, Muslims and Christians, European merchants and missionaries, actively co-operated.

The first educational institution established by the Government was the Calcutta *Madrasa*. It was founded by Warren Hastings in 1781 in response to the request of Muslims of Calcutta. Hastings had not only paid the price of the land on which the *Madrasa* was built; he also maintained the institution for about two years at his own expense. In 1782, the *Madrasa* was taken over by the Government. Ten years later the Banaras Sanskrit College was established to promote Sanskrit learning. In establishing these two institutions the East India Company's Government sought to conciliate its Muslim and Hindu subjects.

Although the character of education imparted in the *Madrasa* and the Sanskrit College was largely religious, it nevertheless served secular purpose. The business

of judicial and revenue administration was still conducted in Persian language. In the administration of justice, the Hindu and Muslim legal systems were generally followed. Trained Hindu and Muslim young men were required to fill subordinate positions in the judicial and revenue administration. These two government institutions, therefore, were suited for this purpose. In 1785, the Government had issued an instruction that vacancies in the *Faujdari* (Criminal) Courts should be filled from qualified students from the *Madrasa*.

Towards the close of the eighteenth century, Christian missionary organisations had started putting pressure upon the British Parliament to send out missionaries and teachers to India. Charles Grant, a former official of the East India Company who afterwards becomes a Director of the East Indian Company and also a member of the Parliament, was one of the active supporters of the missionary movement. In 1792, Grant had written a treatise entitled *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain Particularly with respect to Morals; and the means of improving it.* This work was submitted to the Court of Directors of the East India Company and the Parliament in 1797. In this treatise Grant grossly over-emphasized the moral degradation of the Indians and sought to draw the attention of the English public authorities to the need for imparting education to the Indian subjects. But education according to Grant's conception was linked with Christianity and educating Indians, therefore, meant to Christianise them. But neither the East Indian Company nor the Parliament was willing to assume any responsibility in this regard. On the contrary, there was a strong feeling among authorities in England against taking measure that would in any way interfere with the social or religious life of the Indian people. In fact, when the question of the renewal of the Company's Charter had come up before the Parliament in 1792-93 Grant's friend Wilberforce, the great humanitarian, sought to pass a bill which would provide for sending out missionaries and school teachers to India. The bill was rejected.

In fact, till 1813, the East India Company's Government was suspicious, if not hostile to English missionary efforts in India. The problem of education, however, could not be entirely ignored. The establishment of the College of Fort William in Calcutta in 1800 by Lord Wellesley was itself a landmark in the history of Indian education. Although designed with the sole purpose of training young English Civil Servants of the Company in the laws and languages of India, this institution undoubtedly gave a great impetus to the cause of education in the sub-continent. Between 1800 and 1805 the College had in its staff over one hundred Hindu and Muslim scholars who besides acting as teachers and translators were also engaged in composing original works in the oriental languages. There was also another aspect of the problem which could not be ignored. British power in India, which represented an alien despotism, suffered from an inherent weakness. It had no roots in the soil. Some Englishman particularly the missionaries, felt that the spread of Christianity could provide

the necessary links between the rulers and the ruled. The need for propagating Christianity in India to serve British interests was now stressed.

Meanwhile, the Government of the East India Company had been contemplating some measures to promote education among its Indian subjects, Lord Minto, the Governor-General, in a minute dated 6 March 1811 proposed the establishment of four new Colleges, two for the promotion of Sanskrit learning and two for Arabic and Persian. The proposal, however, was not put into effect for want of sanction from the Court of Directors.

The educational responsibility of the East India Company's Government was for the first time officially recognised in the Charter Act of 1813. The Act included an important clause which declared that a sum of not less than one lac rupees shall be spent each year for promotions of education of the inhabitants of British territories of India.

Significantly enough the Charter Act also included an ecclesiastical clause, which provided for the establishment of Bishopric for the whole of the British territories of India and one Archdeaconry for each of the three provinces, Bengal, Madras and Bombay. The salaries of the Bishop (£5,000 per year) and of the Archdeacons (£2,000 each) were to be paid out of the Indian Revenue. This indicated that missionary agitation and propaganda had some effect in the making of Government policy towards India.

Despite the official interest the East India Company Government had now begun to take in the matter of education, noting positive was actually done until 1823 when the General Committee of Public Instruction was established. Nevertheless, during the decade following the Charter Act of 1813, efforts at independent and non-official levels were made to promote education in Bengal. These efforts were encouraged by the Government.

In July 1814, Robert May, a Christian missionary established a school at Chinsurah based in the monitorial system. This was a system developed in England by Joseph Lancaster (1778-1838) under which the senior students taught the junior ones. May's school was a great success and he soon established a number of affiliated schools in the villages around Chinsurah. In these schools reading writing and arithmetic were taught in the Bengali language. In 1815, the Government sanctioned a monthly grant of Rs.600/- for the purpose of establishing schools according to the plan introduced by May who was put in charge of the project. Some more schools were thus started under May's supervision. These schools came to be known as "The Company's Schools". In 1816, May had established a separate school for teachers and also suggested that efforts should be made so that every village could support its own school. The success of these schools clearly indicated the increasing demand for an improved system of education even outside Calcutta. The fact that students came from different castes and communities also illustrated that caste and religion did not stand in the way of education.

The establishment of the Calcutta Hindu College (1816), the Calcutta School-Book Society (1817) and the Calcutta School Society (1818) marked further steps towards educational progress through non-official endeavour.

The activities of the British missionaries of Sreerampur in promoting education in Bengal deserve special mention. One of them Joshua Marshman had, in 1816, drawn up a plan of elementary education through vernacular language based on monitorial system. According to this plan, an experimental normal school was established at Sreerampur. Soon a large number of similar schools were established in the neighbouring villages, which became highly popular. The Baptist Mission Press at Sreerampur was also turning over a large number of works in the Bengali language on various subjects including textbooks. In 1818 the missionaries had established a College at Sreerampur. Although the primary object of this institution was to promote the cause of Christianity, Christian as well as Arabic and Sanskrit literature was taught there. The College curriculum also included Geography, Chemistry, Physics and special textbooks in Bengali. The Sreerampur College was the first institution in the sub-continent where the vernacular was used as a medium of instruction at all levels, primary, secondary and advanced. It should be noted that under the traditional educational system both Hindu and Muslim, the vernacular did not have any place. Education under the old order was confined to the few. By promoting education through the vernacular medium the missionaries sought to establish a dialogue with the common people which, they believed, was the first essential step towards the promotion of Christianity. Although their efforts at conversion achieved limited success, they made great contribution to the development of vernacular literature.

Till 1823, the Government was more concerned in preserving the existing institutions rather than creating new ones. Its attention was naturally turned to be Calcutta *Madrasa* whose condition was not very satisfactory. In 1791 it was discovered that some of its students were persons of most depraved character. The Government therefore decided that the future administration of the institution should be entrusted to a Committee of superintendence consisting of the President of the Board of Revenue the Persian translator to the Government and the Preparer of Reports. The *Madrasa* comprised five classes and each student received a monthly grant of Rs.15, 10, 8, 7 and 6 according to his class.

In 1821, the Government decided to establish a Sanskrit College in Calcutta. It should be noted that the education policy of the Government was now guided by 'the Orient a lists' like H.H.Wilson who believed that by promoting the cause of traditional i.e. Oriental learning could the Government hope to influence the people. Western science and learning, they maintained, were to be promoted only through those who were acquainted with Eastern science and learning. The Sanskrit College was actually opened on January 1, 1824. By 1830

provisions were made for the teaching of English and Western systems of Anatomy and Medicine, in addition to the different branches of Sanskrit literature which included Rhetoric, Arithmetic, Logic, Medicine, Vedanta and Law. The study of English was made optional.

As stated before, the General Committee of Public Instruction was established in 1823. One of its earliest tasks was to undertake an enquiry into the state of teaching in the province and also to suggest such measures as it may appear expedient to adopt with a view to provide the better instruction of the people, to the introduction among them of useful knowledge and to the improvement of their moral character. Funds including those sanctioned by the Act of 1813 were placed at the disposal of the Committee. The Committee was to exercise superintendence and control over all Government institutions and was also asked to give assistance and encouragement to the private schools in any way it considered suitable. The Government still followed the conservative line and did not favour the introduction of any radical change in education.

Meanwhile the Hindu College, the only non-official institutions of higher learning, was passing through financial crisis and in 1823 it applied to the Government for financial assistance. The Government agreed on condition that the College be open to Government inspection.

By 1823, however, there was a reaction against the educational policy of the Government. The great Bengali reformer Rammohan Roy in a letter addressed to Lord Amherst in December 1823 criticised the Government for deciding to establish Sanskrit College in Calcutta. An ardent advocate of modern liberal education Rammohan expressed his apprehension that the Government plan to establish a Sanskrit College in Calcutta for promotion of traditional Hindu learning would not promote useful knowledge. He appealed to the government for establishment of a College which would provide a useful Western liberal and scientific education. He, therefore, made a fervent appeal to the Government to "promote a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction embracing mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and anatomy with other useful science which may be accomplished with the sum proposed by employing a few gentlemen of talents and learning educated in Europe, and providing a College furnished with the necessary books, instruments and other apparatus". This appeal was, however, ignored by the Government and as noted before the Sanskrit College was duly established.

Rammohan Roy, however, was not alone in expressing apprehension regarding the Government educational policy. In a despatch to the Bengal Government dated 18 February 1824 the Court of Directors expressed similar apprehension. It should be noted that the Utilitarian philosopher James Mill and his brilliant son John Stuart Mill were now working at the India House and they exercised some influence in moulding the Indian policy particularly with

regard to education. Thus the despatch emphasised that "the great end should not have been to teach Hindu learning, but useful learning".

After the establishment of the Committee of Public Instruction, attempts were made to improve the condition of the existing institutions. Thus through translation into Arabic and Persian of various English works on European science was sought to be introduced into the *Madrasa* curriculum.

In spite of the fact that the Committee of Public Instruction had been trying to introduce the teaching of English in the *Madrasa* since 1824, no English class was established until 1828 which again did not attract many students. Although the *Madrasa* was the only institution of higher learning for the Muslims of Bengal it never attracted a very large number of students. It is a sad commentary on the state of education of the Muslims. This phenomenon cannot be explained by poverty only. It was also due to apathy and suspicion towards any institution with which the English Government was associated.

The type of education imparted in the *Madrasa* was not satisfactory. Thus Dr. Mill, Principal of the Bishop's College, Calcutta, who conducted the examination of the students in mathematics, noted that the state of science as taught in the Arabic text in the *Madrasa*, was backdated by about one thousand years and was thus far behind European science. He suggested the teaching of European since through the medium of the English language. He concluded that "Intellect has not sufficient room to expand itself" under the old learning.

In contrast to the *Madrasa* the Hindu College was making rapid progress. The Hindus had been showing great enthusiasm for study of English literature and western science. The number of students at the Hindu College had also considerably increased. The Committee of Public Instruction in its report of 1831 noted that the Hindu College students were acquiring "a command of the English language and a familiarity with its literature and science to an extent rarely equalled by any schools in Europe." In fact, by 1831, the Hindu College had become the centre of a remarkable intellectual ferment which threatened to bring about a social revolution in Bengal.

A comparative review of the educational development of the Hindus and Muslims in Bengal during this period would reveal certain significant facts. It would appear that the Muslim had not as yet recovered from the demoralisation which resulted for the loss of their political power and the consequent economic and social instability. At a time when the Hindus were forging ahead in different directions, the Muslims had failed to respond intelligently to the circumstance in which they found themselves. Not only had they failed to appreciate the value of English education in the altered conditions of the time, they, in fact did not seem to show much enthusiasm even for their own traditional Muslim learning. Adam made the significant observation. "Perhaps we shall not err widely if we suppose that the state of learning amongst the Musalmans of India reassembles that which existed among the nations of Europe before the invention of printing".

The Muslims had failed to appreciate that whatever its religious or cultural value, this sort of learning handed down by tradition could not promote their material welfare in an age when the knowledge of the West which itself represented a revolt against tradition, was creating new values which were to play a dominant part in the age in the making and the age to come. In contrast, the Hindu attitude was more realistic and more rewarding.

To what extent the Muslims had been neglecting the study of English was illustrated by the fact that when the Calcutta Medical College was established in 1835, not a single Muslim candidate was available who possessed a sufficient knowledge of English, the requisite qualification for admission.

In 1835 Lord William Bentinck contemplated the inauguration of a new educational policy which would mark a radical departure from the policy hitherto followed by the preceding governments. Influenced by Macaulay and the English educated Hindus of Calcutta, he was about to embark on a policy which would involve the abolition of *Madrasa* and the Sanskrit College and the utilisation of all funds set apart for education for promoting only English education. Against this contemplated move, the Muslims reacted sharply because they knew that if the new policy was implemented they would be the worst sufferers. A massive petition in Persian signed by over 8 thousand Muslims was presented to the Governor-General-in-Council protesting against the contemplated move to abolish the *Madrasa*. The petition could not be ignored by the Government. On 9 March 1835 an official reply to the petitioners was given in which the Government assured them that the *Madrasa* would not be abolished. On 7 March 1835 the Government had declared the new education policy. It proclaimed that "the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India and that all the funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone". The *Madrasa* and the Sanskrit Colleges however were not to be abolished, but no stipend would be granted hereafter to any student at these institutions. It was resolved that all funds available for education should be employed in imparting to the people a knowledge of English literature and science through the medium of the English language.

By 1835 the Government had decided that it should not establish any other institution for the exclusive benefit any particular community. This was evident from the character of the institutions established in Hughly, Murshidabad and Dhaka. Out of the funds left by Haji Muhammad Mohsin, the great philanthropist, the Government had established a *Madrasa* and an English School at Hughly. In 1835 the two institutions were amalgamated into a College for the teaching of English literature and science along with oriental subjects. In Murshidabad also a school had been established with two separate departments, English and Oriental. Although this institution was meant primarily for the benefit of the members of the Nawab Family, it was open to

others as well, irrespective of religion or sect. In 1835, it was brought under the control of the Committee of Public Instruction and it was decided to raise its status to that of a College. Similarly, at Dhaka an English school had been established in 1835.

In 1838, the Government had taken another important decision which also adversely affected the position of the Muslims. In that year, Persian was abolished as the language of judicial business. Its place was taken by English in the higher and vernacular in the lower courts. This change particularly benefited the Hindus. The Muslims had refused to learn English, and had neglected Bengali which was regarded by them as a rustic dialect. On the contrary, the Hindus had learnt both with avidity and were able to reap the rewards which resulted from this change. Till the end of the nineteenth century Bengali Muslim aristocracy in general treated the Bengali language with contempt.

Regarding the new education policy inaugurated by Bentinck it should be noted that in view of representations made on behalf of the Madrasa and the Sanskrit College, Lord Auckland's Government modified it. It eventually took a compromise decision of continuing Bentinck's policy of promoting English education while preserving the character of the oriental institutions by providing separate funds for their maintenance.

The General Committee of Public Instruction was reconstructed and renamed the Council of Education in 1842. Till 1855 the Council was responsible for all matters covering education. In 1844 over a hundred vernacular schools were established in the districts. Meanwhile, the need was felt for the establishment of a University in Bengal and preparations were made accordingly by the Council of Education. The Government had by now decided upon introducing a well-integrated system of secular education.

In 1853 the Hindu College of Calcutta which was now administered by the Government was declared open to students of all castes and creeds. The College was renamed Presidency College. Against this decision, conservative Hindus of Calcutta raised hue and cry. Their leaders Raja Radhakanta Deb and others resigned from the Managing Committee of the Hindu College as a mark of protest. The conservative Hindus eventually established on a new College known as Hindu Metropolitan College.

In 1854 Sir Charles Wood, President of the Board of Control, issued his famous despatch to the Government of India in which major reforms in the educational system were suggested "We must emphatically declare"; the despatch stated, "that the education we desire to see extended in India is that which has for its object the diffusion of the improved arts, science, philosophy and literature of Europe; in short of European knowledge". Accordingly, in 1857 Universities were established in the Presidency towns of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. These universities were established on the model of the London University. Each University was to have a Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and a Senate. The Senate

was to manage the University funds and frame regulations for examinations. Professorships were to be instituted in various branches of learning, such as Law, Civil Engineering, Classical Oriental language. An Education Department was created in each of the provinces of British India. The system of grant-in-aid to the educational institutions was introduced.

After the great uprising of 1857-58, the Muslims began to realize the importance of Western education. The Muhammadan Literary Society of Calcutta established under the leadership of Nawab Abdul Latif made significant contributions towards breaking Muslim prejudice against English education. The attitude of the Government however became cautious. Radical changes were now to be avoided. In 1882 an Education Commission was appointed by Lord Ripon to make an exhaustive inquiry into the state of education. It was headed to Sir W. W. Hunter. The Commission made special recommendations for promoting education of the Muslims which included liberal encouragement to Muslims who would go for higher English education; appointment of trained Muslim teachers in the schools; Studentships reserved for Muslims; appointment of Muslim inspectors of schools.

In 1902 Lord Curzen appointed a Commission to enquire into condition and prospectus of the Universities established in British India and to make recommendations with a view to promote the advancement of learning. The Commission made the following recommendations:

1. The Universities were recognised as teaching bodies and the jurisdiction of each university was more clearly defined.
2. The Senate, the Syndicate and the Faculties should be recognized and made more representative than before.
3. A more strict and systematic supervision of the affiliated Colleges to the University and the imposition of more exacting conditions of affiliation.
4. A much closer attention to the conditions under which students live and work.
5. Substantial changes in the curricular and in the methods of examination.

These recommendations were accepted by the Government and were incorporated in the Indian Universities Act of 1904. According to this Act the functions of the Universities were enlarged. The Universities were to be teaching institutions. Formerly its functions were mainly holding of examinations and conferring of degrees. Secondly, the Senates were to be reduced to manageable size (not less than 50 and not more than 100). Formerly University fellows were appointed by Government for life. This was not a good practice. Sometimes fellows were appointed for reasons other than academic. Therefore the Act of 1904 provided that University fellows should be appointed for five years only and their number should be not less than 50 and not more than 100.

The principle of elections were also introduced. It was provided in the Act that a certain number of fellows should be elected (Calcutta, Bombay and Madras to have 20 while Allahabad and the Punjab 15). Of these in case of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, 10 to be elected by the registered graduates of 10 years standing, and to be elected by the faculties for which the Chancellor was empowered to prescribe the qualifications. For Allahabad and the Punjab 10 to be elected from registered graduates and five by faculties. Another important change was to give statutory recognition of the Syndicates and also to give an adequate representation to University teachers on the Syndicate concerned. The Government was also vested with certain powers regarding the regulations to be framed by the Senate. The Act in general tightened the hold of the Government on the Universities. The Act, passed in the wake of nationalist agitation, however provoked bitter controversy. The main point of criticism was that the Act would lead to greater Governmental and European control over education.

In 1913, the Government passed a resolution which sought to it clarify its policy with regard to higher education. It was decided to establish residential universities at Dhaka, Aligarh and Benaras. New affiliating universities were also to be established at Rangoon, Patna and Nagpur.

In 1917, the Government appointed the Calcutta University Commission to review the problem of education. This is also known as the Sadler Commission from its President Dr. (later Sir) M.E.Sadler the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leeds. The other members of the Commission were Dr. Gregory, Mr. (Later Sir) Philip Hartog, Prof. Ramsay Muir, Sir Ashutosh Mokherjee, the D.P.I. Bengal, and Dr. (Later Sir) Ziauddin Ahmed. The Commission's report was published in 1919. Its recommendation included: (i) The dividing line between the University and Secondary courses is more properly drawn at the Intermediate examination than at Matriculation; (ii) Government should, therefore, create a new type of institution in Arts, Science, Medicine, Engineering, and Teaching etc. These Colleges either might run as independent institutions or might be attached to selected high schools; (iii) The admission test for the University should be the passing of the Intermediate Examination; and (iv) A Board of Secondary and Intermediate Education consisting of the representatives of Government, University, High Schools, Intermediate Colleges should be established and entrusted with the administration and control of Secondary Education.

The Commission further recommended that:

- a. A unitary teaching University should be established immediately at Dhaka.
- b. The teaching resources of Calcutta City should be pooled together with a view to establishment of a teaching University at Calcutta.

- c. The Colleges in the *mufussil* should be so developed as to make it possible to encourage the gradual rise of new university centres by the concentration of resources for higher teaching at few points. Rajshahi was, for instance, maintained as one of the possible sites for a new university. It was not before 1953 that a University was eventually established at Rajshahi. The first English school at Rajshahi was established in 1828. It was raised to a first-grade College in 1873. Law classes were started at the College in 1879 and M.A. classes in 1892; Post-graduate studies in Rajshahi College continued till 1909 when affiliation for M.A. and Law classes were withdrawn by the Calcutta University under its new regulations.

Other important recommendations of the Sadler Commission were:

- a. The regulations governing the work of the Universities should be made less rigid.
- b. Honours courses, as distinct from Pass courses should be instituted in the Universities in order to make provision for the need of able students.
- c. The duration of the degree course should be three years after the Intermediate stage;
- d. Appointments to Professorships and Readerships should be made by special selection committees, including external experts.
- e. Having regard to the comparatively backward condition of the Muslim community in regard to education, every reasonable means should be taken to encourage Muslim students and to safeguard their interests.
- f. In view of the necessity for paying greater attention to the health and physical welfare of students, a Director of Physical Training, holding the rank and salary of a Professor, should be appointed in each University; a Board of Students' Welfare, including medical representatives should be one of the standing boards or committees of each University; and special efforts should be made to supervise the conditions of students residence.

A unitary, teaching and residential university was established at Dhaka in 1920. It actually started functioning from July 1, 1921.

Under the Government of India Act of 1919, the department of education was transferred into the hands of Indian ministers responsible to Provincial legislatures. Nevertheless, the Government of India controlled and guided the general policy with regard to higher education. But under the Government of India Act of 1935 the entire university education was placed under the control of the Provincial Government.

Mention should be made of a unique institution started by private initiative namely, the Viswa Bharati at Santiniketan. It was founded by Poet Rabindra Nath Tagore in 1922 with the following objects:

- i. "bringing the diverse cultures of the East into more intimate relationship with one another.

- ii. approaching the science and culture of the West from the standpoint of their unity.
- iii. realising in common fellowship and humanitarian activities the concord of the East and the West, and their bringing about the condition that would lead to world harmony".

The Viswa Bharati is a co-educational and residential institution and has attracted students not only for different parts of the sub-continent but also from other parts of Asia and Europe.

### Development of Education in Pakistan Period, 1947-1971

After the establishment of Pakistan the first national conference on education was held in November 1947 in Karachi. At this conference it was resolved to make primary education free and compulsory for boys and girls of 6-11 years age. In March 1949, a seventeen -member committee headed by Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan was formed by the provincial government of East Bengal to review the education system and make necessary recommendations. The government decided to accept the committee's recommendations to raise the duration of primary education from four years to five years.

In January 1957 a seven- member Education Commission was appointed by the then East Pakistan Government headed by Mr Ataur Rahman Khan who was the Chief Minister of the Province. The Commission recommended that within next ten years primary education of five-year duration should be made universal and compulsory.

In October 1958 the Army took over the power in Pakistan through a *coup d'état*. Two months after assuming power the military President of Pakistan Field- Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan appointed a new eleven- member Commission headed by the Education Secretary Mr S M Sharif. The Commission was asked to make necessary recommendations for reform and reorganization of the existing education system. Among the important recommendations made by the Sharif Commission were: (i) to make primary education of five years duration compulsory within next ten years, and subsequently to raise the duration of primary education to eight years; (ii) the duration of secondary education was to be from IX to XII class. The report of the Sharif Commission received the approval of the Government and its implementation commenced from the academic year 1961-62. When the Government passed the University Ordinance of 1961, which severely restricted the autonomy of the Universities a widespread countrywide agitation was started by the students. They demanded the annulment of the Sharif Commission Report. In face if this agitation the Government abolished the proposal for three-year Bachelor's Degree Pass course and revert to the old two-year course. The student who had already completed

two-year Bachelor's course were given automatic degree. But the agitation continued. To meet the crisis the government of Pakistan by a special ordinance passed in September 1964 appointed a high-powered Education Commission headed by Mr Justice Hamoodur Rahman, a judge of the Pakistan Supreme Court. The salient features of the Commission's recommendations were: (i) medium of instruction at all levels should be mother tongue; (ii) arrangements should be made to translate basic text books written in English and other languages into Bengali and other regional languages; (iii) adequate facilities for co-education should be made in the Colleges and Universities; and (iv) separate residential halls for the girl students should be built. As regards Madrasa Education, it was proposed that necessary reforms should be introduced in the Madrasa curriculum to make Madrasa education modern and scientific. The Commission also recommended that steps should be taken to provide all educational institutions especially Colleges and Universities with adequate furniture, laboratory, and equipments. Before these well-thought out recommendations could be fully implemented the liberation war had started in March 1971 which led to the break up of Pakistan and the emergence of the independent state of Bangladesh.

## Post-Independence Development

Articles 15 and 17 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bangladesh which was framed in 1972 declared that every citizen had the basic right to education. The existing educational structure had three tiers, namely, primary, secondary and higher. There were also three parallel systems of education: general, madrasa and vocational. In July 1972, the Government of Bangladesh appointed a nineteen-member Education Commission headed by the noted scientist Dr. M. Qudrat-i-Khuda. The Commission submitted its report to the Government in September 1973. The Commission recommended the introduction of universal primary education from class I to VIII with provision to make it compulsory and free in stages within next ten years. The Commission also made some specific recommendations for pre-primary education. These recommendations, however, could not be implemented mainly due to unforeseen circumstances. However, the government had by an ordinance passed in 1974 decided to nationalise in stages a total number of 36,156 primary schools. In 1979 an advisory committee on education was appointed by the government. It recommended that by 1983 primary education up-to class V should be made compulsory. The Committee further recommended the maintenance of the three-tier secondary education system, namely, lower secondary, middle secondary and higher secondary. It was further recommended that the existing madrasa education should be made up-to-date and productive.

In 1987 another Commission headed by Professor Mofizuddin Ahmed, former Vice-Chancellor of Jahangirnagar University was appointed by the government to review the existing state of education and to make recommendations for its improvement. The salient recommendations of the Commission were to provide adequate facilities for pre-primary education for three to five years old children and to introduce compulsory primary education of five-year duration. Another proposal of the Commission was that the existing degree Colleges should discontinue to provide higher secondary education which should be taken over by upgraded secondary schools. The Commission also emphasized the need for proper inspection and supervision of the educational institutions. Other recommendations of the Commission were to provide special training facilities for all categories of teachers and establishment of more secondary schools in the outlaying regions. Yet another recommendation was that steps should be taken for improvement of the madrasa and technical education.

### **Madrasa Education**

In 1989 the Government appointed a nineteen-member Committee headed by Professor M A Bari, Former Chairman, University Grants Commission, with a view to bring about all-round improvement of madrasa education. Among recommendations of the Committee were: (i) education at the *ibtedai* level should be of five -year duration and it should be brought to the standard of general primary education keeping, however, its distinct religious character; (ii) education at *dakhil* level should be of five-year duration extending from VI to X classes and it should be of the standard of the general secondary level; (iii) *alim* level should be of XI and XII classes of general higher secondary standard; *fazil* should be of two-year Bachelor degree standard, and finally, (iv) *kamil* should be of two-year duration and of general Master degree standard.

Although it was recommended that the standard of *madrasa* education should be improved to meet the requirements of the modern age, while retaining its distinctive character and quality it was further recommended that from among those who would pass the *kamil* examination the talented ones would be provided with opportunities and facilities to pursue higher education and research leading to M. Phil. and Ph.D. degrees. For such scholars facilities should be provided in the Islamic Foundation, the Alia Madrasa and the Universities.

In January 1997 the last Awami League Government appointed another Education Committee to formulate a new education policy. The Committee was headed by Profesor Shamsul Huq, former Chairman of University Grants Commission. The Committee after reviewing the reports and recommendation of the previous bodies submitted a comprehensive report making specific recommendations for providing the nation with a well-planned education system to meet the needs and challenges of the present age.

In 1995 Higher Secondary Teacher Institutions (HSTTI) were established at divisional headquarters to provide professional training for school teachers.

### **University Education**

At the time of the creation of Pakistan in August 1947 there was only one University in Bangladesh, namely, the Dhaka University. It was established in 1921 on the model of Oxford University of Britain. The Dhaka University was a purely residential University and its jurisdiction was limited to Dhaka town area. The Colleges located outside Dhaka were affiliated to the Calcutta University. After partition these Colleges were brought under the jurisdiction of Dhaka University which then lost its residential character.

In 1953 a new University was established at Rajshahi. This was in accordance with the Sadler Commission's Report of 1918 which had recommended the establishment of a University in north Bengal. The establishment of the Rajshahi University fulfilled the long -felt need of the people of the northern region for an institute of higher learning.

In 1961 a special institute for promoting higher education and training in agriculture was established at Mymensingh. It was called Agricultural University. In 1962 another institution, namely, the University of Engineering and Technology was established at Dhaka upgrading the existing Ahsanullah Engineering College. In 1965 the University of Chittagong was established in the outskirts of Chittagong town.

In 1970 a new residential University called the Jahangirnagar Muslim University was established at Savar near Dhaka. After independence, its name was changed to Jahangirnagar University to signify its non-denominational character.

In 1982 in the changed political scenario another University called the Islamic University was established at Gazipur near Dhaka. Later it was shifted to Kushtia. In 1986 the Shah Jalal University of Science and Technology was established at Sylhet. Finally, in 1991 another new University called the University of Khulna was established at Khulna.

In 1992 a special kind of institute called the National University was established at Gazipur, a few miles north of Dhaka. Unlike the other Universities, it was mainly an affiliating institution. The Colleges which were under the jurisdiction of Dhaka, Rajshahi and Chittagong Universities were now affiliated to this new University which also took over the academic control of these Colleges.

In 1992 yet another special type of University called The Bangladesh Open University was established at Gazipur to provide extended facilities for higher education through electronic media such as radio, television, internet.

### **Private Universities**

In 1992 the Government passed an Act which provided for the establishment of private Universities. This was in response to the growing demand for higher

education of better quality which most of the existing state Universities, it was believed by many, could not provide. By now a number of enlightened entrepreneurs had come forward to invest in high quality education. Thus by the year 2000 as many as sixteen private Universities came to be established. (by the year 2003 the number had increased up to fifty-one). The Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) began to function from 1993. Its declared objective was "to produce international standard graduates" who would be equipped to provide new leadership to the community.

### **Medical Education**

Between 1946 and 1992 the following Medical Colleges were established to promote higher education in medical science: Dhaka Medical College (1946); Chittagong Medical College (1957); Rajshahi Medical College (1958); Sir Salimullah Medical College (1968); Mymensingh Medical College (1968); Sylhet Medical College (1968); Barisal Sher-i-Bangla Medical College (1970). In 1992 new Medical Colleges were established at Khulna, Dinajpur, Bogra, Comilla and Faridpur. To promote research in Medical science the Institute of Post-Graduate Medicine and Research (IPGMR) was established in Dhaka which was later upgraded to Bangabandhu Medical University.

Education is the most important agency for promotion of human development. The general standard of education in Bangladesh leaves much room for improvement. An enlightened social and political leadership could bring about major transformation in our education system to meet the challenges of the new millennium.

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284

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## **PART-II**



## CHAPTER TWELVE

### (a) ISLAM: Religion and Philosophy

Azizun Nahar Islam

Kazi Nurul Islam

#### 1. Basic features of Islam

Like any other religion of the world Islam has certain basic features. These are as follows:

- a. As a monotheistic religion Islam believes in only one God, called *Allah*, which literally means the only Being to be worshipped.
- b. Islam states that there have been prophets before Prophet Mohammed. Islam believes that God has sent messengers for all nations throughout the ages. Of them twenty-five names have been mentioned in the *Qur'an*. A Muslim must believe in all these prophets, otherwise, he or she will cease to be a Muslim.
- c. Prophet Muhammad is the last of the prophets of God. No other prophet will come after him.
- d. Islam accepts the sacredness and the authority of the revealed scriptures of God - such as the Torah of the Jews, and the Gospel of Jesus.
- e. Islam believes in the existence of angels and spirits.
- f. It believes in a life after death and the resurrection of the dead on the Day of Judgment when God will reward and punish people on the basis of their virtues and vices respectively.
- g. Islam considers heaven and hell to be the permanent abodes of the righteous and the evildoers respectively, after the Day of Judgment.
- h. Islam is totally opposed to polytheism, ritualism, idolatry and priesthood.
- i. It teaches an ethics of perfect purity, service to humanity and world brotherhood of man.

## 2. Islam not the Youngest Religion

It is generally held, and even some Muslim scholars like Ismail Ragi al- Faruqui hold that 'Islam is the youngest of the world religions'. But this seems to be a wrong interpretation of Islam for it is not a new religion, it is, according to its believers, the universal religion coming down from the dawn of human consciousness. And in the *Qur'an* it is categorically stated, "the religion before God is Islam" (*Innадиан индallahil Islam* Q. 3: 19). That means, according to the *Qur'an*, Islam is the only religion, and as such the oldest religion in the world before God. That is why Islam relates itself specifically to two world religions namely, Judaism and Christianity, and generally to all monotheistic religions of the world. Muslims as an indispensable part of their faith (*Iman*) are bound to confirm: "I believe in God and in His angels, in His sacred books and in His messengers, in the Day of Judgment and in the apportionment of good and evil from Him in the day of resurrection" (*amantu billahi wa malaikatihи wa kutubиhi wa rusulиhi wal yawmil akhiri wal qadre khairиhi wa sarribi minallahi tala wal bathи ba'dal mawt*).

## 3. Islam vs Muhammadanism

Western scholars often use the word '*Muhammadanism*' instead of Islam. *Muhammadanism* seems to them to carry the implication of the worship of Muhammad, as Christian and Christianity imply the worship of the Christ. We know that many religions of the world have been named after the names of the founders concerned or after the name of the community and nation. For example, Christianity takes its appellation from the name of Jesus Christ, Buddhism from its founder Gautama Buddha and Judaism from the name of the tribe Judah. This is not so with Islam. The word 'Islam' does not convey any such relationship, for according to its believers, it does not belong to any particular person, people or country. Muslims do not submit to Muhammad but to God and only God. However important and exalted, the prophet's role it is unquestionably subordinate to God. It may be mentioned here that a similar attitude was upheld by Jesus and his first disciples. If we go through the history of Christianity, we find that originally it was theocentric rather than Christocentric. In fact, it was not the apostles, but their opponents who first called them Christians. Only later was Christianity transformed into a Jesuscentred religion rather than a God centered one. Hinduism is also considered to be a misnomer and modern scholars preferring *Sanatana Dharma*, for it.

## 4. Muhammad the Prophet of Islam

The prophet of Islam, Muhammad was born in *Makkah* on April 22, 571 and died on June 8, 632. His life story is important to Muslims for his example is

considered a key that opens the door of the divine presence. His very childhood gave indication of the sublime and rigorous personality that was to emerge. He was soft spoken and of such genial disposition, that anyone coming into his contact would automatically develop love and respect for him. The perfection of rare virtues like tolerance, forbearance, truthfulness, were all exhibited in his personality. A man of balanced personality he possessed a noble example of human greatness. His unique and unimpeachable trustworthiness won him the title of *al-amin*, a relentless custodian and unfailing trustee.

At the age of 25, he married *Khadijah*, a wealthy widow of *Makkah*. This marriage gave him economic liberty and sufficient leisure to pursue his own inclinations. Instead of socializing and making any attempt to gain eminence he would wander in hills and dales, absorbed in profound thoughts. He would frequently resort to a lonely mountain-cave named *Hira* for meditation. He was carefully renouncing worldly happiness and taking up a way ridden with difficulties and sorrows. He had all the means and opportunities for a comfortable life but his turbulent soul did not find any satisfaction in them. He sought answers to the questions always arising within him: "Whence do I come? To what end am I destined? Has my life a purpose or goal? Is there any ultimate Reality over all external appearances?"

According to Muslim belief, when Muhammad was forty years old, one night in the month of *Ramadan* while absorbed in the cave *Hira* an angel in human-like form, *Gabriel*, came to him and commanded: "Recite thou in the name of thy Lord Who created." Three times Muhammad demurred that he could not, for he was unlettered and three times the angel commanded him. After the third time he was able to recite the first words. It was the beginning of the revelation. This night, the twenty seventh of *Ramadan*, is called *lailatul qadr* the night of power and excellence. The revelation continued for a period of twenty-three years. The collection of those revelations is known as the *Qur'an*.

Before the beginning of the revelations the entire world with its shortcomings and limitations appeared before Muhammad. But after the revelation he realized that besides this world there is another world which is perfect, eternal and the real above of man. With this he found meaning and purpose in this life and the universe. Now to him this world was the tillage for the hereafter. He did not give up humanness but his mind attached value only to matter connected with the hereafter.

From the third year of the date of revelation Prophet Muhammad was asked to preach the new faith among the people. At the outset the people of *Makkah* paid no heed to his preaching, rather they jeered at him, threw stones at him and oppressed him in ways too numerous to mention. The Prophet faced the bitterest hostility from the *Quraish*, the tribe into which he was born, had to flee to Medina, and fought a serious war with non-Muslims on religious and

political issues. But finally he conquered Makkah and there was mass conversion of the Arabs to Islam. Of all his achievements the following are worth mentioning: (i) He preached the religion of equality and fraternity; (ii) He united the warring tribes of Arabia into a mighty nation; (iii) He laid the foundation of a new civilization later on known as Islamic civilization; and (iii) He removed social inequality, raised the status of women, and improved the condition of the slaves, abolished drunkenness, debauchery, gambling and blood-feuds.

### 5. The Qur'an

Muslims consider the *Qur'an* as the infallible word of God, a perfect transcription of an eternal tablet preserved in the Heaven. It is the record of the verbal revelation vouchsafed by God to Prophet Muhammad at intervals over a period of twenty-three years, between 610 and 632 as the paramount authority for the Muslim community, and the ultimate source as well as permanent inspiration of Islam. The *Qur'an* has produced marvellous effects on the minds of those who came into contact with it and brought about an unparalleled revolution in the world and the upliftment of many nations from degradation. Throughout the world it is the only religious text which compels its followers to have sincere faith in all other sacred texts along with the prophets, and declares that there should not be any compulsion in religion. The *Qur'an*, in the clearest possible terms, claims to be the greatest spiritual force which is ultimately destined to bring the whole of humanity to perfection.

The *Qur'an* is declared to be a healing for what is in the heart, and a guidance and a mercy for the believers. One who regularly reads the *Qur'an* and understands it, experiences that every line of the *Qur'an* brings before the mind of the reader the goodness, power, and knowledge of the Divine Being, God. Though the *Qur'an* contains the principles of the laws necessary for the guidance of man, it is a book that manifests the glory, purity, greatness, grandeur, goodness, love, power and knowledge of the Supreme Being. The main purpose of the *Qur'an* is the emancipation of heart of man and to enable him to grow, morally and spiritually to the highest stature of which he is capable. The *Qur'an* intends to awaken in man the higher consciousness of man to help him discover for himself the really Real.

### 6. Kinds of Believers and Unbelievers

In the *Qur'an* we find four groups of people in terms of belief: *Kafir* or disbeliever, *Munafiq* or hypocrite, *Muslim* and *Mumin*. Muslim and Mumin possess belief, which the disbeliever and hypocrite do not, but their belief or disbelief varies in degree. Now let us look at the characteristics of each of these people.

## 6.1 Kafir

The disbeliever is called *Kafir* and the greatest sin in Islam is *Kufr* or disbelief. The *Kafir* denies the existence of one God. He is puffed with pride (Q. 40 : 27), behaves haughtily (Q 4 : 172) and mocks the prophets and what they brought from God (6 : 10). He associates partners with God (40: 12) and always remains occupied with the pleasures of this world (47: 12).

## 6.2 Munafiq

The hypocrite is called *Munafiq*. He is a pretender and a liar. He pretends to be a believer, but in fact, he is not (2: 8). He makes some pretensions in order to achieve some worldly gains (4: 139). He says one thing but does another. *Munafiqs* are more dangerous than *Kafirs*, and in fact, are worse.

## 6.3 Muslim

A Muslim is a believer; he believes in one God and in that which has been revealed to Muhammad and other prophets (Q: 84). It should be mentioned here that the single most important principle of Islam is: 'There is no lord except God. This principle of one Godness is so important that according to a saying of Prophet Muhammad, a man will ultimately go to heaven if he uttered *la ilaha illallah* i.e., there is no lord but God at least once in his lifetime. It should also be mentioned here that all the prophets before Muhammad have been called Muslims in the *Qur'an*, and *Abraham* surrendered himself to God and asked God to make his progeny Muslims (Q: 128).

## 6.4 Mumin

Diametrically opposite to the unbeliever or *Kafir* is the believer or *Mumin*. A *Mumin* is a Muslim who sincerely believes in one God, whose heart quivers at the mention of God's name, for whom the signs of God increase his belief, who serves God steadfastly and spends in charity (Q. 8 : 24). Now one may raise the question: What is the distinction between a Muslim and a *Mumin*? There is a verse in the *Qur'an* that differentiates a Muslim from a *Mumin*, which runs as follows:

"The Arabs of the desert say, 'We believe (*amanna*)'. You Muhammad say to them, 'You do not believe yet'. Say rather, we have surrendered (*aslamna*) because belief (*iman*) had not entered our hearts. The (true) believers (*mumin*) are those who believe in God and His messenger, and after that never cherish any doubt ..." (Q9: 14-15).

Thus, we find that the distinction between a Muslim and a *Mumin* is quite clear. Indeed, a Muslim is one in whose heart belief has just entered; it has not yet penetrated into his heart. Hence, all *Mumins* are Muslims but all Muslims may not be considered *Mumins* in the strictest sense of the term.

## 7. Islam's attitude towards other religions:

We have seen so far what is Islam and who are Muslims. Now let us see Islam's attitude towards other religions. Islam is unique in that it has related itself to religions of the world; that it has done so in its formative stage, and that on this account, its relation to other religions has a constitutive place in its very essence and core. Islam seeks to bring about reconciliation between the followers of different faiths and establishes a basis of respect and honour among them. It holds out to them the hand of cooperation and friendship on a basis of righteousness. Islam's relation to other religions is 'ideational', i.e., linking the worldview of Islam, its view of God, of reality, of man, of the world and history of other religions. The relation has been also practical, i.e., providing a *modus vivendi* for Muslims and adherents of other religions of the world to live and work together, each group according to the values and precepts of its own faith. People belonging to different faiths are invited to unite on the basic principle in which all of them profess to believe:

"Say, people of the Scripture, come to an agreement between us and you: that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered unto Him (Q. 3: 64).

## 8. Five Pillars of Islam

Religion is not an end in itself, rather the means for the realization of the ideal i.e., the development and perfection of imperfect humanity. Every human being has a dual nature - the higher and the lower. The aim of religion is to transform the lower nature into the higher, to guide and help man in bringing about such transformation. With the end in view of achieving this end Islam has enjoined certain beliefs and practices which are generally known as the five pillars of Islam. According to Islamic faith, these are the fundamental tenets and the fountainheads of all the thoughts and deeds that lead man to all-round perfection. These pillars are: *Kalima* (witness), *Salat* (prayer), *Siam* (fasting), *Zakat* (alms) and *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Makkah). These pillars are likely to generate in man a high degree of self-discipline and a lofty sense of social, national and spiritual values. A very brief outline of these pillars are given below:

### 8.1 Kalima

*Kalima* is the belief in the unity of Allah and the prophethood of Muhammad. It is the first and the most fundamental article of faith in Islam. In fact, belief in Islam starts with the formula: "There is no lord but God and Muhammad is his messenger" (*la ilah illallahu Muhammadur rasulullah*). This belief in the unity of God struck seriously at the very root of polytheism

of pre-Islamic Arabia. The unity of the Lordship of God goes one step further than what is generally known as monotheism. *Kalima* or *Tawhid* does not merely assert the unity of God, but also the unity of the Lordship of God and its emphasis is on the unity of the Lordship. The denial of the unity of God is regarded as a *Kufr* or infidelity and the denial of the unity of Lordship of God is regarded as *shirk* or ascribing partnership to God. *Shirk* is a graver sin than *kufr*.

*Kalima* or belief in the unity of God is the fundamental basis of Islamic faith and the other four tenets are the practical guides that would enable man to attain this objective. *Kalima* is of tremendous pragmatic value for: (i) it gives unity of purpose and strength to the individual; (ii) enhances his powers and self-confidence; (iii) removes all cowardice and all fear of beings other than God; and finally (iv) it enjoins upon man the faith that there should be unity of purpose and ideal as well as identity of interest based on the perception of all mankind as a single whole. The significance of *Kalima* is that the only object of worship is none but God whose qualities alone man should try to imbibe and thereby install himself as God's vicegerent on earth. The importance of "There is no lord but God" (*la ilaha illallah*) can be understood from three traditions of Prophet Muhammad. Once he said: There are more than seventy departments of the faith and among them the most superior and exalted is belief in the *kalima- la ilaha illallah*. Among the prayer formulas, *Kalima* is considered to be the best. The Prophet said: "Of all the prayer formulas the best and the most excellent is *la ilaha illallah*". In another tradition it is related that once God gave this reply to a question put to him by Prophet Moses: "O Moses, if the seven heavens and the seven earths and all that is contained in them are placed on one side of the balance and *la ilaha illallah* on the other, the side on which *la ilah illallah* is placed will turn out to be heavier."

## 8.2 Namaz or Salat

*Namaz* (prayer) is the second pillar of Islamic faith. It is the most important duty of a Muslim after he has brought faith in God and in Prophet Muhammad. Prayer in some form or other existed and still exists in all religions. But prayer in Islam has certain unique features. Islamic prayer, understood in its proper sense, is a communion between God and man. "It is an interaction between the Divinity within and the Divinity overhead" *Namaz* or *Salat* is the most special act of Divine worship which a Muslim is called upon to perform five times a day.

Islam recognises no priesthood; rather it holds that each man is his own priest. Physical cleanliness is essential as a preliminary to prayer, but without the purity of the heart, bodily cleanliness is absolutely meaningless. The main purpose of prayer is to know God to establish direct communion with Him and to seek his Divine blessings. It is the most special act of divine worship, which a Muslim is called upon to perform five times a day with a sincere heart, proper

devotion and mental concentration. In prayer, the individual should subject himself to a sort of auto criticism, should take stock of his past deeds and also try to understand his obligations to himself to God and to the society of which he is an integral part. Therefore, prayer is not simply a mechanical movement of the limbs, rather a conscious psychological effort to know one's self, to hold direct communion with God and to have a thorough scrutiny of one's own conduct in life.

Prayer as a spiritual act necessitates directing of one's soul towards the object of one's worship. It is the device by which alone the development of the soul can best be achieved. The real purpose of our existence in this world is the development of the soul and the prayer is the means for it. The daily prayer is not a ritual but a remembrance and acknowledgement of subordination and gratitude to God, the Creator. From what has been stated above, it is evident that Islam has laid greater emphasis on *Namaz* than all other religious obligations excepting *Kalima*. When anyone came to the Prophet to embrace Islam, the first promise he took from him, after instructing him in Divine Oneness, was that he would offer *Namaz* regularly and particularly. Thus, after *Kalima*, *Namaz* is the bedrock of Islam.

### 8.3 Siam or Fasting

*Siam* or fasting every year throughout the whole month of *Ramadan* from sunrise to sunset is the third pillar of Islam. The word *Ramadan* comes from the root *ramz*, literally means to burn. Now the question comes: What is there to be burnt during the month of *Ramadan*? The nature of man as conceived by Islam is composed of two parts: angelic and devilish. A human being has been made of good fabrics, but is always put under adverse circumstances to struggle for self-realisation. It is the duty of every human being to burn his evil propensities and to bring them under the control of higher reason. Islam wants the animality in man has to be transformed into higher virtues by a deliberate and conscious effort. Fasting or *siam* understood in this sense is undoubtedly a noble contribution to man's struggle for perfecting imperfect humanity, generating thereby a higher sense of values. It is not a negative doctrine of self-abnegation or self-mortification, but a positive attitude of mind to create a disposition of discipline and harmony.

The man who fasts must have a definite purpose before him. According to the *Qur'an* the purpose of fasting is the attainment of *taqwa* or control of the mind, to make the fast a spiritual discipline to attain nearness of God and to seek His pleasures in all of his actions, and to make a moral discipline to shun any kind of evil. The essence of the fast is its moral and spiritual value. The Prophet of Islam categorically stated: "Whoever does not give up lying and acting falsely, God does not stand in need of his giving up food and drink." "Fasting is a shield, so let the man who fasts not indulge in any foul speech or

do any evil deed, and if any one fights or quarrels with him or abuses him, he should say, I am fasting." Thus, the person who fasts should not only refrain from food but he should also refrain from foul speech or evil deeds. He undergoes not only a physical discipline by curbing his carnal desires, the craving for food and drink, but he is actually required to undergo a direct moral discipline. It is not only a training on the physical side which has a moral value; but it is also a direct training on the spiritual side.

#### **8.4 Zakat or Almsgiving**

Among the fundamental tenets of Islam, *Zakat* occupies a place next in importance only to *Kalima* and *Namaz*. *Zakat* means that a Muslim who is in possession of a certain amount of wealth, or more is required to spend one-fortieth of it at the end of every twelve months on the poor, the needy and the wayfarer. The object of prayer and fasting is primarily meant to regulate the conduct of the individual as a member of the society or community. By nature, man is selfish. Islam wants to mould this tendency and to generate in him a sense of social values. Islam aims at the establishment of a society of universal brotherhood with equality of opportunities in life. That is why it advises man to make his individual interest subservient first to those of the society and then to humanity at large. Thus, no member of a society should take advantage of the difficulties of the other members and sacrifice them to the gratification of any kind of selfish motives. Islam wants to reduce the differences between man and man and as a result, the duty of any Muslim is to work for offering equal opportunities of life to all.

*Zakat* literally means growth and increase as well as parity. Islam holds that the giving of *Zakat* leads to increase of property in this world, purification of the giver from sins, and the development of spiritual merit for the next world. Therefore, *Zakat* or charity towards mankind in its widest sense is laid down as the second great pillar on which the structure of Islam stands. The basic principles of Islam are five in number. Of these, three are theoretical and the rest are practical. The three theoretical essentials are: (i) Belief in God, (ii) Belief in the Divine Revelations; and (iii) Belief in the Hereafter. The practical essentials are: (1) Prayer and *Zakat*. Prayer is the means of restoration of the Divine in man and *Zakat* stands for acts of benevolence and doing good to humanity in general.

#### **8.5 Hajj or the Pilgrimage to Makkah**

The last of the fundamental duties in Islam is *Hajj*. It means a journey towards God. It is obligatory for every able-bodied Muslim having a certain standard of financial solvency to visit Makkah at least once in lifetime. Those who cannot afford expenses of the journey are exempted from the performance of *Hajj*. The visit to a place which is associated with the life and activity of a great

personality like prophet Muhammad has a strong reaction on the mind of the visitors to Makkah because (i) it is intimately associated with the life and struggle of Prophet Muhammad and because (ii) its hoary antiquity dates back to the Prophet Abraham who built the first mosque there and whose noble ideal of sacrifice to the will of God is still celebrated every year by the observance of *Idul Azha*. The sacrifice of an animal during *Idul Azha* is a purely symbolic institution, which represents one's whole - hearted devotion to the ideal.

The visit to the *Kaba* or the House of God is the symbol of obedience on the part of the pilgrims to God. The pilgrims are required to forget everything in devotion to Him during the specific days of Hajj. They are expected to be ready to sacrifice themselves in their devotion to God.

One of the main purposes of Hajj is to discipline the devotees, to make them forgetful of the material comforts of life, to instil in them the spirit of abstaining from everything for the sake of God. The institution of Hajj serves as the unifying force of the Muslim community all over the world. Every year Hajj draws Muslims from their homes, from all parts of the world and assembles them at one place. It is the greatest achievement of Islam that this biggest assembly of people of all races and colours at a particular time of the year is potent enough to generate feelings of brotherhood and fraternity. The importance of Hajj and the spiritual merit of those who perform it have been emphasised in a number of traditions: "He who performs the Hajj and commits no wicked or sinful deed during it and does not disobey God, will return from it as pure and guiltless as he was at the time of his birth". "The reward for a pure Hajj is paradise itself and nothing short of it".

## 9. God and His relation to man

There are both theistic and atheistic religions. Of the theistic religions, some are monotheistic, some are ditheistic, and some are polytheistic. Islam is a strictly monotheistic religion. It is so conscious of and emphatic about its monotheistic character that the Qur'an repeatedly asserts that there is no lord but God. God is not a biological entity that can be seen with our naked eyes. God being invisible and unseen by the physical eye, it is rather hard to grasp the idea about His existence.

God is the Supreme Reality, the only creator of everything. He is not only the creator but also the sustainer and destroyer of everything. He sustains and maintains everything and also destroys the entire universe whenever He so desires. God is Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent, Benevolent and All-Glorious. The very opening verse of the Qur'an characterises God as Compassionate and Merciful. He is also described as the Lord and the Guide. From the ethical point of view, God is often characterised in the Qur'an as All-forgiving, All-Compassionate, All-Merciful and so on. God is also regarded as the Final Judge of all the good and bad deeds of human beings.

God is the One and only One, the only One to Whom worship is due. All other things and beings we perceive or can think of can no way be compared with Him. He is Eternal, without beginning and end; Absolute, not limited by time or space or circumstances. We must not think of Him as having a son or a father for that would mean to import animal qualities into our conception of Him. His qualities and nature are unique. According to Islam, God should therefore be the object of our desires, the end of all our actions, the principle of all our affections and governing power of our whole entity.

God is self-caused and self-sufficient, infinite and spiritual in nature. He is not only the creator but also the spirit underlying every movement of the world process. He is both transcendent and immanent. He works and manifests Himself in and through natural phenomena. Only through knowing Him does one know and understand Nature, which is considered to be the visible garment of God. That is why it is said that "He prays best who loves most all His creatures, great and small". Islam believes that service to humanity is the service to God, and the knowledge of Nature leads to the knowledge of the Perfect Being.

## 10. Arguments for God's existence in the Qur'an

The *Qur'an* advances numerous arguments to prove the existence of God. There are three main kinds of arguments for the affirmation of God's existence which the *Qur'an* chiefly deals with. These arguments are: material experience, inner experience and spiritual experience.

### 10.1 Material experience

That there is some creative force, (generally known as 'Nature'), which is beyond human intellect, is accepted, even by recent scientists. This creative force is not a blind force, but one possessing wisdom and acting with a purpose. To a keen observer and deep thinker, everything created by that force is found meaningful and purposeful. Even to the ordinary eye, wisdom and purpose are observable throughout the whole of Nature's creation, from the tiniest particle of dust to the mighty spheres moving in the universes on their appointed courses. Many verses of the *Qur'an* state that one law prevails in the whole universe. The entire creation is under control. No one thing interferes with the course of another. It seems that all things are helping each other to attain perfection. What does this indicate? It indicates that there must be an all-wise controller of the whole universe.

The *Qur'an* states that there were things in nature existing before the creation of human beings, such as fruit-trees, herbal plants, vegetables, animals, birds, fish, metals etc. which provide for the maintenance and sustenance and for the various uses of mankind such as food, drink, clothes and means of

transportation, cultivation, navigation, aviation etc. Now comes the question: Whose wisdom and benevolence must it have been to provide for these needs of all kinds? The more we think and contemplate on things in nature the more we get puzzled and wonderstruck to find out the maker of those things. There is then no other alternative but to say that the maker of these things must be none else than the Rational, Creative Almighty God, as the creator of the entire universe.

### **10.2 Inner experience**

The latent faculties in man are enough to teach him the distinction between good and evil and to warn him of dangers that beset his life. It is quite surprising that a small voice within him makes a personal appeal to each individual to awaken and stimulate those faculties. In the Qur'an this consciousness is sometimes mentioned in terms of its unimaginable nearness to the Divine Spirit: "We are nearer to him than his life vein" (50:160). The very idea that God is nearer to man than his own self clearly shows the consciousness of God in human soul is even clearer than the consciousness of its own existence. Further, more, there is in it the instinct to turn to God for help. There is an urge of love for something Divine and to make every possible sacrifice. Thus, consciously or unconsciously man seeks Divine help.

### **10.3 Spiritual Experience**

Through the disclosure of Divine attributes mentioned in the Qur'an the belief in God becomes the most important factor in the development of human nature because, knowledge of those attributes enables him to set before himself the high ideal of imitating Divine morals before himself, the high ideal of imitating Divine morals, and it is only through this that man can rise to the highest moral eminence. To mention a few of the Divine attributes: God is the nourisher of all the worlds, so His worshipper will do his best to serve the cause of the humanity and exercise care even for dumb creation. God is loving and affectionate to His creatures. Therefore, anyone who believes in Him will be moved by the impulse of love and affection towards His creation. Since God is merciful and forgiving, His servant must be kind, merciful and forgiving to his fellow-beings without any discrimination. Hence, belief in God possessing the perfect attributes as revealed in the Qur'an is the highest ideal which a man can place before himself and without this idea there will remain a void in man's life which drains it of all earnestness and every noble aspiration.

## **11. The Concept of suffering in Islam**

Islam has a unique conception of suffering. It believes in two lives: the present life and the life after death. Thus, there are two kinds of sufferings: suffering in

this world and eschatological suffering. According to Islam, life in this world is very short and life after death is endless. Therefore, it places emphasis on suffering and happiness in the life after death. Suffering may be divided into two kinds: suffering caused by the individuals themselves and sufferings which come from God. Most of the sufferings in this world and the entire suffering in the life after death are caused by the individuals themselves.

### **11.1 Sufferings caused by individuals themselves**

Islam holds that we are responsible for the most of the sufferings we meet with. It is stated in the Qur'an that God does not oppress men, they oppress themselves. Prophet Muhammad has repeatedly stressed this point. He said: "No misfortune or vexation befalls a servant, small or great, but on account of his fault committed, and most of these God forgives". Now one question may naturally follow: Which kind of activity causes suffering? According to the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet, we suffer mainly because of the disobedience to God, discarding *Salat*, non-payment of *Zakat*, disobedience to parents, attraction towards worldly things etc.

### **11.2 Disobedience to God**

According to the Qur'an, suffering or afflictions are usually the result of the disobedience to God. Adam and Eve disobeyed God, ate the fruit of the prohibited tree and as consequences they were separated from Him. They fell down from their divine glory and suffered immensely. According to Islam, the most grievous sin is *shirk* or associating others with God, i.e., disloyalty to God.

### **11.3 Discarding of *Salat***

It has already been stated that *Salat* or daily prayer is one of the most important tenets of Islam. Discarding *Salat* means rejection of faith. Those who are discarding *Salat*, face numberless losses and will suffer in this life as well as in the life after death. The ignominy and disgrace the defaulters from *Salat* will have to face at the very outset on the Day of Judgement has been stated at different places in the Qur'an and on different occasions by the Prophet.

### **11.4 Discarding *Zakat***

*Zakat* or charity towards man is laid down in the Qur'an as the second great pillar on which the structure of Islam stands. People who have been blessed by God with wealth and property should pay *Zakat*. If they fail to perform their duty, they suffer either in this world or in the world hereafter. Prophet Muhammad has repeatedly warned his followers against the consequences of the non-payment of *Zakat*: "He who possesses gold or silver (i.e. wealth) but does not fulfil the obligations that are attached to the possession of

wealth (i.e., does not pay *zakat* etc.) plates of fire will be prepared for him on the Day of Judgement.

### **11.5 Attraction for the worldly things**

It has been stated in the Qur'an that this life is very short and the life hereafter is never ending. In the words of Prophet Muhammad: "What I fear most for you are passions for wealth, greed, immodesty and mischief making. When man develops attractions for things, he proceeds towards suffering.

### **11.6 Suffering which comes from God**

Islam holds that God is just, kind and merciful. Now the question naturally follows: Why should God bestow suffering upon the people? Being just, kind and merciful and bestowing suffering apparently does not seem to be consistent. There are many instances of unmerited suffering. Now one may argue that either God permits all the above instances of suffering or these occur against His will. But the second supposition contradicts with the power and wisdom of God and the first one contradicts with the love and mercy of God. The Qur'an has solved this apparent contradiction or inconsistency.

According to Islam, suffering conferred by God is of three types: (i) suffering for those who are dear to God; (ii) suffering to save one from more severe kinds of suffering and (iii) suffering for those who are not on the right path. The first one is a kind of test of the patience and faith of the believers, the second one is a precautionary measure and the third one is punitive or educative.

According to the Qur'an and the *Hadith*, those who are dear to God suffer most in this world. The lives of the prophets of the Semitic religions are burning examples of this kind of suffering. Now one may raise the question: Why do the people who are dear to God suffer in this world? Islam gives two reasons for this: God bestows sufferings: (i) to test the *iman* or faith; and (ii) to save His dear people from suffering in the life after death. In the Qur'an suffering is considered as a necessary part of the purpose of God. It helps to create a faithful disposition. And it also helps to discriminate the sincere from the insincere. Suffering not only forms character, it also exposes it; it reveals a man's true nature. God bestows suffering on the believers to save them from the suffering in the life after death. When a believer commits sin he meets with sufferings in this world so that no punishment is left for hereafter. The punishment of the unbeliever is stopped in this world and he is recompensed in the life after death.

## **12. Muslim Philosophy: Its Nature and origin**

During the life time of Prophet Muhammad Muslims did not have to indulge in freethinking. The Prophet was their guide in all the spheres of life including social, political and moral. The people did not feel the necessity to find out

solutions from their individual thinking for growing problems. But after the death of the Prophet and his immediate successors the Muslims were forced to think independently because they did not get his guidance in the moments of crises. There started divergent opinions regarding the meaning and interpretation of many verses of the Qur'an as well as the traditions of the Prophet.

Thus arose the different theological sects e.g., the *Qadariyas*, the *Jabariyas*, the *Mutazilas*, the *Ashariyas*, etc. Every sect had its own philosophical arguments in support of their own views. But whatever developments or differences may have taken place in the course of their quest for the ultimate truth their basic foundation has always been on the solid rock of the Qur'an with its elucidation in the *Hadith*. This was the beginning of Muslim Philosophy. The Qur'an and Hadith were like the mother's sacred breasts on which Muslim thought was fed from its infancy.

There are some scholars who prefer to designate this subject as Islamic philosophy. But there are some other scholars who want to draw a clear cut distinction between Islamic Philosophy and Muslim Philosophy. There are reasons for one to be inclined to accept the views of the latter instead of the former. 'Muslim Philosophy' is a wider term which includes within its scope the strict philosophy of the Qur'an and the Hadith. It also includes the ideas of different schools of thought that arose in Islam from time to time. 'Islamic Philosophy' seems to be narrower in scope, because it comprises on the philosophical ideas which are strictly in accordance with the Qur'an and Hadith in their explicit meanings.

Some western scholars who designate this subject as Arabic Philosophy. But this name is quite unacceptable for the following reasons:

- If Arabic Philosophy means the philosophical activities of the Arabs, then it cannot be called Arabic philosophy, because very few Muslim philosophers were of pure Arab origin.
- If by 'Arabic Philosophy' we mean philosophical writings in Arabic language, then also it cannot be called Arabic philosophy, because there are a large number of books on this subject written originally in languages other than Arabic.

When Islam expanded beyond the boundaries of Arab countries, Muslims came in contact with various peoples and their cultures. The Muslim scholars seriously studied their literature with an end in view to solve many religious, political and social problems. The study was inspired both by the teachings of the Qur'an and the Hadith. It may be mentioned here that the Qur'an attaches great importance to the study of *hikmat* or rationalism. It is stated in the Qur'an that whosoever has been given *hikmat* has been given great wealth. The Prophet also said that the ink of the scholar is more holy than the blood

of the martyr. There are many *Hadiths* like; "He who leaves his home in search of knowledge, walks in the path of Allah". "He who travels in search of knowledge, to him Allah shows the way to paradise". The Qur'an attaches special emphasis on the study of nature, the creation of heaven and earth etc. It tries to awaken in men the capacity for reflective thinking.

As a result, the Muslims were required to develop the art of *hikmat* or rationalism to the best of their ability. Naturally, Muslim thought underwent various stages of development and what the Muslims produced has a unique contribution in the history of philosophy. They assimilated the Greek ideas of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus in the light of the divine knowledge of the Qur'an. Indeed, Muslim philosophy is a blend of western and eastern thought under the dominating influence of Islamic principles. The blending is such that Muslim Philosophy developed on its own track independently of those whom it imitated.

## 12.1 Philosophical Schools in Islam

There were serious divisions among the Muslim thinkers regarding the interpretation of some verses of the Qur'an. They were confronted with certain issues like the freedom of will, the attributes of God, the creation of the Qur'an, the life after death, beatific vision etc. Muslim thinkers had divergent interpretations on each of the issues. As a result, there arose many philosophical schools in Islam. Of those, the *Jabariya*, the *Qadariya*, the *Mutazila* and the *Ashariya* schools are the most important ones.

## 12.2 The Jabariya and the Qadariya

In Muslim philosophy one cannot come to any conclusion which will go against the teachings of the Qur'an. But in the Qur'an there are certain passages which are apparently contradictory to each other. Some verses seem to have affirmed and confirmed the absolutism of the Divine Will. For Example:

"In Thy hand is all Good. Verily, over all thing Thou hast power" (Q. 3: 26). "He to Whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth". (Q.25:2) "He forgiveth whom He pleaseth. For God hath power over all things". (Q. 2: 284)

On the basis of these and some other verses of the Qur'an some Muslim thinkers held that everything in the world is done by a decree of God. This school of thought which was founded by Jahm Ibn Safwan is known as *Jabariya*. *Jabr* means compulsion and *Jabariya* implies fatalism and determinism. According to *Jahm*, God is Omnipotent and man has no freedom of will, no liberty of volition and no choice of action. Man is entirely helpless and, he works as a machine does and he is not responsible for his deeds. If man were free and controller of his own actions, there would be as many active agents as

there are men and this would mean limitation of God's power. *Jahm* further held that man does not really act, it is only metaphorically that he is said to act in the same way as the sun is said to shine and the mill wheel to turn. *Jabariyas* are generally divided into two groups: extreme ones and moderate ones. The former held that neither action nor the ability to act belongs to man. The latter maintained that man has got ability which is not, however, effective.

The critics of this school of thought are of the opinion that this does not represent the true Islamic view. They argue that if a man is compelled by God to act according to His decree, then He becomes a participator in the sins committed by man. They further contend that this philosophy of predestination makes God a tyrant punishing man for actions which were preordained by Himself. In other words, the doctrine of *Jabr* converts God into an unjust Master.

There are certain verses in the Qur'an which recognise that man has freedom of will and liberty to action good or bad. For example:

"If any one earns sin, he earns it against his own soul: for God is full of knowledge and wisdom" (Q. 4: 111)" Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves" (Q. 13: 11).

On the basis of these and some other verses of the Qur'an a group of Muslim thinkers believed in the liberty of human will and action. According to them man is the master of his own works. They also held that the capacity for doing action was given to him by God and it is in this sense that God is considered to be the Ultimate Master. Ma'bad al Juhaini is the founder of this school of thought. The exponents of this view are called *Qadariyas*, because they held that man has *qadr* or power over his action. He is not forced or compelled by any external agency. On the contrary, he has got the power to determine the course of his own activity.

The *Qadariyas* argue that if everything is done according to the Divine Will of God, man cannot be and should not be held responsible for his works. As a moral being he has *qadr* or power over his actions. He is neither impelled nor compelled by any external agency to act, but has power to determine the course of his action.

The critics of this school are of the opinion that to affirm such a principle would destroy all the foundations of morality, because it would give all human beings licence in the indulgence of their animal propensities. Again if such individual is vested with a discretion to choose what is right and what is wrong, no sanction or no law can have any force. It is true that philosophical ideas of the *Qadariyas* have raised the status of mankind. But it has encroached on the rights and powers of the Supreme Being.

Both the *Qadariyas* and the *Jabariyas* were extremists. The true Islamic view is just the midway between the two extremes. According to Islam, God has pointed out to us the two paths, one of which leads us to Him and the other

takes us far away from His perfection. We are at liberty to take the one or the other. Pain or joy, reward or punishments depend upon our own conduct. But we do not have the capacity of turning evil into good or sin into virtue. God is undoubtedly the supreme sovereign, but human beings also have some power in moulding their destiny. Man possesses power under certain limitations. Thus it seems to be quite plausible to hold that man within the limited sphere of his existence is a builder of his character and an architect of his fortune subject to the control and supervision of the Supreme Intelligence.

### 12.3 The Mutazilas

The *Mutazila* is the earliest school of Muslim thought which had been influenced by Greek philosophy. Muslim thinkers belonging to this school dealt with some philosophical problems along with theological ones. The tendency of this school was more rationalistic than the previous schools. As a result, the *Mutazilas* are generally regarded as the "Rationalists of Islam". This school was started by Wasil-bin Ata at the beginning of the eighth century. For about three centuries, this school dominated the intellect of the people. Quite a large number of distinguished scholars, theologians, historians, mathematicians, physicists and others of the time belonged to this school. Even some of the rulers adhered to the *Mutazila* views, e.g., Umayyad Yazid bin Walid and Abbasid al Mansur, al Hadi and al-Mamun.

The basic tendency of the *Mutazilas* was to turn from the objective or external standard of truth to a subjective or critical attitude of mind. They considered reason to be the principal source of knowledge. But they did not undermine the necessity of revelation. In fact, their insistence on reason was based on the Qur'an, because very often the Qur'an appeals to reason, reflection and understanding. Hence, if reason is not considered to be the principal source of knowledge then the Qur'anic appeal to human intellect would definitely become meaningless.

In fact, the *Mutazilas* consider both reason and revelation to be the sources of knowledge and the criterion for distinguishing between good and evil. But in case of any inconsistency between reason and the literal meaning of revelation, the latter should be rejected and some deep meaning which conforms to reason, should be sought out. Thus, ultimately the *Mutazilas* made reason the principal source of knowledge and the true criterion of distinguishing between good and evil.

They made a serious endeavour to purify the original monotheistic ideal of Islam from all kinds of anthropomorphic charges. Their main purpose was to make their faith logical and rational. The problems discussed by them are generally classified under six heads: Attributes of God, Divine Justice, Eternity of the Qur'an, Beatific Vision, the Nature of Evil and the Creation of the world.

### 12.3.1 Attributes of God

The *Mutazilas* called themselves the "People of Unity," because they denied all attributes of God. The attributes of God, they held, imply plurality. But Islam has laid the greatest emphasis on the unity to God. No shadow of dualism or pluralism can be attached to Him. He has no attribute apart from His Essence. On the basis of this emphasis on the unity of God laid down by Islam, the *Mutazilas* held that God has no attribute beyond His Being. They argued that the absolute unity of God is not compatible with His attributes as held by some Muslims theologians known as the *Sifatias*. They further maintained that if the attributes are ascribed to God apart from His essence, these attributes will either be co-eternal with God or non-eternal. But belief in co-eternal attributes implies that two things will be eternal God and His attributes. This goes against those verses of the Qur'an which declare that God is the only Eternal Being. Again, non-eternal attributes imply that there was a time when God had no attributes, and that He possessed them afterwards. That means, God was imperfect in the beginning and became perfect at a later period. This idea also goes against the verses of the Qur'an, e.g., "You will never find a change in the ways of God."

### 12.3.2 Divine Justice

By Divine Justice, the *Mutazila* meant that God is ever just and can never be cruel. They accepted the *Qadariya* view which holds that man is the author of his own action. They tried to prove their contention by referring to certain verses of the Qur'an. While discussing the *Qadariya* viewpoint some verses relating to the freedom of will were quoted before. Some more verses that directly refer to the justice of God are quoted below:

"It was not we that wronged them: they wronged their own soul" (Q.11.101).  
 "Have we not made for him a pair of eyes? And a tongue and a pair of lips? And shown him the highways?" (Q.90: 8-10) "That no bearer of burdens can bear the burdens of another; that man can have nothing but what he strives for; that (the fruit of) his striving will soon come in sight; then he will be rewarded with a reward complete (Q.53: 38-41).

The *Mutazilas* argue that these and other similar verses become meaningless if man is not free in his action, good or bad. Responsibility without privilege is a contradiction in terms. God cannot be a participant in the action of man. If He punishes man for actions over which he has no control, He becomes an unjust Master. Thus the main theme of the *Mutazila* doctrine of *adl* or justice is that to maintain the justice and kindness of God we must concede freedom to man.

### 12.3.3 Eternity of the Qur'an

At the very beginning of the development of Muslim theology, the view arose that the Qur'an was uncreated and eternal. The *Mutazilas* did not believe in the

eternity of the Qur'an. They held that the existence of the eternal Qur'an is fundamentally opposed to the Qur'anic principle of Divine Unity. Since God is one, they argued, there cannot be anything co-eternal side by side with Him. The eternity of the Qur'an implies the existence of another being co-eternal with God. The unity of God is the cardinal principle of Islam and naturally, any belief in the eternal Qur'an is not consistent with the teachings of Islam. Hence, they held that the Qur'an was created in time and was expressed in words and revealed to Prophet Muhammad.

#### **12.3.4 Beatific Vision**

On the basis of the text of the Qur'an and Hadith it was a general belief among the Muslims that the virtuous will have a vision of God in the life hereafter. This vision is known as Beatific Vision. The *Mutazilas* vehemently opposed the Vision of God as described by the Traditions because this would imply God's position in certain space and time. And this is quite contrary to the idea of God. God has no body and as such any vision of Him is impossible. Now if God could be seen, He would become limited and determined. Some *Mutazilas* of course, tried to solve this question by saying that the vision of God should be taken figuratively and not literally. The traditional idea that the pious will be rewarded with the Vision of God should be taken figuratively. According to Abu'l Hundayl, for example, Vision of God means that virtuous would know God in their heart. Thus this vision is completely different from what is generally meant by the term.

#### **12.3.5 The nature of evil**

Since God is considered to be righteous, it implies that He is not the author of evil. Now there arises a question: How should we account for evils and mischief that we find in the world? The *Mutazilas* have two different answers to this question. The early *Mutazilas* held that the presence of evil and mischief in this world does not indicate any kind of Divine righteousness. They maintained that everything that occurs in the world is for the good of the creatures. They also held that God has the power to do whatever He likes, but does not do anything against His nature. Some of the later *Mutazilas* are of the opinion that God cannot do anything which is repugnant to His nature. They held that it is not that God does not do any evil to His creatures, but that His nature is such that He cannot do evil to His creatures. Thus God cannot be said to be the author of evil and mischief that prevail in the world. In fact, it is the man himself who should be held responsible for the evils and misfortunes of his life.

#### **12.3.6 Creation of the world**

The later *Mutazilas* were tremendously influenced by Aristotle. As a result, they wanted to reconcile the Qur'anic view with Aristotelian philosophy. According

to the Qur'an, this world is created, but Aristotle held that it is eternal. These *Mutazilas* considered the world to be both eternal and created. The world existed in essence in a state of quiescence from eternity and later on God introduced motion which gave it body and life. The *Mutazilas* contended that when the Qur'an states that the world is created it refers to this act of introducing motion to that essence which was in a state of eternal rest. They also held that by the eternity of the world, Aristotle referred to the quiescent state before the introduction of motion and movement. The world existed potentially from eternity and it was actualized at a point of time and this is creation. Before the quality of motion was added by God, the world existed without the relation of space, time and causalities. The moment God introduced the quality of motion; the world came into being with all these relations. Thus, the *Mutazilas* made a reconciliation between the Qur'anic view of creation and the Aristotelian philosophy of the eternity of the world.

#### 12.4 The Ashariyas

The attempt of the *Mutazilas* to rationalise the faith and to formulate the idea of an abstract impersonal absolute God could not satisfy the ordinary people. A section of Muslims viewed the *Mutazilas* with suspicion. They apprehended that the masses might be led into the conclusion that religion was no longer compulsory. Moreover, the *Mutazilas* held that reason is the real creation of truth and revelation only confirms the dictates of reason. Thus the orthodox Muslims condemned all sorts of speculative thinking and held that the Qur'an and Hadith must be believed without question (*bila kaifa*). A group of scholars known as "Brethren of Purity" (*Ikhwan-as Safa*) exerted their energies in reconciling reason with revelation. They wanted to give a new interpretation of religion. They advocated the view that religion was meant for the ordinary people and the philosophical significance could be known only to the few intellectually developed people.

But this kind of hostile attitude against rationalism did not continue for long. A new school of thought evolved from among the orthodox people who wanted to give reasons to their faith. Abu Hasan Ali bin Ismail al-Ashari was the founder of this school. After his name, the school was named *Ashariya* or *Asharism*. In his early youth he was a disciple of the last great *Mutazila* philosopher Abdul Wahab al-Jabbari. He was a staunch *Mutazila* and lectured and wrote for the movement until he was forty. But being dissatisfied with the *Mutazila* doctrine he established a new school of thought. This was a compromise between the extreme orthodox views and *Mutazila* rationalism.

Al-Ashari was the most popular and important thinker of the period. He studied philosophy and logic from his *Mutazila* teachers. After conversion, he used this training against the *Mutazilas* against whom he started the movement. It was a reaction of revelation against reason. But from this it does

not mean that *Al-Ashari* and those who held similar views (e.g. Al Tahawi in Egypt and Al- Maturidi in Samarkhand) wanted to suppress reason. They only tried to reconcile reason with revelation. But the *Mutazilas* and the *Ashariyas* used reason in their own way, with the difference that the *Mutazilas* gave prominence to reason while the *Ashariyas* gave importance to revelation. They tried to give their own interpretations to the problems raised by the previous schools of thought. But in their interpretations to those problems they tried to preserve the purity of the orthodox belief. Let us discuss those problems in brief.

#### **12.4.1 The attributes of God:**

According to the *Mutazilas* the presence of eternal attributes in God is incompatible with His unity. That is why, to uphold the unity of God they either cut down the number of God's attributes or denied them altogether. Against the views of the *Mutazilas*, the *Ashariyas* tried to uphold the traditional views, i.e. they put forward arguments to safeguard the attributes of God. Their treatment of God's attributes passed through two stages. In the first stage they upheld the seven rational attributes and explained away the anthropomorphic words such as hands, faces, etc and in the second stage they accepted all the attributes of God. But they advocated the doctrine of difference or *Mukhalafa* which means that the attributes of God should be understood as different from the attributes of created beings. The *Ashariyas* held that the difference between the attributes of God and that of His creation is not a matter of degree; they differ in their whole nature. The attributes are in God but not in the sense in which we have these attributes. For example, God's knowledge does not depend on the subject - object relation which is indispensable in our knowledge. *Ashariyas* also held that God has attributes, but it is beyond the capacity of man to understand how these exist in Him.

#### **12.4.2 Freedom of will**

Regarding the problem of freedom of will the *Ashariyas* followed a middle course between the fatalism of the *Jabariyas* and the self-determinism of the *Mutazilas*. In order to justify their position they introduced the principle of *Kasb* or acquisition. According to this principle, man does not have absolute power for doing any action. But he acquires the merit or demerit of the act done by him for the exercise of his option in selecting the course of action. The *Ashariyas* maintained that human actions are initiated and pre-ordained by God. Man has been given the only power of appropriation or acquisition (*Kasb*) which he does not inherit, but acquires by the use of his discretion or choice. The *Ashariyas* farther contended that it is due to this power of acquisition that man will be held responsible for his action. The choice of an action and its completion is partially due to his ability. This choice and completion depend upon the intention on the part of man which makes him responsible for his

actions. Thus, the *Ashariyas* accounted for free-will and responsibility on the part of man and tried to arrive at a compromise between the views of the *Mutazilas* and the *Jabariyas*.

#### 12.4.3 The eternity of the Qur'an

The *Mutazilas* maintained that the Qur'an is the work of God and hence His creation. But the *Ashariyas* rejected this doctrine of the Qur'an. They held that the Qur'an is eternal and uncreated. But its expression in language is in time. The Qur'an, they contended, existed in essence from eternity, but was revealed later in time. When it was communicated to Prophet Muhammad it became created. It was first uttered long before the birth of the Prophet and it was communicated to him by the angel Gabriel. The Qur'an is not the expression of the Prophet; rather it is the expression of God Himself. The language of the Qur'an is the language of God.

The *Ashariyas* based their views regarding the eternity of the Qur'an on certain of its verses. Besides, Al-Ashari put forward a logical argument, which is as follows:

The Qur'an categorically states that when God intends to create something, He says, 'Be' and it is. Now if the Qur'an is considered to be created as the *Mutazilas* held, the word 'Be' must have been uttered to it before it would have come into being. Again, for the creation of the word 'Be', which is the word of the Qur'an, another word would be needed. This way, one word would be needed for the creation of another and so on and so forth. But this will lead to the state of infinite regress. Thus, Al-Ashari argued that to avoid infinite regress we cannot but accept that the Qur'an is eternal.

#### 12.4.4 Beatific Vision

The Qur'an promises that the virtuous will be rewarded with the vision of God. The *Mutazilas* held that such a vision of God should not be interpreted in a literal sense for that would presuppose that God has some form. But the *Mutazilas* rejected the idea of describing God by any quality belonging to the world of phenomena. They strongly held that as God has no form and as such no vision of Him is possible. They also maintained that the Qur'anic promise that the virtuous will be rewarded with the vision of God should be interpreted in a figurative sense and not in a literal sense.

As against the *Mutazila* view, Al Ashari asserted that vision of God is possible and it should be believed. He held that God would be visible to the eyes on the Day of Resurrection as the moon is seen in the night of the full moon and the believers would see Him. He also held that while the believers would see Him, the unbelievers would be separated from Him by a wall of division. To prove his position he cited some verses of the Qur'an. In addition to the support from the Qur'an and the Hadith he put forward certain rational arguments. One of those arguments stands thus: If whatever exists is capable of

being shown to man by God, then we have to admit that since God exists, He is also capable of being shown to man.

### 13. Islamic Mysticism

Islamic mysticism is known as *Sufism*. It is regarded as one of the four main schools of Muslim Philosophy. It differs from mysticism in other religions. Sufism is an attempt to purify the soul but does not neglect worldly affairs. But mysticism in other religions rejects the worldly affairs of life and concentrates on the development of the soul. In all the worldly affairs a *Sufi* will not forget his Creator. All the activities of a *Sufi* will be performed in accordance with the dictates of the Qur'an. Prophet Muhammad is considered by the Muslims to be the greatest *Sufi* of the world.

To be *Sufi* one must follow certain principles. One must show great respect to one's spiritual teacher. One should obey the teacher like the corpse in the hands of corpse - bearers. Complete submission to the will of God is the keynote of *Sufism*. A *Sufi* must live in harmony with the Divine will. He must have selfless love for God. When his soul turns its attention to God, he becomes uninterested in all worldly enjoyments. Hence, it is not only renunciation of all evils, but a change from a tendency towards the world to a tendency towards God. The lower passions of men are great obstacles to the attainment of union with God. To control these passions the *Sufi* must forget his individual self and live in the Divine Self.

There are three stages of spiritual knowledge in *Sufism*: normal, abnormal and super - normal. In normal spiritual knowledge, a *Sufi* can exercise his intellectual reasoning. By abnormal knowledge is meant loss of worldly consciousness in a state of ecstasy. In a super-normal state of knowledge a *Sufi* makes union with the Truth, i.e., he makes union with God.

To attain the ultimate goal of the *Sufi* life, a *Sufi* must minimise his worldly needs and become harmless to other creatures. According to *Sufism*, poverty means the absence of desire for wealth and not the actual lack of wealth. A *Sufi* is always anxious for the knowledge of God and remains ready to bear any amount of trouble to remove the curtain that veils him from God. In a state of ecstasy, the *Sufi* experiences reality, in everything around him. In *Sufi* literature, this state of losing self-consciousness is called *Fana*. It involves a moral transformation of his soul through the negation of worldly desires. This state is followed by another, called *Baqqa*, a permanent and continuous life with God. In the former, the soul is liberated from all worldly desires and in the latter, it becomes one with Him. By *Baqqa*, the *Sufi* means the elimination of evil qualities and retention of moral virtues. In this state, the *Sufi* passes from the phenomenal self to the Divine Self and in meditation, he discovers that God is one with his own essence. In other words, he finds nothing but God and he becomes one with Him.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### (b) HINDUISM: Religion and Philosophy

Jaysankar L. Shaw

Hinduism is a religion where there is no conflict between reason and faith. Hence there is no conflict between philosophy and religion in the usual senses of these terms. Philosophy deals with certain basic or fundamental questions such as, What is truth? What is meaning? What is knowledge? What is good? What is beauty? What is the purpose of life? What is the nature of ultimate reality? Philosophy tries to justify a particular view or a set of views on rational grounds as opposed to some religions which justify a particular view on grounds of faith, or a set of beliefs. Hinduism justifies religious doctrines on rational grounds. Hence philosophy and religion in Hinduism are not opposed to each other, rather one supplements the other. Hinduism tries to justify on rational grounds our duties towards other human beings, creatures, or nature at large. Hence it is a religion without any dogma. It is also called '*Sanatana Dharma*'. The word '*Sanatana*' means 'eternal' or 'everlasting' and the word '*Dharma*' is derived from the root '*Dhr*' which means 'to hold' or 'to sustain'. Hence the term '*Sanatana Dharma*' may be interpreted as 'the eternal rules or laws which promote the well-being of the whole world including mankind'.

The *Vedas* (literally 'knowledge'), the *Upanisads* (treatises on philosophical discourse, although literally 'sitting down near to'), the *Bhagavad Gita* (literally 'the song of the God'), two great epics, viz., the *Ramayana*, and the *Mahabharata*, of which the *Bhagavad Gita* is a part, and the *Puranas* (literally 'ancient tales') are some of the basic scriptures of the Hindus. It is claimed that the *Bhagavad Gita* contains the essence of Hinduism. Hence almost all the sects of Hinduism refer to this holy book. Moreover, all the systems of Hindu philosophy have their roots in some of these scriptures, especially the *Vedas* and the *Upanisads*, and derive their inspiration from them.

Religion or *Dharma* is an integral aspect of Hindu philosophy. Different Hindu philosophical systems differ with respect to the nature of reality or the

nature of the relation between man and ultimate reality, but they do not differ with respect to the ultimate goal of human beings. Liberation, or freedom from bondage and suffering (*Moksha*) is considered as the *summum bonum* (the highest good) or the ultimate goal of life. *Dharma* or religion is a means towards the attainment of this ideal. In course of the realisation of this ultimate goal of life, earthly pleasures (*kama*) or possessions such as wealth (*artha*) have not been negated. They are accepted as possible means for promoting human well-being. Hence Hinduism cannot be identified with asceticism. Hinduism takes a positive, not a negative, attitude towards our life, existence and the world.

Hinduism tries to justify the existence and a distinction between good and evil, justice and injustice, truth and falsehood, knowledge and ignorance, virtue and vice, love and hatred, unselfish and selfish actions, and between being and non-being in this world. Moreover, all the sects of Hinduism emphasise the promotion of good, justice, virtue, love, knowledge and truth. It is also claimed that we cannot achieve the ultimate goal without promoting these ideals and negating their opposites. In this sense, there is identity-in-difference among the different sects of Hinduism or even among the different systems of Hindu philosophy.

With respect to other aspects of religion such as, what sort of deity is to be worshipped or what sort of ritual is to be performed, there is diversity among the different sects of Hinduism or even among the members of the same sect. Each individual is free to worship a deity of his or her own choice. Hence Hinduism recognises the individuality, or the freedom of each individual. If personhood lies in differences, then Hinduism treats every individual as a person. At the same time, Hinduism does not discriminate between individuals on the basis of gender, race, caste or creed. In this sense, it is a religion for the whole of mankind or human race. Even a Christian, a Jew, a Muslim or Marxist can be a Hindu, so long as she/he is committed to these basic ideals.

Hinduism does not claim that the essence of religion lies in certain ritual activities or in certain types of food an individual takes, or in a certain deity one worships. It gives us a general direction for these functions of individuals. Activities which are conducive to the promotion of certain basic or fundamental ideals, such as goodness, justice or well-being, are prescribed and hence encouraged; but the activities which are hindrances to the promotion of these ideals are forbidden and hence discouraged; and the activities which do not come under any one of these categories are permissible. Hinduism emphasises our commitment to these ideals which are for the well-being of all and the promotion of these ideals.

As regards the paths for the realisation of the ultimate goal, it is claimed that the *Bhagavad Gita* has mentioned three paths for the achievement of *Moksha* (freedom from bondage). These are called 'the path of devotion (or love)', 'the path of knowledge', and 'the path of holy or unselfish work'. Different sects

of Hinduism or different systems of Hindu philosophy emphasise these paths in varying degrees. Some even claim that each of the paths will lead an individual to the ultimate goal. But a closer examination of the *Bhagavad Gita* might reveal that they are not alternative or independent paths, and each of them refers to the rest. Hence knowledge without any holy work or devotion will not amount to wisdom or lead to freedom from bondage. Similarly, devotion without any holy work which presupposes knowledge will not lead to the ultimate goal. Again, an action which does not presuppose knowledge and devotion cannot be distinguished from a mechanical action, and hence cannot be holy or unselfish. But an action, which is enlightened by knowledge and is dedicated to the Almighty, becomes unselfish and thereby holy. Let us quote a few passages from the *Bhagavad Gita* in support of this interpretation:

- 4.33: Wisdom is in truth the end of all holy work.
- 5.4: Ignorant men, but not the wise, say that *Sankhya* and *Yoga* are different paths; but he who gives all his soul to one reaches the end of the two.
- 11.53: He who works for me, who loves me, whose End Supreme I am, free from Attachment to all things, and with love for all creation, he in truth comes into me.

From the above remarks, it follows that since *Sankhya* and *Yoga* are not different paths, the path of knowledge and the path of unselfish action are also not different paths. Similarly, if a person loves God, then he works for Him, and he loves His creation and works for His creation. Therefore, each of the paths will ultimately involve the rest, and the difference between them is initial, but not final. Hence Hinduism does not prescribe or preach renunciation of action, but renunciation in action, as our actions are to be enlightened by knowledge and are to be considered as offerings to the Almighty.

Since Hinduism emphasises both action and knowledge, it is not opposed to science or the experimental method. As a matter of fact, it relies heavily on science, which gives us knowledge about the empirical world, for the performance of a good, just, or a virtuous action. If science gives us knowledge of means and ends, or in other words, how phenomena are related to each other, then scientific knowledge would be a prerequisite for the successful performance of an action which will be holy if unselfish.

Again, since Hinduism emphasises the rational justification of our actions and thereby removes doubt, there is no scope for thoroughgoing scepticism which doubts everything. If the rough going sceptic claims that there is no distinction between truth and falsehood, good and evil, or between existence and non-existence, then Hinduism claims that the position of the sceptic is self-destructive and hence it cannot even be stated or maintained as a tenable position. Since this view of the sceptic is self-destructive, it cannot be claimed to be better than the one which is non-self-destructive. Moreover, since

Hinduism aims at the well-being of the entire creation, it is certainly better than the one which falls short of this ideal. Hence Hinduism cannot be refuted by a sceptic or replaced by any other doctrine or ideal which falls short of Hinduism.

In my above discussion I have tried to state the essence of Hinduism without mentioning how it is being practised among the Hindus in modern times. Now let me say a few words about how it is being practised and the significance of some of the rituals or *pujas* (worships).

In modern times most of the elaborate Vedic rituals are being replaced by image worship of the gods and goddesses, social ceremonies such as weddings, rites such as death (*sradhya*), and sacred festivals such as *Holi* or *Durga puja*. Different gods and goddesses represent different aspects of the Ultimate Reality or the Almighty. One of the main purposes of these worships (*pujas*) is the meditative identification of the worshipper with the divine Presence in and through the image of the deity. It is an occasion for the commitment and the promotion of our ideals. Let us consider the *Durga Puja* (*Durga*-festival) which is the biggest and the most popular festival in Bengal and certain parts of North India.

The word *Durga*, means 'one who dispels danger or misery', although literally it means 'inaccessible'. *Durga* is one of the manifestations of the Ultimate Reality and she is also known as '*Uma*', or '*Parvati*'. The goddess *Durga* represents the power (*sakti*) to eliminate evil, danger, injustice, suffering and distress. She is depicted as slaying the buffalo-demon *Mahi sasura* which is the embodiment of evil or injustice. According to our *Puranas* (ancient tales), she was created for the purpose of slaying the buffalo-demon. To her enemies she presents a menacing form, but to her devotees she appears as a kindly mother, and is the expression of goodness, grace and virtue. She is also known as the wife of Lord *Siva*, who is another manifestation of the Ultimate Reality and known as 'the god of creation and reproduction'. The goddess *Durga* is depicted as riding a lion and holding ten weapons in her ten hands. She received these weapons from different gods so that she can fight against the buffalo-demon. Since a lion is a courageous animal, it becomes her carrier in the battle against the demon.

Since the goddess *Durga* is said to have four children, they are also worshipped along with her and they also represent different aspects of the Reality. *Kartiqa* (or *Kartikeya*) and *Ganesa* are the two sons of *Siva* and *Durga*. *Kartiqa* is the first-born son, and he is a symbol of courage and bravery. Hence he is considered as the god of war. According to one legend, *Kartiqa* was born to destroy the demon *Taraka*. *Kartiqa* is also called '*Kumar*' (adolescent, boy) as he was never married. Since he is the god of courage and strength, he holds a bow and arrows in his hands.

The other son *Ganesa* is considered as the remover of obstacles, and he is invoked at the beginning of a worship or a new enterprise. He is depicted as a

man with the head of an elephant which is a symbol of keen intelligence or sagacity. But according to another legend he lost his head in the battle. When *Siva* came to know of this, he promised to cut off the head of the first living creature he came across and join it to the body of *Ganesa*. Since the first living creature was an elephant, *Ganesa* got the head of an elephant.

*Laksmi* and *Sarasvati* are considered as daughters of *Siva* and *Durga*. *Laksmi* is the goddess of good fortune and prosperity. She is also known as 'Padma', 'Kamala' or 'Sri'. She is the wife of Lord *Vishnu* who is the preserver of the world or creation. *Sarasvati* is the goddess of learning and art. Hence she is represented as holding a manuscript in one hand and a lute (*vina*) in the other, which are symbols of learning and the arts respectively. She is widely worshipped by students and scholars all over India. She is considered as the wife of *Brahma* who is the creator of this world. Similarly, other gods and goddesses represent other aspects or manifestations of the Ultimate Reality, and the ideals they stand for are the basic values of human beings which we cherish and strive for. Worship is a commitment and devotion to these values. The promotion and the realisation of these values will eventually lead us to *Moksa* (liberation).

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## CHAPTER TWELVE

### (c) CHRISTIANITY: Religion and Philosophy

Pierluigi Pizzamiglio

#### Part I: Historical Perspective

**A** proper historical approach to our subject-matter is not only possible, but even essential since a central assumption of Christian Faith is to conceive the whole story of mankind and their world as a Drama of Redemption (= buying back: God's activity in delivering us from the bondage of sin and evil) or as the *History of Salvation*, running from Creation to a final Kingdom of God and finding its center in Jesus Christ.

#### A. Jesus the Christ

Jesus of Nazareth, founder of Christianity, was a Galilean Jew, the son of a woman called Mary who was married to Joseph, a carpenter. The miraculous, divine conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary apart from the procreative power of the marital act is called "virginal conception": it emphasizes the central mystery of the Christian Faith that Jesus has only one Father in Heaven and so is a true God, while having one mother on earth and so is true man.

After about thirty years of a hidden, humble existence at Nazareth, Jesus started his public life of preacher proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom of God by words and deeds and miracles.

He called Disciples to follow him and chose a core group of twelve (later called Apostles): the beginning of the Church.

His life and teaching aroused the antagonism of some Jewish leaders and teachers. After about three years of public apostolic life, in Jerusalem (where he instituted a New Covenant with God in the context of his Last Supper, a meal which effectively symbolizes the self-sacrificing service of others to which Jesus Christ – and his followers – are called) he was betrayed, arrested, condemned and executed on a cross and buried.

Three days after his crucifixion he appeared gloriously alive to a number of individuals and groups. Therefore his disciples were in a new condition of experience: they became able to recognize and proclaim Jesus as the Christ (a word derived from the Greek translation of the Hebrew term Messiah, which means "the Anointed One") or the Lord and Savior, seated at the right hand of the Father.

### B. Before Jesus Christ

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the primary object of Christian Faith. It is also the starting point for understanding the past of the world and mankind.

The historic destiny of Jesus, crowned by his death and resurrection, makes known and fulfils the real and definitive content of God's *Revelation*: God's personal self-manifestation and communication of his salvific will.

The Revelation of God has been communicated through events of history and words. Creation already reveals God in his wisdom and sovereign power and allows the people to contemplate the Creator by analogy with the beauty of his creatures. Nevertheless, the object of divine Revelation is always something in the sphere of religion: it does not burden itself with cosmological data or metaphysical speculation. God reveals his plan which traces the way of salvation for mankind from sin: both from Original Sin (the wounding of nature suffered by our first parents, Adam and Eve, which affected all later generations) and from Personal Sins (any thought, word or deed that deliberately disobeys God's will and in some way rejects the divine goodness and love).

It is however in the history of Israel (the Hebrew or Jewish nation, descended from Jacob, who received the new name of Israel, that means "God's rules") that God-Yahweh reveals himself everywhere in quite specific fashion. His acts reveal who He is: the compassionate God and the mighty God, who saves. The types and pledge of every deliverance brought about by God in favour of the people is the "Exodus": a Latin word that means "a way out" and designates primarily the departure of the Hebrews from Egypt and the long journey of forty years which led them across the desert into the Promised Land.

The delivered people entered into a *Covenant* with Yahweh: this clearly is not a pact between equals, but Yahweh decides with a sovereign liberty to grant his allegiance to the Chosen People and he dictates his own conditions or commandments.

The *Old Testament* is the part of the *Bible* written at the time of this Old Covenant. Written under a special influence or 'inspiration' of God, the *Old Testament* is a collection of 46 sacred books written down over a period of 900 years (of course before Christ - B.C.), expressing many languages and cultures in many literary forms.

In his Incarnation (the eternal Son of God, while remaining fully divine, became truly and fully human) Jesus Christ was the climax of the divine self-revelation: being simultaneously the Revealer and the Message (i.e. the content of revelation).

### C. After Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ - dead, risen and exalted at the right hand of the Father - completed his work of salvation by sending his Spirit, the **Holy Spirit**. Now the principal agent in the history of universal salvation is the Holy Spirit: he causes the words and deeds of Jesus to be understood and actualized.

The Community founded by Jesus Christ - the **Church** - has been anointed by the Holy Spirit as the final sign (= Sacrament) of God's will to save the whole human family. Of universal significance, the Good News (the Gospel) of Jesus Christ was to be preached everywhere and to everyone.

To the new and eternal Covenant, sealed by the sacrifice of Christ, bears witness the second part of the **Bible**, the **New Testament**: written in the First Century A.D. under the special inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it is a collection of 27 sacred books (the four Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, twenty-one Apostolic Letters and the Book of Revelation) that are normative for Christian Faith.

The Church's **Mission** is basically to continue the revelatory, loving, liberating, life-giving, saving mission of Jesus. All true disciples of Jesus are equipped to accomplish it with the power of the Holy Spirit, because all baptized are born of the Spirit who remains with them and within them. Thus Jesus is the source and the Spirit is the force of Church's mission in the world.

Jesus Christ, triumphant over death, has initiated a new manner of life with God. He has gone there first, to prepare a place for his people. Then he will return in glory (**Parousia** – coming, arrival) at the end of history and lead them there, so that they might always be with him.

## Part II: Doctrinal Perspective

A doctrinal or theoretical approach to our subject-matter is permitted and necessary since Christian Faith, made possible through the help of the Holy Spirit, is a free, **reasonable** and total response through which the faithful confess the truth about the divine self-disclosure (revelation), definitively made in Christ, and obediently commit themselves and entrust their future to God.

### A. God (The Trinity)

Revelation, whether regarded from the side of absolute God or from that of finite man, cannot bring about a complete disclosure of the mystery of God and man's turning from God in sin has the consequence of clouding his knowledge.

Nevertheless, through Revelation God himself has entered into human language and has permanently empowered it to express him. Then, if human speech is not to fail in its purpose in regard to the absolute God, it must follow the path by which God himself came down to man in Revelation itself, i.e. it must be in accordance with Revelation.

But the complete and definitive form of God's true being along with us has revealed itself in the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. Consequently, language about God which is in accordance with Revelation must always remain centred on God's highest concrete expression which took place in the coming of God-man Jesus Christ.

Through his very presence and his sacrifice for the salvation of all Jesus Christ revealed that "God is love". He made us a gift of the love that unites Father and Son: this loving relationship between the Father and the Son is their Holy Spirit. If the Spirit seals the union of Father and Son, then "God is spirit".

In order to elucidate the Christian message in a philosophical form which was meaningful to the educated people of the Hellenistic-Roman society, from the third Century A.D. Christians started to use the term "Trinity" and the related ones: the One God exists in three persons-subsistence-hypostases who are the one divine nature-essence-substance and are equal, coeternal and omnipotent. The mystery of the God-man Jesus Christ was elucidated by claiming that in him there were two natures (divine and human) in one (divine) person.

Of course, the Trinity is an absolute mystery, which is not perceivable to reason even after being revealed.

## B. The Church

The English term "Church" is an equivalent translation of the Greek word "Ekklesia", that means "to call out" or the "assembly convoked" by God.

The Church is first of all a concrete and tangible reality, whose meaning is nevertheless revealed only to the eyes of faith. Revelation helps us to understand the Church through a multiplicity of concepts and images.

### The Church is a mystery

The word 'mystery' here means the act whereby God manifests his love in the incarnate Son Jesus Christ, to bring mankind to glory. The Church is then seen as the "mystery of Christ": that means that Church is in Christ the effective sign (sacrament or mystery) of intimate union with God and of unity for the whole human race. Jesus Christ, risen from dead, has sent his life-giving Spirit upon the disciples and through his Spirit he has established his **Mystical (or Mysterious) Body**, which is the Church - gathered principally by the celebration of the Eucharist (Lord's Supper), as the universal sign-sacrament of salvation. Then, what principally constitutes the Church is the Holy Spirit in men's hearts.

## The Church is the People of God

The notion of the 'People of God' originally expressed the national and religious unity of Israel. It thus brings out the continuity of the Church with the people of the Old Covenant and, even more, it stresses with the Liturgy or Worship that the Church is a growing Community involved in history and affected by the weakness of its members which always stands in need of the mercy of God.

Then, the Church is the People of God of the New Covenant established by the Holy Spirit as the Body of Christ, hierarchically constituted and serving to promote the Reign of God for the salvation of mankind.

The Church is thus a **Hierarchical Society** or Fellowship: but the visible and social structure of the Church is only the sign and means of the action of Jesus Christ in the Spirit.

The Church is also the seed and the beginning of the Kingdom of God: it is already in substance (really and truly) the Kingdom of God, but in a state of pilgrimage, in an imperfect manner, only a partial realization. But if the idea of the Kingdom of God denotes fullness and consummation, there is even now in the Church a clear sense of the distance which still separates it from that glorious consummation and which explains the tension and the missionary engagement which must dominate it in its yearning for the return of the Saviour, Jesus Christ.

## C. Christian Life

Behind the expression 'Christian Life or Existence' lies the assumption that there is a behaviour (towards God and the Others) that arises out of and that is necessarily bound up with Christianity, that is specific to it.

Worship is the adoration of God which expresses itself in praise, thanksgiving, self-offering, penitence and petitions. Personal worship of God can take place anywhere and at any time. Christian worship has its foundation in Jesus Christ. Persons who are brought into relationship with God through Jesus Christ are also made participants in Christ's worship because they share in his life.

Liturgy is the formal public worship of Christian Assemblies, i.e. performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, who is the Head of this Body. Liturgy is centered in the Eucharistic Celebration or Mass: the Church's eucharist (= thanksgiving) is its memorial of Jesus Christ, because the Church believes that in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus lies the power of salvation for all people seeking communion with God. Then the principal Christian feast is the weekly Sunday, when the Church regularly assembles for its eucharist, other special forms of Liturgy - called 'Sacraments' - are designed for special occasions: Baptism, Confirmation, Marriage, Ordination, Penance, Sickness.

The proclamation of the Scriptures is a structural constant in all liturgical rites. The Liturgical Year is an annual cycle during which successive aspects of the

mystery of salvation in Christ are celebrated: the principal festal seasons of the liturgical year are Christmas (incarnation of Jesus Christ), after four weeks of Advent (Jesus' coming), and Easter (death and resurrection of Jesus Christ), after forty days of Lent (a special season for prayer, fasting, almsgiving and conversion).

As for the Moral Life, Jesus Christ is the unique Law of the Christian: it is through him, through obedience to his Gospel (Good News) and to the teaching of the Church, that man attains God in faith and enters into the mystery of salvation.

Jesus Christ joined together the two basic Commandments: to love God and to love one another. The love of God seems to be inseparable from the love of neighbour: "A man who does not love the brother whom he can see cannot love God, whom he has never seen... We love God's children if we love God himself" (1 John 4: 20-21).

Then, Christian morality or ethics must be based on the new life in Christ and must be primarily a morality of charity, in individual and social life.

The problems with morality are both with knowing what to do and in being able to do it. The first question focused on the sources of moral judgment (Revelation, Tradition, Teaching of the Church) and the unavoidable role of personal conscience, being always the human person the fundamental value. The second question recalls that it is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian which helps and whose fruits are charity, justice and peace.

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## CHAPTER TWELVE

### (d) BUDDHISM: Religion and Philosophy

Niru Kumar Chakma

Buddhism is one of the oldest living world religions that grew in India in the sixth century B.C. about the teachings of a great Aryan Sage called the Buddha. *The Buddha* is however a title, and not a name. It was given to Siddharta Gautama, the Sage's family and clan name, after he attained Perfect Enlightenment or *Nirvana*. The story of Buddhism, as we have it, is that Siddharta was born of the Aryan race in the Ksatriya family of the Sakya clan in 563 B.C. as the son of the king Suddhodana, the ruler of a principality called Kapilavastu bordering on modern Nepal.

The prince grew up in the splendor and luxuries of life that were due to a prince, but the sorrows and sufferings of man affected him deeply. When he realised that old age, disease and death would fall on him as on every human being, in his 29<sup>th</sup> year he made what is known as the great renunciation in the Buddhist tradition, left the splendour of his princely life and became a pauper in order to discover the origin of suffering and a way out of it. Turning himself into a homeless ascetic, young Siddharta made a relentless quest for truth for a period of six long years spending under various religious teachers for guidance, practising most severe penances, and finally at the age of 35 attained Perfect Enlightenment under the bodhi tree on the bank of the river *Niranjana* at *Gaya*. He was henceforth called the Buddha, the 'awakened' or 'enlightened'.

When the Buddha was born and attained supreme enlightenment, the Indo-Aryan society was stratified into four hereditary groups, namely, *Brahmin*, *Ksatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Sudra*, of which the Brahmins were enjoying the highest status. The Vedic religion allowed animal sacrifice to propitiate gods. Only the Brahmins had the right to officiate in the sacrificial cult which they continued to monopolise for several centuries. Even though the Ksatriya and Vaishya enjoyed some privileges along with the Brahmins, they did not have that prominent a role as the Brahmins in the performance of the sacrifice. The Sudra, the lowest of the groups as well as the women were deprived of religious and

spiritual rights. It was into this Indian religious world of the caste system and class distinctions, of meaningless rites and rituals, of convention and eccentricity where superstition and dogmatism reigned supreme that the Buddha had to preach his *Dhamma*. He emerged as a great reformative force to defy the arrogance of the orthodox Brahmins, to nullify the importance of caste, and expose the futility and meaninglessness of ritualistic and sacrificial practices. He protested against social injustices, accepted and sheltered in his Sangha all irrespective of caste, creed, colour and race, and brought about radical social changes not by any force or violence, but by the force of loving kindness and tolerance to all, human and other living creatures.

Although Indo-Aryan society was overshadowed by cruel and repulsive animal sacrifices coupled with the growing power of the priesthood, a strong impulse towards intellectual activity was to be seen in the wandering life of a large number of holy men who would abandon their homes to live in the forests, under trees, in huts or caves subjecting themselves to severe physical torments. Not only did these so-called holy men or hermits starve themselves into living skeletons, they also used to sleep on the beds of spikes and consume dirty and indescribable filth as food. The Buddha chose to be such a wandering ascetic. For certainly he left home for homelessness. Importantly, however, his ascetic life was very different. He was opposed to two extremes : excessive sensual pleasure and extreme self-torture. The Buddha began his very first sermon, *The Turning of the Wheel of the Law* by saying: 'Avoid these two extremes: attachment to pleasures of the senses which is low and vulgar, and attachment to self-mortification which is painful; both are unprofitable'. And he characterizes his own position as the Middle Way. The teaching of the Buddha is, therefore, known as the middle path.

The Buddha, unlike the founder of a revealed religion, Islam or Christianity, for instance, was neither a god nor a prophet or incarnation of a god, but an ordinary man, though a prince he might be, who attained Perfect Wisdom by his own effort and became a supreme human being. His teaching revolves around the problem of suffering, and points a way whereby it is claimed that anybody can solve this problem without the help of any external or supernatural power. In this sense the Buddha may be regarded as a messenger, for he had definitely a message to preach, the message of the Law of Deliverance. But then the Buddha was no saviour of mankind. He rather exhorted his followers to depend on themselves for their deliverance. As he said: 'you yourself must make the effort, Buddhas only point the way'. Buddhism is therefore a religion of self-help. 'Work out your own salvation with diligence', said the Buddha.

Buddhism, unlike a theistic religion, owes no allegiance to God, and also lacks most of the features that are generally considered to be essential to a religion, such as, creation, an eternal soul, faith, last judgement, etc.

Nevertheless, Buddhism may still be rightly called a religion inasmuch as it presents itself as a spiritual discipline of the highest order and such a noble way of life as to be based on one of the finest systems of ethics ever known to the world. The teaching of the Buddha is not revealed, but is based wholly on human experience. The truths discovered and proclaimed by the Buddha are not to be taken as articles of faith. The Buddha rather urged his adherents not to believe anything until they have themselves experienced it and found it to be true. This is aptly stated in the *Anguttara -Nikaya*:

*Don't believe anything on mere hearsay.*

*Don't believe traditions just because they happen to be old and have been passed down through many generations.*

*Don't believe anything because people talk a lot about it.*

*Don't believe anything solely because the written testimony of some ancient wise men is shown to you.*

*Never believe anything that begs to be taken for granted or because ancient precedent tempts you to regard it as true.*

*And don't believe anything on the mere authority of your teachers.*

*What you should accept as true and as the guide to your life is whatever agrees with your own reason and your own experience after thorough investigation, and whatever is helpful both to your own well-being and that of other living beings.*

The Buddha always emphasized practice rather than theory in various ways. His message of enlightenment was purely practical. He refused to enter into theoretical speculations which he considered not profitable for attaining Nirvana. The Buddha used to set aside any discussion on metaphysical questions as to whether the world was finite or infinite, eternal or non-eternal, whether the soul was different from the body or identical and so on, because answers to such questions are uncertain, undetermined or meaningless. An attempt to solve these problems on which there is no sufficient evidence is tantamount to accepting as true the conflicting one-sided accounts of an elephant given by different blind persons who touch its different parts. To the Buddha the most urgent problem is to end suffering. But one who is entangled in the endless theoretical controversy over these uncertain questions without trying to get rid of miseries behaves like a foolish man who has been shot with a poisonous arrow but refuses treatment of the wound until he is informed of the name, address, family background and the origin of the offender.

Instead of involving himself in the discussion of controversial metaphysical questions, the Buddha always tried to enlighten his followers on the most important questions of suffering, its origin, its cessation and the way that leads to its cessation. The answers to these vital questions of life constitute the foundations of the Buddha's teachings known as the Four Noble Truths: (i) Suffering (*dukkha*); (ii) the Arising of Suffering (*dukkha-samudaya*); (iii) the Extinction of

Suffering (*dukkha-nirodha*); and (iv) the way to the Extinction of Suffering (*dukkha-nirodha-gamini-patipada*). The first three represent the philosophy of Buddhism, while the fourth represents its ethics. But the two are so interwoven that one cannot be understood without the knowledge of the other.

The first noble truth is about the fact that human life is permeated by miseries. There is physical and mental sickness; there is pain, lamentation, despair. There is grief and sorrow resulting from the loss of, or separation from the near and dear ones. Birth is suffering, decay is suffering, death is suffering. Not to get what one desires is suffering or to get what one hates is suffering. The Buddha was the first to have realized the fundamental impermanence of all phenomena including everything that we call self, body, mind and sensation.

The second noble truth which explains the cause of suffering is one of the most complex and subtle aspects of the Buddha's teachings. In it the Buddha shows how man is caught up in the whirlpool of suffering through his failure to realise the impermanence of things. Man tends to grasp transience of things as though they are stable and permanent and are thus subjected to suffering. The Buddha explains the cause of suffering not by positing a creator or first cause but by his doctrine called *paticcasamuppada* or the theory of dependent origination. It is a theory of causation that explains the origin of suffering through a chain of twelve interconnected links (*dvadasa nidana*). To state briefly, there is (i) *suffering* in life because there is (ii) *birth*. Birth is due to our (iii) *desire to be born* which is again caused by (iv) *craving or grasping* the objects. This craving is again caused by (v) our *thirst* to enjoy objects. There would have been no thirst for any object, had we not had (vi) *sense experience*. But sense experience alone would not arise or give any pleasant feelings but for (vii) *contact* between sense and objects. This contact again would not take place had there been no (viii) *six organs of cognition*. The six organs of cognition are caused by the (ix) *mind-body organism* which would not come into being without (x) *consciousness*. This consciousness comes from what are called (xi) *impressions of the past life* which initiate our present existence and cause rebirth due to (xii) *ignorance* about truth.

The Buddha explains not only the origin of suffering but in fact all the phenomena of the world by his doctrine of dependent origination, according to which, everything in the world is "related to, contingent upon and conditioned by something else". On this doctrine are based the three other theories taught by the Buddha, namely, the theory of impermanence (*anitta*), the theory of no soul (*atman*) and the theory of *Karma*. The Buddha denies the existence of a permanent and eternal self. If all things are transitory, subject to change and decay, it follows that there is no abiding substance called "soul" that persists after the body perishes and migrates to another body. The theory of *Karma* states that one has to reap the consequences of one's actions so that a man's suffering is of his/her own making and it is only by one's effort that one can get rid of it.

The Buddha teaches not only suffering but also shows the way to remove that suffering. The state of existence without suffering is *Nirvana* which is to be realized by developing the Fourth Noble Truth called the Eight-Fold-Path (*astangika-marga*). This unique path which consists of eight steps or rules gives in a nutshell the essentials of Buddhist ethics. The steps are: (i) Right Understanding (*Sammaditti*); (ii) Right Resolve (*Samma Sankapa*); (iii) Right Speech (*Samma Vacā*); (iv) Right Action (*Samma Kammanta*); (v) Right Livelihood (*Samma Ajiva*); (vi) Right Effort (*Samma Vyama*); (vii) Right Mindfulness (*Samma Sati*); and (viii) Right Concentration (*Samma Samadhi*). The eight steps have been conveniently brought under three headings: the first two are called wisdom (*Prajna*); the next three morality (*Sila*) and the last three are known as meditation (*Samadhi*). The path requires an adherent not only to have perfect knowledge about the four noble truths, the world and self, but also must practice a moral discipline and undertake meditational practices.

The teachings of the Buddha which his disciples preserved by committing to memory and transmitting them orally from generation to generation were compiled and arranged immediately after death in what is known as the *Tipitaka*. – The *Tipitaka* was, however, committed to writing much later, about 83 B.C. in Sri Lanka during the rule of the *Sinhala king Vatta Gamini*. *Tipitaka* means three baskets. These are: 1) the basket of discipline (*Vinaya Pitaka*), the basket of discourses (*Sutta Pitaka*) and the basket of ultimate doctrine (*Abhidhamma Pitaka*).

About a century after the great passing away (*mahaparinirvana*) of the Buddha controversy amongst his followers with regard to the exact interpretation of his teachings and the *Vinaya* resulted in a schism within the *Sangha*. The elder members of the *Sangha* who upheld and preserved the orthodox views of their Master were called *Theravadins*, and the dissenters came to be known as *Mahasanghikas*. The division of the Buddhist *Sangha* into these two factions is said to have eventually given rise to as many as eighteen sects. Today, however, Buddhism is generally recognized by its two principal divisions, namely, *Hinayana* and *Mahayana*. The term 'yana' means vehicle or carrier and therefore *Hinayana* means small carrier and by *Mahayana* is meant great vehicle or carrier. The followers of *Mahayana* called their faith a great vehicle in that it was for all mankind to attain *Nirvana*, while they term *Hinayana* a small vehicle as, in their view, it was not meant for the enlightenment of all. The *Mahayanists* are supposed to be liberal since they moulded the teachings of the Buddha to a great extent in order to accommodate many things of popular interests. The *Hinayanists* are, on the other hand, said to be conservative as they remained strictly loyal to the original principles of Buddhism and called themselves *Theravadins* i.e., the followers of the doctrine of the elders. In that sense they seem to be small in number.

In philosophical matters also the *Hinayanists* and *Mahayanists* disagree. And this led to the development of many schools of which the most important are:

(i) The *Madhyamika*; (ii) The *Yogacara*; (iii) The *Sautrantika*; and (iv) The *Vaibhasika*. The first two come under *Mahayana* and the other two belong to *Hinayana*. The main controversy lies in the fact that the *Madhyamika* and the *Yogacara* are idealistic, while the *Sautrantika* and the *Vaibhasika* claim to be realists.

Buddhism, which was once the dominant cultural and intellectual force of India and became the state religion in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. during the reign of Emperor Ashoka gradually lost ground in its homeland. The travel-accounts of the famous Chinese pilgrims, namely, Fa-hien, Song-yun, Hsuan-tsang and I-tsing, who visited India in the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries respectively testify to the decline of Buddhism in different parts of the country. These travel accounts also give us a vivid picture of the flourishing state of Buddhism in the eastern part of India that includes Bengal and the area now known as Bangladesh. It is important to note that Bengal or Bangladesh was the last stronghold of Buddhism when it disappeared from other parts of the country and that the religion lasted longest in this eastern part up to as late as the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Bangladesh also occupies a special place in the history of Indian Buddhism by giving rise to what is popularly known as esoteric (*Tantric*) Buddhism.

It is difficult to ascertain exactly when Bangladesh came under the influence of Buddhism. But it is known from historical records that from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. to the 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Bangladesh was ruled by over half a dozen dynasties, namely, Maurya, Kushan, Gupta, Gauda, Pala, Chandra, Sena etc. Although not all the reigning monarchs had patronized it and some of them were even opposed to its progress, Buddhism prospered and flourished in Bengal over a period of more than eight hundred years.

During the Gupta period there was an all round development of Indian culture including Buddhism. Buddhism both in its Hinayana and Mahayana forms continued to flourish in the hands of the Gupta kings. Although the Gupta rulers were *Vaisnavas* by faith, they patronized Buddhism side by side with Brahmanism. Fa-hien, who visited India at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D., gave a vivid account of the flourishing state of Buddhism in Bangladesh. Fa-hien is said to have traveled eastward across the course of the Ganges where he came across Buddha stupas and monks at various places. It is known from his account that there were at that time twenty-two monasteries with monks who lived in accordance with the Buddhist *Vinaya*.

Amongst other Chinese records regarding the condition of Buddhism in Bengal in the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. the account of Hiuen-Tsang is particularly important. According to this Chinese pilgrim, there were six or seven Buddhist monasteries at *Kajangala* near Rajmahal which housed over three hundred monks. At *Pundravardhana* there were twenty monasteries with more than 3000 monks who practised both *Hinayana* and *Mahayana*. It is also known that

in *Samatata* there were more than thirty Buddhist monasteries with over 2000 monks; in *Karnasuvarna* more than ten monasteries with over 2000 monks; and in *Tamralipti* more than ten monasteries with over 1000 monks.

After the period of Gupta rule the most important and reputed patrons of Buddhism in Bengal were the Pala kings. When Buddhism was gradually losing hold in other parts of India it was the Pala kings who made Buddhism flourish and expand in Bengal and Bihar. Their important contributions towards the development of Buddhism include the building of new monasteries and restoration of the old ones. The *Vikramasila Vihara* at Magadha and two other monasteries, one at *Odantapuri* and the other at *Somapuri* are said to have been built by king Dharmapala. The archeological relics found at Paharpur of Rajshahi district still stand as testimony to this *Somapuri Vihara*. Another living testimony of the Pala period is the famous *Shalbana Vihara* at Mainamoti of Comilla. Amongst other famous Viharas of the Pala period may be mentioned *Po-sh-po* of Bogra, *Jagaddala* of Dinajpur, *Vikrampuri Vihara* of Savar, and *Pandit Vihara* of Chittagong.

During the later part of the Pala rule in Bengal there were several independent Buddhist Kingdoms of which *Harikela* and the *Chandra* Kingdom are notable. The famous Buddhist scholar of Vikrampura of Dhaka, *Atisa Dipankara*, is believed to have been born in the royal family of the Chandras.

The rule of the Chandras was the last stronghold of Buddhism in Bengal. After the Chandra, those who emerged as rulers of Bengal viz. the Barmans and the Senas were Saivas or Vaisnavas who followed tantric Hinduism. Buddhism without royal patronage and support gradually began to be extinct; its institutions were closed down and what remained as Buddhism deviated from its original form and was turned into mysticism. In Buddhist literature the leaders of this mystic Buddhism or tantra are known as Siddas and their number is generally supposed to be eighty four. From the Tibetan sources their names have come to be known of whom the most important are: *Nagarjuna*, *Saraha*, *Advayavajra*, *Tillopada*, *Naropada*, *Kahnu-pada*, *Dham-pada*, *Dombipada*, *Lui-pada*, *Shabor-pada*, *Biru-pada* and *Kukkuri-pada*. The collection of 47 poems known as *Charyapadas* composed by 22 Buddhist *Siddacharyas* are regarded as the old specimens of the Bengali language.

Tantric Buddhism had several forms, namely, *Vajrayana*, *Sahajayana*, *Mantryana*, *Kalachakrayana* etc. Since Buddhism has no worship of gods or goddesses and rituals to satisfy the religious aspirations of the common man, it was losing ground, while Hinduism was growing stronger and powerful by attracting people with its ritualistic appeal. During the rule of the Sena dynasty Buddhism was engulfed by the sakti movement and the more powerful Brahmanical faith. The Buddha came to be worshipped as an avatar of Visnu. The rites and rituals that were necessary for the worship of the Hindu gods and goddesses had now become part of Buddhism. The Buddhist monasteries were

virtually turned into Hindu temples. But then even these remaining centres of worship could not withstand the onslaught of Iktiaruddin Muhammed Bin Bakhtiar Khilji who invaded Bihar and Bengal in 1197.

329

### A short Reading List

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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### (a) Bengal Architecture Through the Ages

A B M Husain

#### **Architecture in the Ancient Period**

##### **Introduction**

Seldom in a period of South Asian histories have architectural monuments occupied a better place in foreign accounts than those in Bangladesh and its adjoining areas in ancient times. The descriptions of Bangladesh monuments by the Buddhist pilgrims Fahien in the 5<sup>th</sup> and Hiuen Tsang, I-tsing and Sheng-Chi in the 7<sup>th</sup> centuries are not mere narratives they have left for us, but also speak of a period of architectural splendour of which posterity must feel proud. To take the instance of *Pundravardhana* (Mahasthan), in an enclosed city of about 5 miles in circuit, Hiuen Tsang noticed 20 *sangharamas* (monasteries) and 100 Brahmanical temples, a fact just sufficient to illustrate the architectural magnitude of the time. Near it according to him was the magnificent *Po-shi-po* monastery (now generally identified with the *Bhasu-Vihara*) which had 'spacious halls and tall storeyed chambers'. Hiuen Tsang also visited other Buddhist centres now in Bangladesh including those of Samatata where he counted more than 30 Buddhist monasteries with 'above 2000 brethren of the *Sthavira* School'. These descriptions also find corroboration in local writings such as those of *Sandhyakar Nandi* in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and in contemporary inscriptions which often describe a temple as 'ornament of the earth', 'high as mountain peaks' or as 'obstructing the very course of the sun with its lofty and imposing towers capped by golden *kalasas*'. But alas! all these have now turned into legends: not a single monastery or a temple now exists as it was seen or described in those days. The reasons for this state of things are not far to seek. Primarily the nature of the soil and the climate are responsible. Both these conditions encourage the rapid growth of jungle vegetation. Once a building ceases to be cared for, the creeping shrubs and trees

speedily take charge, soon to break it to pieces so that before long there remains merely an unrecognisable mound of ruin. Secondly the non-durability of the major building materials - the brick and the wood, the spoliation of buildings for quarrying building materials by conquerors, the change of river courses, and the atrocities of the brick and treasure hunters account no less for this ruination.

In spite of this the archaeological excavations which started in the twenties of the last century and which are now being pursued have unveiled a number of architectural remains including monasteries and temples which not only testify to the existence of the monuments described above at one time, but also inform us of many other details which are of fundamental importance in reconstructing the early history of Bangladesh. The Buddhist manuscript illustrations of the 11th century such as those of the *Astasahasrika Prajnaparamita* and the contemporary miniature sculptural representations of various stupas and temples found in various archaeological sites also supplement these sources. In the absence of the existence of architectural monuments in their entirety, it is thus with the help of these materials only that we have to proceed in delineating the early architectural history of Bangladesh.

## Monuments

### a. Religious Buildings:

- i. Stupa: Some examples: Relic Stupa, Commemorative Stupa and Votive Stupa. Examples of the first two kinds are rare. Of Votive Stupa we have an example, now preserved in Dhaka Museum from Ashrafpur in Dhaka. Other examples are in Mainamati at *Kotila Mura* and *Itakhola Mura*.
  - ii. Monastery: Some important examples: *Sitakot Vihara* in Dinajpur (c. 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> c.), *Bhasu Vihara* in Bogra near Mahasthan (before 7<sup>th</sup> c.), *Salban Vihara* and *Ananda Vihara* in Mainamati, Comilla (c. 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> c.), *Somapur Vihara* at Paharpur in Naogaon (c. 770-810 A.D.).
  - iii. Temple: Some important examples: *Bhadra* or *Pida* type, *Rekha* type and *Ratna* type. Examples are rare from the Ancient period —*Govinda Bhita* and *Lakshindarer Medh* at Mahasthangarh —*Salban Vihara* Temple.
- b. Secular Buildings: Some examples: Mahasthan Fort, Gateways, Community Kitchens, Water reservoirs, wells and dining halls in the *Salban Vihara* and *Somapura Vihara* —Damp proof granaries at Bangarh in West Dinajpur.

## General Characteristics

A stupa was generally built on a square or circular foundation, occasionally decorated with horizontal mouldings. Over the base was erected the hemispherical dome (*anda*), occasionally over a drum (*medhi*), and surmounted by a square capital (*harmika*) with a round disk (*chhatra*) at the top.

A monastery was generally square in plan and consisted of rows of rooms on all the four sides of a vast courtyard in the middle. They must have originally had several storeys. In the centre of the courtyard was erected the main temple which was flanked on all other sides by smaller structures such as subsidiary temples, stupas, water reservoirs, baths, granaries, dining halls and kitchens -a sort of a modern residential university.

The temples were generally built on a square, rectangular or cruciform plan with an ambulatory passage round the sanctum (*garbhagriha*). The square temples often were the smallest of the three, and the cruciform the largest. In some cases pillared halls (*mandapas*) were constructed on the frontal side. The ornamentations of the temples consisted mostly of horizontal mouldings and terracotta representations of human and animal figures. The human figures represented religious and social subjects of common interest.

The fort-walls and gateways appear to be strong structures with defensive arrangements such as rampart-walks and arrow-slits. Other secular structures were also strongly built. Much cannot however be said of them because very few of them exist except the foundations. The method of construction was trabeate.

### Comments

It is regrettable that the pre-Muslim architecture of Bangladesh has not survived the test of time, but the skeleton left to us in the form of material remains is sufficient to build an imaginary picture which must have been glorious and inspiring. From the evidence we have it is not possible to delineate clearly the styles that were developed by different peoples in the different periods of history. Nor is it possible to make a clear distinction between the Hindu and Buddhist architecture that adorned the country for centuries. On the contrary homogeneity is always noticeable, and it is on the basis of this continuity that the architecture of ancient Bangladesh is generally reconstructed. That Bangladesh at one time was the focal point of Indian architecture is apparent not only from the literary accounts and inscriptional references but also from the profound influence it exercised on the architecture of South-East Asia. That the current of the architectural movement which once started in Northern India and Orissa reached a period of glory in Bangladesh before it crossed to South-East Asian countries is amply testified by the excavated remains in the various sites only touched upon, and by the numerous architectural members used in the subsequent Muslim monuments.

Hundreds of mounds, large and small, strewn in various parts of Bangladesh have not yet even been unearthed. It is not known what exactly are lying underneath these sites. Therefore, many aspects of the architectural history of ancient Bangladesh remain still unknown, and when more details become available after the opening of these sites, a period of greater glory no doubt will be unfurled.

## Mediaeval Period

### A. Sultanate Architecture

The conquest of Bengal by Bakhtiyar Khalji in 1204 opened a new chapter in the history of Bengal architecture. The architecture so long had been Hindu and Buddhist, but now it is different and Muslim. Since the architecture was then mainly a subject of royal patronage, it naturally rotated with the change of political history. One of the first acts of the Muslim conquerors, after their conquests, was to erect mosques, not only to perform the religious duty of prayer but also to show and establish the authority of Islam. Bengal also was no exception. Bakhtiyar Khalji erected 'mosques, madrasahs and khanqahs' after his conquests, but we do not know much of them, and can only form some hypotheses about their forms and characteristics. From the evidence of other countries and later examples of the country it can be surmised that they used materials readily available locally from the spoils of war. In other countries, as for example in West Asia, the Muslims immediately after their conquests used abandoned churches and Zoroastrian temples whenever necessary as mosques, but in India and in Bengal it was not possible because of the architectural character of the temples; primarily their size and orientation made them unsuitable for conversion. So what logic dictated was to give the craftsmen, mostly local, their plan and ask them to construct with local material and according to their skills. The result was obvious: a Muslim mosque constructed with materials from local temples and following local methods of construction.

Because of the unstable political condition after the conquest for more than a century, it is unlikely that many monuments were erected within this period. Except for four inscriptional references, and the extant examples of the mosque and tomb of Zafar Khan Ghazi, and the *Bari Masjid* and *Minar* at Tribeni in the Hooghly district of West Bengal, we do not have surviving examples of any religious or secular buildings. The assumption of power by the Iliyas Shahi dynasty in 1342 however changed the scene. So long the country had been ruled by Delhi Governors, occasionally rebellious and independent, but now an independent dynasty was established with authority spread over the almost entire country and with local aspirations. Haji Iliyas Shah was the first ruler of Bengal who assumed the title of 'Shahi Bangalah'. This dynasty ruled Bengal, with a short interregnum of twenty nine years (1413-42) of the House of Ganesh, from 1342 to 1487 to be followed successively first by a short rule of the Habshis (1487-93), and then by the Husain Shahis from 1493 to 1538, the Suris from 1538 to 1564, and Karranis from 1564 to the Mughal conquest in 1575. It was the most important period of the history of architecture in Bengal. The architecture then assumed a style of its own, now generally described as the 'Bengali style', distinct from the imperial Delhi Sultanate style or other regional

styles of India. Of this style the significant contributors were the Iliyas Shahis and the Husain Shahis.

## Monuments

### a. Religious Buildings:

- i. Mosques: Some important examples: *Adina Masjid* at Hazrat Pandua (1375), *Shat Gumbad Mosque*, Nine-domed Mosque and *Ronvijoypur Mosque* at Bagerhat(mid 15<sup>th</sup> c.), *Baba Adam's Mosque* at Rampal (1483), *Darasbari Masjid* (c. 1470), *Chhota Sona Masjid* and *Bara Sona Masjid* at Gaur (early 16<sup>th</sup> c.), *Bagha Masjid* (1523) and *Kushumba Masjid* (1558) in Rajshahi.
  - ii. Tombs: important examples: *Tomb of Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah* (c. 1410) in Sonargaon, *Eklakhi Mausoleum* at Gaur (1413-42), *Tomb of Khan Jahan Ali* (c. 1459) at Bagerhat.
  - iii. Madrasas: Two Known examples are : *Belbari Madrasa* in West Bengal Gaur and *Darasbari Madrasa* in Bangladesh side. The *Darasbari Madrasa* has been example, and was build in 1504, two years after the first.
  - iv. Miscellaneous Structures: Some important examples: *Minar at Chhota Pandua*, *Minar* (1487-93) and *Qadam Rasul* (1531) at Gaur.
- b. Secular Buildings: Some important examples: *Citadel of Gaur* and its *Gateways* (1435-59), *Citadel of Sataisghara* and the ruined *hammam* (c. 1342) in Pandua, the border outpost of Khalifatabad (mid 15<sup>th</sup> c.).

## General Characteristics

The extant examples of the Sultani architecture in Bengal are mostly religious monuments. Their materials are brick occasionally veneered with stone, but almost always strengthened by stone pillars or lintels quarried from older buildings. The mosques are generally without *sahn* and *riwaq*, the rare exception being the great *Adina Masjid* of Pandua. They are generally divided into several categories such as square single-domed or multi-domed, rectangular multi-domed with or without a vaulted nave, the vaults being in the form of Bengali *chau-chala* (quadri-lateral sloping-roofed) huts. In both the single or multi-domed types, sometimes a variation is effected with the addition of a *verandah* in front. The roofs are almost always curvilinear, and end in four corner towers rising only up to roof level. Two important features appear to be new. They are the insertion of a number of *mibrabs* in the *qibla* wall corresponding to the number of arched openings in the front façade of the *liwan*, and the placement of a *maqsura* in the form of a second storey attached to the right hand side of the *qibla* wall. Their corbelled pendentives are a distinguishing feature. The monuments are almost always ornamented with terracotta plaques of vegetal designs.

The tombs are always square surmounted by a single dome, and can always be compared with a single-domed mosque.

The lone example of an excavated *madrasa* at Darasbari, which we have, is a square type with cells around a courtyard. It must have had all the features of a courtyard type mosque. It is interesting that the plan so resembles the plan of the *vihara* mentioned above. The minars were of traditional type-tall, cylindrical and tapering, but giving a local look distinguishing them from those in upper India. The *Qadam Rasul* is a single-domed monument, but rectangular in design, and gives the impression of a mosque with all constructive and decorative features. We know very little about secular architecture except from the remnants of some fort walls, gateways and a *hammam*. The ruins conform to the local style with heavy walls and other decorative features of horizontal mouldings and terracotta plaques. The method of construction was always arcuate.

### Comments

Sultanate period of Muslim architecture in Bengal is the most important period of its history. It is the period when Bengali architecture took a definite form, giving its separate identity distinct from the architecture of the Delhi Sultans. Though it started with ideas taken from the earlier Islamic world through Delhi, by the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century it was completely independent with local adjustments giving a new look suitable to the aspirations of the local people. With the coming of the Mughals the style was discarded and substituted by the imperial Mughal style of Northern India in a miniature form. Nevertheless the style continued in temple construction up to the period of the British Raj, when it was eclipsed with the joint invasion by the Mughal and Western influences.

### B. The Mughal Architecture

The conquest of Bengal by the Mughals brought a new order in its political, social and cultural life. Earlier the Muslim rulers were drawn from various races such as Turks, Arabs, Abyssinians and Afghans who at the beginning worked nominally as the governors of the Delhi Sultans but subsequently threw off the yoke of their masters declaring independence and establishing their own dynastic rules. With their independence they cut off all their connections with the centre at Delhi thereby introducing a new independent system based on local aspirations and culture. The Mughals in Bengal like their masters in Northern India at Agra, Lahore or Delhi were the direct descendants of the Mongol-Timurid race of central Asia and Persia and were sent as Viceroys to represent the *Badshahs* and their rule. They were mostly the relatives of the *Badshahs* or their confidants. What was therefore introduced in Bengal during

the period was a direct rule based on Mughal life and culture at the centre. Bengal during the pre-Mughal period had an identity of its own, but now it was lost and turned into a Mughal Province with all Mughal ways in their mini forms. The architecture was no exception. What was so long the independent style was now reduced to a provincial version of the imperial style. The local characteristics except the core material vanished and these were supplanted by new forms and new techniques.

Although Bengal was conquered by Akbar's General, Munim Khan in 1575, the establishment of a complete authority over the entire area of Bengal was not attained till the beginning of Jahangir's reign. Since the period of Akbar and Jahangir was mostly occupied with wars with the local zamindars known as *Bara Bhuiyas*, very few architectural structures could be made during this period. Bengal architecture under the Mughals in Bengal was mostly the work of the subahdars under Shahjahan and Aurangzeb. During the time of Aurangzeb, Bengal *subahdari* became hereditary, and the *subahdars* then were so powerful that they led an almost independent life thereby making their own contributions to architecture, independent of the will of the Mughal emperors at the centre. Under Shaista Khan, who ruled Bengal from 1664 to 1688 with a short interregnum in 1678-79, many monuments were erected in the country, particularly around the capital of Dhaka so that some authorities even go to speak of an independent '*Shaista Khani* style'.

One important feature of the Mughal period in Bengal was that not only did the Mughals erect buildings of their own choice but also the Hindus erected temples, a large number of which are still extant in the country. Not that temples were not erected during the rule of the independent sultans, some of whom are known to have had extremely secular minds, but it must be presumed that time has consumed them. The nature of the buildings, small and vertical in form, the nature of the climate with heavy rains during a substantial part of the year and the nature of the patronage must speak for this rarity. During the rule of the Mughals the patronage of zamindars, both Muslim and Hindu alike, along with the time factor must have been some of the most important reasons for this survival of Hindu temple buildings.

## Monuments

### a. Religious Buildings:

- Mosques: Some important examples: *Jami Masjid* of old Malda (1596), *Kherua Masjid* (1582), *Atiya Masjid* (1409), *Mosque of Musa Khan* (early 17<sup>th</sup> c.), *Mosque of Shah Niamatullah Wali* at Firozpur (mid 17<sup>th</sup> c.), *Mosque of Haji Khawaja Shahbaz* (mid 17<sup>th</sup> c.), *Sat Masjid* (late 17<sup>th</sup> c.), *Khawaja Ambar's Mosque* (1680), *Kartalab Khan's Mosque* (1700-04), *Khan Muhammed Mirdha's Mosque* (1706), *Dhanmondi Idgah* (1640).

- ii. Tombs: Some important examples: *Tombs of Bibi Pari* (c. 1684), *Dara Begum's Tomb* (late 17<sup>th</sup> c.), *Tomb of Haji Khwaja Shabbaz* (1679), *Octagonal Tomb at Rohanpur* (mid 17<sup>th</sup> c.).
- iii. Temples: Some important examples: *Dhakeswari Temple* (mostly modernized), *Jor-Bangla Temple at Pabna* (early 17<sup>th</sup> c.), *Raja Ram Temple at Khalia in Faridpur* (early 18<sup>th</sup> c.), *Kantanagar Temple in Dinajpur* (1752).
- b. Secular Buildings: Some important examples: *Bara Katra* (1644), *Chhota Katra* (1663), *Lalbagh Fort* (1678), *Pagla Bridge* (mid 17<sup>th</sup> c.), *Sonargaon Bridge* (mid 17<sup>th</sup> c.), *Tabkhana at Firozpur* (c. 1664), *Idrakpur Fort* (1660), *Sonakanda Fort* (mid 17<sup>th</sup> c.), *Zinjira Fort* (late 17<sup>th</sup> c.).

### General Characteristics

Most of the Mughal monuments are seen in Dhaka and Murshidabad, the capitals of the Mughal province. Monuments scattered throughout the province are also noticed. These are mostly built in imitation of the Mughal imperial monuments in Northern India, but on a smaller scale. The material, as in the Sultanate period, is brick but always plastered over. The mosques in most cases are rectangular and three-domed, the middle one being larger than the side ones. The domes, bulbous in shape, to be distinguished from the inverted cup-shaped of the earlier period, are built on round pendentives instead of the corbelled pendentives of the Sultan period. Corresponding to the domes are gateways in front and *mibrabs* inside the back walls. The curvilinear roof is now gone, and instead merlon parapets have been placed to ornament the cornice. The same merlons are also noticed around the base of the dome, which is now crowned by finials. The arches are now four-centred instead of two-centred, and the pillars within the monuments are brick-built instead of the quarried stone columns of the earlier period. Terracottas were also discarded. The ornamentation is now in the form of plaster panelling, and the gateways are seen decorated with imitation *muqarnas*-works. The principle of ornamentation is the same irrespective of the form of monuments.

The temples are interesting. They combine both the features of the Sultan style with its curvilinear form of cornice and terracotta ornamentation and the Mughal plaster-covered surface with four-centred arches of engrailed design. The *do-chala* and *chau-chala* roofs which were seen as features in some important monuments of the Sultan period are now fairly common in temples.

### Comments

The number of monuments surviving from the Mughal period are more in number than those from the Sultan period. The reason is nearness of time, and the cheapness of material and easy technique of construction. Because of their

simplicity and cheapness the style got its way throughout the length and breadth of the country to be emulated not only by the Mughal officers, but also by local zamindars eager to be benevolent to the public. The mosques in the countryside are mostly square and single-domed, and have created a tradition which is followed even today.

The temples, unlike the Mughal monuments, did not break with the past. They combined the features of both Sultani and Mughal architecture and may be looked upon as examples of continuity throughout the ages.

### **Modern Period : 1765 to the Present Day**

The year 1765 may be regarded as the starting point of modern history in India. Although western influence started to come to India directly with the arrival of the Portuguese at the Port of Calicot in 1498 and then through the Dutch, the English and the French, the period of colonisation with conquest began with the defeat of Nawab Sirajuddoula by the English at the battle of Palasey in 1757. The period immediately after 1757 was a period of confusion, but with the establishment of the dual government by the English East India Company and the granting of the *diwani* by the Mughal emperor in 1765 the period of consolidation began. The Company kept the age-long zamindari system with modification of the mode of revenue collection and started to appoint new zamindars. These new zamindars revived the old system of instituting public works such as digging of large tanks, building mosques and temples, but with a difference. In the Sultanate or Mughal period, such public works were the prerogatives of the Sultans, *Badshahs* or their Viceroys as *amirs* or *subahdars* in the provinces. With those prerogatives now withdrawn, the new zamindars started to erect more monuments with the intention of both religious piety and public utility. Monuments were erected now in larger numbers by absentee landlords obviously to mark their presence in the local areas and thereby to get people's allegiance. In this period were thus erected not only religious edifices of the earlier tradition but also secular buildings such as palaces and official buildings with characteristics of western influence. Along with these were also erected buildings by the colonial powers for their own use such as *kuthis* and churches not, however, without local characteristics. It was this continuation of local tradition and western influence, which created a new style known as the colonial style. From the establishment of the English as the supreme power in the middle of the eighteenth century, almost all the extant monuments in Bengal of the colonial period are English or British colonial. During the Pakistani period, an Islamic revivalism occasionally mingled with British imperial idealism was attempted in the architecture of Bangladesh but in the absence of expertise and necessary finance the objective was not achieved.

In the more recent period internationalism both in design and technique has been adopted as the order particularly in official and commercial buildings. Multi-storied residential buildings are also getting popular. The spirit of nationalism and freedom has created new hopes, and these have aptly been demonstrated in creating some of the most attractive monuments of our time.

## Monuments

### a. Religious Buildings:

- i. Mosques: some important examples: *Chaumohani Mosque* in Chittagong (1790), *Sitara Mosque* in Dhaka (originally a 18<sup>th</sup>, but enlarged and redecorated in the last c.), *Kismat Maria Mosque* in Raishahi (19<sup>th</sup> c.), *Baitul Mukarram Masjid* in Dhaka, *Dhaka University Mosque*, *Education Extension Centre Mosque* in Dhanmondi, *Mosque at National Memorial in Savar*.
- ii. Temples: Some important examples: *Govinda Temple* at Puthia (early 19<sup>th</sup> c.), *Siva Temple* at Puthia (1823), *Aat-chala Temple* at Chandina (19<sup>th</sup> c.).
- iii. Churches: Some important examples: *Church of St. Nicholas Tolentino* at Nagori (originally 1663), *Tejgaon Church* (originally 1663), *Anglican Church* at Johnson Road in Dhaka (1824), *St. Antones Church* at Panjora (1905).

### b. Secular Buildings:

- i. Kuthis: Some important examples: *Sardah Kuthis* (late 18th c.), *Bara Kuthi* at Rajshahi (early 19<sup>th</sup> c.)
- ii. Palaces: Some important examples: *Ruplal House* in Dhaka (early 19<sup>th</sup> c.), *Balihati Palace* in Manikganj (mid 19<sup>th</sup> c.), *Dighapatia Palace* in Natore (mid 19<sup>th</sup> c.), *Dubalhati Palace* in Naogaon (late 19<sup>th</sup> c.), *Tajhat Palace* in Rangpur (late 19<sup>th</sup> c.), *Ahsan Manzil* in Dhaka (1872), *Shashi Lodge* in Mymensingh (1905-11).
- iii. Official Buildings: Some important examples: *Old Highcourt Building* in Dhaka (1905-11), *Curzon Hall* in Dhaka (1905-11), *Carmichael College* in Rangpur (1916), *Salimullah Muslim Hall* (1929), *High Court Building* in Dhaka, and *Bangabhaban*.

## General Characteristics

Till the introduction of the colonial style the monuments of the period exhibit the traditional features of the Mughal period. The mosques and temples bore the same characteristics as they did in the preceding period except that in some cases mosques were ornamented with ceramic tiles and plaster vegetation motifs and temples erected with more *ratnas*. Some of these features also appear to have been derived from the North Indian Mughal monuments of the seventeenth century. The *ratnas*, it is very likely, are an adaptation from the *chhatris* built around the domes begun in the Sultanate period but perfected in Mughal times.

One of the important aspects of the temples of this period is the verticality created by superimposed *chau-chalas* generally described as *aat-chala* or pyramidal spires, which are occasionally very high. Because of this verticality the temples of this type are weaker than the other types and this must have been responsible for a speedy decline. The churches of this period are no doubt copies of their country-churches, but with an adaptation of local features such as pointed arches and plaster-coverings.

The colonial architecture in India has often been described as Indo-British, i.e., Indian and British elements mixed together. What is Indian is both Hindu and Muslim, and what is British is both British and classical. The mixed style the British created with the intention of satisfying the local people and at the same time not forgetting their own imperial outlook. Colonial architecture is marked by majestic buildings of residential and official nature with lofty domes and classical pillars, and with semi-circular arches and pediments. In some cases only Indian elements have been put together, but in such a way that they bear a new look easily distinguishable from the architecture of the past. Colonial architecture became very popular with the local zamindars who while erecting palaces not only kept their requirements in mind but also emulated the imperial dignity to satisfy their foreign masters. In the Pakistani period nothing new was created in Bangladesh. In some mosques Islamic forms with *sahn* and *riwaq* were tried, but indeed they became bad copies of the great examples. In official buildings what was done was just to imitate the colonial examples of the early twentieth century.

The creation of Bangladesh has opened a new vista for the architects to create according to the hopes and aspirations of the people, and it must be said that in some cases, as for example, in residential buildings and memorials they have been successful. The new designs of the central *Shahid Minar*, the *National Memorial* and the *Mausoleum of the Three Leaders* at Dhaka speak of the ingenuity and mastery of the architects. One of the characteristics of Bangladesh architecture is that they look forward to invent new designs and use new techniques according to time and space, this being also the characteristic of the present day world. It can thus now be said with some amount of confidence that they are now looking forward to membership of the new international community.

### Comments

Like all other countries of the world Bengal also passed through vicissitude of history, but unlike many others it never lost its spirit of individuality. The architecture although underwent changes at the hands of different peoples at different times, nevertheless maintained a link always to speak of 'continuity' particularly in religious and residential buildings. The present day tall commercial and residential buildings, prompted by technological advancement, are a new development, and if it is a break with the tradition for Bangladesh, it

is also a break for all other countries. It is heartening that Bangladesh is not lagging behind in grasping the modern methods. It is our hope that Bangladeshi architects, while keeping in mind their own individuality in buildings of social and cultural importance, will nevertheless march forward to keep pace with time and world unity.

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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### (b) Painting and Sculpture in Bangladesh

Nazrul Islam

#### Painting

The artistic tradition of Bangladesh is rooted in its town planning, architecture and sculptural arts dating back to nearly 2300 years. The tradition of the art of painting in Bangladesh can be traced back to the rules of the Palas (8<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> centuries), the Chandras (10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> centuries), the Varmans (11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> centuries) and the Senas (11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> centuries). Most of these early works are illustrated hand-written manuscripts, known as *Punthi*. These manuscripts were written on palm leaves (*Talpata*). Some paintings were done on the wooden covers of the *Punthis*. Some of these *Punthis* are dated, others have no dates. Some illustrated *Punthis* are also found in the Muslim Period (end of 13<sup>th</sup> century to middle of 15<sup>th</sup> century).

With some exceptions, the illustrated *Punthis* are religious texts. The pictures relate to various gods and goddesses. Some of the *Punthi*-pictures illustrate the life of Lord Buddha and the *Jataka* stories. The Buddhist religious philosophy, specially *Tantric* philosophy, formed the basis of these paintings.

Among the invaluable collections of these Pala manuscript paintings are the ones preserved at the Cambridge University Library, Asiatic Society of Bengal, Kolkata and the Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi. There are rich illustrations in the *Punthi Ashtasahasrika Pragyaparamita* written during Mahipal's rule (995 – 1043). These paintings are small in dimension but depict long stories, mostly related to the Buddha and his associates. These paintings try to evoke devotion and seriousness, but in the course of implementing these, glimpses of ordinary folk life of Bengal of the time also appear. In these pictures generally the main character is placed in the centre and shown larger than the other figures, who remain on either side of the central figure. The surrounding spaces are filled in by floral or geometric designs. The style of painting is

characterized by bold flowing lines and two dimensionality of perspective. The pictures show skill in figure drawing.

The tradition of the artistic style of the Pala Period in Bengal continued through the Chandra, the Varman and the Sena periods in some form or other and their influence spread also over to Nepal and Tibet.

Following these periods came the Sultani Period (early 14<sup>th</sup> century to late 15<sup>th</sup> century) when painting received less importance, although architecture and the decorative arts flourished. Interestingly, a significant development in the art of painting of the time was the increased popularity of the *Patua* style, which had begun much earlier during Raja Sasanka (7<sup>th</sup> Century). The minstrels used to go around in villages singing with illustrated *Patas* (pictures) on cloth. The *Patas* were based mostly on Hindu religious stories but later the Gajir *Pata* (15<sup>th</sup> century onward) were based on Muslim saints (Satyapir). *Patas* were also based on magic (*Jadupata*).

Another age-old tradition in folk painting can be said to be the art of *Alpana* illustration, floral or geometric designs in bright colours done on the floor and on courtyards or walls. (The tradition continues till today and has been enriched by its extension on major city avenues on such occasions as 21<sup>st</sup> February in Dhaka).

The Mughal rule was officially entrenched in present day Bangladesh with the establishment of Dhaka (Jahangirnagar) as the capital of Subah Bangla in 1610. Although architecture flourished in Dhaka during the Mughals, there is not much evidence of the development of painting at that time. Following the shifting of the capital from Dhaka to Murshidabad in 1716, a new style of painting developed there. This style has been labeled by some art theoreticians as the Bengal-Mughal style or the Murshidabad style of painting. The typical paintings were based on portraiture of the nobility, court scenes, hunting scenes and also stories of Hindu mythology, Ragmalas and Muslim religious occasions. Later on, around late 18<sup>th</sup> century to early 19<sup>th</sup> century, artists of Dhaka produced interesting paintings on the Muharram or Eid Processions or Janmasthami Processions. Away in Calcutta there took place the revival of the *Pata* tradition towards the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. These *pata* paintings were known as the Kalighata *patas*, as these were done by the *patuas* (artists) of Kalighat, a suburb of Calcutta (now Kolkata). These *patas* were distinctive for spontaneity of the thick brush line and freshness of colour. The pictures were generally satirical presentations of the Calcutta Babus and of every day life.

Around the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British established two modern art schools in India, one in Madras in 1850 and the other in Calcutta in 1854 to be followed by others in Bombay and Lahore. Art graduates of Calcutta faced competition from the Kalighata Patuas. However, in time the Patuas lost their popularity and the modern trained artists began to make their mark. Initially, the Calcutta Art School was based on purely British or European

models of art but around the end of the century, E.B Havel, the new Principal of the Calcutta Art School, thought it better to revive the eastern tradition in painting. In this effort he found Abanindranath Tagore as an associate. Abanindranath was made Principal of the Calcutta Art School in 1905; coincidentally that was also the year of the first Partition of Bengal.

Abanindranath established the Bengal School of painting, neo-classical in nature, which tried to revive the Mughal style with treatment of Chinese and Japanese wash techniques and European landscape elements. Abanindranath had several great disciples like Nandalal Basu, Mukul De and Abdur Rahman Chughtai. But there were great individualists within Abanindranath's own family, like his elder brother Gaganendranath who developed his own modern cubist style or Abanindranath's uncle, Rabindranath, the poet, who also became famous as an artist in the 1930s with his expressionist surrealist paintings and drawings.

As opposed to the Bengal School of Abanindranath, Jamini Roy led a style which came to be known as the Calcutta School, basically depending on modern western styles rather than on Abanindranath's Indian neo-classicism. But Jamini Roy soon turned to the *Patua* style and developed his own unique style, closely akin to the Patuas. In his later phase, however, Jamini Roy became rather stereotyped because of a tendency to mass produce. In our own time we have seen the influence of Jamini Roy on Zainul Abedin and more so on Quamrul Hasan, the two great artists of Bangladesh.

Zainul Abedin, however, had distanced himself quite early from both the Bengal School and the Calcutta School. He made himself an artist apart from the rest. As a powerful expressionist, he made an extraordinary synthesis of western social realism with eastern aesthetics, particularly with the economy and fluency of line.

After the partition of the subcontinent, and the creation of Pakistan with Dhaka as the Capital of East Bengal or East Pakistan, opportunities came for developing a modern art institute. Zainul Abedin took the onerous task of establishing the Government Institute of Fine Arts in Dhaka (in 1948) with Quamrul Hasan, Safiuddin Ahmed, Anwarul Huq, Khawaja Shafiq Ahmed and others. The Institute was later upgraded to a government college, and subsequently made the Institute of Fine Art of the University of Dhaka. It now offers a four-year degree programme, a two-year Master's programme and also a Ph.D. programme. Chittagong University and Rajshahi University also have their own Fine Arts Departments. Some private universities have also introduced fine arts programmes. There are now several other colleges of arts and crafts. Large numbers of people now receive art education. Fine Arts have become a major cultural activity in Bangladesh and artists have attained high social status receiving the highest national awards every year.

The contemporary modern artists in this country express themselves in techniques and styles not too dissimilar from the ones followed by their

colleagues in other Asian countries or in the west, yet there is something distinctive in the works of many a contemporary Bangladeshi artist. A dominant feature which offers distinction to the contemporary modern painting of Bangladesh is perhaps the identification of our artists with the nature and landscape of the country. The meandering rivers, the green crop fields, lush foliage, colossal floods, devastating cyclones, amorphous clouds, the heavy monsoon rains and the bright winter sun, have all served as constant sources of inspiration to the artists of this country. Very few however among the established senior artists have depicted nature in a realistic manner. Rather nature has been represented in impressionistic, expressionistic, surrealistic and symbolic manners. Beautiful impressionist works on landscape were produced by eminent painters like Zainul Abedin (1914-1976) and Quamrul Hasan, (1921-1989) in the fifties and sixties, as well as by younger artists later. Elements of nature have been picked up also for symbolic images, or to create stylized forms and shapes. The most successful of the senior painters in this style are Safiuddin Ahmed, Quayum Chowdhury, Samarjit Roy Chowdhury and Rafiqunnabi. They have created forms which are unmistakably theirs. These can be the stern of a boat, the form of a tree or a leaf or a bird or a fish. The colours too are representational, browns, greens and blues predominating. Even the more abstract of painters in Bangladesh, like Mohammed Kibria, Aminul Islam, Abdur Razzaque, Murtaza Baseer, Syed Jahangir, Kazi Abdul Baset, Devdas Chakravorty, Shamsul Islam Nizami, Abu Taher, Mominul Reza, Kazi Gias and others select their colours from the natural environment of Bangladesh.

A large number of painters have based their semi-abstract compositions on the natural landscape. This group of painters include Hashem Khan, Mohammad Mohsin, Hasan Habib, Monirul Islam, Mansurul Karim, Farida Zaman, Hashi Chakravorty, Bonijul Huq, Chandra Shekhar De, Jamal Ahmed, Alokes Ghosh, K.M.A. Quayyum and Shamsuddoha.

Another distinction of contemporary painting in Bangladesh can be discerned in the influence of the national artistic tradition, which is rural-folk. Thus some of the painters are in love with the beauty not only of the primary colours and shapes of folk crafts but also with the many traditional motifs and forms in folk art, including the *Patas*. Some of the modern painters of contemporary Bangladesh have very intelligently used these folk motifs in their works. The two most respected artists of the country, Zainul Abedin and Quamrul Hasan were the more passionate users of the folk motifs. Other distinguished artists who have made intelligent adaptation of the folk elements and motifs include Quayum Chowdhury (particularly of the designs on boats), the late Rashid Chowdhury (1932-1986) (of woven designs) and Abdus Shakoor Shah.

More than the natural landscape or the rural folk arts, crafts and motifs, the people and life of Bangladesh have probably been a greater source of inspiration for modern painters of this country. And this is the third major characteristic

feature of Bangladeshi art. The representations of the life of the people have been made through figurative expressionist or surrealist styles. The rural mass has received more attention but the urban proletariat has not been neglected. Zainul Abedin the founder of modern painting in Bangladesh rose into eminence with his extraordinarily powerful sketches of the Bengal Famine of 1943. These sketches remain the most significant works of art by any Bangladeshi artist even till today. Quamrul Hasan and S.M Sultan (1923-1994) have also been committed to the portrayal of life of the people, particularly of the rural habitat. Quamrul Hasan was a great artist of rural women's life. He had developed a remarkable style of lyrical lines and bright colours. Sultan's faith in the working class of this country is demonstrated through his vigorous style and through the depiction of the robust male and buxom female figures in his paintings. The style is more symbolic than realistic.

Many young painters have followed the tradition of these great senior artists in depicting the life of the people in a more or less semi-realistic or figurative expressionist manner. Of them, Shahabuddin is particularly important. Although he now lives and works in Paris, the subject matter of most of his works is still the people of Bangladesh. He has a powerful brush and an extraordinary dexterity in drawing of the male figure in motion. Among other young artists concerned with the portrayal of people's life are Mahbubul Amin, Ranjit Das and others.

Major political events, particularly, the War of Liberation in 1971, has inspired many of our artists, both old and young, to create memorable works of art, in painting, in graphics and in sculpture. Remarkable paintings came from the brush of Quamrul Hasan, Aminul Islam, Shahabuddin, Chandra Sekhar De, Hashi Chakravarty and others.

The precarious human condition that characterizes our present day society has been the subject matter of painting for several angry young artists. They are obviously unhappy with the social injustices and degeneration of values. The works of these artists are characterized by stylized figurative elements with occasional symbolism and surrealistic mannerism. Shishir Bhattacharya, Laila Mansur, Hritendra Sharma, Nilufar Chaman, Dhali Al Mamun, Nisar Hossain, and others belong to this genre of artists.

The human condition also appeals to talented young painters like G.S. Kabir and Mohammed Younus but they prefer a rather cool composure combining elements of geometric abstraction with realistic or expressionistic style. Many of the young artists have also shown talent in the innovation or adaptation of a new medium, such as installation art of Asoke Karmakar.

In the print medium, new dimensions have been added. There has also been excellence in the quality of expression. Beginning with the works of Safiuddin Ahmed, Abdur Razzaque, Mohamad Kibria, through Rafiqunnabi, Monirul Islam, Kalidas Karmaker, Abdus Satter and A.K.M Alamgir, the achievement in

the print or graphic medium is remarkable. Among the talented younger print makers are Ratan Majumder, Rokeya Sultana, Mohammad Moslem Mia, Amirul Momenin, Rafi Huq and Habibur Rahman. Although the works of some of the graphic artists are overwhelmingly style and technique biased, in others one finds critical statement of the societal condition.

A remarkable phenomenon in the contemporary art of Bangladesh has been the emergence of talented women artists in the recent decades. Of them, Farida Zaman, Rokeya Sultana, (Late) Dipa Huq, Kanak Champa Chakma, Nilufer Chaman, Laila Mansur, Nasrin Begum and Murshida Arzoo Alpana are noteworthy.

Another interesting development in Bangladesh art has been the active participation of self-taught painters, the most prominent among them being Abdus Salam, an architect planner, Kazi Salahuddin, social science graduate and Bulbon Osman, an art-critic and writer.

## Sculpture

The sculptural tradition of Bangladesh is said to be as rich as that of the other parts of the South Asian (Indian) Subcontinent. Some of the unauthenticated specimens of sculpture found in Bangladesh date back as early as the Sunga and Kushana periods. That specimens belonging to the Gupta Period (5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries) were found in parts of present Bangladesh territories need not cause any controversy. The local tradition in sculpture flourished, however, under the rulers of Bengal, the Palas and the Senas (8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries), who followed Buddhist and Vaishnavite-Brahmanic faiths respectively. The sculptures during these periods in Bengal, like sculptures elsewhere in India during and before them, were generally symbolic-religious. Sculpture, like all forms of traditional Indian art, was ideally conceived.

The most highly artistic works are those on Buddha, Vishnu, Ganga and Manjusri. These evoke devotional emotion. There were also sculptural works evoking sensuality. These are human figures, rhythmically positioned and with female body elements, like breasts and hips, exaggerated in shape and size. Major centres of sculptural finds were Mahasthan, Mainamati, Paharpur, Vikrampur, Sonargaon, Dinajpur, Faridpur, Chittagong and Comilla.

Most of the sculptural works of these periods were made on black stones brought from Rajmahal. Sandstones and red-stones were also used. Copper and bronze, and sometimes gold and silver were also used. Some wooden sculptures of these periods have also been found.

Under the Muslim and British rules in India, sculpture was more or less abandoned as an art form. A popular belief that sculpture (since it mostly amounted to the figurative representation and was very closely connected to the portrayal of religious figures) was against the Islamic faith, probably was the main reason for sculpture being forgotten as an art form during the Muslim rule

in India. But its neglect during most part of British rule is somewhat intriguing, since around the same time this art medium flourished in the western world and other visual art mediums developed in India itself.

Thus for several centuries sculpture remained in the background in this subcontinent only to be revived in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (However, the art of making the *Protimas* during the *Pujas* had a continuity).

Art in the contemporary world is secular and individualistic as against the religious and anonymous art of the past. Art as a means of expression of secular faith has also found its rightful place in modern Bangladesh. Painting has already become a very powerful medium of expression of our artists. Because of its rather obscure background sculpture is taking somewhat more time to gain momentum in this country.

However, a very modern form of sculpture was introduced in this country in the 1950s, interestingly by a female artist, Novera Ahmed. She took her artistic training in Europe, and came back to Dhaka in the mid-fifties. She executed a very large number of interesting sculptural works and put up a solo exhibition, which was entitled *The Inner Gaze*. Novera Ahmed mostly worked with concrete and white cement. She was thoroughly modern in style and was heavily influenced by such great British sculptors as Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth. Unfortunately, Novera's career in Bangladesh ended within the early 60s. Some of her excellent works can be seen in Dhaka, particularly the relief works at the Dhaka University Library (formerly Central Public Library) and a sculpture recently placed in the lawn of the Bangladesh National Museum Campus, by courtesy of the original owners of the piece. Novera's efforts were totally her own and were not aimed at starting an organized sculptural movement. But she had by herself set a high standard of modern sculptural art in Bangladesh.

A movement in sculptural education and training was initiated in the mid-sixties by the College of Arts and Crafts in Dhaka (now the Institute of Fine Art of Dhaka University). The leadership was given by a senior teacher of the college, Abdur Razzaque, a reputed painter and graphic artist with training in sculpture. To start with, Razzaque had a number of very talented students like (the late) Anwar Jahan, Syed Abdullah Khalid, Hamiduzzam Khan, Manzurul Hai, Enamul Haque Enam and Shamim Sikder. Most of these early students of the College have later established themselves as serious sculptors. Subsequently many more young artists have joined the pursuit of sculpture.

Abdur Razzaque, winner of the 1990 Ekushe Padak and a major painter of the country, is also a very talented sculptor. His creative acumen has been expressed best in semi-abstract figurative forms and pure abstract forms in wood and metal. But his monumental realistic work of a lone freedom fighter (*Jagrot Chourangi*) placed at the Joydevpur cross-roads symbolizes the heroic role of the freedom fighters and inspires the people whenever they pass along that

route. As the first piece of post liberation outdoor representation of a human figure on a grand scale, this work has set a new direction in art in Bangladesh by breaking a social taboo against the medium. The piece was commissioned by the Bangladesh Army.

Some very successful and touching modern sculptural works have been produced by Hamiduzzaman Khan. People tortured by the Pakistani army and their collaborators during the War of Liberation, the heroic freedom fighters and the victims of devastating coastal cyclones have been the major subject matters of his work. He has applied contemporary and modern expressionist and abstract styles to depict his ideas. For a medium he prefers bronze, welding and environmental collage (such as with sand or other items). He has also executed a number of major commissioned works, including the composition of three birds at Bangabhaban, the President's House, the Charging Freedom Fighter at Sylhet Cantonment or the Wounded Freedom Fighter (*Sangshaptak*) at the Jahangirnagar University campus.

Abdullah Khalid's name in sculpture has become permanent with the execution of the Three Freedom Fighters known as the *Aparajeyo Bangla* standing in the campus of the Arts Faculty of Dhaka University. This is a slightly more than life size work in reinforced concrete. The piece has become symbolic of revolutionary activities of students of Dhaka University.

Nitun Kundu, another senior artist is also a sculptor in the abstract form. But his large sculptural work on the Freedom Fighters (*Shabash Bangladesh*) placed at the Rajshahi University Campus is a realistic work. Rasha, a self taught sculptor, and an international award winner, depicts the distressed human conditions in large wooden figurative compositions in the expressionist style. Shamim Sikder, the first serious female sculptor since pioneer Novera Ahmed, is prolific in production and works mainly with cement and copper. She is a sculptor of the human form and of portraiture. Two of her large sculptural compositions (*Shoparjito Shadinota* and *Shadinota Sangram*) adorn Dhaka University campus based on the Liberation War theme.

Among the very young sculptors, Mahbubur Rahman has already earned considerable honour and reputation through his enigmatic sculptural statements on the contemporary social predicaments. One of his large works is in the collection of the prestigious Fukuoka Museum of Arts in Japan.

A breakthrough was made in Bangladesh art through the use of terracotta as a medium of modern creative work. Terracotta has a very rich and old tradition in Bangladesh as evident from the beautiful works at Mainamati or in the walls of the Kantaji Mandir in Dinajpur. This has now been revived by artists like Aloke Roy, and others. Interesting works in the surrealist style distinguish Aloke Roy.

Ceramic unfortunately has not been able to make much of a mark in spite of the rich tradition of pottery in Bangladesh. Abu Sayeed Talukder has

however appeared with some distinction with his coloured pottery and painter Nizami has also shown creative originality in ceramic.

Modern sculptural art moves ahead in Bangladesh amidst several serious constraints which also includes a lack of its universal social acceptability. However, some degree of state or corporate patronage along with support of the connoisseurs of art offer encouragement to the young sculptors of the country. At least there is no dearth of talent.

Contemporary art in Bangladesh has indeed been a vital creative activity for the last nearly five decades, ever since its institutional beginning with the establishment of the Institute of Arts in 1948 in Dhaka. Fine Art is now taught at undergraduate and postgraduate levels at different universities of the country. The organization of the ten Asian Art Biennials since 1981 is also one evidence of this vitality. The remarkable standard of painting, graphics and sculpture in Bangladesh has been proven beyond doubt by the large number of our artists being awarded prizes in prestigious international competitions in Asia and the West and by their frequent participation in major Asian or international shows. The attitude of the Bangladeshi artists in expressing themselves is fundamentally modern and universal and yet one could say that emotions, feelings, and cultural and political symbolism rather than mere technical or stylistic adventurism, characterize the contemporary art of this country. Our very rich artistic heritage in painting, sculpture and other arts, provide the necessary inspiration to our contemporary artists. In the arts we do have a future.

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## *Written in Bengla*

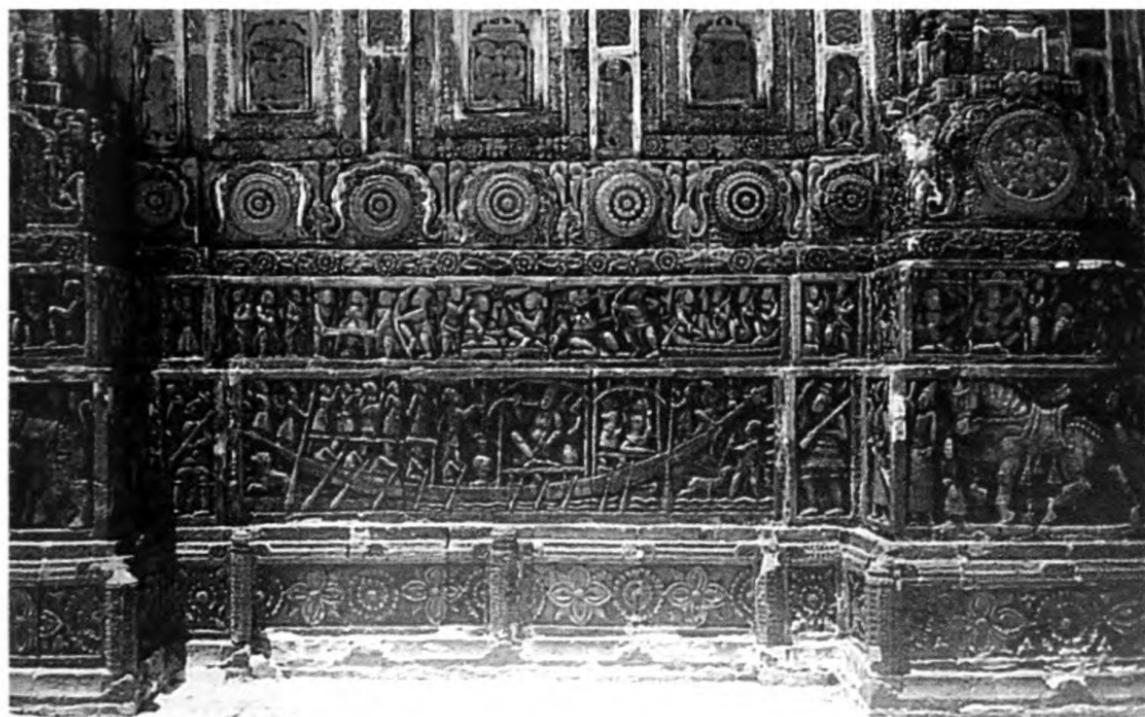
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তরফদার, ম. র., ১৯৮৭, বাংলার শিল্পকলা, আনিসুজ্জামান (সম্পাদিত), বাংলা সাহিত্যের ইতিহাস, প্রথম খণ্ড, বাংলা একাডেমী, ঢাকা, পৃ. ১৫৪-২৩।

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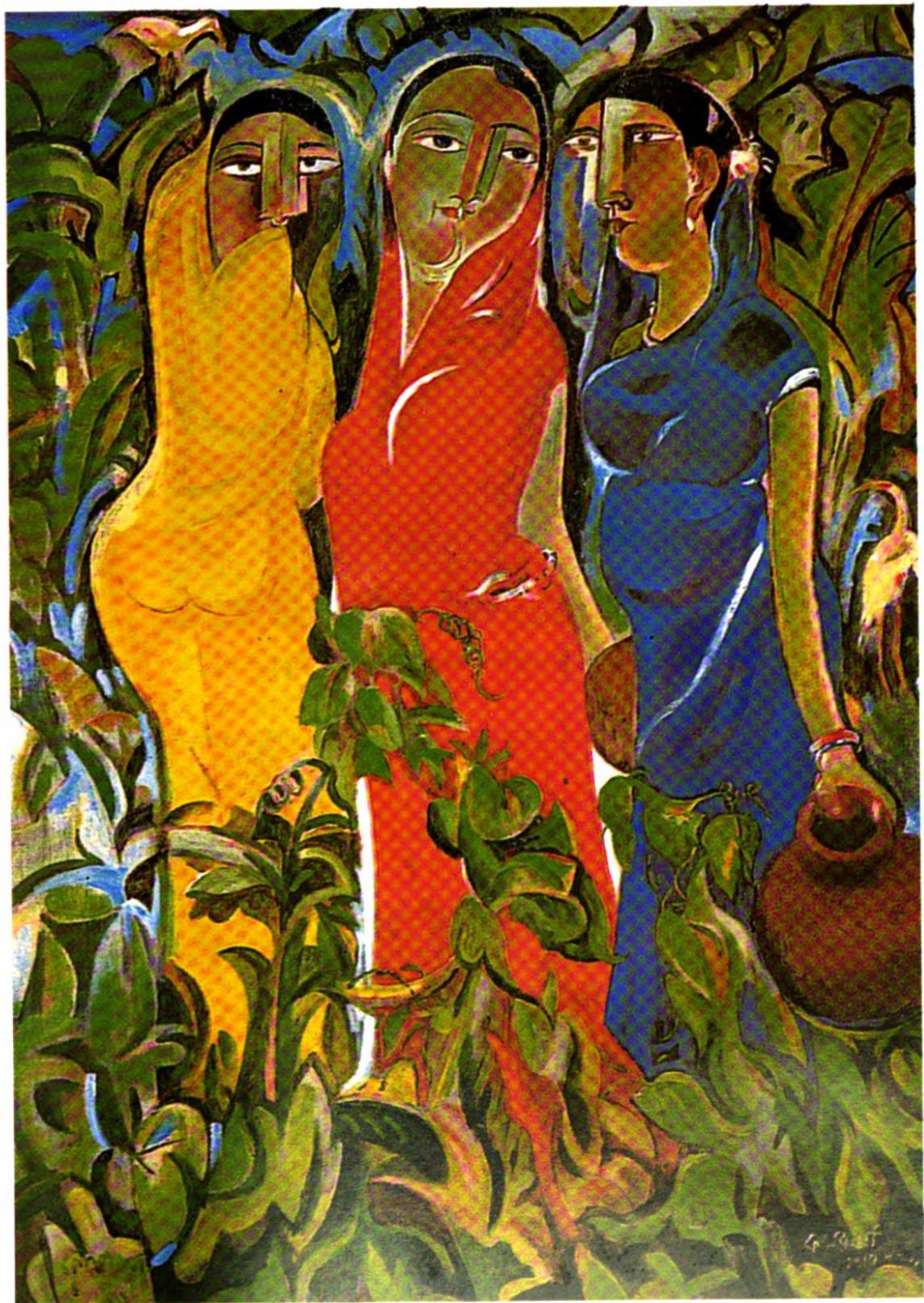
16. Surya from Sukhabaspur, Dhaka, Black Chlorite, Sculpture, Early Hindu Period



17. Terracota panel from Kantaji Mandir, Dinajpur, 18<sup>th</sup> Century

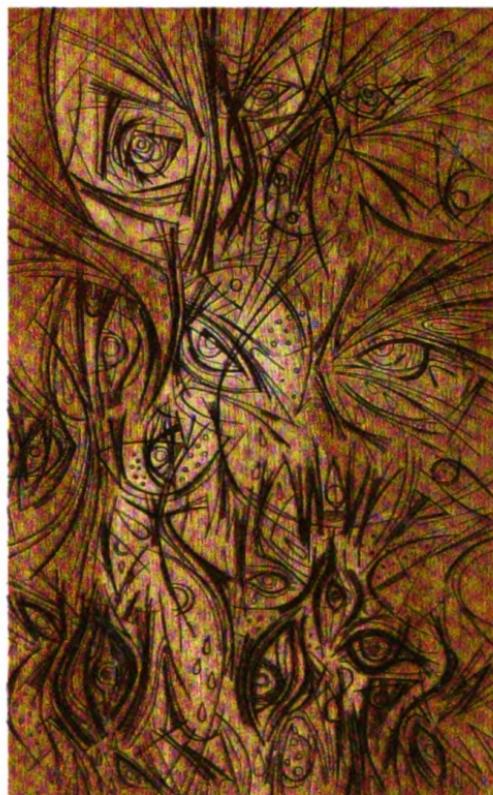


18. Zainul Abedin, Famine Sketch, Ink, 1943

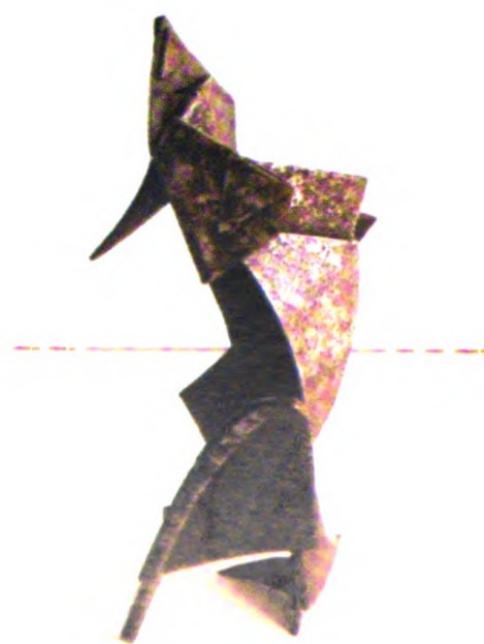


19. Quamrul Hasan, Three Women, Oil, 1983

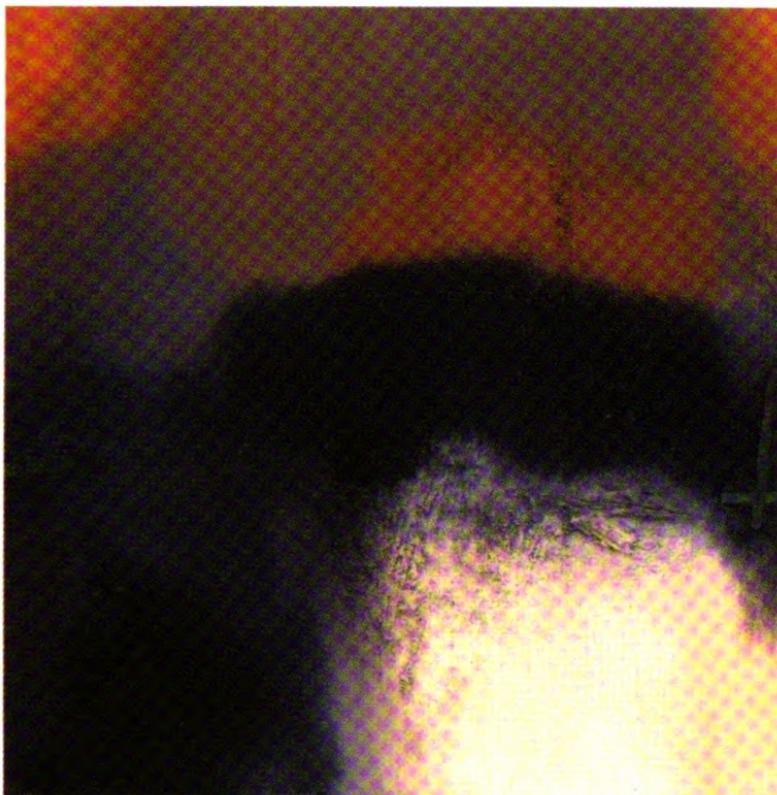
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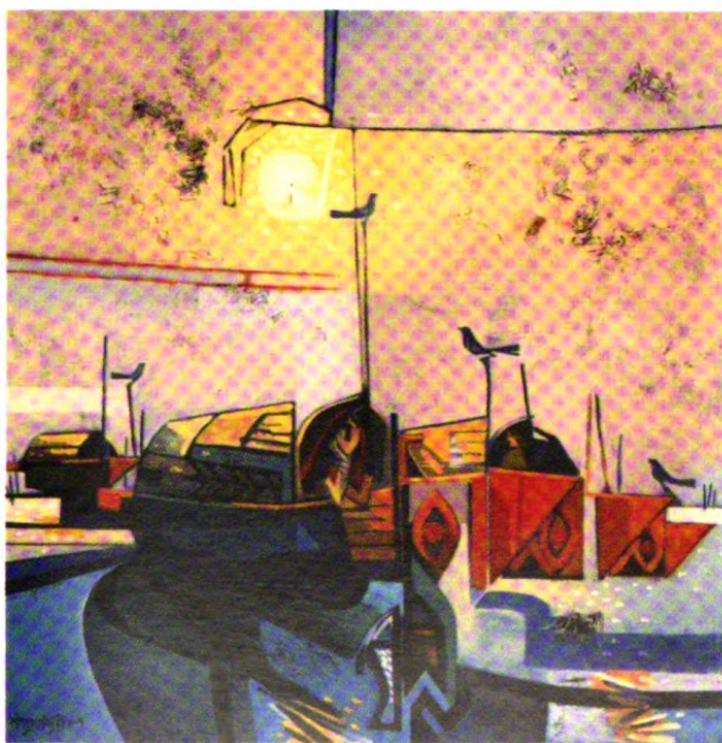
20. Safiuddin Ahmed, In memory of 1971, Copper Engraving, 1984



21. Abdur Razzaque, Composition, Steel, 1980



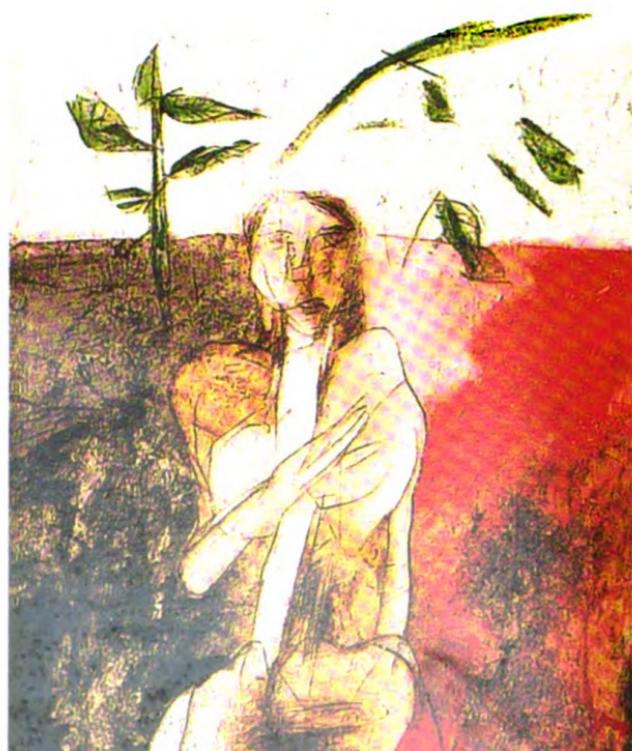
22. Mohammed Kibria, Painting, Oil, 1993



23. Qayyum Chowdhury, River at Noon, Oil, 2000



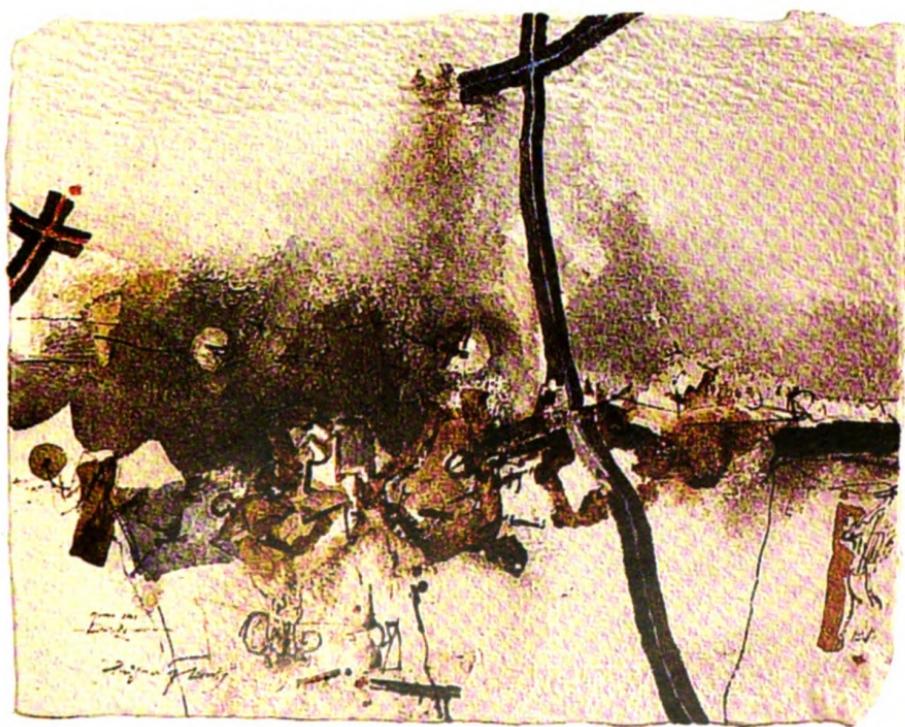
24. Abu Taher, Composition with Red, Oil, 2000



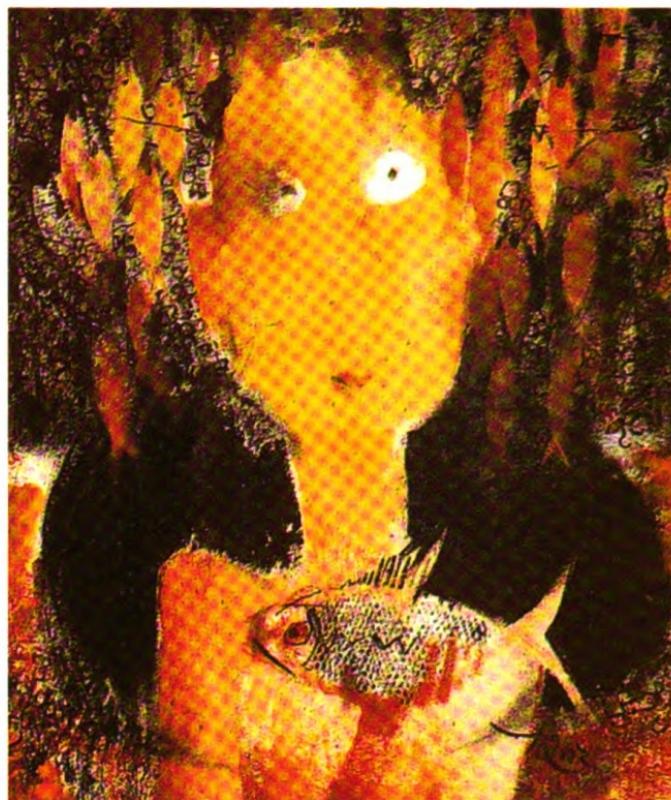
25. Mansur ul Karim, A Source, Oil, 1992



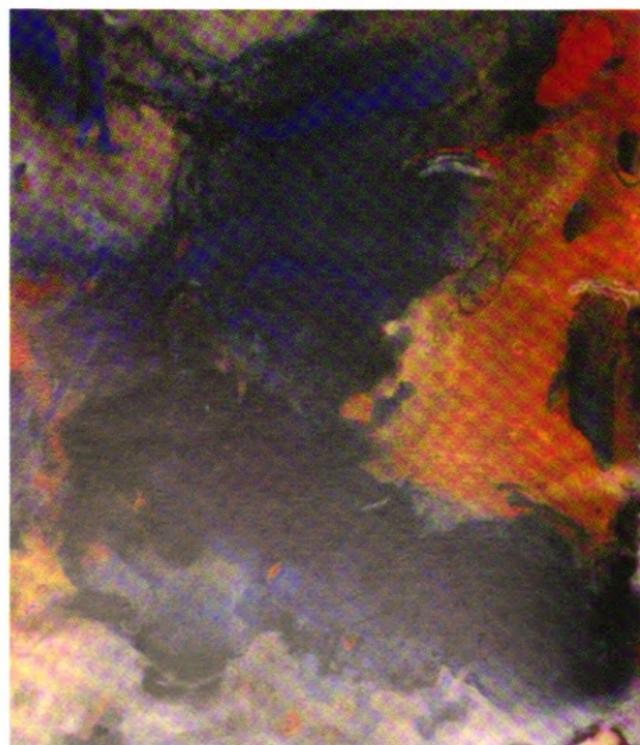
26. Hashem Khan, Uprise, Oil, 1999



27. Monirul Islam, Prisoner of Liberty, Water colour, 2001



28. Farida Zaman, 25th March 1971, Plastic, 1990



29. Rokeya Sultana, Earth, Water and Air, Tempera, 2002

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### Bengali Language and Literature

Anisuzzaman

#### I

Bengali (or Bangla in the language) is spoken by 20 million people in Bangladesh and the Indian states of West Bengal, Assam and Tripura, and also by immigrant communities in many parts of Asia, Europe and North America. It is the state language of Bangladesh. Bengali is a member of the Indo-European family of languages, having developed through the Prakrit and Apabhramsa stages of the Indo-Aryan branch of the family. There are two views with regards to its origin. M Shahidullah suggests that Bengali developed from Gaudi Prakrit and Gaudi Apabhramsa in the seventh century A D while S K Chatterjee and Sukumar Sen hold that it grew out of Magadhi Prakrit and Magadhi Apabhramsa in the tenth century A D. There is, however, an agreement among the scholars that at the earliest stage of development of the Neo Indo-Aryan languages, Oriya, Bengali and Assamese formed a single stream from which Oriya branched out first and then Assamese. This is why the earliest specimens of Bengali language are also claimed by the Assamese and Oriya speakers as their own.

Bengali went through a lot of changes since it appeared on the scene. Sanskrit words account for approximately 44% of its vocabulary, words derived from Sanskrit or taken from pre-Aryan or non-Aryan languages constitute 51.45%, and foreign words add up to 4.55% of which Persian is the largest contributor and then English.

There are two separate styles of the written Bengali prose: *sadhu* and *calit* (or *calti*). The current norm is to use the *calit* form and the standard colloquial Bengali is close to it, but people mostly speak a variety of dialects, some of which are quite unintelligible to other dialect-speakers.

The Bengali script is derived from an eastern variety of Brahmi script. It was standardized in the mid-nineteenth century and the alphabet consisted of 12

vowels and 40 consonants. The later reformers have dropped one each of the vowels and consonants.

Attempts to standardize the Bengali orthography were also made in the nineteenth century. Still no uniformity could be attained to spell the non-Sanskritic words. In 1936, the University of Calcutta reformed these, but because of the fact that the recommendations allowed alternative spellings of the same word, no uniformity could be affected. Since then various proposals have been made by scholars, newspaper houses and academics in Kolkata and Dhaka. The Bangla Academy has come out with a set of recommendations and compiled a spelling dictionary. So many attempts to bring uniformity, despite their merits, have not been helpful in dispelling confusion.

It is a fairly common practice to divide the history of Bengali literature into three periods: Old (7/10-12 C.), Middle (13-18 C.) and Modern (19<sup>th</sup> century and thereafter). Some scholars have found this division arbitrary. They point out that new evidences show that the kind of literary writings produced before the twelfth century had continued until at least the fifteenth. Drawing of the line at twelfth century is, therefore, hardly justified. An alternative suggestion has been made to treat the whole of Bengali literature to the end of the eighteenth century as a single period. With the introduction of the printing press in Bengal in 1788 a major change had taken place in the literary scenario that underwent further changes in the nineteenth century. It may, therefore, be said that a new age began with the dawn of the nineteenth century.

## II

The earliest specimens of Bengali language and literature are the *Caryagiti*. These Buddhist mystic songs were found in an anthology discovered by M Haraprasad Shastri from the Royal Library of Nepal in 1907 and, along with two other works, was published in 1909. A Sanskrit commentary was found with the manuscript and, later on, a Tibetan translation of the songs was also discovered. The anthology originally had fifty songs of which three and a half were mutilated. Songs of twenty poets were collected in the volume, Kanhapada having contributed twelve of those. The poets of the *Caryagiti* were also known as Siddhacaryas, meaning spiritual masters. All these songs have an outer meaning, the theme of which was taken from everyday contemporary life. Behind this lay the spiritual content. So the text is at the same time a testimony to contemporary social life and a guide for Tantric Buddhists. As has been mentioned above, these were composed between the seventh or tenth and twelfth century A D. Each song contained within itself the name or pseudonym of the poet and the mode and time-beat in which these are to be sung were supplied at the head of the songs.

In the fifties of the last century, Arnold Bake, the Dutch musicologist, collected about a hundred songs from a Nepalese Buddhist monk. Shashibhusan Dasgupta identified these as Bengali songs written after the *Caryagiti* form. These songs were authored by five poets, two of whose poems are included in the collection published by Shastri. Dasgupta placed the date of the composition of these songs between the tenth and fifteenth century and after. Thus the notion that there was no literary output for a century and a half following the Turkish conquest of Bengal fell through.

Another mutilated manuscript was discovered from a countryside in Bengal by Basantarajan Roy and was published in 1916. Roy furnished the title, *Srikrasnakirtan*, of this long narrative poem by Badu Candidas and it is generally regarded to be a work of the early fifteenth century, if not late fourteenth century. The subject matter is the legendary dalliance between Krsna, an incarnation of the Hindu god Visnu, and Radha, a married milkmaid. The poem, however, is by no means a spiritual one, rather it reads like a love-affair between a country-couple, 'often verging on crudeness and vulgarity'. It has only three characters, Radha, Krsna, and Badayi, the go-between. The poem is divided into several parts and has a dramatic element in it. The authorship gave rise to the debate on the number of Candidases in Bengali literature.

We shall now refer to several genres that appeared in Bengali literature between the fifteenth and eighteenth century. In doing so we shall not be able to adhere to a chronological order. The first of these genres was translation from Sanskrit. It starts with Krttivas' translation of the epic, *Ramayana*, by Valmiki. From the autobiographical account given in the work, it appears that Krttivas was patronized by some Sultan in the later half of the fifteenth century. Scores of other translations of the *Ramayana* followed, but Krittivas' one is still considered the best of all.

Maladhar Basu, patronized by Sultan Ruknuddin Barbak Shah who gave the poet the title of Gunaraj Khan, authored *Srikrsnavijay* during the second half of the fifteenth century. This was another poem on the Krsna legend, but is based on the *Bhagavata* and *Visnupurana*. It is also a narrative poem, but devotional in character. Another narrative poem on the Krsna legend was authored by Damodar Sen, who was better known as Yasoraj Khan, the title given to him by his patron, Sultan Husain Shah. The poem was entitled *Krsnamangal*, but the work is, unfortunately, not extant. The other notable work on the Krsna legend was the seventeenth century poem, *Harivamsa* by Bhavananda.

The other Sanskrit epic, the *Mahabharata*, was first translated by Parameswar Das, whose sobriquet was Kavindra, at the instance of Paragal Khan, a general of Husain Shah and governor of Chittagong, and, then, of his son, Chuti Khan, another general of Husain Shah who successfully led the expedition to Tipperah. Paragal had also asked Srikar Nandi to translate a part of the *Mahabharata*. These two poets were followed by many others in

translating this epic, but it was Kashiram Das who produced the most popular *Mahabharat* in Bengali early in the seventeenth century.

Translations from Persian, Hindi and Avadhi formed another genre. Some scholars insist that the beginning of this genre was made by Shah Muhammad Sagir when he produced *Yusuf-Zelekha* in Bengali in the early fifteenth century. Other scholars put his date at a much later period. Many of such translations were made in the seventeenth century at the court of Arakan where Bengali poets were greatly privileged. Daulat Qazi translated *Sati Mayna O Lor-Candrani* from Avadhi, but could not finish it. It was Alaol, another court poet of Arakan, and, perhaps, the brightest poet of the seventeenth century Bengali literature, later completed the work. Alaol is best known for his translation of *Padmavati*, a Bengali rendering of Malik Mohammad Jaisi's Hindi poem. Alaol was a polyglot and a man of many skills. He translated *Saifulkulk Badiujjamal*, *Sikandarnama*, *Tohfa* and *Sapta Paikar* from Persian. The other notable poet of Arakan was Qoreshi Magan who translated *Candravati* from Hindi. The preponderance of metrical romances in this genre of Bengali literature has led some scholars to call it the trend of romance-poems.

Outside the pale of the Arakan Court, metrical romances were also rendered into Bengali from Persian and Hindi. Notable among these are *Layly-Majnu* by Daulat Uzir Bahram Khan (sixteenth century), *Yusuf-Zulekha* by Abdul Hakim (seventeenth century) and *Madhumalati* by Muhammad Kabir (eighteenth century).

But not all translations were romances. Take, for instance, *Navivamsa*, a poetical work in two volumes by Syed Sultan, the first of which narrates the lives of the prophets from Adam to Muhammad (actually until his birth) and the second (also known as *Rasul-vijay*) concentrates on Muhammad's life and preaching. Interestingly enough, the poet includes Brahma, Visnu, Siva and Hari (the first three are the principal gods of the Hindu pantheon while Hari is the same as Visnu) in the list of prophets. Two other biographical accounts of prophet Muhammad, both entitled *Rasulvijay*, were contributed by Zainuddin whose date has been put variously between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, and by Shabarid Khan in the seventeenth century. Another seventeenth century poet, Muhammad Khan, produced *Maktul Hosen*, which narrates the tragic story of Karbala. Hayat Mamud in the eighteenth century followed him. There were several books of conduct for Muslims, one of which was Alaol's *Tohfa* and other notable one was Nasrullah Khan's *Shariatnama*, also a seventeenth century work.

We must now turn to the genre known as *Mangal Kavya*. These narrative poems in praise of the local deities are so called because of the belief that even listening to its singing brought one benefaction; and also the fact that a *Mangal Kavya* was sung from one Tuesday night to the next one. Branches of this genre were many but we shall confine ourselves to three principal streams and some other works.

Manasa, the goddess of serpents, was specially revered by people living in the marshy land of East Bengal, but poems in her praise are found both in East and West Bengal. The two early poets of *Manasamangal* were Vipradas, who composed his poem in 1495 A D, and Vijay Gupta, a contemporary, belonged to the bank of the river Hugli and Barisal respectively. In order to gain a respectable position as a goddess, Manasa must have offerings from the merchant Cand. Being a Shivite he refuses to worship her. Manasa destroys his ocean-going vessels with all their merchandise and finally puts his son, Lakhindar, to death in his iron chamber on his bridal night. The widowed Behula refuses to accept her fate, goes to the assembly of gods, please them by her dance, and promises to make Cand offer worship to Manasa who would then bring her husband back to life. Cand now pays tributes to Manasa, not out of conviction, but at the request of his daughter-in-law and at the possibility of getting back his son. Although the *Manasamangal* poems were meant to sing the glory of the goddess, it was Cand, the principled human being, stood higher than any divine soul. Among many poets of *Manasamangal*, two others stand out: Ketakadas-Ksemananda in West and Bamsidas in East Bengal, both of whom are believed to have composed their poems in the seventeenth century.

*Candimangal*, written in praise of the goddess Candi, is a poem in two parts, each narrating an independent story. Here, also, the goddess ultimately succeeds in having herself worshipped by the mortals, but the latter are much more attractive characters in more than one way. Mukunda Chakravarty, a sixteenth century poet having the sobriquet of Kabikankan, was decidedly the best of the *Candimangal* poets and, perhaps, unparalleled in his century. His work contains such lively social pictures that this has been used as a source of history. Mukunda was followed by Dvija Madhav, who was no mean poet, but the former overshadowed him.

The god Dharma, which could be a shorter form of Dharmaraja or Yama (god of death), combines in him a large variety of traditions and myths. There are two types of texts in praise of him. The first one gives the rituals of his worship, such as one finds in *Shunyapurāṇ* by Ramai Pandit (?) in the seventeenth century. The other narrates the exploits of Lausen, and this type of texts is seen as *Dharmamangal* proper. In all probability Rupram Chakravarty was the earliest to write one such text in the seventeenth century. The two other notables in this domain were Ghanaram Chakravarty and Manikram Ganguly, both of whom belonged to the eighteenth century.

The most remarkable poet of the *Mangal Kavya* genre was Bharatcandra Ray, the court-poet of Navadwip in the eighteenth century. His title *Gurukar* was apt for he came to be appreciated by generations of readers both for his innovation and craftsmanship. His most captivating work, *Anandamangal* (1753), is divided into three parts: the first one is devoted to the praise of the goddess Annada or Annapurna, where he shows an ancestor of his patron-king

receiving the goddess' favour; the second one narrates the erotic love-episode of Vidya and Sundar (supposed to be an allegory of knowledge and beauty) from Sanskrit sources; and the third one deals with the historical war between Mansingh, the general of the emperor Jahangir, and Pratapaditya, king of Jessore. Not many works of the period has touched upon anything historical. Roy was undoubtedly the best poetic talent of his times.

There were other poems on various cults of which one is known as Nath literature. The Nath cult culled its principles from Buddhism, Shivite asceticism and Tantric yoga. There were two main streams of Nath works: the story of Goraksanath of which the best narrator was Sheikh Faizullah (*Goraksavijay*, sixteenth century), and the story of Queen Maynamati, her husband King Manikcandra and their posthumous son Govindacandra, authored among others, by Abdus Shukur Mahmud and Durlabh Mallik, both of the eighteenth century, and their poems have the same title, *Gopicandrer Sannyas*. It is interesting to note that both Hindu and Muslim poets have contributed to this body of literature. The same has happened with the poems in praise of Satyanarayan, a deity otherwise known as Satyapir in his Muslim incarnation. Among their authors are Sheikh Faizullah, Krsnaram Das and Bharatcandra Roy.

In this connection it may be noted that Krsnaram Das' *Raymangal*, composed in the seventeenth century, narrates the conflict between a Hindu deity (Daksin Ray) and a Muslim pir (Bada Khan Ghazi) which comes to a peaceful end by divine interference (God coming in the form of half-Krsna and half-Muhammad).

The genre of Vaisnav literature owes its origin to the religious movement of Sri Caitanya (1486-1533), which is known as Gaudiya Vaisnav Dharma or the Bengal School of Vaisnavism. Caitanya taught devotion to Radha and Krsna, repudiation of the caste-system and equality of all men and women. His cult of devotion inspired many, both Vaisnavs and non-Vaisnavs, including several Muslim poets, to compose poems on various aspects of the love of Krsna and Radha. These poems were short lyrics, and, when set to tune, known as Kirtan. In Kirtan we find the beginning of genuine vernacular songs. Among those who excelled in Vaisnav lyrics were Candidas (barring Badu Candidas, there were at least two more, one in the sixteenth and another in the seventeenth centuries), Govindadas and Jnanadas (both of the seventeenth century). The poems of Vidyapati, the pre-Caitanya poet of Mithila (writing in Maithili on the Radha-Krsna theme), became an inseparable part of Bengali Vaisnav lyric tradition. Under Vidyapati's inspiration there also arose an artificial poetic language, Brajabuli, virtually a mixture of Bengali and Maithili, for composition of Vaisnav lyrics, with Govindadas as its chief exponent.

The other stream of Vaisnav literature comprised biographies. Never before a biography of a contemporary person was written in Bengali. The best biography of Caitanya was produced by Krsnadas Kaviraj, whose monumental

*Caitanyacaritamrta* (sixteenth century) was both a biography and a compendium of Caitanya's teachings. Later, biographies of some of the associates of Caitanya, including a couple of women who rose to become leaders of the Vaisnav movement, were also written.

Devotional songs of the Mother Goddess, known as Shakta padavali, after the fashion of the Vaisnav lyrics, were produced in the eighteenth century by Ramprasad Sen who was followed by others.

Two different trends appeared from the middle of the eighteenth century. One comprised various forms of poetry, intended to entertain the not-so-enlightened public, was produced by popular poets in Kolkata known as Kabiwalas or poetasters. The other was the Dobhasi punthi, printed in Hugli, Dhaka and Kolkata, to satisfy, again, the ordinary Muslim folk. These were romances, tales of war glorifying Muslim heroes, and works in praise of pirs. The works are known as Dobhasi, because their language had a very high rate of Perso-Arabic words. Needless to say that these poets depended heavily on popular Persian and Hindi works.

The date of the Eastern Bengal Ballads is uncertain, but these are generally thought to belong to the period ending in the eighteenth century. The literary merits of the ballads, particularly those of the *Maimansingha Geetika*, have been widely acclaimed. The themes of eternal human love and of the weals and woes of the simple folk are expressed here in an unadorned language and style that appeal directly to the hearts of the listeners or readers. The Baul school probably appeared at the turn of the century. It represents a synthesis of Tantric Buddhism, Vaisnavism (more particularly of its Sahajiya variety) and Sufism with aspects of Shakta and Shivite beliefs thrown in. Baul songs carry within themselves the mystic ideas and guidance to the complex practices of the school, but the songs are appreciated for their sincere devotion and outwardly simple diction, with beautiful tune. Even without the tune, much of the Baul songs are read as excellent poetry of humanism and universalism. Lalan Shah (c. 1774-1890) was the first and the foremost of Baul lyricists, followed by a host of others includings Panju Shah, Pagla Kanai and Sheikh Madan.

It will be observed that until the end of the eighteenth century, the vehicle of Bengali literary works was poetry and this was meant to be sung in accompaniment of musical instruments. Although religion played a major part, there were also secular poetry and poetry that bore the mark of religious syncretism. Some of the Vaisnav lyrics are comparable to love-poetry anywhere in the world. Similarly, some of the romances are satisfying from many points of view. The social realism of the *Mangal Kavyas* and the intellectual exercise in some of the biographical works point out to a variety and an awareness that were rare. Some of the translations of Sanskrit epics have stood the test of time. So there is much in pre-modern Bengali literature which we can take pride in.

## III

The British East India Company, which had virtually became the ruler of Bengal since the mid-eighteenth century, founded the College of Fort William in Kolkata at the dawn of the nineteenth century to provide the scope for its employees to learn 'native' languages. In 1801, the College opened a Bengali department and William Carey, a Baptist missionary working in Bengal, was put in charge. He appointed pundits and assistants in the department and had caused 13 books in Bengali prose to be published by the College for the use of its students. This has been seen by many as the beginning of Bengali prose.

Such a view appears to be a little exaggerated, for there existed a considerable amount of prose writing in Bengali since the sixteenth century. This was not only limited to epistles and documents, but was extended to Christian and Vaisnav doctrinal matters, dialogues in plays, models of letter-writing and primers. Dom Antonio, prince of Bhusna, who became a Christian missionary after he was captured and sold to a Roman Catholic priest, wrote *Brahman-Roman Katholik Samvad*, probably between 1668 and 1670, in the form of catechism. It was published in Roman characters in Lisbon in 1743 along with another catechism, *Krpar Shastrer Artha Bhed*, authored by Manoel-de-Assumpcaon, a Portuguese missionary, in Bhawal (near Dhaka) in 1735. Many Vaisnav tracts like 'Karika' by Rupagoswami, 'Caintanyarupaprapti' by a Candidas and 'Asraynirnay' and 'Atmajijnasa', both by some Krsnadas, have never been fully published from the manuscripts. Plays written in Assam in the sixteenth century and in Nepal in the seventeenth century have a lot of dialogues in Bengali. There are other examples, but it will be suffice to say that a variety of indigenous forms of Bengali prose was evolving between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Although the Christian missionary writings bear the stamp of non-Bengali sentence structure, the Bengali translations of various legal Codes and Acts adopted by the East India Company were taking Bengali prose away from the growing indigenous style and the College of Fort William sought to compose prose without the knowledge of or care for what went before in the field.

The works of the College of Fort William show several styles of Bengali prose. The first book, Ramram Basu's *Raja Pratapaditya Carit* (1801) had a lot of Perso-Arabic elements in it. Willam Carey's *Kathopakathan* (1801) is a collection of dialogues between persons belonging to various strata of society, and it successfully documents the colloquial Bengali. Tarinicaran Mitra's translation of *The Oriental Fabulist* (1803) follows English sentence-pattern literally. Carey was gradually convinced erroneously that Bengali was a direct descendent of Sanskrit and the more one employed Sanskrit words in Bengali, the more his language became chaste. Mrtyunjay Vidyalankar, pundit of the College, produced *Prabodh-Candrika*, which was published posthumously in

1833. This book shows three distinct styles: the Sanskritic, the *sadhu*, and the colloquial. In the years to come more were written in these three styles.

Rammohun Roy (1774-1833), who is best known for his successful campaign to abolish suttee (burning of the Hindu widows in the funeral pyre of their husbands) and for his monotheistic views that later led to the foundation of the Brahmo Samaj, was the first Bengali prose writer outside of textbooks. He translated the Upanisads, engaged himself in polemical writings on religious and social subjects, founded a periodical, and wrote a fine Bengali grammar. His style was simple and direct though a little archaic at the same time. The appearance of Bengali periodicals from 1818 helped develop Bengali prose further. But it was left to Iswarchandra Vidyasagar (1820-91), perhaps the most remarkable figure in nineteenth century Bengal, whose movement led to the enactment of the law providing for remarriage of Hindu widows and whose efforts helped the spread of education, to enrich it. To Bengali prose, he brought discipline, rhythm, sonority and balance. His translations of Hindi, Sanskrit and English works *Vetalpancabimshati* (1847), *Shakuntala* (1854), *Sitar Banabas* (1860) and *Bhrantibilas* (1869) demonstrate qualities of an original writer. His social, polemical and autobiographical writings are of importance and even the textbooks he wrote cannot be ignored. Altogether, he showed how the language should suit the theme of any work.

Pearichand Mitra (1814-83) deviated from the style established by Vidyasagar. His early works which are of essence were written in a prose much closer to the colloquial and his first novel, *Alaler Gharer Dulal* (1858), with which the Bengali novel is considered to have begun, portrays matters much closer to our home. Taking his cue from Caunter, Bhudev Mukherji (1825-94) introduced the historical tale that appears to have influenced a number of contemporary fiction writers. His well-written and thought-provoking essays on the individual, family and society were also received very well.

Bankim Chandra Chatterji (1838-94) evolved a prose-style of his own to suit the form of the novel. Most of his 14 fictions are historical romances of love, chivalry, valour and war that captured the imagination of his readers. *Durgeshnandini*, (1865), his first novel, *Candrashekhar* (1877) and *Rajsimha* (1881, rewritten 1893) are examples of such works. He also produced social novels like *Visavrksa* (1873) and *Krsnakanter Uil* (1878), portraying the love-affair of a married man with a widow, that created sensation on more than one ground. Bankim Chandra upholds prevalent social values, but shows that it is not possible for individuals to follow those values all the time. Such deviations create much problems and sufferings, but that is the fate of man. He also speaks of nationalism in some of his works like *Anandamath* (1882), but like many other works by his contemporaries, it lent support to what may be termed as Hindu nationalism. Bankim Chandra, however, invokes Hindu-Muslim amity in his essays and criticism of which form, along with satire, he was a master.

This is evidenced by two-volume *Vividha Prabandha* (1879 and 1892) and *Kamalakanter Daptar* (1875, enlarged 1885).

Notable among those who followed Bankim Chandra in the field of novel were Ramesh Chandra Dutt in historical romances, Indranath Banerji in satirical novel and Trailokynath Mukherji in adopting the technique of the fairy tale for the modern form of novel.

Even before the establishment of the College of Fort William new developments were taking place in the field of theatre. Gerasim Lebedeff, a Russian traveller, staged a Bengali translation of an English play in Kolkata in 1795 and 1796 in what he called the 'Bengali Theatre', modelled after the western playhouse. It was followed by a dramatization of the poem *Vidyasundar* by Bharatcandra Ray. The plays were performed by a local cast, both male and female, and they met with success. Kolkata already had English playhouses. Very soon wealthy Bengalees were putting up playhouses at their own gardens and Hindu College boys were performing English plays in their College. Translations of English and Sanskrit plays into Bengali were being made and staged. Thus the indigenous form of dramatic performances known as Yatra was being taken over by the proscenium stage of the western variety. Two originals plays, *Bhadrarjun* by Taracaran Sikdar and *Kirtivilas*, the first tragedy in the language, by G C Gupta were published in 1852. The urge for social reform prompted some wealthy men to hold competitions for original plays on such themes. It was Ramranayan Tarkaratna (1822-86) who made the best of it. His *Kulinakulasarvasva* (1854) showed the way of farces on social subjects and these found favour with the audience.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-73) was, however, entirely dissatisfied with what was going on the Bengali stage and, as a matter of challenge, decided to produce 'a classical and regular drama'. He borrowed much from Sanskrit, Greek and English dramas, but threw the theories of Sanskrit drama to the winds. His first play *Sharmistha* (1859) was a success. In his second play, *Padmavati* (1860) Madhusudan experimented with the blank verse in Bengali, but returned to prose in *Krsnakumari* (1861), the first historical play in Bengali, which he wanted to construct after the Greek tragedy, but which was, perhaps, more influenced by Shakespearean tragedy. Madhusudan also produced two roaring farces, *Ekei Ki Bale Sabhyata* and *Budha Saliker Ghade Ro* (both in 1859), exposing the hollowness of the half-educated Bengalee Babu who wished to emulate the civilized European and the hypocrisy of the apparently pious but actually lecherous men of the old school. These two are still among the best farces in the language.

Dinabandhu Mitra's (1829-74) first play, *Nil Darpan* (Dhaka, 1860), reflected the oppression of the indigo-cultivators by the British planters to such an extent that it gave fillip to the indigo revolt that was to take place soon. As a play it is melodramatic and, in certain parts, coached in highly bookish language, but it

left a permanent mark on the Bengali stage. Among his many other plays, *Sadharan Ekadashi* (1866) stands out as a comedy that verges almost on tragedy due to the skilful portrayal of the central character, a highly educated young man forced to live as a hanger on of the half-educated wealthy because of the former's lack of means, and also due to the playwright's deft handling of the plot.

The first public theatre was opened in Kolkata in 1872 with the performance of *Nil Darpan*. It gave rise to various theatre groups, all professionals, and the demand for script went up. Plays with nationalist fervour, satires depicting social evils and individual shortcomings, and historical and social plays came in plenty. A kind of free verse was introduced and much was translated from European plays. Jyotirindranath Tagore (1848-1925), an elder brother of Rabindranath, was a quite successful playwright having produced original, adapted and translated works. Girishchandra Ghosh (1844-1911) was perhaps the most renowned actor, director and playwright of his times. He is credited to have authored fifty plays of which the following brought out the best in him: *Buddhadevacarit* (1887), a biographical play, *Prafulla* (1889), a social tragedy, *Jana* (1894), a mythological play and *Sirajaddaula* (1905), a historical one. Amritalal Basu (1853-1929) is best known for his satires such as *Babu* (1893) and *Bauma* (1896). Dvijendralal Ray, popularly known as D. L. Ray (1863-1913), was a poet of repute, musician of quality and playwright of fame. His poetical and mythological play *Sita* (1903) was a success, but he would be more remembered for such historical plays as *Nurjahan* (1907) and *Sajahan* (1910). Ksirodprasad Vidyavinson (1863-1927) tried his hands in many kinds of plays ranging from the mythological to historical, comic to devotional. His most well-known plays are *Alibaba* (1897), based on a tale from the Arabian Nights and rendered with lots of songs and dances, and *Alamgir* (1921), a historical play.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt was a polyglot steeped in European literature and a great admirer of its classical variety. Having written his first play, he embarked upon a 'heroic poem' after the Greek epics, employing blank verse for its entirety. *Tillottamasambhab Kavya* (1860) by itself was not great, but caused a revolution in Bengali poetry. *Meghanadavadh Kavya* (1861), the second of his 'epiclings', as the poet used to call these, was a great improvement on the first. In this poem, he made Ravan, the villain of the *Ramayana*, his hero, and Ram, the hero of the Sanskrit epic, was portrayed as a weakling. He had bettered his blank verse and his choice of words were more appropriate. The European epics cast their shadow in characterization, narration of events and ornamentation, but the Indian rhetoricians are not quite forgotten. The tragedy of the hero, who must succumb to his fate, was poignant. In *Birangana* (1862), Madhusudan follows Ovid while in *Brajangana* (1861), he uses the Radha legend, but the versification, again, is European. Lastly, he introduced sonnets in Bengali in his *Caturdashpadi Kavitavali* (1866), where he follows both Petrarch and Shakespeare. The elegance of these poems is only matched by their lyricism.

Among those who followed Madhusudan in the field of epic poems were Hemchandra Banerji (*Brtrasamhar*, 1875 and 1877), and Navin Chandra Sen (the trilogy, *Raiyatka*, 1886, *Kuruksetra*, 1893, and *Prabhas*, 1896, a reinterpretation of the *Mahabharata*).

Despite the lyricism of *Caturdashpadi Kavitavali*, Biharilal Chakravarti (1834-94) is considered as the forerunner of lyrical poetry in Bengali. He was out and out a romantic, but his pensive mood was not always well articulated. His *Saradamangal* (1879) and *Sadher Asan* (1888-89) were exceptional expressions of individuality in the midst of epic thoughts of many not-so-successful imitators of Madhusudan. Fortunately, Devendranath Sen, Govindacandra Das and Aksaykumar Baral put the lyric form of poetry on a firm foundation so much so that Bengali poetry saw the demise of the pseudo-epic form. Dwijendralal Ray added a lot of humour and variety in versification while Kamini Ray proved to be the most successful of the female poets, although she was profoundly influenced by Rabindranath.

It was around 1870 that the Muslim writers joined the contemporary trends in Bengali literature, leaving behind the tradition of Dobhasi punthi. Mir Mosharraf Hossain (1848-1911) was the first and most talented writer among them. He started with a light tale, *Ratnavati* (1869), produced plays, poems and essays, but he was at his best in the three-part *Visad Sindhu* (1885, 1887 and 1890). This was a sort of an historical romance with an inorganic plot. He must have been inspired by the Dobhasi punthis composed on the tragic theme of Karbala, but he also took cues from Madhusudan and Bankim Chandra when he underscored the role of all-pervasive fate and the uncontrollable passion of men for women, both of which lead to tragic end of human lives. Mosharraf Hossain also wrote four autobiographical works, *Udasin Pathikar Maner Katha* (1890), *Gazi Miyar Bastani* (1899), *Amar Jivani*, 10 parts (1908-09), and *Amar Jivanir Jivani-Bibi Kulsum* (1910) in which he narrated the lives of his parents partially, his own life and that of his second wife. These were interspersed with not-so-sympathetic portrayal of the Indigo Revolt and caricatures of the lives of well-to-do Muslim families. Mosharraf Hossain was a great champion of Hindu-Muslim unity, but his feelings underwent a change with the turn of the century.

Kaikobad (1857-1952), wrote two epic-poems, *Mahashmashan* (1904), based on the third battle of Panipat, and *Maharam Sharif* (1932), which he tried to posit against *Visad-Sindhu* for historical accuracy. He also produced several metrical romances, but his abilities are best shown in his lyric poems, which he started composing from the age of twelve, and, of which two collections, *Ashrumala* (1895) and *Amiyadbara* (1923), are the most representative. Kaikobad took pride in Muslim tradition, but he was remarkably non-communal. Mozammel Huq (1860-1933) started as a lyric poet, but soon turned to be one of the best prose-writers of his time. He also seems to have taken the materials of much of his prose works like *Maharsi Mansur* (1896), *Tapas-Kahini* (1914), *Ferdausi-Carit*

(1918) and *Shahnama* (1909) from Dobhasi punthis. Mozammel Huq wrote two fictions- a pseudo-historical romance and a social novel.

A number of writers made their mark dealing with subjects Islamic. Shaikh Abdur Rahim (1859-1931) had the distinction of writing a biography of the prophet, *Hazrat Mahammader Jivancarit O Dharmaniti* (1887), the first to be written by a Bengali Muslim, where the author tried to dismiss miracles as much as possible. Reyaz-al-Din Ahmad Mashhadi produced an excellent biography of Jamal-al-Din Afghani (1838-97), *Samaj O Sangskarak* (1889). Muhammad Reyazuddin Ahmed also contributed a biography of the Prophet, *Hazrat Mohammad Mostafar Jivancarit* (1927). Mohammad Maniruzzaman Islamabadi's best work, perhaps, is the historical essay, *Bharate Musalman Sabhyata* (1914). Yakub Ali Chowdhury emphasized the human aspects of the prophet's life in *Manab-mukut* (1922) and the universality of Islam in his other works. Mohammad Naimuddin (1832-1907), was in all probability, the first Muslim to translate the Quran into Bengali (1891-1909), though he had to leave it incomplete.

Mohammad Meherullah and Shaikh Jamiruddin took delight in polemical writings where they entered into arguments with Christian Missionaries, found fault with Hinduism but appreciated the Brahmo movement, and criticized the unIslamic practices of fellow Muslims. Mohammad Akram Khan (1868-1968), a noted journalist and politician, started almost in a similar vein, but his *Mostafa Carit* (1923) and *Samasya O Samadhan* (1928) show remarkable rationality in dealing with the life of the prophet and in interpreting certain tenets of Islam in the contemporary context. Shaikh Fazlal Karim wrote biographies of Sufi saints and ideal Muslim women in history, and in his *Path O Patheya* (1923), he undertook to show the ways of attaining ideal life where concern for the afterlife takes precedence over this worldliness.

#### IV

About Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), a literary historian has noted that,

Tagore's literary life extended over sixty years, and he reminds one of Victor Hugo in the copiousness and variety of his work: over one thousand poems; nearly two dozen plays and playlets; eight novels; eight or more volume of short stories; more than two thousand songs of which he wrote both the words and music; and a mass of prose on literary, social, religious, political and other topics. Add to these his English translations; his paintings; his travels and lecture-tours in Asia, America and Europe; and his activities as educationist, as social and religious reformer, and as politician and there you have, judged by quantity alone, the life-work of a Titan. (J C Ghosh, *Bengali Literature*, Oxford, 1948, p 169).

Rabindranath had an all-round education at home. His first book of poems *Kabi-Kahini* was published in 1878, but he had been contributing to periodicals and reading out in meetings pieces of his writings since he was 13. He has acknowledged his literary debts to Biharilal Chakravarti, who was also a family friend, but there is hardly any trace of Biharilal's direct influence, except for the fact that Rabindranath never tried his hands in epics. He traces his literary development from *Sandhyasamgit* (1882), a collection of poems expressing despondency – not so unusual of a young man. It was in *Manasi* (1880) that he appears as a mature poet and makes love, nature and his own social environment his subject of poetry. In *Sonar Tari* (1894) and *Citra* (1896) we notice for the first time a trace of mysticism (when he talks about his personal god who determines his destiny – poetic and otherwise) while in *Ksanika* (1900) he is down-to-earth and playful, more so in the matter of love, trying to make the best of the fleeting moments of life. The diction and metres of the poems here are very simple – much different from his other poems. In *Gitanjali* (1910) and the two other books that followed, most of which are songs, he appears as a devotee and mystic after the Upanisadic tradition. The English translations of many of his poems, collected in *Gitanjali* (1912) won him the Nobel Prize for literature, but it also gave the false impression in the West that, true to the Indian tradition, he was a mystic poet *per se*. Those who are conversant with his original Bengali works know that this is but only one phase of his vast interest in life. In *Balaka* (1916) he introduced a new form of metre with unequal lines and uneven pause, but essentially clinging to rhyme. Here Rabindranath, reaching a new height in poetic expression, speaks of creative evolution, somewhat, but not quite, after Bergson. *Purabi* (1925) is another great work and its love-poems have a special appeal, coming as they did from a sixty-four year old. In *Punasca* (1932), he introduces in Bengali an equivalent of English free verse and the French *vers libre*. Known as 'prose-poems', each of these has a story to tell. In the closing years of his life he expressed concern about what was happening to mankind as well as introspecting about the self in relation to the planet earth. His last poems were posthumously collected in *Shes Lekha* (1941) where his philosophical quest perforce comes to an end.

As a novelist he made a false start by attempting to produce novels with historical themes. Very soon he realized that the days of historical romances were over. Taking cue from Bankim Chandra he came up with *Cokher Bali* (1903), a social novel, where his original reflections are easily recognizable. *Gora* (1910) is certainly his most remarkable novel that reflects the social, political and religious movements of the nineteenth century Bengal and ended with humanism transcending all borders. *Caturanga* (1916), a novel of high emotional crises, was exquisitely executed. *Ghare-Baire* (1916) has two layers of narrations: the first one relating to interpersonal relations and the second one in relation to the politics of the Swadeshi movement and the philosophical basis of patriotism. In *Yogayog* (1929), Rabindranath shows the familial conflict among characters from different

cultural backgrounds. *Sheser Kavita* (1929) is a superb love-story with a kind of 'modernism' that Rabindranath was accused by the contemporary young writers of lacking. *Car Adhyay* (1934) is a novelet where the question of a patriotic goal was weighed against moral considerations. The fact that Rabindranath lifted the level of the Bengali novel to a high degree is undeniable.

Rabindranath's family environment was conducive to music, plays and dance. It is no wonder, therefore, that he started writing plays and acting in those at an early age. The early plays like *Valmiki Pratibha* (1881) and *Mayar Khela* (1888) were musical. *Raja O Rani* (1889) is a tragic play in verse which the playwright thought was too lyrical. The other verse-plays, *Visarajan* (1890), depicting the conflict between orthodoxy and high ideals, and *Citrangada* (1892), depicting unashamed love, are superior in dramatic qualities. *Raja* (1910) happens to be the first of his symbolic plays, partly inspired by Maeterlinck. It may be interpreted as a story of man's relation with his creator. *Raktakarabi* (1924), also a symbolic and allegorical play, depicts the greed of modern industrial civilization as against the harmony of nature. *Cirakumar Sabha* (1926) is the best example of Rabindranath's comedies. In his later life, he combined music, dance and plays in *Citrangada* (1936), *Candalika* (1938) and *Shyama* (1939), all of which are examples of a new form, known as dance-drama.

When Rabindranath came to manage his father's estates in what is now Bangladesh, he also came in contact with the common man and varied nature. It was then that he produced the first short stories in Bengali. Towards the end of his life he proclaimed his belief that, of all his creations, his songs and short stories would be the lasting ones. Both in content and form his short stories are of wide variety.

Rabindranath's essays are also of a large spectrum. He deals with language and literature, history and society, politics and religion, education and rural reconstruction, nationalism and internationalism, travels and memoirs. Many would like to add a number of letters that he wrote to friends and relations to this genre. The most notable feature of his prose works is his universalism which was expressed in a language most suitable to the theme. His achievements as a composer and a painter were enormous. Those, however, are beyond the pale of our discussion.

## V

Two of Rabindranath's relations, among many other members of his extended family who had contributed to the development of Bengali literature, deserve to be mentioned at this point: Balendranath Tagore (1870-99) offered excellent literary criticism reflecting a sharp and original mind, while Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951), the great painter, enriched juvenile literature, wrote

extensively on aesthetics and art criticism, and produced enjoyable autobiographical narratives. Their senior, Ramendrasundar Trivedi (1864-1919) was a pioneer of writings on science in Bengali, and, at the same time, a very worthy author of philosophical and literary essays. Prabhatkumar Mukhopadhyay (1873-1932) was the best known short story writer after Rabindranath and penned several popular novels. Sukumar Ray (1887-1923) was, undoubtedly, the master of works for children.

Three poets specially made their mark : Satyendranath Datta (1882-1922) showed excellent skill in 'lexical cadence and metrical sonority' in his poetry as well as in translating poems from several literatures; Mohitlal Majumdar (1888-1952), who followed him in a number of ways, will be remembered for the philosophical attitude to life and death in his poetry — an attitude shaped by Omar Khayyam at one end and Schopenhauer at the other; and Jatindranath Sengupta (1887-1954) concerned himself more with the miseries of life than anything else, and expressed himself with touching sincerity.

Mohammad Najibur Rahman's (1860-1923) *Anwara* (1914), a social novel portraying Muslim family life and underlining the ideals of a Muslim wife, gained immense popularity. Ismail Hossain Siraji's (1880-1931) first work was a collection of poems, *Analprabha* (1900), the second edition (1907) of which was proscribed by the government for sedition and the poet was imprisoned for two years. He produced several other volumes of poems, both narrative and lyrical, but became better known for his historical romances, such as *Raynandini* (1918), whose purpose was to eulogise the prowess of Muslim heroes that attracted love and admiration even from the Hindu princesses of the enemy-camp. He also upheld, in other works, the cause of liberation and education of women.

The question of education and overall emancipation of women, more particularly those of the Muslim community in Bengal, agitated the minds of quite a number of powerful writers. The foremost of them was Ruqayyah Sakhawat Hossain (1880-1932) who wrote both in Bengali and English. Her two-volume essays, *Maticur* (1906 and 1921), and a satirical narrative, *Abarodhvashini* (1928), among others, seriously indicted the conservatives who wanted to put the women in seclusion. Begum Ruqayyah founded a girls' school in Kolkata in 1911 in the face of much opposition. She wrote with a facile pen, combining humour and sarcasm that drew loud protest from her targets. Kazi Imdadul Huq (1882-1926) was also critical of male chauvinism and other ills that had penetrated the Bengali Muslim society of the time. These were very well reflected in his novel *Abdullah* (1933) as well as in his essays. Mohammad Lutfar Rahman (1889-1936) founded a journal to ventilate the cause of women and a home for the destitutes among them, and wrote several novels to draw attention to women's plight. He composed didactic poems, but it was in his extremely well-written essays that he emerged at his best, upholding universal human values above all.

Among the litterateurs who wrote during Rabindranath's lifetime, the three most outstanding were Pramatha Chaudhuri (1868-1946), Sharatchandra Chatterjee (1876-1938) and Qazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976). Pramatha Chaudhuri was an essayist, short-story writer and poet, but he is best remembered for the monthly literary journal he edited, the *Sabujpatra* (1914), which successfully led a movement to replace the standard written *sadhu* Bengali style by the *calit* (or *calti*, the standard colloquial Bengali) for literary writings. Having succeeded in enlisting the support of Rabindranath, he overcame the initial resistance put up by his adversaries in this respect. Breaking away from the traditional forms and ideas, Pramatha Chaudhuri introduced a highly critical approach to life and literature and was full of wit, humour and sarcasm. He also wrote under the pen name of Birbal (*Birbaler Halkhata*, 1917), and his quartet of short stories-turned-novel, *Car-iyari-katha* (1916), was a new addition to Bengali literature both in form and in content.

Sharatchandra Chatterjee was one of the best story-tellers anywhere in the world. He publicly acknowledged his debt to Rabindranath and the influence of Bankim Chandra may also be traced in his works, but this did not in any way diminish his originality. Having lived an unusual life in India and Burma, he attracted the attention of readers when he started publishing short and long stories in some literary magazines in Kolkata. Beginning with a novelette, *Badadidi* in 1913, he published thirty works of novels and short stories, several plays, essays and addresses on social, political and literary themes. His best novels, perhaps, were *Shrikanta* (four volumes, 1917-33), *Caritrabin* (1917), *Grhadaha* (1920) and *Shesprashna* (1931), but *Pather Dabi* (1926), proscribed by the government for its political content, and *Devadas* (1917), a sentimental love-story, were also immensely popular. He was, according to Sukumar Sen, 'the first novelist in India to live in some comfort on the returns of his literary output'.

Nazrul Islam responded to the demands of his time, and by doing so, he made his works timeless. It was he, more than anyone else, who gave literary expression to the anti-colonial movement, and more particularly, to the Non-cooperation movement launched by Gandhi in 1921. In 1922, he published a poem 'Vidrohi' and found himself famous so much so that the epithet of rebel poet is still stuck to his name. His first book of short stories, *Byathar Dan*, and his first collection of poems, *Agnibina*, came out the same year (1922), and, in between, he founded, under his editorship, a bi-weekly, the *Dhumketu*. A poem he contributed to this journal was considered seditious by the government, and he was arrested and sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for a year. It was then that Rabindranath dedicated one of his works to this 'poet' who had published only a single volume of poetry. His collection of poems and songs, *Biser Banshi* (1924), *Bhangar Gan* (1924), *Pralay Shikha* (1930) and *Candrabindu* (1930), and a book of essays, *Yugabani* (1922) were also proscribed by the government. Two other volumes of poems, *Samyabadi* (1926) and *Sarbahara* (1926) reflected his

faith in egalitarianism. But Nazrul was more than a poet of protest. *Dolancarpa* (1923), *Chayanat* (1924), *Sindhu-hillol* (1927) and *Cakrabak* (1929) bear testimony to his concern for love and nature. In these, he introduced not only keen sensitivity, but also a kind of sensuality that was found objectionable by some critics. He also produced devotional poems and songs of many varieties — Islamic, Vaisnav and Shakta, and set most of these to tune. As a composer he has left his permanent mark in Bengali music. Music was a taboo for Bengali Muslims, but they could hardly afford to disown the songs he composed on themes Islamic. Many conservatives have charged his writings with heresy, but such charges were drowned in the tumultuous reception of his works by avid readers. Nazrul contributed short stories and novels, essays and addresses, filmscripts and plays, and his journalistic career was also notable. He had experimented with metres, produced an excellent diction, and used metaphors from mythology and history of the Hindu and Muslim at a time when they were getting at each other's throats in the country. No wonder that as early as in 1929, he was accorded a civic reception in Kolkata where he was acclaimed as the National Poet of Bengal. After he was brought to Dhaka in 1972 to spend his last days, he was proclaimed the National Poet of Bangladesh.

The proliferation of formal essays owes much to the contemporary social, religious and political movements. A lot of attention was also given to historical writings and literary history and criticism. The efforts of Haraprasad Shastri, Basantanjan Roy and Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad extended our knowledge of the Bengali literary past. Dineshchandra Sen produced a history of the Bengali language and literature on the basis of the available materials. Suniti Kumar Chatterji presented us with his monumental history of the Bengali language while his pupil and colleague, Sukumar Sen, wrote a five-volume history of the Bengali literature which is still unparalleled. Much centred around Tagore: his four-volume biography by Prabhatkumar Mukhopadhyay and criticisms of his works by Ajit Kumar Chakravarty, Pramathanath Bishi and Nihar Ranjan Ray, whose contributions to other fields were not to be passed over. Atul Chandra Gupta, Humayun Kabir and Gopal Halder offered literary criticisms of very different types. Jagadish Chandra Bose's essays on science was a mixture of formal knowledge and familiar form. Shrikumar Bandyopadhyay, Subodhchandra Sengupta and Shashibhusan Dasgupta's criticism were more of an academic nature. The familiar essay was enriched by the lighthearted pieces by Haraprasad Shastri and the sermonizing ones by Kaliprasanna Ghosh.

Between the two world wars appeared a new trend in Bengali literature that was marked by realism after the European fashion and, perhaps, latent influence of Marx and Freud. On the one hand, it portrayed the life of the downtrodden — the slum-dwellers, the industrial workers, the daily wage earners, the beggars and the kind, and, on the other, it reflected the sexual desire of man and

woman — a subject that was socially forbidden for public discussions. Also noticeable was the tendency to decry or, at least, circumvent Rabindranath and his tradition that became the order of the day in Bengali literature.

Among the journals that carried such literary works, needless to say, by a group of youngsters, the *Kallol* was the foremost. Gokulchandra Nag (1895-1925) and Dineshranjan Das (1888-1941) founded the journal in May 1923, corresponding to the Bengali year 1330, and hence its contributors and those who wrote after the same fashion came to be variously known as those of *Kollol*, belonging to the *Kallol* group, product of the *Kallol* age, writers of the thirties or post-thirty writers. The first indications of the new school were found in *Pathik* (1925), the only novel by Gokul Nag and in the short stories and novels of Jagadish Gupta (1886-1957), such as *Vinodini* (1928) and *Asadhu Siddhartha* (1929), respectively. The most representative writer of the group, however, were the trio of Premendra Mitra (1904-88), Achintyakumar Sengupta (1903-76) and Buddhadeva Basu (1908-74). Premendra appeared in the literary scene with *Pank* (1927), the first of his novels, but excelled himself as a short story writer and a poet. Achintyakumar is better known as a novelist, whose first novel, *Bede*, was published in 1929, but he was also a poet, short-story writer and biographer. Buddhadeva's first work was also a novel, *Sada* (1930), which was immediately followed by his first book of poetry, *Bandir Vandana* (1930) and his first collection of short stories, *Abhinay, Abhinay nay* (1930). He was much more versatile than this would suggest, for he contributed personal essays, literary criticism, plays and translations, and, for many years, edited the most prestigious journal of poetry, the *Kavita*. He was not only a protagonist of the new school of writings, but his essays and reviews helped establish many of the contemporary poets. Among other poets, Ajit Datta (1907-78), Bishnu Dey (1909-82), Sudhindranath Datta (1901-60), Amiya Chakravarty (1901-86), Samar Sen (1916-87), Subhas Mukhopadhyay (1919-2003), Arun Mitra (1909-2000) and Sukanta Bhattacharya (1926-47) made their mark, but the one who influenced the later poets most was Jivanananda Das (1899-1954). His first book of poems was *Jhara Palak* (1927), but it was *Dhusar Pandulipi* (1936) that testified to his originality, while *Banalata Sen* (1942) and the posthumous *Rupasi Bangla* (1957) became the most popular. He was influenced by European imagist poets and drawn towards symbolism and surrealism which gave Bengali poetry a totally different look, often difficult to know for a casual reader.

Although Jasimuddin (1903-76) had contributed to the *Kallol*, he never belonged to the group, for his was an entirely different voice. In his poetry, Jasimuddin brought into play the life and diction of rural East Bengal with a daring simplicity that became its hallmark. On the other hand, Sailajananda Mukhopadhyay (1900-76), author of *Kaylakuthi* (1930) and many other volumes of short stories and novels, belonged to the *Kallol* group, enriched its trends of realism, and pioneered the portrayal of, what came to be known as, regional life

in Bengal. Regional novels and stories found their best exponent in Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay (1898-1971) whose *Hansuli Banker Upakatha* (1947, eleven years after the publication of his first book of short stories) stands out as a very significant novel in Bengali literature. Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay's (1899-1950) first novel, *Pather Panchali* (1929), and its sequel, *Aparajita* (1932), both autobiographical, are his best works and give a sentimental and nostalgic narrative of Bengali pastoral life. Banaphul, pseudonym of Balaichand Mukhopadhyay (1899-1979), successfully introduced the short short story in Bengali as evidenced in his first collection of stories, *Banaphuler Galpa* (1935), while the three-volume *Jangam* (1943-45) is considered his best novel. Manik Bandyopadhyay's (1908-56) first novel was *Divaratriir Kavya* (1935), but he was at his best in *Putulnacer Itikatha* (1936) and *Padmanadir Majhi* (1939), while he demonstrated exceptional craftsmanship in his short stories. His storyline was always based on his keen observation and, in portraying human characters, he combined the lessons from Marx and Freud. Bibhutibhusan Mukhopadhyay (1894-1987) is known for his novel *Nilanguriya* (1942), a masterly written love-story, while his short stories, collected in *Ranur Pratham Bhag* (1937) and other volumes, offer both humorous and tragic notes. For humour and satire, Parashuram, pseudonym of Rajshekhar Basu (1880-1960), author of *Gaddalika* (1924) and other volumes of short stories, is unparalleled. Annadashankar Ray (1904-2002) is at his best as an essayist, but his six-volume novel, *Satyasatyā* (1932-43), has placed him high in the world of fiction while his reputation as a poet and versifier is well deserved.

Of the playwrights of the time, the more notables are Shachin Sengupta, Manmatha Ray, Tulsi Lahiri, Bidhayak Bhattacharya, Mahendra Gupta, Bijan Bhattacharya and Banaphul.

In 1926, a literary organization, styled as the Muslim Sahitya Samaj, was founded in Dhaka under the leadership of Kazi Abdul Wadud (1884-1970), a college teacher, and Abul Husain (1896-1938), a university lecturer. It had the newly established Dhaka University as its centre, and the emancipation of intellect as its motto. The group, which included Kazi Anwarul Qadir, Qazi Motahar Hossain, Abul Fazal and Abdul Qadir, drew its inspiration from Prophet Muhammad and the Sufis, Shaikh Sadi and Kemal Ataturk to Romain Rolland, Rammohun Roy and Rabindranath, among others. No wonder that such synthesis was unacceptable to the conservatives more so when the Hindu-Muslim conflict was developing fast. Despite the large support from Nazrul Islam, the organization ceased to exist in less than five years in the face of opposition. Still, Kazi Abdul Wadud's social criticism in his two-volume essays, *Nava-paryay* (1926 and 1929), and *Shashwata Banga* (1951), and Abul Husain's left-leaning economic essays left an indelible mark on Bengali literature and contemporary Muslim society. The studies of Rabindranath, Goethe and Prophet Muhammad by Wadud testifies to his range of interest and catholicity

of mind. Although they were not members of the group, S. Wazed Ali and Mohammad Wazed Ali, in their literary and social essays, put forward thoughtful views and liberal ideas.

The poetry of Shahadat Hossain (1895-1953) and Gholam Mustafa (1897-1964) were largely inspired by Rabindranath, though the diction of the former reminds one of the classicists while the latter was a romantic throughout. Both wrote on the glories of Islam and the El Dorado that Pakistan was going to be. Abdul Qadir, mentioned above, excelled in sonnets. The new trend of Bengali poetry of the twenties and thirties found their exponents in Ahsan Habib (1917-86), Abul Hossain (b.1922) and Syed Ali Ahsan (1922-2002) who reflected the complexities of the world they lived in. Farrukh Ahmed (1920-75), also a modernist like them, was steeped in the ideas of Islamic rejuvenation and was very successful in his use of Perso-Arabic words in Bengali.

Abul Mansur Ahmad (1888-1979), a noted journalist and politician, was a great satirist whose sharp observations were reflected in his first couple of short story collections, *Ayna* (1935) and *Fud Kanfarens* (1944). Although Mahbub-ul Alam is better known as the author of an interesting novel, *Momener Jabanbandi* (1946), his artistry is better evidenced by his short stories. Abul Fazal had attempted to incorporate social criticism in his short stories. Again, the new trend in fiction was reflected in the short stories of Abu Rushd (b. 1919), short stories and novels by Syed Waliullah (1920-76) and those by Shawkat Osman (1917-98).

## VI

As the British left their Indian empire, they partitioned the country into India and Pakistan, in response to the demand by the Muslims for a separate homeland. At the same time, they divided the Punjab and Bengal into two despite protestations that each of these British Indian provinces had a very long and inseparable historical and cultural tradition. Thus, West Bengal became one of the provinces, later states, of India while East Bengal became the distant and more populous part of Pakistan. Bengali literature now came to have two centres: Kolkata and Dhaka. In over half a century so much has been produced in both the areas that it is impossible to record or do justice to them in the short span of an essay.

Many of the litterateurs mentioned above continued their literary pursuit in West Bengal; as would appear from their life-span. After them, Birendra Chattopadhyay and Narendranath Chakrabarty, Naresh Guha and Shankha Ghosh came to limelight as poets. The visit to Kolkata of the Beat poet, Allen Ginsberg, inspired Samir Ray Chaudhuri and Malay Ray Chaudhuri to launch the short-lived *Hangri Jenerashan* (1962), a bulletin that was the mouthpiece of a new poetical movement which went by the same name. One of their members

was Shakti Chattopadhyay (1934-95), who outlived the movement to become the leading poet of his time.

Sivram Chakravarty's short stories had already made their mark as highly humorous, full of puns and comic situations. Syed Mujtaba Ali opened a new vista of humor in his travelogue and *belles-lettres*. Narayan Gangopadhyay and Narendranath Mitra delved into newer areas of social life and human experience in their novels and short stories. Advaita Mallaburman, in his lone novel, recreated the life of East Bengal fishermen and Mahasveta Devi treated on hitherto unknown territories in her attempts to portray the life of the tribal. Bimal Mitra resurrected the historical novel which had its culmination in Sunil Gangopadhyay's (b.1934) trilogy, *Sei Samay*, *Pratham Alo* and *Purba-Pascim*. Sunil's social novels have also been very well received. Samaresh Basu started as a novelist of social realism but soon turned his attention to sexual behaviour that led to the proscription of one of his works and his protracted trial on charges of obscenity from which both the book and the author were acquitted. Kamalkumar Majundar chose for his novels an entirely different prose style. Among other writers of fiction, Shirsendu Mukhopadhyay, Samaresh Majumdar, Debesh Roy and Syed Mustafa Siraj deserve special mention.

The Group Theatre movement, started in the forties and flourished in the next decades, had a salutary effect on Bengali drama. Playwrights like Manoj Mitra, Mohit Chattopadhyay, Badal Sarkar, Shambhu Mitra and Utpal Datta brought in new contents and experimented with newer forms such as the absurd plays while Buddhadeva Basu revived the verse-play.

Nirendranath Roy's criticism of both English and Bengali literatures represented the highest peak of Marxist interpretation in this region. Sibnarayan Roy contributed a great deal to literary criticism, though of a different variety. Abu Sayeed Ayub and Shankha Ghosh appeared, after Buddhadeva Basu, as new interpreters of Tagore. Amalendu Basu's theoretical approach to poetry and its application to Bengali poets received a great deal of appreciation as did Jagadish Bhattacharya's analyses of many luminaries of Bengali literature.

## VII

The establishment of Pakistan, in the early years, created an euphoria affecting Bengali cultural scenario and political positions in East Pakistan. The federal government was determined to make Urdu the only state language ignoring the claim of Bengali, spoken by the majority of the people. Simultaneously, it attempted to replace Bengali script by the Arabic one which was an anathema to the overwhelmingly Muslim population in this part. A large number of unfamiliar Perso-Arabic elements was introduced into Bengali, much to the chagrin of most speakers of the language. There was also an attempt to alienate

the people from the part of the Bengali cultural tradition contributed by the non-Muslims. All these were done in the name of Islam and the supposed ideals of the state. Some writers went along with this attitude. There ensued a conflict on the political plane between the government and the followers of its cultural policy, on the one hand, and the students in general, some other sections of the people and a number of politicians on the other. On the cultural plane the conflict appeared to be one between an urgent religious sense and a liberal humanism, championed by those who were left-leaning or saw themselves as modernists. The bloodshed on 21 February 1952 for the cause of making Bengali one of the state languages of the country put an end to most of these conflicts and a rising tide of Bengali nationalism swept the country leading to the liberation war that made the existence of Bangladesh possible. Thirty years have passed since then and the country had deviated in many respects from its position in 1971.

There were certainly those whose concern for Muslim tradition was genuine and much more deeper. In poetry, for instance, Farrukh Ahmad borrowed from Dobhashi literature in Bengali, and going to the source, from Persian literature, first giving a shape to this 'tradition' in content and then form. But talents like him were few and they were outnumbered by the 'modernists'. Drawing from the perception of critics one may say that Abul Hossain's joyless satire expressed in a bare style, Ahsan Habib's melancholic sentimentality combined with verbal melody, Syed Ali Ahsan's sensuousness and exuberance of personal feelings, Sanaul Huq's fondness for the natural setting of East Bengal, and Sikander Abu Jafar's lyrical patriotism were what we got from their generation. Next came Shamsur Rahman (b.1929) the foremost Bengali poet today, with his mastery of language, complex thinking, passionate love for human being and awareness of the contemporary world. For the last fifty years he has been the most remarkable artistic voice of protest from East Bengal, later Bangladesh. Hasan Hafizur Rahman blended intellectuality with suppressed passion while Abu Zafar Obaidullah first used the form of nursery rhymes and then of the long narrative poem that showed economy and lyric grace as well as a personal statement that could be shared by many. Al Mahmud distinguished for his own diction, employing a large number of dialectical words, and then demonstrating a strong liking for Perso-Arabic elements as he moved from a down-to-earth position to a spiritual plane. While Shahid Quadri is noted intellectuality. Abu Hena Mustafa Kamal had a gift for lyricism blended with a kind of introspection. Mohammad Moniruzzaman appears with romantic sensibility, Rafiq Azad gives his perception of social reality in poetry, and Nirmalendu Goon loudly proclaims his social commitment. Abul Hasan gave his poetry an unusual grace, and Rudra Mohammad Shahidullah showed animated feeling for his people.

Among fiction writers, Syed Waliullah emerged as a realist and social critic, but then became the first Bengali writer to use the stream of consciousness

technique without compromising his perception of reality. Showkat Osman, Shahidullah Kaiser and Satyen Sen reflected their experience in a fashion that may be loosely called Marxist. Shamsuddin Abul Kalam painstakingly recorded the woes and joys of the rural people. Abu Ishaq's concern for the common man, Shahed Ali's lust for life, Abu Jafar Shamsuddin's painstaking chronicles of the past and his lifetime, Abu Rushd's mild approach to reality – all these represent the more senior writers.

Alauddin Al Azad started as a Marxist but soon went beyond its pale. Rashid Karim was more interested in man-woman relations than anything else. Selina Hossain has drawn from history and old poetry, but she skillfully portrays the contemporary life in all its complexities. Shaukat Ali's fiction represents a wide spectrum. Mahmudul Huq's lyrical quality has never come into conflict with the expected portrayal of real life. Hasan Azizul Huq's short stories have their own novelty. Akhtaruzzaman Elias brought in magic realism in Bengali for the first time. Zahir Raihan, a superb short story writer, introduced, in a way, the short novel in our literature. Humayun Ahmed, an exceptionally gifted story-teller, has used this form to the extent of making it the standard for novels. This will be confirmed if we look at the works of two other worthy novelists, Imdadul Huq Milan and Mainul Ahsan Saber. Hasnat Abdul Hye has shown a remarkable restraint in portraying men and events both in his novels and short stories.

Among the early playwrights, four need to be mentioned: Nurul Momen for his humour and verbal wit, Munier Chowdhury for his brilliant conception, witty dialogues and social commitment, Ashkar Ibne Shaikh for his idealism, and Showkat Osman for his unadorned realism. Sayeed Ahmed was very successful with his absurd plays. The Group Theatre movement appeared in 1972 and at once found new playwrights to meet its demands. Thus two verse-plays — the one on the Bangladesh liberation war and the other on anti-imperialist struggle — by Syed Shamsul Huq, a major poet and fiction-writer, have been deservedly very popular. Other noted playwrights include Momtazuddin Ahmed, Abdullah al Mamun and Selim al-Deen.

It is not easy to separate research works from the critical ones, but it would, perhaps, be appropriate to say that Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad, the grand old collector of manuscripts, Muhammad Shahidullah, the polyglot scholar, and M Enamul Huq, who wrote an excellent account of Sufi influence in Bengal, were primary concerned with the history of Bengali literature. Many others contributed to the same field, but this was not their first love. Muhammad Mansuruddin, for instance, was a great collector of Baul songs, and was deeply immersed in folk literature. Muhammad Abdul Hai was a noted linguist and Syed Ali Ahsan a gifted literary critic. Abdul Qadir's study of several authors have helped literary historians but his main contribution lies in the field of prosody. Ahmed Sharif has written on social issues, but his contribution to Bengali literary history surpassed all his other efforts. Munier Chowdhury

introduced the comparative study of literature. Mazharul Islam and Ashraf Siddiqui are two eminent foklorists. Kazi Abdul Mannan and Mustafa Nurul Islam have also made important contribution to history of literature and the press. Ghulam Murshid's interests have been wide, but his reconstruction of Michael Madhusudan's life will, perhaps, be most lasting.

In the domain of essays, Qazi Motahar Hossain and Abul Fazal had written mostly on social questions, but their literary essays have also a quality of their own. Abdul Huq was remarkable for his clarity of thought and expression on matters broadly cultural. Ranesh Dasgupta had been the foremost Marxist literary critic. Kabir Chowdhury has written exclusively on world literature. Zillur Rahman Siddiqui writes on various subjects, from literature to politics, but he has also produced fine informal essays. Serajul Islam Chowdhury, who writes on a wide range of subjects, is specially known for his masterly style and gripping language as much as for combining social issues with literary ones. Borhanuddin Khan Jahangir is erudite, and at the same time rather complex in expression. Abu Hena Mustafa Kamal had an excellent capacity to get into the depth of his subject and his prose, sparsed with eloquence and a sense of humor, never made the reading heavy. Abdul Mannan Syed, also a poet and short story-writer, stands out for his painstaking research and high standard of literary criticism that he applies. Ahmed Sofa blended social and cultural themes and his insight often brought out significant observations and conclusions. Taslima Nasrin's undaunted feminism and vehement anti-communalism have led her to be persecuted at home and made her the most well-known Bangladeshi writer abroad. She is prolific and also repetitive, both in content and mode of expression, but her poetry is undoubtedly marked by genuine feelings and her anthologies of columns, contributed to newspapers and periodicals, are immensely readable.

Any brief account of contemporary writings is bound to be sketchy and the present one is no exception. The author has got to apologise to the readers for its inadequacy and to the writers who have remained unnamed, not because they did not deserve to be mentioned, but because of the limitations of space and his own knowledge.

### Suggested Readings

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## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### Bengali Music

Karunamaya Goswami

**C**harya Geeti: The earliest form of writing in Bengali when the language was just evolving is a kind of song known as *charya geeti*: *charya song*. It is widely believed that charya songs flourished over a long period from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. Musically these songs were modelled after a stylized composition of a the then popular classical genre called *charya* and lyrically they stood patterned like a sonnet. The poet-composers came from the line of the mystic Buddhist saints who spoke symbolically about the secrets of spiritual development leading to *nirvana*: extinction. The singing pattern is believed to have been a combination of the solo and the chorus. A *raga* musical form as it was, the *charya* performance had to be governed by the formational norms of each individual *raga* on which each individual song was composed. Over a long period of performance the *charya*-performers, as it appears to-day, were able to evolve and establish a popular musical model.

**Geeta Govinda:** The charya musical model dominated the mainstream Bengali musical compositions till the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, when a great *vaishnava* poet-composer, Jayadeva appeared on the literary and musical scene of Bengal and switched over to a new form of music and poetry presenting the immortal *Radha-Krishna* love-lore. Jayadeva was born in a village in the district of Birbhum now in West Bengal. He was the court poet of Lakshmana Sena, a king of Bengal who ascended the throne in 1178/79 A.D. A poet, musician, musicologist and choreographer of a very high order, Jayadeva lives on in the music history of Bengal as well as Indian music history as a whole for leaving behind a book of songs which not only shaped the later course of music and poetry in Bengal but also influenced very profoundly the traditions of music, dance and drama in different regions of India. Jayadeva called his song-book *Geeta Govinda*: Song on *Govinda*, which is the other name of *Lord Krishna*. *Geeta Govinda* is a collection of 24 songs on the *Radha-Krishna* love-lore, a

theme which has been countlessly presented in all the Indian art forms. Himself a great performer of classical music, Jayadeva adopted an elaborate *dhruvapada* musical model for his songs which stood very close to the dhrupad form in the modern sense. The *Geeta Govinda* songs, written in sweet and simple Sanskrit, marked the beginning of a great *vaishnava* musical era in Bengal which in full glory continued till the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The era was at its height when *Shri Chaitanya* (1486-1533) made the singing of *vaishnava* songs an indispensable part of performing the *vaishnava* religion which he preached.

**Shri Krishna Kirtana:** Next to *Geeta Govinda* song we get one more illustrious song-book called the '*Shri Krishna Kirtana*' written some time between 1450 and 1500 A.D. by one Badu Chandidas who enriched and diversified his musical and literary inheritance from the charya-poets and the poetry of the *Geeta Govinda* by incorporating into his work the regional musical and lyrical developments from Bengal. Both *charya* and the *dhruvapada* musical form of the *Geeta Govinda* were compositional styles of all India nature. Badu Chandidas made extensive use of the *Radha-Krishna* episode in his huge narrative work in which he excellently arranged hundreds of songs. '*Shri Krishna Kirtan*' was a grand song-drama which Badu Chandidas and his troupe performed on a simple stage. It is regarded by critics as a multi-dimensional work which served as the basis for some important musical and literary genres to flourish in Bengal during the next one hundred years or more.

**Padavali Kirtana:** But as for its immediate impact, '*Shri Krishna Kirtana*' served as a lively background for the compositions of hundreds of *vaishnava* poets who presented the lyrical versions of the spiritual movement in Bengal of *Shri Chaitanya*. These poet-composers have been called *mahajana*: saints, and their compositions *mahajana padavali*: songs by saints. The songs were popularly known as *kirtana* because they were sung aloud. Although *vaishnava* songs had been composed and sung long since, they were given a religious sanction by *Shri Chaitanya*, who made singing in praise of *Lord Krishna* a compulsory part of the cult he preached. *Shri Chaitanya* himself was an untiring singer of *vaishnava* songs. He also taught others how to sing. He is regarded as the father of *padavali* singing. Like the *Radha-Krishna* love-lore, numerous songs were also composed on the life and teachings of *Shri Chaitanya*. Many of the *padavali* composers possessed high poetic and musical talent. They brought about a combination of music of an excellent kind and lyricism of a high order. In fact they employed music to heighten the suggestivity of the lyric. This combination became aesthetically so accomplished that it became an ideal for the composers in Bengal where music did not grow independently to take an upper hand over poetry. This is, in fact, the most vital point of consideration where the Hindustani compositions and those of Bengal basically differ.

The musical ideas floated by Badu Chandidas developed into the great *vaishnava* school of music in Bengal during the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Narottama Thakur (1531-1587), a *vaishnava* saint from Rajshahi took a leading role in founding the musical school. Narottama was a renowned musicologist and a skilled performer who combined Hindustani classical genres like *dhrupad* with the indigenous musical forms of Bengal to give an initial shape to the idea of the *vaishnava* musical school which he presented at a grand *vaishnava* convention held in his village probably in 1584. The idea was unanimously accepted in the assemblage. Narottama's instance inspired others to evolve new schools of *vaishnava* music which in course of time stood at five. They together gave an elaborate shape to a tradition of music which is typically known to be Bengal's own contribution to Indian music. The *vaishnava* music has an amazingly intricate system of *tal*: rhythm.

**Shaktapada sangeet:** The glorious age of *padavali* continued till the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and there could, till those days, be no song in Bengal without *Kanu*, a popular name for *Krishna*. But the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century saw the emergence of a different musical tradition in Bengal known as *shaktapada sangeet*: songs on goddesses of power. The poet-composers of this line borrowed very largely from *mangala gan*, representing the renowned tradition of Bengali narrative compositions on the power-cult gods and goddesses. Critics believe that *mangala gan* was first composed in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The trend followed for several centuries and reached its climax in the compositions of Bharat Chandra Ray (1712-1760). *Shaktapada sangeet* comprised lyrical compositions in praise of the goddess *Kali* and the goddess *Durga* sung as an essential part of their *upasana*: worship. Ramprasad Sen (1720-1781) was the trendsetter. *Vaishnava padavali* were songs of love, of perpetual love between the eternal feminine as symbolized by *Radha* and the eternal masculine symbolized by *Krishna*. But at the core of *shaktapada sangeet* there remains the eternal mother, symbol of infinite compassion and power but often displaying violent and terrorizing physical features. For many years songs on power-cult goddesses formed the principal trend of Bengali art music. Ramprasad Sen also innovated a new compositional form known till to day as the melody of Ramprasad. It was the combination of *baul*, a Bengali folk form and a classical melody. The combination was strewn with some phrases from *kirtan*. The melody of Ramprasad is historically very important because it was the first ever interaction on authentic record between the folk and the classical music giving an exemplary shape to a new compositional pattern. This approach of combination dominated much of the musical works in Bengal during the nationalist movements throughout the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Next to Ramprasad Sen was Kamalakanta Bhattacharya (1772-1821), a talented poet and a trained musician who took up in a big way Ramprasad's line of *shaktapada sangeet*. The tradition created by Ramprasad and Kamalakanta proved extremely fertile and hundreds of poet-composers appeared over the next one hundred and fifty years or so to build a huge stock of songs glorifying the

power-cult goddesses, particularly *Kali*. They accepted every prevailing mode of music, classical or semi-classical as the basis of their compositions. Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976) was the last of the great Bengali composers of *shaktapada sangeet*.

**Tappa: Secular Songs** - The beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was marked by the historic emergence in Bengal of a musical genre called *tappa*. It was historic in more than one sense, the most important of which was the *tappa*-poets' courageous efforts to build a different kind of Bengali urban music, for instance, a secular one. So long Bengali song irrespective of whether they were *Charya*, *padavali kirtan* or *shaktapada sangeet* had been religious songs, sung as part of religious obligations. There was, of course, the question of love in *padavali kirtan*, but it was love in a spiritual sense, between the two eternal entities, one *Radha* the feminine symbolizing the finite and the other *Krishna*, the masculine symbolizing the infinite and so on. But the *tappa* poet-composers got rid of symbolism and spiritualism of every kind and sought to portray love as a tender relation between man and woman emphasizing mostly that inevitable aspect of the man-woman relationship, namely, *viraha*: separation.

Ramnidhi Gupta, popularly known as Nidhu Babu (1741-1839) was really the man, a gifted poet, musician and performer who took upon himself the single handed responsibility of initiating the secular tradition of Bengali urban music with his center of activity in Calcutta. He learned *tappa* at a place far outside Bengal almost as soon as it was propagated by Golam Nabi (1742-1792), one of his contemporaries in Lucknow, a great center of Hindustani classical music. *Tappa* is the third of the great four Hindustani schools of music, the other three schools being 1. *Dhrupad*, 2. *Kheyal* and 3. *Thumri*. It is widely believed that Golam Nabi made a wonderful combination of Lucknow kheyal and the regional music of Punjab as sung by the camel drivers to arrive at the *tappa* style.

Ramnidhi Gupta learned *tappa* with great care and was inspired by its secular essence. He resolutely decided to change the course of Bengali music by founding in Bengal a secular musical trend by himself acting in the roles of its poet, composer and performer. He composed hundreds of *tappa* songs of two stanzas of two lines each and spoke of love as a human phenomenon in unambiguous terms. Ramnidhi made some distinguished changes to the improvisational ethos of *Hindustani tappa* to tone down its jovial spirit and make it perceptibly sad and slow to suit to the dejected mood of his lyrics couching the feelings of tearful heroines with little or no hope of union with the heroes.

Contemporary with Ramnidhi was Kalidas Chattopadhyay (1750-1820) who was a *tappa* poet, composer and performer of a high order. He learned *tappa* at Banaras, widely known as a city of music, from the direct line of Golam Nabi. Both Ramnidhi and Kalidas began their career at the very beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup>

century. Kalidas did not favour Ramnidhi's secular approach to poetry and music. He rather chose to compose *tappa* songs on the power-cult goddesses, mostly on *Kali* and from these two founding fathers we get two distinct lines of *Bengali tappa*, namely the secular school of love songs and the religious line of *shaktapada sangeet*. Even by the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century religion was the dominating content of Bengali music, although Ramnidhi's secular trend was paid ample attention by many poet-composers of his time and by many more who appeared afterwards. Dasharathi Ray (1806-1857), Shridhar Kathak (1816-?), Govinda Adhikari (1800-1872). Ashutosh Dev (1803-1856). Kashi Prasad Ghose (1809-1873), Monomohan Basu (1831-1912), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), D.L.Ray (1863-1913) and many others like them are found to liberally borrow from the *tappa* musical style set forth by Ramnidhi.

**Brahma Sangeet:** The 19<sup>th</sup> century mainstream Bengali music had, apart from *tappa*, some other branches of development of which two must be mentioned without fail. They are *Brahma sangeet* and *Swadeshi gan*.

**Brahma sangeet :** *Brahma songs* are inseparably related to the new spiritual order founded by the Bengali thinker and religious reformer, Raja Rammohan Ray (1774-1833). The cult he preached is known as Brahmo dharma: Brahmo religion. The *Brahma songs* were the new religion's prayer songs. In the traditional Hindu concept God is one but His numerous attributes are symbolized by gods and goddesses. The traditional Hindu religious songs glorify these gods and goddesses. But Rammohan Ray put an exceptional emphasis on the oneness and indivisibility of God and introduced a new system of worship. He explained his religious ideas in extensive and inspiring writings. Rammohan Ray, who was a man of great musical culture strongly believed in the efficacy of music in purifying the human mind. So he made prayer songs an inseparable part of his Brahmo religious practice. As he started preaching his new religious cult, he felt that fresh devotional songs would have to be composed and himself began to compose the kind of songs he required. A fresh stream of Bengali songs made a beginning.

Rammohan Ray was a trained musician and had a keen taste for classical music. As for his own songs he followed the *tappa* model of his trainer, Kalidas Chattopadhyay, a pioneer Bengali *tappa* composer. The *dhrupad* musical style was soon associated with *Brahma songs* as Rammohan himself invited the noted dhrupad performer Vishnu Chakravarti to take charge of the musical training in his Brahmo religious organization. Rammohan died in England only five years after he founded the Brahmo religious society (1828). His *tappa* tradition did not last long and instead the *dhrupad* model of *Vishnu* became the overwhelming musical model for the composers of *Brahma songs* to follow. Rammohan Ray was not happy to be the only composer of *Brahma songs* in the initial years. He inspired some of his friends like Nimai Charan Mitra, Krishnamohan Majumdar, Bhairav Chandra Datta, Kalinath Ray, Gourmohan

Sarkar and Nilratan Haldar to compose *Brahma songs* which they successfully did. Brahma religious movement with its prayer songs made a good start and it continued to thrive well in spite of the early death of its propounder.

Devendranath Tagore (1817-1905) became the leader of the Brahma society after Rammohan Ray. Himself a philosopher, poet and musician, Devendranath was a passionate follower of Rammohan's trend of *Brahma songs*. He was an admirer of *Vishnu* and his *dhrupad* style. So *dhrupad* was the musical model for the Brahma sect under his leadership.

The members of the Brahma society did not always stand united. Keshav chandra Sen (1838-1884) entered into a philosophical dispute with Devendranath and founded in 1866 his own break-away sect which he called Indian Brahma Society. The musical model for the prayer songs of this society was also changed. They followed the model of *padavali kirtan* instead of *dhrupad*. Shivnath Shastri (1847-1919) and Anandamohan Basu (1847-1906) conflicted ideologically with Keshav Sen and founded a third stream of the Brahma sect and called it General Brahma Society. But they did not discard Keshav Sen's musical model for prayer songs.

The *dhrupad* based musical style flourished in the prayer songs of the sect led by Devendranath Tagore which was called Old Brahma Society. Devendranath turned his ancestral home at Jorasanko in Calcutta into a great center of musical activities and the devotional songs of the sect under his leadership got ample support from the musical environment of his home. He himself composed some Brahma songs and inspired the members of his family to follow suit. His great songs who earned tremendous reputation as poets and musicians composed hundreds of sons in the Old Brahma Society *dhrupad* style and accomplished what best could be done in this stream. Dwijendranath Tagore, Satyendranath Tagore, Jyotirindrnath Tagore and above all Rabindranath Tagore – and all sons of Devendranath Tagore composed brilliant *Brahma Songs* and shaped the most remarkable chapter of Bengali devotional music.

**Swadeshi Gan: Patriotic Songs** - Bengali songs of patriotic spirit, *swadeshi gan* as they were called, were a mid 19<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon. The principal inspiration in composing such songs was political in nature which originated out of a sense of confrontation between the native Indian people and the British rulers. The background of such songs was formed by the 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalist poets. The patriotic call was first heard in the poems and songs of Ishwar Gupta (1812-1859). The nationalist appeal of the poems of Rangalal Bandyopadhyay, Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay, Madhusudan Datta, Nabinchandra Sen and others heightened the spirit of Ishwar Gupta's patriotic call. Particular mention must be made of an exhibition of country-based things with which the new musical stream surged forth.

The exhibition known as the *Hindu Mela* was started in the spirit of a pamphlet containing the text of a talk made by an eminent Bengali thinker,

Rajnarayan Basu in 1866 in which he urged all the educated members of Bengali society to be imbued with a sense of patriotism and dedicate themselves to the good of the country. Navagopal Mitra, also a nationalist thinker quickly caught the idea and thought of organizing a week-long exhibition of country-based goods which, to his mind, would inspire the people to look at the core of the problem of foreign rule. The exhibition was arranged in 1867 under active assistance from Devendranath Tagore and the other members of the Jorasanko Tagore family. It was a brilliant occasion to display country-based goods and traditional physical feats, to honour the talented people of the country and the most importantly, to sing patriotic songs. The idea was that the patriotic songs from the exhibition platform would reach the heart of a large number of people attending the celebration at a time. It is on record that the second session of the *swadeshi* or the patriotic fair in 1868 was inaugurated with a song whose lyric was written by Satyendranath Tagore and music was composed by Vaishnu Chakravarti. This is regarded as the first great Bengali patriotic song of heroic sentiment. Satyendranath's song became very popular and the patriotic songs were sung in an ever increasing number in the subsequent sessions of the *mela* which continued without break for 14 years. Dwijendranath Tagore composed a song for the exhibition in the *raga Natavehag* which described India under foreign rule as a weeping woman. The essential sadness of his patriotic feeling was quickly picked up by many other poet-composers and a stream of doleful Bengali patriotic songs was set beside the stronger stream of songs of heroic sentiment. Satyendranath Tagore and Dwijendranath Tagore, both sons of Devendranath Tagore became the founders of these two distinguished streams and eminent Bengali poet composers like Manomohan Basu, Ganendranath Tagore, Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay, Govindachandra Ray, Vishnurama Chattopadhyay and Rangalal Bandyopadhyay joined them soon to prepare the early background of Bengali patriotic songs.

Rabindranath Tagore joined some later sessions of the *swadeshi* exhibition and himself sang some of his patriotic songs. His elder brother Jyotindranath Tagore who was a renowned poet and composer formed an association named Rejuvenation Club (Sanjibani Sabha) whose motto was to preach patriotism through writings and songs. A good deal of patriotic songs were composed under the auspices of this club. The professional theatre in Bengal opened amidst enthusiasm with the founding of the General Theater in 1872 in Calcutta. From the very beginning the professional theatre propagated patriotism through plays featuring songs. The founding of the Indian National Congress (1885) also proved inspiring for the growth of Bengali patriotic songs. It was customary to sing patriotic songs in Congress sessions.

The movement opposing the partition of Bengal (1905-1911) created a very large background for the flourishing of Bengali patriotic songs. Lord Curzon, then Governor General of India made a declaration to partition Bengal in 1905

on the ground of increasing administrative efficiency. The movement launched to oppose the partition was very largely known as the *swadeshi movement* which stood for the opposition to British rule and the unity of Bengal. The idea of boycotting all what was foreign was a remarkable feature of the movement. Patriotic songs played a very important role in propagating the message of the movement against the partition of Bengal. Poets and composers like Rabindranath Tagore, Dwijendralal Ray, Atulprasad Sen, Rajani Kanta Sen, Mukunda Das, Kaliprasanna Kavyavisarad, Amritalal Basu, Pramathnath Ray Chaudhuri, Vijayachandra Majumdar, Ashwinikumar Datta, Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, Kaminikumar Bhattacharya, Manomohan Chakravarti and many others composed numerous songs in support of this movement.

The swadeshi movement was started in Calcutta. But soon it spread over the whole of Bengal and patriotic songs in huge number began to be composed and sung in every corner of the country. Powerful poets and composers appeared on the scene from the far-flung areas. A towering poet-composer and playwright like Mukunda Das came from a remote town like Barisal.

The enthusiasm for Bengali patriotic songs waned and the swadeshi movement declined when the partition of Bengal order was rescinded in 1911. The chief musical exponents of the movement had either died or retired from composing patriotic songs.

But this was only a temporary phase. The stream of patriotic songs in Bengal once again surged forth after a decade or so when, through successive movements the people of Bengal were locked in a tough confrontation with the foreign rulers. The movement for independence was gaining momentum and violent political clashes were taking place. A new wave of terrorist-style attacks by the secret revolutionary organizations fighting for freedom of India were mounted on the members of the British ruling class and their local collaborators. The barbaric massacre at Jalianwallahbag (1919) of hundreds of unarmed people by a British army detachment and the non-co-operation movement of Mahatma Gandhi (1920-21) created the backdrop of this tense freedom struggle. Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976), called the rebel poet of Bengal for his fiery anti-British outpourings became the poetical and musical mouthpiece of this volatile time and composed a fresh batch of explosive patriotic songs.

**Jyotirindranath Tagore (1849-1925):** Son of Devendranath Tagore, Jyotirindranath, a great poet-composer infused a spirit of modernness into the tradition of Bengali urban music and gave it a new aesthetic direction. He systematized the 19<sup>th</sup> century musical attitudes of Bengal and tried to put them into a frame of discipline in the Western sense. Jyotirindranath is considered as the forerunner of the five great Bengali poet composers who created the golden age of modern urban Bengali music. They are Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Dwijendralal Ray (1863-1913), Rajani Kanta Sen (1865-1910), Atulprasad Sen (1871-1934) and Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976). He was adequately educated in

Indian and Western music and known as a towering musicologist. Jyotirindranath founded music schools to impart formal music education and published music journals. He developed a notation system to accurately preserve and teach music. What was more, he began to propagate the idea of totally composed music as opposed to the Indian tradition of the improvisatory one. He himself followed the Western idea of composed music and inspired others to do the same. That was a hard battle he had to fight to establish absolute right of the composer over the music he composed. As the tradition would go, only the poet's right was guaranteed, nobody could change the text, while the performer was at liberty, often extravagantly, to play upon the musical composition. Jyotirindranath would leave no scope for the performer to add or alter. It was a historical turning point which would drive the modern urban music of Bengal predominantly to the composed musical line. The impact of this new musical idea was immediately felt in the works of Jyotirindranath's disciple and younger brother, Rabindranath Tagore, the greatest Bengali poet and composer and the great epitome of composed music in Bengal.

**Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941):** Rabindranath Tagore is the greatest Bengali poet and composer. He is the only Bengali poet and also the only poet from the Indian sub-continent to win the Nobel Prize (1913). The book of poems for which the award came was called *Gitanjali* : Song Offerings. The collected poems were mostly songs representing some of the best of his compositional style. Rabindranath was brought up in an excellent home environment of classical music. But he had little interest in taking rigorous training. He only enriched his sensibilities with diverse musical experiences from the home atmosphere. Tagore received, of course, some musical schooling from his elder brother, Jyotirindranath Tagore.

It is on record that Rabindranath Tagore began to systematically compose songs from 1881. The number of his song stands at about 2500. His sixty years of life as a poet-composer is divided by critics into three phases. The first phase extends from 1881 to 1900, the second phase extends from 1901 to 1920 and the third phase extends from 1921 to 1941. The first phase has been described as the period of preparation. Tagore prepared himself musically and lyrically by composing his own songs, following some existing Hindustani classical song-models. The second phase has been called the period of experimentation. At this stage Tagore made wide-ranging experiments in creating varied melodic patterns independent of Hindustani stock-songs. He, in this phase, is also found to pay keen attention to the folk music of Bengal, particularly baul. Tagore composed most of his patriotic songs at this time and many of these songs were profoundly influenced by *baul* music. The third phase has been described as the phase of composition par excellence. It presents us with what is known as the Tagore musical style. The compositions of this stage were made on the basis of

experiences gathered and experimentation made of a very wide range spread over forty years. The mature Tagore musical style evolved out of a combination of folk forms, particularly *baul* and classical melodies and musical patterns. It gave a new direction of Bengaliness to the urban music of Bengal.

Rabindranath Tagore put his songs into four major categories. He called them *Puja*: Worship, *swadesh*: Homeland, *Prem*: Love, and *Prakriti* : Nature. There are two minor categories namely, *Vichitra*: Variety and *Anushthanik*: Ceremonial.

Tagore's *Puja* category songs also known as *Brahma sangeet* are about six hundred and fifty in number. Composed mostly in the *dhrupad* musical style, these songs stand as the best of Bengali devotional songs. The *Puja* category songs in their excellent combination of excellent lyricism and music make the essence of allegiance to God universally inspiring. Even though as a religious movement *Brahmaism* has declined Tagore's *Brahma songs* are progressively gaining in popularity. His experimentation in these songs gave a new direction to Bengali urban music.

The *swadesh* category songs of Rabindranath Tagore stand at about seventy in number. They include some of the best of Bengali patriotic songs. Tagore started his career as a poet-composer in a keen patriotic home environment. As a young man he began to compose patriotic songs and continued the mission till 1911 when the movement opposing the partition of Bengal was over. His contribution to this genre afterwards was very scant. Tagore composed his historic song "My golden Bengal, I love you", now the national anthem of Bangladesh, during the swadeshi movement. In most of his songs composed during the swadeshi movement Tagore experimented with folk melodies, particularly with *baul* and thus began a trend which took a finished shape in the third or the last phase of his life as a composer.

Rabindranath Tagore composed nearly 300 songs on the seasons of Bengal. His position in this respect is unique in the sense that no other Bengali poet-composer has worked so significantly and on such a huge scale like him. He does not merely describe the visible changes in nature: in flowers, in plants and creepers, in wind, in river and in sky etc., he also communicates the corresponding states of the human mind. The relation between music and nature has always been intimate and this assumed an organized shape in the classical music of India where seasonal melodies were made and the six major *ragas* were linked with the six seasons. Nature always played an important role in shaping the aesthetic inspirations of men when they lived close to it. But they were being increasingly cut off from nature as the rural life declined and cities as centers of modern industrial civilization grew and expanded. Rabindranath Tagore tried to revive in his seasonal songs the old and affectionate and perhaps eternal relation between man and nature. He came to North Bengal to oversee his ancestral estate at an early age. There he passed year after year in the midst of trees, and the green and golden fields, shaded villages and roaring rivers. At the age of forty

Rabindranath founded the *Shantiniketan* school where also he lived very close to a pastoral environment. This closeness to nature inspired him keenly to give a pen picture in hundreds of songs of the changing state of the Bengali mind and the changing cycle of nature. Tagore composed the best of Bengali season-songs.

Rabindranath Tagore composed over four hundred love songs. The stream of such songs flows smoothly from the first to the last phase of his creative life. He never failed to be inspired with the intrinsic charm and depth of the man-woman relationship and presented the basic feelings of life in its endless shades and subtleties. As in the music, so in the theme, a gradual development takes place in Tagore songs of love. The songs of Tagore's first phase of musical life give a robust feeling of a personalized relationship. But in the songs of the later phases the personal mode of feelings merges into the universal urge and the expressions both lyrical and musical become philosophical and nearly ethereal.

Like the best of Bengali love songs Tagore songs on love never present a jovial mood. They are pensive songs musing over a sense of separation between the feminine and the masculine both seeking a union which mostly appears to be remote. Tagore presented the best of Bengali songs on love.

Rabindranath Tagore termed some of his songs ceremonial. They are befitting to some ceremonies and festivals. These songs speak of Tagore's great innovative power. Today Bengalis cannot think of holding many of their ceremonies without Tagore songs.

Tagore modeled his music on *dhrupad*. He recognized this on many occasions. Once he said: "We have got two things in *dhrupad*. I. Vastness and depth 2. A sense of control and symmetry." These are the qualities which he valued most as a composer. It must be said very clearly that Tagore only portrayed the essence of dhrupad music as symbolized by the qualities like vastness, depth, control and symmetry; he never chose it for its intricate way of improvisation. His highest objective as a composer was to heighten the lyrical suggestivity which he pursued with a missionary zeal. Tagore never approved of the traditional idea of extempore improvisation granting a stronger hand to music over poetry. He rather worked consistently and continuously to bring about a combination of poetry and music. His success in this respect is regarded as phenomenal. Rabindranath Tagore pursued very strictly the concept of composed music unknown to Bengal before his elder brother, Jyotirindranath. He gave an institutional shape to this concept by composing nearly two thousand five hundred songs on this model and established the idea of the absolute right of a composer over his composition. He left nothing for the care of posterity. Tagore took very careful steps in teaching his music and preparing their notations and in grooming a generation of performers so that his compositions could not be distorted through carelessness or willful improvisations. He largely followed the four-movement structural design of *dhrupad* which immediately became the most widely followed musical model in Bengal.

The modern developments of urban music in Bengal owe very largely to Rabindranath Tagore. He gave them a new aesthetic direction and he himself exists as the highest model of a composer-poet.

**Dwijendralal Ray (1863-1913):** Dwijendralal Ray, popularly known as D.L.Ray was one of the major poets and composers of Bengal. He was the first Bengali composer to create a musical style out of a combination of *raga* music and Western music. He also created a personal approach to *raga* music, particularly *kheyal* and *tappa*. Son of a renowned musician, Dewan Kartikayachandra Ray, D.L.Ray received his early music education from his father. Having passed M.A. in English in 1884 he went to England for higher education. There he learned Western music under the careful guidance of tutors. On his return to India, he joined government service as a Deputy Magistrate at Munger, a small town in Bihar. There he began his illustrious career as a poet and composer. He was tutored by S.N. Majumdar and some others in acquiring intensive knowledge of *raga music* and performing ability.

D.L. Ray's initial success as a poet composer was strongly felt in humorous songs. He equally excelled in pungent satire and refreshing humor. His lyrics were perfectly worthy of humor. He evolved a new idiom for it. His music was also new, a kind which was unheard of in Bengal. It was the product of a judicious combination of *raga* music with Western music. He evolved a pattern of movement which was purely new and enlivening.

D.L. Ray earned phenomenal success as a composer of patriotic songs. The lyrics proved of his great poetic power and the compositional style proved of his power of innovation. It was again a wonderful combination of *raga* music and Western music. The heroic appeal of the patriotic songs burst out of the composition in a significantly controlled charge of emotion. The Western-type rise and fall of melodic phrases added a new dimension to expressiveness. His utilization of the Western chorus style in a *raga* musical frame gave a new direction to Bengali patriotic songs. D.L.Ray was also a pioneer in Bengal of composing march music.

D.L.Ray's love songs, which are a dominant genre, prove of his individual approach to *raga music*, more particularly to *kheyal* and *tappa* and to a mixed form *tap-kheyal*. Attention was paid to every individual song from the angle of composed music. It was *kheyal* or *tappa* or *tap-kheyal* as the case might be, but it was not the traditional stereotype. It was a fresh one. As the very first phrase was delivered, one would feel that something new was going to happen, something fresh suiting the talent of the lyric was composed. This is what an innovative man thoroughly educated in Western music would unmistakably do.

It is unfortunate that D.L.Ray did not receive the right kind of appreciation from the contemporary critics. The shining presence of Rabindranath Tagore did it all. But present day critics are trying hard to reinstate him to the proper

place in history he demands for his momentous contributions as a builder of modern Bengali urban music.

**Rajani Kanta Sen (1865-1910):** Rajani Kanta Sen is one of the major makers of modern Bengali music. He is particularly known for his accomplishments as a composer of devotional songs. Rajani Kanta Sen was born in the district of Sirajganj now in Bangladesh. His father, Guruprasad Sen was a poet and musician. Rajani Kanta took an interest in signing and writing songs at an early age. But he earned the real reputation of a composer as he settled in Rajshahi now in Bangladesh as a lawyer.

Rajani Kanta took an active interest in the movement opposing the partition of Bengal (1905-1911) and himself took part in it. He also composed songs on the movement's *swadeshi* mottos. But soon misfortunes began to haunt him. He lost his children and then he himself fell fatally ill first with a kidney ailment and then with throat cancer. Even from death-bed Rajani Kanta Sen composed some sublime songs on the spirit of surrender to the will of God.

Today Rajani Kanta Sen is best remembered for his patriotic and devotional songs. Some of his patriotic songs are still sung with fervour. He extended whole-hearted support to the *swadeshi* ideas behind the movement opposing the partition of Bengal. The idea of boycott of foreign goods inspired him greatly and he composed the greatest Bengali song on boycott *mayer deya mota kapar mathay tule ne re bhai*. The song earned him sweeping overnight popularity.

Rajani Kanta Sen composed a large number of devotional songs, most of which can simply be termed great. In simplicity of approach and depth of feeling the lyrics are touching and the music sublime. As finished compositions they possess an overwhelming virtue which is found in the great works of art. In spite of his remaining within the ambit of the traditional styles of Bengali urban music in every respect, Rajani Kanta did something new; something purely of his own and the works of no other poet-composer in Bengal can be compared with this.

Rajani Kanta's favourite musical form was *kheyal*. But he had an individual approach to this form and devised a musical mode of his own which stood perfectly capable of communicating the depth of his feeling, innocence of his urge for divine mercy and salvation. Baul, an important folk form of Bengal was significantly accommodated in some of his compositions.

**Atulprasad Sen (1871-1934):** Atulprasad Sen is one of the five major Bengali poet-composers. His prime contribution consisted in creating a thumri-based background for Bengali art songs. He was born in Dhaka. His father, a physician and music lover, unfortunately died when Atulprasad was very young. His grandfather who was a poet, composer and singer took the responsibility of his upbringing. Atulprasad's childhood passed in a literary and musical environment. This proved extremely useful for the flowering of his talent as a poet-composer and singer. On his return from London as a Barrister Atulprasad joined the bar at Lucknow where he lived to the end of his life.

Atulprasad Sen composed two hundred and ten songs in all. He divided them into four broad groups which are *Debvata* : God, *Prakriti* : Nature, *Manava* : Man, and *Swadesh* : Motherland. His mode of classification appears to be influenced by Rabindranath Tagore. Like D. L. Ray, Atulprasad had been to England and knew Western music well. But he never borrowed as much as a single Western melodic or rhythmic turn in his compositions. *Raga* musical genres like *kheyal*, *thumri* and *ghazal* were his principal musical sources. He also made occasional use of *tappa*.

Atulprasad Sen is regarded as the pioneer Bengali *ghazal* composer. Much before Kazi Nazrul Islam, Atulprasad composed six or seven Bengali *ghazals*. He lived in Lucknow, a city renowned for *thumri* and *ghazal* schools of music. Atulprasad knew Urdu well for which he had easy access to the mainstream *ghazal* poetry developed in India in Urdu over hundreds of years. With this background he began to compose Bengali *ghazals*. Musically this effort could be of immense possibilities had he continued the trend for a long time. But he stopped at the initial stage after composing only six or seven songs. He rather chose to continuously try to compose Bengali songs on the *thumri* model. So as a *ghazal* maker Atulprasad Send was not known beyond his small enlightened intimate circle. As he lived far from Calcutta, the prime center for musical activities in Bengal, he was not in the immediate limelight for Bengali people. So Atulprasad's contribution as a *ghazal* maker was discovered much later.

*Thumri* is the sweetest form of Hindustani light classical music. The genre had a systematic beginning in Lucknow in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Hindustani models like *dhrupad*, *kheyal* and *tappa* had always been consistently followed by the Bengali composers since the very beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But Bengal had to wait for Atulprasad Sen to introduce a fresh trend of *thumri* based compositional style. With its infinite tenderness and charm, the *thumri* style captivated the Bengali music loving people and the cycle of the Hindustani connection with the urban music of Bengal, in this way, became complete. Atulprasad put the trend of *thumri-based* songs on a solid ground by composing over a hundred songs on hosts of *thumri* shades. This *thumri* based mode of composition became the most widely accepted style of music by the Bengali composers of the post - Tagore era who worked for popular and entertaining music.

Living far away from Bengal, Atulprasad under the influence of Rabindranath Tagore, took an active interest in folk and semi-folk music of Bengal like *baul* and *kirtan* and composed some immortal songs based on these airs. On some occasions he came out with a wonderful blending of classical and folk forms.

Atulprasad Sen contributed largely to the *swadeshi* ideas as reflected in Bengali songs ever since 1867 and he himself composed some major songs on those themes. The greatest song on the love of Bengali as the mother tongue was composed by him. The song was compassed to mark Tagore's winning of

nobel Prize. Its enchanting musical style came from *baul*. The musical formations of his devotional songs were by and large, borrowed from *kheyal* and *baul* and *kirtan* or a mixture of them. Atulprasad Sen is very widely acclaimed for his brilliant love songs, which are infinitely sweet and sad. His personal sense of failure in love shrouds all his compositions with a tremendous longing for union. Hindustani forms like *kheyal* and *thumri* took a new turn in his works and left behind a mark of his keen original approach. As a composer of love songs Atulprasad still remain irresistible. Atulprasad Sen is the only major Bengali poet who wrote nothing remarkable other than songs.

**Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976):** Kazi Nazrul Islam is a major Bengali poet and composer. He enriched the modern urban music of Bengal in many ways. Nazrul came of a poor family from Burdwan now in West Bengal, India. He struggled hard for livelihood ever since he was a child. He showed strong symptoms of poetic and musical talent at an early age when he worked for folk musical troupes. In 1917 Nazrul, then a promising student, left school to join army. Even in the barracks in Karachi, a city now in Pakistan, Nazrul took interest in writing and composing. At the end of the First World War when his regiment was disbanded, Nazrul came to Calcutta in March 1920. There he started his career as writer, composer and journalist. He stood with an indomitable will against the British subjugation of India and against evils in all forms. He began writing poems on rebellious ideas and was known as the 'rebel poet' of Bengal from 1922. He was arrested by the British-Indian Government on a charge of writing and publishing a seditious poem in November, 1922 and was sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment. He was freed in December, 1923. From the end of 1925 Nazrul began to take part in active politics of socialist orientation and worked for economic freedom of the toiling people.

In spite of engaging in these ventures Nazrul always found a time to compose songs. In the initial years he took a larger interest in the patriotic song genre. From the end of 1926 he began to compose *ghazal* and concentrated more on music and literature than on politics and similar things. Nazrul Islam joined the gramophone company His Master's Voice in Calcutta by the middle of 1928 as a composer and trainer. This marked the beginning of an exceptionally productive period of his life as a songwriter and composer. He worked as a composer of stage music and more importantly as a composer of film music. His contribution in the initial years of talkies in Bengal is deemed to be historic. Nazrul started broadcasting for All India Radio, Calcutta in 1938. The broadcasts done at regular intervals lighted up some old obscure *ragas* and also some *ragas* created freshly by him. At the height of his creative life Kazi Nazrul Islam fell seriously ill in 1942. That was an incapacitating illness from which he could never recover. He totally lost his power of speech and mental powers and continued to live only physically. He was then only 43. Nazrul was brought to Dhaka in May, 1972 after the emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign

state in 1971. Arrangements were made for him in Dhaka to live in state honour. Nazrul breathed his last in Dhaka on August 29, 1976 and was laid to rest with full state honour in the compound of Dhaka University mosque. He is the national poet of Bangladesh.

Nazrul's creative life extended for nearly 22 years. His life exclusively as a composer, however, did not stretch for more than 16 years. He composed an amazing number of more than three thousand songs in such a short period. It is not only a question of number but also question of variety of forms and themes that he covered. His instance will ever remain a miracle in the history of music.

Nazrul's life as a composer is divided into four phases. The first phase extending from 1920 to 1926 is the phase of patriotic songs. The second phase extending from the close of 1926 to the middle of 1928 is known as the ghazal phase. The third phase which extended from 1928 to 1938 is the gramophone company phase. The fourth phase called the radio phase extended from 1938 to the middle of 1942.

Kazi Nazrul Islam is the foremost composer of Bengali patriotic songs. His immortal compositions in this genre have always been sung with fervor. He composed songs on a variety of *swadeshi* themes some of which were old and some were his innovations. Even in songs on traditional themes he infused a new spirit. Songs on freedom movement, for instance, took an unprecedented heroic turn in his style. In the exposition of heroic sentiment Nazrul presented the uncompromising power of a rebel which had nothing in common with the songs in this genre composed earlier. The songs on communal harmony also, for instance, took a new turn in his compositions. As a genre it was old. But Nazrul gave it a new direction in its invigorating appeal of music and language.

Songs on social awakening too found a new idiom in his compositions reflecting an indomitable force of will. The categories like "songs of socialist inspiration" and "songs of Muslim awakening" were something new in the history of Bengali patriotic songs. The Bengali poet-composers had so long spoken about political freedom alone. But Nazrul spoke of the economic emancipation of the weaker sections of society, thereby laying the foundation in Bengal of the progressive cultural movement. His songs of Muslim awakening had also contributed to augmenting the Muslim renaissance in Bengal. His songs on the awakening of women proved to be exceptionally inspiring. The tradition of patriotic poetry and music in Bengal has been enriched by hundreds of poets and composers ever since 1867. But none equals Nazrul in this respect.

*Ghazal*, a kind of love song was first developed in Iran. In India it was accommodated in Hindustani music and became a prominent branch of Urdu poetry. It stood as a light classical Hindustani form next to *thumri*. Urdu *ghazals* flourished over hundreds of years and all the powerful Urdu poets paid

attention to this form. But in Bengal none before Kazi Nazrul Islam took any effective interest in building up the *ghazal* trend of urban music. Atulprasad Sen's work in this genre was not much known. Only Nazrul was coming out with his overwhelming *ghazal* compositions one after another. They created an unprecedented interest in the Bengali music loving people. No other musical genre was received with so much of immediate popularity in Bengal. No other musical genre was paid so much of immediate attention by all the leading Bengali performers at a time. Nazrul just created an era. In sweetness and melancholy, in tender and subtle improvisation and in poetic and musical expressiveness of a different kind, the *ghazals* of Nazrul gave a new direction to modern Bengali music. Nazrul became the propounder of a new way of composition which purely belonged to him so much so that even to-day *Bengali ghazal* and Nazrul are one.

In the third phase of his life as a composer Nazrul worked for the gramophone companies in Calcutta. He also worked for the stage and the film. This phase marked a tremendous flourishing of Nazrul's talent as a lyricist and composer. He was able to compose songs on all possible themes, in all possible musical forms and at an incredible speed. He stunned every one by his gift of impromptu composition. Most of his three thousand and more songs were composed in this period. He was one of the great builders of the golden age of gramophone records in Bengal. Nazrul gave leadership to the first ever large scale commercial production of Bengali music by the gramophone and the film industries. The notable sections of his composition in the decade-long third phase of his life were the modern songs, the devotional songs, the songs of the folk musical tradition and the *raga* songs. A new musical genre, typically known as modern was a significant phenomenon in post-Tagore Bengali music. As entertainment was the basic instinct in this new music, it grew very fast out of the business support from the commercial music producers. Nazrul was one who could spontaneously bring about a combination of entertainment and art. His compositions were always very near the heart of people. He could, therefore, work very intimately to lay the foundation of the entertaining approach to Bengali music. Hundreds of modern songs that he composed built up a strong academic basis for the emerging values in Bengali urban music. Many of Nazrul's immortal love songs belong to this trend.

Kazi Nazrul Islam occupies a unique position in the history of Bengali culture for equally enriching the streams of Islamic songs and Hindu religious songs. He was the first ever composer of Islamic devotional songs in the Bengali urban musical stream who built up an academic background for the upcoming composers by leaving behind more than two hundred songs on various Islamic themes. This was a singularly distinct contribution of Nazrul towards enriching Bengali devotional music. Nazrul's success as a composer of Hindu religious songs was also phenomenal. We do not know of any other poet-composer in Bengal

who has written Hindu religious songs on such a surprising variety of themes involving such a variety of musical styles. He fared equally well in *Vaishnava* and *Shakta* musical traditions and composed nearly six hundred songs glorifying chiefly the goddess *Kali* and the idols of eternal love: *Radha* and *Krishna*.

The trend of composing urban Bengali songs in folk musical models took a significant shape in the works of Nazrul. They were as good as remodeled folk songs. The record and the film industries took a keen interest in them. In most cases Nazrul composed his renowned songs in this genre for films. The songs he composed on the model of *jhumur* require particular mention. *Jhumur* is an attractive form of ethnic music belonging to the *Santhals*. None before Nazrul had taken any interest in giving an urban Bengali version of this ethnic music. Its dancing movement and characteristic syncopation added new charm to many of Nazrul's remodeled songs.

Kazi Nazrul Islam achieved a towering success as a Bengali *raga* musical composer. He had a strong urge for *raga* music which formed the very basis of most of his compositions. He composed songs on all the major Hindustani forms although he was particularly inspired about working on *kheyal*, *thumri* and *ghazal*. His romantic sensibilities got useful support from them. He took an active interest in experimenting with *raga* music and himself created 17 new *ragas*. Nazrul took part in two experimental programmes from the Calcutta Radio Station which he named as *Haramanini*: The Lost Gems and *Navaraga manlika*: The Wreath of New *Ragas*. These programmes, in which Nazrul would himself sing self-composed songs on unfamiliar *ragas* and the *ragas* of his own, were broadcast at regular intervals. This creatively investigative approach of Nazrul led to some wonderful consequences. Particular mention must be made of a new genre namely *Rag pradhan gan* : classico-modern Bengali songs which Nazrul pioneered.

Thus we see that Nazrul Islam worked with great excellence for the total enrichment of Bengali urban music. The post-Tagore musical developments in Bengal follow by and large from his works. The decade that began in 1930 stands historically as a period of transition from the old to the new ways of Bengali urban music. The origination of free musical tendencies of "modern" music and the division of labour between a lyricist, a composer and a singer to produce a finished song, improvements in recording mechanism, introduction of background singing for movies, improvements in orchestration and expansion of radio musical programmes are the important features of the emerging musical picture in Bengal. Nazrul stands to bridge between the old and new ways of Bengali music. He is also the last of the great Bengali poet-composers.

### Contemporaries of Nazrul

Mention must here be made of others who contributed greatly to enrich the urban music of Bengal at that period of transition. As lyricists we get Hiren Basu, Hemendrakumar Ray, Tulsi Lahiri, Anil Bhattacharya, Ajay

Bhattacharya, Pranab Ray, Subodh Purakayastha, Shailen Ray, Vani Kumar, Saurindra Mohan Mukhopadhyay, Premendra Mitra and Dharendra Nath Mukhopadhyay.

As composers and music directors we get Hiren Basu, Hemendra Kumar Ray, Tulsi Lahiri, Vinay Goswami, Hinangshu Datta, Nitai Matilal, Kamal Dasgupta, Suval Dasgupta, Krishna Chandra De, Shailesh Dattagupta, Chitta Ray, Raichand Varal, Vishanchand Varal and Pankaj Kumar Mallik. As singers we get Angur Vala, Indu Vala, Harimati, Kamala Jharia, Radharani, Shaila Devi, K. Mallik, K.C. De, Kanan Devi, Juthika Ray, Sachin Dev Barman, Abbasuddin Ahmad, Satya Chaudhuri, Mrinal Kanti Ghose, Jaganmay Mitra, Suprabha Sarkar and Kundanlal Saigal. These lyricists, composers and singers together contributed to begin the new age of Bengali urban music which was governed by the trading instincts of the gramophone and the film industries.

**Film Music:** Bengali film music, which is an extended version of the music of Bengali professional drama, requires particular consideration. The film became the most influential branch of art in Bengal even from the musical point of view. From 1931 onwards when the age of talkies began in Calcutta and the device of background singing was developed, music became the most fascinating factor for the film trade. Stage-success in Bengal traditionally depended on featuring songs. So the film producers from the beginning did not fail to exploit this part of the filmgoers' sentiment and all that happened in the stream of Bengali urban music since 1931 was chiefly done by the makers of film music. The initial shape of Bengali film music was given by Hiren Basu, Pankajkumar Mallik, Raichand Varal, K.C. De, Kamal Dasgupta and others. The music, entertaining although, derived mainly from the light classical Hindustani genres. It had a depth, weight and expense of its own. But as time went by, the musical pattern changed in keeping with the changing modes of entertainment and that by and large was for the worse. There were startling improvements in the technical aspects of film making. But there was gradual deterioration in the making of music for which Bengali urban music in total sense was thrown into chaos. As matters stand today, the idea of cheap entertainment is demolishing the musical values which have for hundreds of years been associated with the making of Bengali culture.

**Dilip Kumar Ray (1897-1980):** Distinct mention must here be made of Dilip Kumar Ray, a great composer-poet and musicologist who enriched the urban music of Bengal in many ways. Son of D. L. Ray (1865-1913), Dilip Kumar is also renowned for superb performing power. He had extraordinary authority over light classical forms like *thumri*, *tappa* and *ghazal*. He was also a master of *kirtan*. Dilip Ray developed a compositional style of his own which was a blend of all these forms. He composed songs on various themes. But his favourite genre was the devotional song. Dilip Ray was a close friend of Kazi Nazrul Islam whose *ghazal* and devotional songs he would fondly sing. An untiring

commentator on musical aesthetics whose exchanges of opinion on music with Rabindranath Tagore have assumed a historic importance, Dilip Kumar Ray created a new compositional style for Bengali urban music.

Unfortunately this style could not well propagated because of his retirement in 1928 to a saintly life in the yogic center of Aurovinda in Pondicherry. Yet Dilip Ray occupies an immortal place in the history of Bengali music for his tender lyrics, his distinguished compositional style and his magnetic ways of performance.

**People's Music:** The Indian People's Theater Association Movement founded in the year 1943 in the context of a broad-based opposition to imperialism and fascism influenced the total creative pursuits of the South Asian sub-continent inclusive of Bengal. Music was one of its dominant aspects. The communist party of India was the driving force behind the movement and a distinct trend of patriotic songs known popularly in Bengal as *Gana Sangeet* : People's Songs flourished under the auspices of the theater association. In the first bulletin of the Indian People's Theater Association published in 1943 it was said : "It is in this situation that the Indian People's Theater Association has been formed to co-ordinate and strengthen all progressive tendencies that have so far manifested themselves in the nature of dramas, songs and dances. It is a movement which seeks to make our arts the expression and the organizers of our people's struggle for freedom. It stands for the defense of culture against imperialism and fascism and for enlightening the masses about the causes and solutions of problems facing them. It tries to quicken their awareness of unity and their passion for a better and just world order."

Songs were looked upon as an effective medium for organizing the working people to realize these newly formulated social ends. They were the new group of songs, composed mostly by the activists of the People's Theater movement. Songs were composed on themes like social change, forging a progressive society and the unity and the victory of the working people. Binay Ray, Jyotirindra Maitra, Hemanga Biswas and Salil Chaudhuri were the architects of this musical movement which took shape under the auspices of IPTA. It added some new approaches to the compositional styles in Bengali music.

Historically, these were the major developments in mainstream Bengali music till 1947 when the British rule in India came to an end and the sub-continent was divided into two states namely India and Pakistan. Bengal was divided into two provinces. East Bengal with its capital in Dhaka was made the eastern province of Pakistan and West Bengal with its capital in Calcutta became a province in India. East Bengal or East Pakistan emerged as the sovereign state of Bangladesh through the War of Liberation against Pakistan rule in 1971.

**Music of West Bengal :** The musical developments in West Bengal during the post partition years concentrated chiefly on the diversified trends of modern

music patronized very liberally by the film and the record industries and the radio. A group of talented lyricists and composers joined those who had been working from the thirties. A batch of powerful singers also came forth. Mohini Chaudhuri, Shyamal Gupta, Gauriprasanna Majumdar, Pulak Bandyopadhyay, Shivadas Bandyopadhyay and others did a wonderful job as lyricists. As composers brilliant contributions were made by Anupam Ghatak, Rabin Chattopadhyay, Hemanta Mukhopadhyay, Nachiketa Ghosh, Salil Chaudhuri, Dilip Sarkar, Sudhin Dasgupta, Prabir Majumdar, Abhijit Bandyopadhyay, Anal Chattopadhyay and some others. Persons like Hiran Basu and Jnan Prakash Ghosh played a significant role in enriching the musical trend. A generation of talented singers including Hemanta Mukhopadhyay, Dhananjay Bhattacharya, Pannalal Bhattacharya, Shyamal Mitra, Satinath Mukhopadhyay, Manabendra Mukhopadhyay, Pratima Bandyopadhyay, Manna De, Sandhya Mukhopadhyay, Lata Mangeshkar and some others gave a very bright performance support to the ever enlarging modern compositional style. Through ups and downs this trend is still continuing there. Meanwhile songs of Rabindranath Tagore have made exceptional headway in matter of their popularity with the urbanized educated society. A tremendous thrust in this respect came from the Tagore birth centenary celebrations of 1961 and the trend is still continuing in an ever-enlarging scale with very useful support by the performers produced by the music department of *Visva Bharati*, a university at *Shantiniketan* founded by Tagore himself. Nazrul songs have also come to the forefront in West Bengal after an obscuring phase of the late forties and fifties.

**Music of Bangladesh:** The post-partition musical developments in urban East Bengal (East Pakistan) had chiefly flowed in two distinct streams, namely, modern songs and patriotic songs. Mention must here be made of the fact that Dhaka had to face a host of challenges to assume the role of the cultural capital of a new-born province for want of adequate institutional and performing support. Earlier musical efforts in Bengal concentrated very largely in Calcutta which occupied for many decades the most illustrious place in the cultural map of India, while social and institutional supports for musical activities befitting a capital were yet to grow in Dhaka. Moreover the musical activities in Dhaka in those days suffered an initial set back due to large scale migration of Hindus from East Bengal to India as an aftermath of partition. The cultivation of music in Bengal was still limited mostly to the Hindus, although some stalwarts from among the Muslims had already made their mark. An account of this situation has been authentically given in his autobiography by Abdul Ahad, a great musical personality of Bangladesh who was the first among the Bengali Muslims to learn Tagore songs at *Shantiniketan* in the lifetime of Rabindranath Tagore and become a Tagore music celebrity. Like some other Muslim musicians stationed in Calcutta, Abdul Ahad came to Dhaka from there in 1948 and joined the Dhaka radio station. He served the cause of music in Dhaka in various

capacities, but the most remarkable role he played for over four decades was that of composer of music for modern songs and patriotic songs. Abdul Ahad has lovingly recalled the memory of those who took a pioneering role immediately after the partition of India to fill the vacuum in Dhaka and inspire the next generation to learn and deliver music.

Their expectations came true and efforts bore fruit. A generation of musically cultured people soon grew and the vacuum was gradually filled. Mention should first of all be made of Abbasuddin Ahmed who, already acknowledged as one of the great singers of the undivided Bengal, came to Dhaka from Calcutta and did yeoman's service in tiding over the initial difficulties. We should also mention the Names of Bimal Ray, Samar Das, Laila Arjumand Banu, Afsari Khanam, Anjali Ray, Shahjahan Hafiz, Sultan Alam, Abdul Halim Chaudhuri, Sheikh Lutfar Rahman, Abdul Latif and some others who as singers and some of them also as composers rendered great services to build the tradition of modern music in Dhaka.

As we have already pointed out, Dhaka was lacking in institutional support for the growth of modern music in the absence of organizations to produce records or films. Radio was the institution which extended the only available assistance. The support from the films came from the early sixties and that from the television came from the mid sixties. Record companies did not grow on a large scale at all. In spite of these limitations, lyricists like Syed Siddiqui, Sikandar Abu Zafar, Azizur Rahman, Khan Ataur Rahman, Mohammad Maniruzzaman, Abu Hena Mostafa Kamal and others and composers like Abdul Ahad, Samar Das, Khan Ataur Rahman, Satya Saha and others worked in close co-operation during the fifties and sixties to build the remarkable trend of modern music in Dhaka. Their works provide a solid ground for the modern musical activities in the capital of Bangladesh to day.

But the patriotic songs here presented a more lively and a more invigorating pulsation. The patriotic songs are, perhaps, everywhere the products of the musical and poetic response to the political urge of a people in a given socio-economic frame. It is also the product of a protest working in the social mind overtly or covertly. East Pakistan was, in this sense, a good ground for the growth of patriotic songs. The people of East Pakistan got the scent of a political design against them hatched by the West Pakistani ruling class soon after Pakistan was founded. It became clearly evident from the speeches made by Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan that the minority of the Pakistani people in West Pakistan had far reaching plans of dominating and exploiting the majority belonging to East Pakistan. The organized movement in East Pakistan against the evil design of West Pakistan started as early as 1948 on the issue of the status of Bengali as a state language and reached the culmination on 21 February, 1952 when some of the demonstrating students and other activists were fired upon and killed by the police. The martyrdom for

Bengali language was a great milestone in the cultural and political history of East Pakistan marking the beginning of a great struggle by the people here against the growing colonial tendencies of West Pakistan. This struggle carried through several phases culminated under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the great War of Liberation in 1971 leading to the founding of the independent, sovereign state of Bangladesh.

This long political struggle had its songs. As the spirit of Bengali nationalism inspired the struggling masses, some songs composed years ago by the great poet-composers like Rabindranath Tagore, Dwijendralal Ray, Atulprasad Sen, Rajanikanta Sen and Kazi Nazrul Islam were sung with fervor. Tagore songs in fact, played a remarkable role in infusing the idea of Bengali nationalism. Songs of IPTA were also sung. Meanwhile the poets and the composers from all over East Pakistan worked together to produce a big treasury of patriotic songs, some of them being very remarkable. The great song of the Language Movement of 1952 : "Can I forget 21 February which is tinged with the blood of my brother" (lyric : Abdul Gaffar Chaudhuri and music : Altaf Mahmud) has always remained a milestone. As the political movements passed through stages of development leading finally to the War of Liberation, patriotic songs were composed in an ever increasing number. They offered an amazing variety of musical styles.

We may here mention the names of some eminent composers and lyricists who played a vital role in nourishing the musical culture of Bangladesh during 1947-1971 period Composers like Abdul Ahad, Samar Das, Khadem Hossain Khan, Mir Kasem Khan, Abu Baqr Khan, Msihul Alam, Dhir Ali, Mansur Ali, Altaf Mahmud, Robin Ghosh, Raja Hossain Khan, Sudhin Das, Khan Ataur Rahman, Subal Das, Satya Saha, Pranesh Das, Sadhan Sarker, Khandakar Nurul Alam and some others will ever be remembered for their brilliant contributions. Sikandar Abu Jafar, Sayed Siddiqui, Ahsan Habib, Masud Karim, Azizur Rahman, Abdul Latif, Mohammad Maniruzzaman, Khan Ataur Rahman, Abu Hena Mostafa, Kamal, Gazi Mazharul Anwar, Fazle Khoda and some others are among those who as lyricists have enriched the modern and the patriotic musical traditions of this country.

The War of Liberation of Bangladesh was a great occasion for composing and performing patriotic songs which inspired the freedom fighters and their supporters throughout the nine months of Liberation War ending on 16<sup>th</sup> December, 1971 with the surrender of the Pakistani forces in Dhaka. Today we signify a group of songs as the songs of Liberation War which were regularly broadcast from the Independent Bangladesh Radio Station. They included some of the songs composed earlier along with the great Bengali patriotic song. "My golden Bengal, I love you", by Rabindranath Tagore. A host of songs portraying the spirit of struggle for liberation were freshly composed. The most renowned of these new compositions was the song "Victory to Bangladesh and victory to Bangladesh, Bangladesh will indeed be victorious" - lyricist : Gazi Mazharul

Anwar, Composer : Anwar Parvez. The foremost song of the War of Liberation: "My golden Bengal, I love you", by Rabindranath Tagore has been made the National Anthem of Bangladesh.

The emergence of Bangladesh as an independent state created a long cherished free and fertile atmosphere for the promotion of music which was hindered in many ways in the pre-liberation period. Institutional support came up in a big way. An abundance of cultural exchange programs with different countries brought musical efforts in Bangladesh into world contact, which resulted in new modes of composition and performance. With some stalwarts of the earlier decades, there came up a new generation of composers and performers which began dedicatedly to build up the musical tradition of Bangladesh befitting the spirit of the hard-earned independence. The hopeful trend still continues.

**Bengali Folk Music:** The history of Bengali folk musical compositions is traced from the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. which was the time for the growth of *Charya songs* in Bengal. It is interesting, therefore, to see that folk music and classical or semi-classical music in Bengal grew up in contemporaneity. Classical or semi classical musical forms flourished in urban or semi-urban areas while the folk musical forms grew up in villages. Generations of rural poet-composers in Bengal created its enriched and varied tradition of folk music. These two musical traditions did not always move in distinctly separate lines, not even during the golden days of classical music in Bengal in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Sometimes they touched each other which resulted in their mutual enrichment. A popular folk musical form in Bengal, namely *bhatiali* is believed to have issued from a classical melody known as *bhatiali*. Some distinguished urban compositional styles are found to derive from a popular Bengali folk musical form, namely *baul*. What stands out to-day as the high point of Bengali music is a product of a combination of classical and folk musical styles. Even then there was always a recognizable distance between these two musical traditions as they pertained to two distinct cultural worlds, the rural and the urban. With the growth of organized city life over hundreds of years this sense of distance has widened. What is more, urbanization being synonymous with modernization and development, the rural life in Bengal with all its traditional wealth of mind is getting increasingly pushed into decline. In this predicament a large number of minor Bengali folk musical forms have become extinct. The major ones fortunately survived the onslaught of time.

The major Bengali folk musical forms are *bhatiali*, *baul*, *bhawaiya*, *gambhira* and *jhumur*. These are, of course, titles of a general nature. They cover a lot of regional varieties related to musical style and textual expression. Folk ballads popularly known as *pala gan* constitute a distinct genre. Some simple forms like *jari gan*, *puthipath* etc. are also largely performed Ceremonial songs which once made up the bulk of Bengali folk music are largely on the wane with only a few genres still holding out rather feebly.

**Baul:** In textual and compositional variety baul forms the richest stream of Bengali folk music. Baul is a mystical cult pertaining to a spiritual discipline which relates to philosophical thoughts about a system of its own. *Baul* is popularly described as a folk religion where the proponents speak everything in songs. Towering poets like *Lalan Shah* (1792-1890) of Kushtia in Bangladesh and *Hasan Raja* (1854-1922) of Sylhet also in Bangladesh have left behind excellent baul songs on their metaphysical thoughts, rich both in textual wealth and music. Apart from these two there have been countless other *bauls* all over the different regions of Bengal each belonging to his own regional musical style. The *bauls* deliver their songs with the help of a simple string instrument known as *ektara* and a simple form of a drum called *dugi* which they themselves play. In an exalted mood a *baul* begins to dance in a way which is popularly known as *baul dance*. Like all the other folk dances of Bengal except *chhau* and *nachni*, *baul* dance is nothing more than a simple movement of body with the rhythm of the song. *Baul*, with its enriched poetry and music, has greatly influenced the development of Bengali urban music. Rabindranath Tagore himself improvised his own musical style out of a combination of *baul* and the classical forms like *kheyal* and *tappa*.

**Bhatiali:** It is popularly known as the boatman's song. *Bhatiali* songs are largely in vogue among the boatmen in all the regions in Bangladesh and West Bengal. The boatmen sing the *bhatiali* songs in their leisure hours when the boats sail down the rivers. *Bhatiali* is believed to originate in the low lying areas of Bengal where for ages boats were the only means of transport. *Bhatiali* songs are characterized by long melodic phrases which originate at the middle of the scale and gradually move over a simple cluster of notes towards the upper most height. We get ample references in the medieval musical literature of India of a raga known as *Bhatiali* or *Bhatiali*. Musicologists presume that the present-day *bhatiali* form of Bengali folk music derived initially from that *raga*. It offers an interesting instance of how a *raga* form was popularized into a folk one.

**Bhwaiya:** It is a song of the high and dry land regions of Rangpur in Bangladesh and Cooch Bihar in West Bengal. *Bhwaiya* is a generic name. It has a number of species each having a name and each possessing its characteristic voice-breaking features. It covers a wide range of themes, from the very light to the very serious.

**Gambhira:** This form is popularly performed in Rajshahi region of Bangladesh and Maldaha region of West Bengal. The word *gambhira* means *Lord Shiva*. Years ago, *gambhira* was a kind of composition about *Shiva* or dedicated to *Shiva*. But in course of time the norm changed and *gambhira* began, by and large, to be composed with nominal or no reference to *Shiva*. It is now a new type of a narrative composition on mundane affairs which combines singing, dancing and acting. In some sense *gambhira* is a Bengali folk dramatic work.

Entertainment is its motto. But a *gambhira* composition is often serious in tone satirizing the social evils which the rural people abundantly confront.

**Jari Gan:** *Jari* song is a popular Bengali folk narrative song which predominantly describes the tragic events related to the historic war of Karbala in which one of the grandsons of the prophet Hazrat Muhammad, the founder of Islam was killed. *Jari gan* follows the style of *patha-sangeet* or recitative music. It is only a little more improved and complicated than *puthipath*. The leading musician in a *jari* performance is called *bayati* or the narrator of the story who is, by tradition, given support by a singing band known as *dohar*.

**Jhapan:** It is a kind of Bengali folk music which belongs to the community of snake charmers. It represents an important ethnomusical trend of Bengal. Once Bengal was infested with poisonous snakes. The nomadic tribe of the snake charmers would move about mostly in boats and catch snakes and treat snake-bitten people. They would also show snake-games. Whatever may be the occasion, they would sing songs in praise of *Manasa*, the goddess of snakes. This is *jhapan*. There is an interesting diversity in the *jhapan* school of music. One important branch of *jhapan* performed in question-answer form by two singing troupes is known as *sakhi*.

**Jhumur:** It belongs to the *Santhals* who are among the earliest native peoples of the sub-continent living in various linguistic areas. The *jhumur* or the *jhumur songs*, as a result, vary in language, although a broad-based musical unity runs through all of them. Bengali *jhumur* is very largely prevalent among the *Santhals* living in the Burdwan - Birbhum region of West Bengal. It also belongs to the *Santhals* who live in the North Bengal region of Bangladesh. *Jhumur* has a perceptible ethnomusical character and in that it differs from all the other Bengali folk musical forms. It is basically a dance music with a sharp rhythmic orientation. Frequent use of syncopation makes its typical feature. *Jhumur* is usually sung with the accompaniment of bamboo flute and a longish drum called *madal*.

**Kavigan:** It is a very rich Bengali folk musical form popular equally in the cities and the countryside. It has an elaborate musical system of its own. *Kavigan* is held by way of a contest between two singing parties, each party being led by a *Kaviyal* : the leading poet who is given musical support by a singing troupe known as *dohar*. The *kavi* musical course revolves round a question usually from the mythological literature which the leading poet of the first party leaves for the leading poet of the second one to answer. The question of victory or defeat for the second party and the cross argument between the two parties keep the whole course spread out over several *asar* : sessions interesting and alive. The history of organized *kavi* performances is traced from the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

**Leto Gan:** *Leto* is a popular folk musical genre of the Burdwan region of West Bengal. A *Leto* musical course is held by way of having two singing parties taking part in a contest in which they fight each other on a certain question thrown by the party which comes to sing first. It combines the question-answer form of *kavigan* and the dance and acting elements of folk drama. The question-answer process proceeds with songs. Each party is led by a leading poet, *goda kavi* as he is called, who composes impromptu songs to answer the question thrown by the leading poet of the other party. *Leto* becomes, in this sense, a contest between the two poet-leaders of the two singing bands.

**Palagan:** *Palagan*, which is folk ballad singing, is an important branch of Bengali folk music. It is a kind of a musical performance narrating the stories of the proverbial heroes and heroines of Bengali folk literature. The lead performer here is called *bayati* or the narrator. He is given support by his troupe known as *dohar*. They collectively sing some refrains as the musical narration progresses. Some times some members of the *dohar* break into spells of dialogue with the *bayati*. At the middle of the place of performance known as *asar*, they fix a space for the lead performer and his troupe. The listeners sit around the *asar* as *palagan* continues. It combines music, poetry, recitation, dialogue and some simple dancing gestures by the lead performer.

**Puthi path:** *Puthipath* is folk ballad reading. Although it is traditionally known as reading, it is, in fact, singing, a kind of repetitive chanting of a melodic formation of a very simple nature being limited only to some three or four notes. It is a very popular musical exercise of rural Bengal. The musical movement conforms to some simple rhythmic accents.

**Sari Gan:** It is work-time music. Critics often broadly divide Bengali folk music into two groups leisure-time music and work-time music. So what the rural Bengali people sing during the working hours belong to the *sari gan* genre. It takes into its fold a diverse group of songs which people sing under different working circumstances. The principal motto of *sari* singing is to invigorate the people in hard work. Group song as it is, *sari gan* is a chorus style performance. Its rhythmic formation is sharp and fast. It enlivens a working atmosphere by urging a working group on land or on water to step, to push, to lift, to strike, to draw etc. in a rhythmic way. With the mechanization of working processes, the tradition of Bengali *sari gan* is fast losing ground.

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## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### Folk-Arts, Crafts, Festivals and Games

Kazi Ihtesham

#### Introduction

**B**angladesh is blessed with many shades of cultural flowers each with its own colour, fragrance and forms. In dealing with visual components of Bangladesh's myriad cultural elements, such as folk- arts, crafts, festivals and games, we are overwhelmed with what we have and what we lost, and are losing everyday. The earliest artistic remains of Bangladesh discovered in Pundranagar, the present Mahasthan near Bogra town, date back to the third century before Christ. Excavations at Mainamati at Comilla and *Paharpur* at Noagoan, greater, Rajshahi reveals excellent workmanship of terracotta plaques, bronze figurines and stone sculptures in a wide variety of designs and patterns. The terracotta plaques provide a fascinating story of the popular art forms of Bangladesh. Social events like marriages and child birth, and everyday living such as men plucking fruits from trees or working with hammer and bellows, and women cutting fishes or spinning thread are depicted with grace.

The cultural heritage is a total concept. Therefore, it is difficult to isolate a particular component. In dealing with four components we cannot compartmentalise them from other areas. For example while dealing with wood craftsmanship we cannot ignore the intricacies of musical instruments. There is bound to be some overlapping, and it is a good sign that we recognise the wholeness and holiness of culture as a vital force of life. There is an absence of understanding what culture is among the so-called educated people, and naturally the cultivation of culture stands low in our agenda. Hundred of species of plants are disappearing in the animal world because of our ignorance and inaptitude to reality. Crafts based on plants suffer most because of mono-crop production and over pressure on land. Most of the crafts and traditional

arts are in the process of extinction. Most of the traditional festivals and games are things of the past. Only local festivals of religious origin are becoming strong. Having said that we shall treat these cultural components separately for convenience.

## Folk Crafts

Bangladesh is a country of 130 million people, and double the number of hands, and each of them is engaged in some form of work. When they had leisure our ancestors made beautiful arts and crafts. Some of them are preserved in the National Museum, Dhaka, and the Folk Art and Crafts Museum, Sonargoan. Those are expressions of the human spirit in material form. In all of them you will find utility and aesthetics go hand in hand. The growth of handicrafts in Bangladesh is the sign of the cultivation of sensitivity and humanism. It stands for the human endeavour to bring elegance and grace into a life otherwise led in a harsh and hard environment.

The objects the folk artists create are toys, cloths, ornaments and other utilitarian stuffs of high quality full of spiritualism. They give a continuous outflow of creativeness, a sustained spirit of animation and freshness which dispels staleness and monotony. These designs and motifs are drawn from nature and enriched by the imagination of the artists. The tools of the artisans are after all an extension of the personality of the craftsman to reach beyond the range of human limitations.

## Folk Professionals

The people who are involved in making items from the materials have a distinct nomenclature. They are identified as a professional class, or religious caste. First we identify the materials used, and the professions or caste involved in them:

### Name of the materials

1. Bamboo
2. Cane
3. Clay, (Pottery)
4. Conch shell
5. Fabrics
6. Fibre
7. Grass
8. Horn
9. Leaf
10. Leather

### Profession or Caste

- |                           |
|---------------------------|
| Bash Sayal (Bamboo maker) |
| Bet Sayal (Cane maker)    |
| Kumar ( Potter)           |
| Shankhari ( Conch maker)  |
| Tanti, Jola (Weaver)      |
| Tontu-Bai (Weaver)        |
| Ghash-Bai (Weaver)        |
| Karukar ( Designer)       |
| Pata Sayal (Leaf maker)   |
| Chamar (Leather maker)    |

Name of the materials	Profession or Caste
11. Metal (Metal crafts)	Shekra (Smiths of all kinds)
12. Seeds	Karukar (Designer)
13. Shola	Karandikar or Malakar
14. Silk	Silk Tanti (Weaver)
15. Tusk & Bones	Karukar (Intricate designer)
16. Wood (Wood Carvings)	Sutar (Carpenter)

### A Craft with its Forms and Functions

The whole range of crafts can be arranged in different forms and functions. For example by using clay as a craft-medium different things are made. An inexpensive clay toy for a poor kid, *Shakher Hari* for the middle class, and high quality products of decorative murals for the rich, are all made from clay. In the last category the products could range from highly aesthetic terracotta placed in Mainamoti, Shalban Vihara or the one colossal terracotta mural placed in BRAC Center, Dhaka, with a few hundred slabs put together, make a composite artistic scene of highly elegant execution. If we go in depth in describing products from one material alone for instance clay, it will cover several hundred pages. Apart from pottery, we have categorised all other items separately.

### Pottery

Archaeological evidence in Bangladesh suggests a high degree of craftsmanship in pottery making. It was undoubtedly invented and developed independently of other crafts. The alluvial treasures formed out of the silt deposits carried by the great rivers, the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna made Bangladesh a very fertile area, and at the same time gave clay, which became the most useful medium to express artistic talents. "Earth or clay has been regarded as the primaeval plastic material not only because of its ready availability but also on account of its easy tractability. It satisfies the creative impulse of the ordinary man as much for aesthetic expression as for domestic ritualistic needs. Burnt clay or terracotta has thus served as an easy or convenient plastic material from time immemorial" (Saraswati: 1962). Glazed pottery is a positive improvement on non-glazed ones, and the glazed ones developed with the improvement of firing techniques. The technique of pot making is very simple and the raw material is available everywhere in Bangladesh. Hand made pottery is still predominantly women's art. Women of the *Kumar* caste and the *Patua* caste generally make a variety of dolls and toys. These are done both by pressing and moulding methods. Big jars are usually prepared by men. Clay products of different shapes and sizes from minute decorative pieces to big vases are available in Dhaka markets. We have identified several dozens of specialized pottery products that are very distinct in designs, and functional value.

**Items of pottery**

415

- A. (a) **Mangalghat** (Auspicious Vases): These are commonly used in all kinds of rituals such as birth, initiation and marriage ceremonies. These are painted and are of different shapes and sizes.
- (b) **Lakshmighat** (Auspicious Vase of the goddess of wealth): These are most decorative and beautiful. *Lakshmi*'s face is on the upper fringe of the vase.
- (c) **Manashaghata** (Vase of the Serpent-goddess): It is based on earthen jars turned upside down, the face of the Serpent Goddess, along with the attached snake hoods, give the vase a peculiar shape and form.
- B. **Mancha** (An earthen stage for religious and medicinal plants): The terracotta *Manchas* are rectangular, hexagonal or octagonal in shape, and the average size varies from 3x1.5 feet to 2x4 feet in diameter. On each side of the pot the images of the gods and goddesses are fixed in medium relief. The curved borders of all sides are beautifully decorated.
- C. **Hari** (Marriage ritual vessels): Earthen vessels of different shapes and sizes. These are used as sending gifts to bride's and bridegroom's houses with varieties of sweets, and are also used for giving food offerings to deities. The designs are geometric and symbolic. The fish is a common subject in all paintings, as a symbol of procreation.
- D. **Putul** (Dolls): The women folk of the *Kumar* and the *Patua* devote most of their spare time, after household work to doll making. These are done by hand and they are of different kinds and different sizes and shapes. These are done mostly by pressing and moulding.
- E. **Mica-coated Red Dolls**: Made by moulding method. The dolls have blue and red stripes on white coating. These are highly prized by children.
- F. **Horse-riders doll, with or without wheels**: These are 5 to 6 inches tall and are blue and red striped.
- G. **Mother-dolls**: Mother carrying a child, usually a boy.
- H. **Doll with hip-jars**: This is almost like carrying a baby, but these are jars for bringing water from nearby ponds.
- I. **Dolls on village life**: There are numerous representation of village life through dolls. Such as:
- Hair-caring dolls;
  - Milk-maid dolls;
  - Rice-grinding dolls; and
  - Horse-rider dolls.

others are Bowls, Spoons, Vases, Pencil holders, Trays, Plates and Candle stands.

This line of product can be longer, with distinctive art and design forms according to regions and religious need. And if we include the pottery of the minorities (indigenous people) the list would be even longer. This is why we put all materials, and not line items of the products derived from materials.

### Agri-materials with scientific names

1. **Bamboo:** *Bambusa arundinacea, Melocana bambusoides, Dendrocalamus longispathus, Bambusa tulda*
2. **Cane:** *Calamus rotang,, Calamus viminalis, Daemonorops jenkinsianus*
3. **Jute:** (the golden fibre of Bangladesh) *Corchorus capsularis, Corchorus olitorious, Corchorur acutangulus.*
4. **Grass:** *Arundo donax, Thysanolaen maxima, Phragmites karka*
5. **Coconut shell:** *Cocos nocifera*
6. **Straw:** *Oryza sativa; Triticum aestivum, Zea mays*
7. **Shola:** *Aeseiryynomeme aspara*
8. **Leaves:** Mainly used coconut leaves, date leaves, palm leaves and palm leaves
9. **Fabrics of all kinds**
10. **Wood products**
11. **Leather products**
12. **Conch shell**
13. **Various kinds of horns**
14. **Metal:** Gold, Brass, Iron, Silver, Copper, Bronze and some other alloys

There is a great demand for each of the items, but not of equal level.

### Problems in Folk arts

One persistent problem is finance. For ornaments, a large amount of money is at stake, and for an artisan a few thousand taka is quite a large amount. Nobody is going to give an advance of that size, and the poor artisan has poor customers too. Confidence level is also very shaky among the artisans. Law and order has become a number one problem for small ornament business, especially for items that are relatively high in value. The shopkeepers cannot keep expensive items in their showcase. There are reports of extortion, mugging and murder all over Bangladesh. With all the problems there is a silver lining. There is a good market for artisans in foreign countries. Some of them get high paid jobs in U.K. and Italy. Some of the large sales centers are doing very good business through good management, monitoring, motivation and a good sense of modern market techniques. They make a blend between the old folk tradition

and the new designs. They employ designers and the artisans mostly women make things according to those designs.

## Traditional Arts (Paintings)

**Alpana:** *Alpana* is very much a part of Hindu women's religious ritual. It is a powerful art form, which in recent times crossed village and women barrier and is practised by men and applied in the city streets. Today without *alpana* we cannot think of Language Day celebration on 21<sup>st</sup> February, a secular event. At the time of *brata*, marriage and *puja* the floor of the house is decorated with numerous motifs mostly of flora and fauna.

1. **Anga Chittra** (Body-paint): This is a very old cultural tradition of decorating the body especially face, feet or hand on special occasions, like wedding or Eid. Putting a black dot on the forehead of a newborn, or a red dot on the forehead of all married Hindu women is part of that culture. At any wedding both Muslims and Hindus use pastes of sandalwood to decorate faces. Muslims put "mehdi", paste for hours, and when the paste is taken out it gives the face a beautiful red hue.
2. **Chal Chittra** (The background art of clay sculpture): On a mud plastered canvas various motifs mainly shells and vines are drawn.
3. **Deh-al Chittra** (Wall painting): In the hilly areas of Dhaka and Mymensingh, as well as Dinajpur, Rajshahi and Bogra mud-wall paintings are seen. In Rajshahi, *Santals* use earth paste of various colors to bring out eye-catching designs.
4. **Ghot Chittra** (Pot painting): Painting on the pots of different kinds is the speciality of this art. Fish and flowers are the main themes. They are of different sizes and shapes. Some of them are known by numbers, clustered together such as, five *topa* or thirteen *topa*.
5. **Ghuri Chittra** (Kite painting): Kite flying is one of the oldest forms of entertainment for both boys and adults. Decorating of kites is done with much care and delight.
6. **Krira Pot Chittra** (Scroll paint about games):
7. **Piri Chittra** (Wood painting): Alpana drawn on wooden planks used as sitting stools.
8. **Pot Chittra** (Fabric painting): The word 'pot' comes from *Patta* i.e. woven fabric. The craft persons who make the twisted and squared fabrics are known as *Patua*.
9. **Sara Chittra** (Lid painting): The lids for pans and pots are known as sara. The painted sara is used in the Hindu marriage ceremony. Lotuses and butterflies are commonly drawn on *saras*.

10. **Kurundi Chittra** (Soft-reed painting): *Kurundi* or *Shola* is a kind of very light reed, with milk white pulp when the outer layer is scraped out. *Malakars*, a folk artist caste, make beautiful artifacts and draw pictures of lotus, *monosha* (goddess of snake) on Kurundi or *shola*.
11. **Kushti Chittra** (Genealogy painting): Beautiful drawings are made by the Pundit when making genealogical tables with horoscopes.
12. **Mukush Chittra** (Mask painting): Wood, burnt clay and paper mould and *shola* are used in making masks. Gods, goddesses, demons and animals are represented in the masks.

Some years back the Ford Foundation made a survey of the crafts of Bangladesh. The *Folk Craft Survey and Design Documentation* found out some remarkable art pieces. In that survey one *Gazi*'s pot was discovered in Narsingdhi district. *Chand Miah*, a charmer by profession owned it. He earned his living by showing the *Gazi*'s pot accompanied with dance and songs.

### **Arts & Craftsmanship in Musical Instruments**

All the musical instruments are good specimens of craftsmanship. Folk musical instruments can be arranged in four categories such as String instruments, Woodwind, Metal, and Leather. All the instruments are made beautifully if professional artists are to use them. But there are inexpensive instruments made for sale in the *melas* for children. They are both instruments and crafts at the same time.

#### ***String Instruments***

**Ek-tara** (One string), the most economic instrument of the masses.

**Do-tara** (two-string, generally four and five).

**Sarinda** (high craftsmanship, with 3 strings made of leather).

**Ananda-lahari** (tath-string) old village instrument known as *thomak*).

**Lao** (Gourd, with metal string); Known as *Nandin*, *Gopachand*.

**Sar-Sangraha** (Collection of music tone) made by Aftabuddin Khan, eldest brother Ustad Alauddin Khan), Horse-string bow. Known as *Bin-raj*.

**Megh-Dumbur** (Thunder-cloud) Bamboo-string instrument.

#### ***Wind- Instruments***

**Flute:** different kinds and shape.

**Sanhai:** kind of piccolo.

**Shinga:** made from buffalo or bull horns.

**Rana Shinga:** (war-horns).

**Conch:** Sea-shell, with hallow space inside, used mostly in Hindu religious or ritual ceremonies.

**Tubri:** made from gourd and thin bamboo.

### *Metal Instruments*

**Kasha:** small cymbals, played with wooden stick.

**Mondira:** like small bowls, played by striking each other.

**Jajh, Jajar:** played with wooden stick.

**Kartal:** metal plate, large cymbal.

**Khartal:** five to six inch long iron bar used in one's hands in pairs.

### *Wood Instruments*

**Kath Taranga:** made of hollow wood and bamboo. Ustad Alauddin Khan is its inventor.

**Bash Taranga:** Made from bamboo, also invented by Ustad Alauddin Khan.

### *Drums*

**Tabla:** Hollow trunk with one side opened, covered with skin, very common instrument in musical performance. Played with fingers.

**Baya:** Made from a special kind of Clay pot, covered with skin. Tabla and baya are two sisters played with two hands by one person as an accompaniment in musical performance.

**Dunduvi:** Large hollow trunk of tree two sides covered with skin. Played with deer horn or leather covered stick.

**Dimdim:** Small hollow trunk of tree, two sides covered with skin.

**Mridanga:** Used to be made of clay, now mainly from wooden trunk, with two sides open which are covered with skin.

**Pakhoaj:** Looks like a Mridanga, but the size differs.

**Srikhol:** Made from clay, very dear instrument in the village.

**Dhol:** Very common wooden drum in the village played with two sticks. The larger among dhols are known as *Bangla Dhol*.

**Dholak:** Smaller than Dhol, the mouths are smaller in size.

**Dhak:** Larger than Dhol, played with two sticks. *Donka* is another name for it.

**Joy Dhak:** The largest of the Dhak, made from metal these days.

**Damru:** Hand-held drum, played with one hand.

**Dugdugi:** Smaller in size than Damru .

**Kara:** Two small wooden planks with holes covered with skin, played with one hand.

**Jag-Jhampa:** Made of Clay larger than kara.

**Nakara:** Made of clay, like a pot, half circular, skin covered, played with stick.

**Tikara:** Like Nakara, the body is made of metal.

**Damama:** Made of Clay like Nakara, larger in size.

**Khamak:** Made of gourd, the side covered with skin has a string of gut in the middle, and is played with fingers, held under armpit.

**Khanjani:** Small hollow wooden trunk, one side covered with skin, the other open.

**Chati:** Made of squared wooden stick, at the ends holes are made and round tins wheels are put inside. Two sticks are played striking each other with one hand.

All these musical instruments have high degree of craftsmanship. Most of the instruments are made by the artists themselves.

### Tribal Arts and Crafts:

Bangladesh has a good number of ethnic or tribal minorities. Except a few, most of their population is very small, but they represent a variety of cultural elements in every sphere of life. Their ingenuity and artistic creativity had earned a good name. We should recognize the tribes before we deal with their artistic activities. The tribes are as follows:

Sl. No.	Tribes	Sl. No.	Tribes
1.	Bom	15.	Mrow
2.	Cak	16.	Mug
3.	Chakma	17.	Munda
4.	Garo	18.	Munipuri
5.	Hajang	19.	Muroung
6.	Hodi	20.	Pangkho
7.	Khang	21.	Polia
8.	Khasia	22.	Rakhine
9.	Khumi	23.	Shaontal
10.	Kocha	24.	Tippra
11.	Kol	25.	Tonchongha
12.	Lusai	26.	Tripura
13.	Marma	27.	Ushoui
14.	Mecha	28.	Vil

The products made by most of the tribes have some form of commonality among themselves, and also with the main stream of population. Some of the products are distinct and defined. The environment they live and the natural things they get determine the items they make and use. They make products

from bamboo and wooden materials, fabrics, and ornaments. They also make different kinds of instruments: Major kinds are Flute, Drum and String. Some of their instruments have different names, for example:

- a. Khang kharong/ khra khrang/dang mong;
- b. Be-ana/bela /beyanj; and
- c. Dhudhuk/tutua /thuthruma.

Tribes are an integral part of Bangladesh. They made very important contributions to our culture. They were neglected at one point but succeeding governments are giving them due recognition in recent times.

1. The Chittagong Hill Tracts' Tribal Cultural Institute is a very active organization. There is another organization by the name Tribal Cultural Institute, Rangamati. It was founded by the Raja of Rangamati. These institutions should get some special attention.
2. Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board is a government organization. It can do a lot in the development of culture over there.

### **Problems in crafts making**

Inherited artistic skills tend to degenerate through generations. While talking to crafts persons we found that they speak eloquently of the skills of their father, and still more of their grandfather and great-grand father. Every craft person has repeated the gradual degeneration of his skill to us. The sense of interrelation of the formal elements of the arts and crafts has also perceptibly declined. We noticed this in all types of crafts we have investigated – such as pottery, metal crafts, wood carving. That means their artistic standard also has fallen. What is the remedy when asked, their answer is: We live from hand to mouth. The common people are the only patrons and they are also poor. They do not want beautiful things. They want useful things.

When asked about art and craft styles they are found to be ignorant about the implications and significance of such styles. They care less about superiority and inferiority of craftsmanship as they have been mechanically practising a particular style or technique which has been handed down to them. Art-connoisseurship is an urban phenomenon. And to look to craft in stylistic pattern or to go into details of technical manipulations involved in their making is a far cry.

### **Bangladesh Folk Art & Crafts Foundation**

This Institution at Sonargoan has undertaken an ambitious plan. Some of its ideas were realized in setting up a replica of "Little Bangladesh". On week-days the place is quiet and serene, but on week-ends it is difficult to move around,

because of the presence of so many visitors. The area has to be expanded up to the old city, even up to the river. That does not mean the residents have to leave their home. The whole area has to be so planned and organized that the villagers who will live in "Little Bangladesh" will follow certain rules to take advantage of its facilities. From road to the river, the area has to be developed with tourists' motels, hotels, all season festival venues, and with the river side as a resort. There should be a combination of government and non-government activities, each doing its best in its area. Without economic viability, the folk foundation will not survive with government dole. Taking this as a model each Thana can have a folk center of its own, managed by local representatives.

### **Bangladesh Small & Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC), Motijheel, Dhaka**

Established in 1957 its main purpose is to promote the establishment of individual units with priority for Agro-support, Agro-processing, import substitution, and export enterprise using indigenous raw materials. It establishes small industries through ancillary units and provides information to target people on investment opportunities. It gives counselling and extension service, and sets up infrastructure for cottage industrial estate. It has a planning cell, and a Promotion Extension Service, as well as a Marketing & Design Center, and Technology. It has two programs, one Women Development Program, and the other Tribal Development Program. It is the largest institution of its kind with centers in each Thana. For better results : work ethics has to be developed to get good results. To develop responsibilities among staffs there should be a system of rewards and punishment. There needs to be monitoring about the quality and quantity of work.

### **Recommendation : Institution Building Process**

In Bangladesh individuals are more important than institutions. The concept of institution exists in a dilute form. We have a few major institutions of culture both in governmental and non-governmental sectors. Traditionally government is the largest patron of culture in Bangladesh, and it is less efficient when it has more people at the top. Non-governmental organizations are doing better these days than the government. Most of the institutions, we visited, if private are autocratic in nature; if governments they are unionized or feudal in character, or a happy combination of both. There is hardly any democratic spirit, and the spirit of commonality to work together for betterment of all, is missing. After saying this we shall not fall victim to a bad dream. There is a flicker of light in the democratic process that is evolving in Bangladesh. Once responsible government is firmly established, responsibility as a shared virtue will be recognized.

## Festivals

Bangladesh has an infinite variety of festivals. The word for festival in Bangla is 'mela', that means 'harmony', and 'ensemble', and in reality a harmonious assembly. That is the gathering of many people in one place in festivity, which is scenic, vocal and may be ideological. There is intrinsic beauty in the traditional folk festivals. Some of the festivals are religious in nature but most which grew out of seasonal need are secular. The religious culture practised as if endowed with divine blessings. In fact, some are parts of religious traditions. These are rich incantations and devotional lyrics addressed to beauty as the source of life. Therefore that this reaching out to beauty and its manifold manifestations should be made a constant factor in the life of the people.

On the secular side a well-organized 'mela' is filled with handicrafts of the cottage industry, folk crafts along with competition of games, carnival of dances and musical performances of comic plays and 'yatra' i.e. a drama without decorated stage or wings. There may be circus, fire-works, competition of games and gambling. There is a leisurely mood with high spirit of enthusiasm and a spirit of carelessness that gives fullest happiness to people.

### Religious Festivals

#### *Muslims:*

- Akheri cahar somba
- Annual urus
- Ashura
- Eid
- Eid-e Milahdunnabi
- Eid-ul Azha
- Eid-ul Fitar
- Maharram
- Mazar basis festivals
- Muslim's sirnee

#### *Hindus:*

- Bathing festivals
- Bek puja
- Birth anniversary
- Bou mela
- Death anniversary
- Dhol yatra
- Durga puja
- Gho-bardhan puja

Jholan yatra  
Kali puja  
Kirtan  
Lakshi puja  
Oshtomi Bath  
Ram commencement  
Rath jattra  
Rush puja  
Sannash puja  
Sawrsati puja  
Shama puja  
Shib Ratra  
Shitol puja  
Siddi path

*Buddhists:*

Buddha Purnima  
Maghi Purnima  
Buddha Dev's puja  
Tithi Puja  
Ashwri Purnima

*Christian:*

Boro Din (Big-Day): X-Mas  
Easter  
Good Friday

*Secular Festivals:*

Agricultural fair  
Ama-bathi mela  
Annual fair  
Baishakhi mela  
Barnni mela  
Basanthi mela  
Bhadra mela  
Bijoy Mela  
Boat race fair  
Boi Mela  
Cattle fair  
Chaitra sankranti  
Ekushey February

Haja Tagore's mela  
 Historical fair  
 Nabanna  
 Nissan's mela  
 Phalgoni purnima  
 Poush sangkranti  
 Trade fair  
 Traditional fair

### *Tribal Festivals:*

We made a separate category of the tribal minorities because they represent some activities which are very distinct and detailed. There is a great potential for attracting tourists to their functions.

1. Wedding ceremony
2. Chaitra sonority:
3. Sanggrai (Marma)
4. Jhijhu(Chakma, Tongchongha)
5. Baishok (Tripura, Usoi)
6. Khubong plai (Mrow, Khumi)
7. Nobo borshaw
8. Kathin Ceebar dan festivals
9. Roth tana festivals
10. Pujas of 14 types or more
11. Birth anniversary
12. Death anniversary

### **Traditional Games:**

Games are the most popular pastime of the youngsters. There are more than hundred traditional games in Bangladesh. Most of the traditional games are still played in the villages. In recent time cricket is driving most other games out of circulation especially in the cities or in the suburbs. Most of the games grew out of seasonal needs, and environmental condition. For example swimming used to be a great sport, and it is rightly said that a Bangladeshi kid can swim before he/she walks. Without proper planning and competitive events it is almost dying. At least 99% of city dwellers do not know how to swim.

When the crops are harvested in winter, the open field is the play ground for every body. It is also the time of great many festivals and games. Again, boat racing is common sight. The kids hardly come out of water playing all sorts of old and improvised games. The list of games, with descriptions is given below.

*List of Some Traditional Games:*

No.	Games	Description
1.	Agh-Dum Bag-Dum .....	Breath Taking Game by Children.
2.	Atas Bajir Khela .....	Fire-work play.
3.	Bamboo Climbing .....	A highly polished 25-30 feet bamboo is erected on the ground, and the one who can get to the top or most of it is the winner.
4.	Bansher khela .....	Eight to Twelve Bamboo Sticks are needed to play 4 to 6 players in square, made of bamboo. Saving the legs before one is caught inside the bamboo hole is the whole art of playing the game.
5.	Banarer khela: (Monkey game )	Teenagers play this game by making one a fall guy and the rest as monkeys who climb up the trees to save themselves.
6.	Bauchi khela .....	Eight to ten players, with a Queen in the middle. The queen is to be rescued without losing the breath. The opponents will try to stop.
7.	Bia Bia khela .....	Marriage Game by girls.
8.	Boat race .....	Races among two to six boats to win in speed and agility.
9.	Boli khela .....	Physical strength game between two players, wrestling with defined rules.
10.	Borop pani khela .....	Touch and Dead Game.
11.	Bull fight .....	Fight between two bulls, but the fight is also between two teams.
12.	Cattle race .....	Race among four to six bulls, with a ladder with each rider.
13.	Choa chuee .....	Hapazard relay race, one who is touched will try to touch one of the others, and it will continue till all of them are tired of running.
14.	Chor chor khela (game of thief)	Game of police and thief like that of Cowboys and Indians.
15.	Chunga khela (Bamboo game):	Bamboo Game.
16.	Cock fight .....	Fight among children one one leg, and the other holding with two hands.
17.	Dan dar khela .....	Baton and stick game.
18.	Danguli khela .....	One two feet stick and the other five inches the smaller is hit with the large, like a cricket bat.
19.	Dariabanda khela .....	Four to five pairs of players play in squares marked on the ground.
20.	Dhub machi .....	Played in the pond with a ball or a floating device, the one who can catch it first will win a point.
21.	Dhok khela (Wrestling game):	Wrestling game.

No. Games	Description
22. Ekka Dokka khela .....	Played mainly by the girls with five rectangular marks on the ground, with a disc.
23. Ghar kanna .....	Girls' game of household.
24. Ghunti khela .....	Played with five stone balls by girls mainly.
25. Gulla-chut .....	Played by both boys and girls on the ground with two groups 10-15 in each side.
26. Ha-Du-Du .....	A kind of breath taking game played by 8 players on each side. It is also known as kabaddi.
27. Jhola bati khela/Corai bathi:	A kind of picnic.
28. Kanamachi .....	Played by both girls and boys, with one having her/his eyes covered with a towel.
29. Kanthi khela .....	Stick game, played with six-inch sticks.
30. Kho Kho .....	Two teams of 5-8 players in each, stand on two sides holding two poles as an anchor. One or more can play holding breaths.
31. Kite fly .....	Used to be a popular game in summer, having colourful kites.
32. Lathi Khela .....	Played by two parties like sword fighting, and do many tricks. Very entertaining for the crowd. Sometimes a gourd is chopped with a stick.
33. Lodu khela .....	Board game with a dice, played by 2-4 players.
34. Loko churi .....	Hiding game played between two teams in the month of June and July.
35. Marble khela .....	Played with marble. Spread marbles first and then hit the particular marble and get all the marbles.
36. Panir khela .....	Water game played by children.
37. Pasa khela .....	A kind of Chess.
38. Paser khela .....	A children will walk besides the other and he or she will separate.
39. Patil bhanga .....	A group or a single person blindfolded has to break a pot with a three to four feet stick.
40. Pigeon fly .....	Competition between parties as to whose pigeon will come back home.
41. Pillow game .....	Fight between kids with pillows.
42. Posu Pakir khela .....	Animal game. A team will make a circle and then run in and out. When a player touches another player he or she must die and get the name of an animal.
43. Putul khela .....	Very elaborate game among girls, who do all the ceremonies in giving marriage to their dolls, and other rituals.
44. Question game .....	Mainly played by school boys and girls. A group of

boys or girls ask questions of one another and those who answer the correct get a point.

45. Ranna bati khela ..... To cook something.
46. Riddle game ..... Played by school kids in the village to test skills and memory.
47. Saper khela ..... Snake charmers make money by showing dances with snakes. Sometimes the snake charmers sell medicine.
48. Sath chara ..... Seven dice arranged in vertical column and hit by a ball. Those who hit the column will have to make it again while the others will try to kill one of them to win it.
49. Sora Khela ..... A cover of clay is set upon the head and the person runs.
50. Swimming ..... Many kinds of tricks are done.
51. Teer Khela ..... Bow and arrow games, made with Bamboo.
52. Tokka Toki Khela ..... Two parties played in a series. One of the Players from one party will hold the eyes of one of the players of the opponent, and call any of his/her players with a code name to strike the forehead of the opponent with a finger; The opponent has to identify the striker. His /her team mates will be witness to the identification.
53. Sath chara ..... Seven dice arranged in vertical column and hit by a ball. Those who hit the column will have to make it again while the others will try to kill one of them to win it.
54. Sora Khela ..... A cover of clay is set upon the head and the person runs.
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### **Tribal Games:**

1. Gadom
2. Gandhu Makkal pal-a
3. Gangi nika

4. Gila kala
5. Gogripa
6. Son nori
7. Sutra Gulla Ganduh
8. Uapongkala

Bangladesh is lucky to have been enriched with a variety of games, with very rich culture and traditions involved in them. In fact some of them are meticulously preserved by the country folks and the tribal people. There should be special efforts to promote them. If we talk about these games to the city dwellers they will be dumb founded. Most of them are unknown and unfathomable to them. Still some of these are played by kids and enjoyed by them. The vitality that ensures in these games is immense and these should be revived at all costs, to regenerate old spirits.

The Ministry of Cultural Affairs and Sports should work at the grass-root level, involving the Union Council Members to promote them. We should not forget that about 50% of the population is women, and there are hardly any facilities involving them in games and sports. Moreover, the kids are the kings of the future but we hardly mould these clays to our cultural heritage. There should be items of cultural interest in the textbooks that may range from games to decoration of gates.

## Institutions

Institutions and organisations that deal with folk arts and crafts are as follows:

1. Ayesha Abed Foundation, Dhaka.
2. Bangladesh Jatio Jadughar (Bangladesh National Museum).
3. Bangladesh Lok O Karu Shilpa Foundation (Bangladesh Folk Arts and Crafts Foundation), P.O. Aminpur, Sonargaon, Narayanganj.
4. Bangladesh Shilpkala Academy, Segunbagicha, Dhaka.
5. Bangldesh Khudra Kutir Shilpa Sangstha (Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation) i.e. BSCIC, Motijheel, Dhaka.
6. Ethnographic Museum, Chittagong.
7. Folk Art Museum, Bangla Academy, Dhaka.
8. Institute of Fine Arts, Dhaka University.
9. International Centre for the Study of Bengal Art.
10. Jatio Grantha Kendra (The National Book Center), Dhaka.
11. Lalbagh Fort Museum, Department of Archaeology.
12. Productive Employment Project (PEP), Badarpur, Faridpur.
13. Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi.

## Comercial & Other Institutions

Institutions and business enterprises those are associated with the development of Folk Craft and Arts. These are as follows:

1. Aarong, Mohakhali, Dhaka.
2. Arshi.
3. Banchte Shekha, Jessore.
4. Bangladesh Handicraft Co-operative Federation.
5. Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (Bangladesh Tourist Corporation).
6. Charu Shilpi Sangshad (Craft Artist Society).
7. Dhaka Art Circle.
8. Drik Picture Library Limited.
9. Friends of Bangladesh, Tongi.
10. Jannakshi.
11. Karika, Dhaka.
12. Kumudini, Dhaka.
13. Mennonite Church Council.
14. Miniature Art Society.
15. Nakshi Kantha Kendra (Embroidery Quilt Center).
16. Narayanganj Art College.
17. Non-professional Women Art Group.
18. Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation.
19. Shilpa Smonnaya (Art Coordination).
20. Shipla Charcha Kendro (Art Discussion Center).
21. Silk Foundation.
22. Skill Development for Underdeveloped Women.
23. Young Artist Association.
24. Zainul Abedin Sangrahashala, Mymensingh.

Other than these institutions mentioned above, there are departments in the universities that deal with some form of folk arts, crafts, festivals and oral literature in their curriculum. All these academic institutions are good resource areas. We have only one national folk institution by the name Bangladesh Folk Art and Crafts Foundation, at Sonargoan, 26 kilometers from Dhaka City. There should be such foundation in each Thana. That means we should have 490 centers which is not too many for 130 million people. This is how a total network has to be established. Apart from these institutions, individuals like Monindra Sutradhar, an 84 year old artisan of Sonargoan, is a symbol of a composite expression of human endeavour. All over Bangladesh there are thousands of

artists, crafts persons and talented people whose skills have remained untapped. Nevertheless, we need to work tirelessly to identify various cultural elements, institutions and ideas to strengthen the foundation of our heritage. The institutions have to be enriched through productive capacity and capacity building quality.

There are 1005 festivals held all over Bangladesh, as recorded in *Bangladeshher Mela*, (Festivals of Bangladesh), BSCIC, but there is hardly any co-ordination among them. There are 4226 Karu Palli (Crafts Villages) according to *Karupalli*, BSCIC, as craft guilds or localized craft neighborhood. Some of them became vibrant with activities because of NGO initiatives, but most others are anemic, for lack of funds or fund raisers. This is a potential area for development because the developed world has understood the utility of natural products. The demand is rising and we need to have good products and promotion.

### Problems

Old artisans and artists are dying, and there is no effort to preserve their experience and effects, i.e. their belongings for the future generations. Most of the developed countries are doing this, including the U.S.A. and Japan. To rejuvenate the cultural heritage we need to have soul searching about our being a member of a society and country, and that should be taught at an early age to the kids. This is not only an appreciation of one's own culture, but the culture of other people far and near. An inventory of what we have both in built and living, we shall be amazed to find what we have, and what we are losing every day. This should include all tribes, trades and traditions. Children should be asked to identify all kinds of items from arts and crafts to get a general view at home. It then brings a sense of history and tradition.

When we talk to people about the declining state of affairs be it art, craft or games, or any other issues they immediately point to the shortage of funds. This is true in the final analysis, but money alone cannot solve the problem without human resource building. There should be regular meetings to look into the issues of arts, crafts, festivals, games, music and museology. For that we need to have institutions that can arrange seminars, workshops and do some brainstorming to seek out solutions.

### Solutions

Local institutions, tribal institutions, and traditional institutions should be the repository of their creative efforts. In the cities the institutions should have attractive service facilities like audio-visual programs, photographic exhibitions, video-libraries about arts and crafts to cater the needs of the kids who will learn to appreciate the culture and traditions. Before that there should be funds made available to make audio and video records along with microfiche from hard

copies of printed materials. Academic institutions should include comprehensive folk curriculum that covers material culture and oral literature such as folk art, architecture, craft, customs, festivals, rituals, and games.

A modern Antiquities Law, Conservation and Preservation Law have to be enacted and they must have teeth. What we have is quite enormous. But we have failed to use them towards income generating projects. An archaeology site is also festival site, at a particular time of the season. But the transport and residential accommodation is always pathetic. When city dwellers shy away from these places because of above problems how can we expect foreign visitors to go there if they are not too stubborn. For that there should be co-ordination among Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, as well as Ministry of Road and Highways. And for that matter Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation should take a lead. Many countries including our neighbours make windfall profits by selling their products. Tourism is a big industry today, and we should not miss that train.

### Conclusion

There is a strong nostalgia that people lived happily in the olden times. The craftsmen produced their crafts and practised their skills, to cater to the caprices of the *Rajas*, *Nawabs* and *Zamindars*. But not all artisans, of course, had the good luck of receiving royal treatment. The vast majority of the artisans had to depend on the common people and cater to their familial, social and religious needs.

Fairs, festivals and rituals together made up congenial milieu in which the artisans worked, the performers played, and the common people participated in numerous games and sports according to the taste and time of seasons. They all lived freely on the support of the common people. In a rural situation like Bangladesh there is hardly any distinction between a buyer and a seller, every body is producing something to survive. The artisan is a farmer, and the farmer is his customer, and in the evening they might be playing *Kabaddi* together. This is a composite whole and there is a great potential for the development of the traditional arts and crafts, festivals and games in Bangladesh. These are the lifeblood of the people.

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## CONTRIBUTORS

A F Salahuddin Ahmed, M.A. (Calcutta), A.M. (Pennsylvania), Ph.D. (London), Formerly Professor of History, University of Dhaka.

Haroun Er Rashid, M.A. (Cantab), M.A. (Williams College, Mass, USA), Professor and Director, School of Environmental Science and Management, Independent University, Bangladesh.

Nazimuddin Ahmed, M.A. (Calcutta), Ph.D. (London), Formerly Director of Archaeology, Bangladesh.

Abdul Momin Chowdhury, M.A. (Dhaka), Ph.D. (London), Vice Chancellor, Primeasia University, Dhaka and Formerly Vice Chancellor, National University Bangladesh.

Shahanara Husain, M.A. (Dhaka), Ph.D. (London), Formerly Professor of History, University of Rajshahi.

Khan Mohammad Mohsin, M.A. (Dhaka), Ph.D. (London), Member, University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, Dhaka.

Abdul Karim, M.A., Ph.D. (Dhaka), Ph.D. (London), Professor Emeritus and Formerly Vice Chancellor, University of Chittagong.

Zaheda Ahmad, M.A., (Rajshahi), Ph.D. (London), Professor, Department of History, University of Dhaka.

A R Mallick, M.A. (Dhaka), Ph.D. (London), Formerly Vice Chancellor, University of Chittagong.

Syed Anwar Husain, M.A. (Dhaka), B.A. (Hons), (Edinburgh), Ph.D. (London), Professor, Department of History, University of Dhaka and Formerly Director General of Bangla Academy.

Tajul Islam Hashmi, M.A. (Dhaka), Ph.D., (Western Australia), Visiting Professor (Asian Studies), University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada.

M Mufakharul Islam, M.A. (Dhaka), Ph.D. (London), Director, School of Liberal Arts and Science, Independent University, Bangladesh.

Wahidul Haque, M.A. (Dhaka), M.S. (Stanford), Ph.D. (Stanford), Professor, Mathematics and Economics, University of Toronto, Canada.

Bazlul Mobin Chowdhury, M.A. (Dhaka), Pg.dip.Soc. (Norwich), Ph.D. (Aberdeen), Vice Chancellor, Independent University, Bangladesh.

A Majeed Khan, M.A., Ph.D. (Minnesota), Vice Chancellor, University of Information Technology and Sciences, Dhaka.

Azizun Nahar Islam, M.A. (Dhaka), Ph.D. (Banaras,India), Professor, Department of Philosophy, University of Dhaka.

Kazi Nurul Islam, M.A. (Dhaka), Ph.D. (Banaras,India), Professor and Chairman, Department of World Religions, University of Dhaka.

Jaysankar L Shaw, M.A., Ph.D. (Rice University, USA), Senior Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, Victoria University, New Zealand.

436

Pierluigi Pizzamiglio, Formerly Professor of History of Mathematic, University of Cattolica, Italy and Professor of Philosophy, National Major Seminary, Dhaka.

Niru Kumar Chakma, M.A. (Dhaka), Ph.D. (Dundee), Professor of Philosophy, University of Dhaka.

A B M Husain, M.A. (Dhaka), B.A. (Hons), (London), Ph.D. (London), Professor Emeritus and Formerly Professor, Department of Islamic History and Culture, University of Rajshahi.

Nazrul Islam, M.A. (Dhaka), Professor, Department of Geography and Environment, University of Dhaka and Honorary Chairman, Centre for Urban Studies, Dhaka.

Anisuzzaman, M.A. (Dhaka), Ph.D. (Dhaka), Professor, Department of Bengali, University of Dhaka.

Karunamaya Goswami, M.A. (Dhaka), Ph.D. (Dhaka), Professor, University of Information Technology and Sciences, Dhaka.

Kazi Ihtesham, M.A. (Rajshahi), M.A. & Ph.D. (University of Michigan), Associate Professor, University of Jahangirnagar.

## GLOSSARY

- Acarya**, pl. -s- monk, expert
- Adbiar**, pl. -s- see *bargadar*
- adl** - justice
- ail**- see ail
- alim** - in madrassah education, from Class XI to Class XII
- alpana**, pl. -s- floral design, especially painted on courtyard or entrances during festivals
- aman** - a variety of rice cultivated in winter
- ameer** - see *amir*
- amir**, also *ameer*, pl. -s- nobleman, chief
- anitta** - impermanence
- artha** - wealth
- asar**, pl. - s- session
- ashraf** - gentle, polished class
- asura**, pl. - s- demon
- atman**, pl. - s- soul
- atraf** - non-upper class
- aul-baul** - group of certain folk singers
- aus** - a variety of rice cultivated in autumn
- badsha**, also *badshah*, pl. -s- king
- badshah** - see *badshah*
- badshah ka takht** - king's throne
- bakhshi** - pay master of the army
- bandobast** - settlement
- bangla**, pl. - s- bungalow (*ek-chala*, one-roofed; *do-chala*, two-roofed; *Char-chala* or *chau-chala*, four-roofed; *jor-bangla*, double-roofed, etc.)
- bania**, pl. - s- trader
- banik**, pl. - s- see *vanika*
- barajivi** - vine-planter
- Barendra Bhumi** - Barind Tract
- bargadar**, also *adbiar*, pl. - s- sharecropper
- baul**, pl. - s- singer of certain folk songs
- bayati**, pl. - s- singer of *jari gan*
- beel**, pl. -s- swampland
- benami** - related to something under another name, such as *benami* transaction
- bepari**, pl. - s- trader
- bhadralok** - gentlemen
- bhakti** - devotion
- bhatiali** - a type of folk songs usually sung
- by boatman
- bhawaiya** - a type of folk songs usually sung by cart men.
- Bhawal Garh** - Madhupur Tract
- bijati** - alien, like culture or religion
- bikshu**, fem. -ni- Buddhist monk
- bodhisatva** - in Buddhism, one who is on the way to the attainment of perfect knowledge
- boro** - a variety of rice cultivated in summer
- brahman** - priestly Hindu class
- brata** - vow
- calit**, also *calti* - standard colloquial form of the Bangla language
- calti** - see *calit*
- caryagiti** - the oldest specimen of the Bangla literature, in verse
- chakra**, pl. - s- wheel
- char** - four, as in *char-chala*, four-roofed
- char** - shoal, as in *char land*
- chaukidar** - village policemen
- chhatra** - round disk
- chhatu** - ground grains
- chbau** - a kind of folk dance
- cipitaka** - flattened rice
- Collyrium - black dye used for beautification of eyes
- dadan** - advance payment by moneylenders, usually a means of exploitation
- dadani** - see *dadan*
- dakhil** - in madrassah education, from Class V to Class X
- dalak**, pl. - s- shrine
- dargah**, also *darga*
- dasyu** - robber, dacoit
- devadasi**, pl. - s- dancing females; temple women
- dewan**, also *diwan*, pl. - s- a minister or counsellor of the state in charge of financial matter; landowner
- dewani**, also *diwani* - office of a counsellor in charge of financial matters; estate
- dharmachakra** - wheel of law
- dhibi**, pl. - s- hillock; mound

*dhoti*, pl. - s- loin-cloth for men  
*dhrupad* – classic, classical  
*diwan* – see *dewan*  
*diwani* – see *dewani*  
*dobhasi* – literature in mixed languages  
*doha*, pl. - s- distich, in the *Caryagiti*, or  
*Caryapada*  
*dohar*, pl. - s- a member of a folk choir  
*doma*, also *domba* – the untouchable caste of  
 the Hindu community  
*dugi*, pl. - s- the smaller one of a pair of  
 musical instrument of percussion, like  
 tabour  
*dukkha* – suffering  
*eklakhi* – worth, amounting to of, or related  
 to 0.1 million  
*fana* – state of losing self-consciousness  
*faraidhi* – see *fardaidi*  
*fardaidi*, also -zi, and -dhi – of a movement  
 for restoration of Islamic practice as they  
 were in the days of the Prophet  
*faraizi* – see *fardaidi*  
*fauzdar*, pl. - s- officer in charge of the  
 police; magistrate; head of police  
*fazil* – in madrassah education, bachelor  
 degree  
*fiqh* – explanation on Islamic matters based  
 on the hadith  
*ghambhira* – a kind of folk music  
*ghazal*, pl. - s- poetry of love  
*ghee* – Indian term for clarified butter  
*goda kavi* – leading poet in a choir  
*gribastha* – family man, householder  
*hajj* – Muslim annual pilgrimage in Makka  
*hakim*, pl. - s- governor, judge  
*hammam*, pl. - s- bathing room  
*haor*, pl. - s- wetland  
*hari*, pl. - s- earthen pot  
*harmika*, pl. - s- square capital  
*hat*, pl. - s- marketplace  
*hikmat* – rationalism  
*ibetadai* – in madrassah education schooling  
 up to Class V  
*Idul Azha* – the Muslim festival of sacrifice  
 celebrated on the 10 of Jilhajj  
*iman* – faith  
*janapada*, pl. - s- human settlement, habitat  
*jangal*, pl. - s- forest  
*jari gan* – a kind of folk songs of mourning

*jatra*, pl. - s- see *yatra*  
*jhumur* – a kind of folk song  
*jihad*, pl. - s- holy war  
*jotadar*, pl. - s- a tenure-holder under a  
 zemindar  
*kaccha* – tucking in, cf. *vikaccha*, tucked in  
*fafir*, pl. - s- disbeliever  
*kalasa*, pl. - s- earthen pitcher, jar  
*kalima* – witness  
*kama* – in madrassah education master  
 degree  
*kanda*, pl. - s- root  
*kapalika* -s- a class of ascetics worshipping  
 goddess Kali  
*karad raja* – king of a tributary state  
*karkhana*, pl. - s- factory, workshop  
*karma* – action, duty, obligation, fate  
*kavi gan* – sort of a contest between two  
 groups of poet who compose verses  
 extemporaneously  
*kaviyal*, pl. - s- leading poet of a *kavi gan*  
 group  
*khai* – toasted rice  
*khanqa*, pl. - s- shelter for sufis and saints  
*khas* – government, as in *khas* land, land  
 belonging to the government  
*kirtana*, pl. - s- sort of Hindu religious song  
 in praise of Radha and Krishna  
*kotwal*, pl. - s- police superintendent  
*krishak*, pl. - s- peasant  
*kshatriya* – political or military Hindu class  
*kufir* – disbelief  
*kundala*, pl. - s- necklace of large beads  
*kuthi*, pl. - s- office and residence, especially  
 of the European indigo-planters in Bengal  
*lac* – dye made from lac used to adorn  
 palms, legs and lips  
*la-kheraj* – rent-free (land)  
*lalmai* – red clay  
*langotia* – a small piece of loin-cloth worn  
 like a suspensor by ascetics  
*lathi*, pl. - s- stick  
*lathial*, pl. - s- literally, one skilled in the  
 tricks with sticks; more often an army of  
 musclemen  
*lungi*, pl. - s- a long loin-cloth chiefly worn  
 by Muslims  
*madal*, pl. - s- a kind of tom-tom played by  
 the Santals

- madrasa*, pl. -s- schools where Islamic instructions are imparted
- magh* – used to refer to the Arakanese people
- mabajan*, pl. -s- moneylender
- mahal*, pl. -s- department
- mahavibara*, pl. -s- grand monastery
- mahavira*, pl. -s- great hero
- Mahua tree – a kind of butter-tree, the mahwa
- maktab*, pl. -s- place of primary schooling in Islamic instruction
- Manasa* – goddess of snake/the goddess of serpents
- mancha*, pl. -s- ring, something circular
- mandapa*, pl. -s- thatched or roofed pavilion
- mangala gan* – songs of well-being
- masnad*, pl. -s- throne
- math*, also *matha*, pl. -s- monastery
- matha* – see math
- matsyanyayam* – state of lawlessness where big fish eat up small ones
- maulvi* – a Muslim scholar or teacher
- mazar*, pl. -s- shrine
- medhi* – drum
- mehdi* – the henna, used to adorn body parts, more often palms and fingernails by women
- mela*, pl. -s- fair, exhibition
- mibrab*, pl. -s- the place in a mosque where the imam says prayers; a niche
- moksha* – freedom from bondage and suffering, emancipation liberation
- mrigaya* – hunting
- mufti* – a Muslim jurist, law officer
- mullah*, pl. -s- a learned man, priest, school master, judge
- mumin* – believer
- munafiq* – hypocrite
- mutsuddi* – a clerk, accountant
- nagarik* – urban
- naib*, pl. -s- a deputy, vicegerent, assistant, rent-collector of an estate
- namaz*, also *salat* – Muslim prayer
- nawabi* – the estate
- nazar* – gift
- niabat* – deputy of a *nawab*, in charge of administration
- padarvali* – a series of verses
- pandit*, also *pundit* – a learned man, scholar, expert, teacher, Sanskrit scholar, pundit
- pata*, pl. -s- picture
- pathshala* – place for primary schooling
- patni* – wife
- patra*, pl. -s- plate
- patta*, pl. -s- woven fabric
- patua* – artist who paints on *pata*
- pir*, pl. -s- Muslim saints and ascetics
- praja*, pl. -s- subject; tenant
- praja samity* – tenants' society
- pratima*, pl. -s- image; icon, especially of goddesses
- puja*, pl. -s- worship, Hindu religious rituals, Hindu festivals
- pundit*, pl. -s- *pandit*
- punthi*, pl. -s- ancient book in handwriting, manuscript
- purana*, pl. -s- ancient tales
- purdah* – veil system
- purohita* – Hindu priest
- puthi path* – reading of *puthi*
- putul*, pl. -s- a doll
- qadr* – power
- qazi*, pl. -s- judge, jurist
- qubla* – the side the Muslims face to say prayers
- qila*, pl. -s- fort
- raga*, pl. -s- specific mode of classical Indian music
- riyat*, also *ryot*, pl. -s- tenant
- riyatwari* – tenant-wise
- raj* – rule; dynasty
- raja pundita* – chief pundit
- rajapath*, pl. -s- highways
- rajbari* – palace, king's house
- rathjatra* – procession of chariots, a festive procession of chariots of god Jagannath
- ratna*, pl. -s- gem; spire on a building
- ryot* – see *riyat*
- sabara* – hill people
- sabha*, pl. -s- society, council
- sadhu* – mendicant; chaste form of the Bangla langue
- sadr* – head of religious department, charity and grnts
- sakhi*, pl. -s- companion of princesses during swimming in the tank
- salat* – see *namaz*

*samatala* – plain land  
*samkara* – mixed caste  
*samsara* – worldly affairs  
*sanatana dharma* – the universal religion  
*sangharama* – monastery  
*sankhya* – one of the three great divisions of the Hindu philosophy  
*sannyasi*, pl. -*s-* mendicant, ascetic  
*sara*, pl. -*s-* lid of an earthen pot  
*sari gan* – a kind of folk song  
*sati*, also *suttee* – a faithful wife who burns herself with her husband's corpse  
*skakri* – power  
*shilpa* – art  
*shirk* – associating others with God, disloyalty to God in Islam  
*shola* – reed pulp  
*shraddha* – death rituals  
*shraman* – lay students in Buddhism  
*shuddhi* – purification  
*Shudra* – the service class of Hindu community  
*siam* – fasting  
*sipah-salar* – governor-general  
*smriti* – law treatise of the Hindu philosophy  
*stridhana* – women's special property  
*stupa* – Buddhist monument, tope  
*subah*, also *subeh* – province  
*subahdar*, also *subehdar* – governor of a province  
*subahdari*, also *subehdari* – governorship of a province  
*subeh* – see *subah*  
*subehdar* – see *subahdar*  
*subehdari* – see *subahdari*  
*sufi* – Muslim saints  
*sunnah* – tradition of the Prophet  
*sura* – wine  
*suttee* – see *sati*  
*svami* – see *swami*  
*swadeshi* movement – Indian national movement favouring home industries and boycott of foreign goods  
*swami*, also *svami* – Hindu spiritual preceptor  
*swaraj* – self-rule, self-government, independence  
*tahkhana* – summer house

*tabildar* – an office in charge of revenue collection in a circle  
*talugdar* – holder of landed estate under a zemindar or government  
*tantrik* – of the rites prescribed in Tantras of Shaktas  
*tappa* – a musical genre  
*taqvi* – agricultural loans  
*taqua* – control of mind  
*tazia*, pl. -*s-* the feretory carried in Muharram procession by Shia Muslims  
*tebhaga* – three-share  
*tol*, pl. -*s-* Sanskrit schools  
*ulema* – Muslim scholars, plural  
*Vaishya* – a Hindu caste in charge of trade, agriculture, etc.  
*vajrakundala* – ring of lightning  
*vana* – forest  
*vanika*, also *banik*, pl. -*s-* merchant, trader  
*varna* – caste in social order  
*vasaga* – inner part of the bed chamber of the king  
*vasagarika* – in charge of *vasaga*  
*vedi* – Vedic – adj. related to the Vedas  
*verandah* – balcony, gallery  
*vihara*, pl. -*s-* a Buddhist or Jain precinct, temple, or monastery  
*vina*, pl. -*s-* lyre; lute  
*viraha* – separation  
*vizir* – see *wazir*  
*wazir*, also *vizir*, pl. -*s-* a minister or counsellor of the state  
*yana* – vehicle  
*yatra*, also *jatra* – a type of open-air folk dram  
*yatra*, also *jatra* – folk drama  
*yoga* – a system of Hindu philosophy showing the means of emancipation of the soul from further migrations  
*zakat* – alms, one of the five pillars of Islam

## INDEX

### A

A K Fazlul Huq - 138, 139, 140, 182, 190, 196, 209, 219, 220, 221, 230  
A.K.M Alamgir - 346, 369  
*aat-chala* - 339, 340  
Abanindranath Tragore - 344, 373  
*Abarodhvasisni* - 374  
Abdul Ahad - 404, 405, 406  
Abul Hashim - 221  
Abdul Hakim - 6, 362  
Abdul Huq - 383  
Abdul Karim Sahityavisarad - 376, 382  
Abdul Latif Nawab - 120, 157, 160, 174, 175, 178, 179, 184, 276  
Abdul Malek - 220  
Abdul Mannan Syed - 383  
Abdul Qadir - 378, 379, 382  
Abdul Gaffar Chaudhuri - 406  
Abdul Wahab al-Jabbari - 307  
Abdullah - 374  
Abdullah al Mamun - 382  
Abdullah Khalid - 348, 349  
Abdur Rahman Chugtai - 344  
Abdur Razzaque - 345, 346, 348  
Abdus Sabur Khan  
Abdus Salam - 222, 347  
Abdus Satter - 346, 343  
Abdus Shakoor Shah - 345  
Abdus Sukur Mahmud - 221, 364  
*Abhattha* - 84  
*Abhidhamma Pitaka* - 326  
*Abhinanda* - 86  
*Abhinay, Abhinay nay* - 377  
Abu Hasan Ali bin Ismail al-Ashari - 293  
Abu Hena Mustafa Kamal - 381, 383  
Abu Ishaq - 382  
Abu Jafar Shamsuddin - 382  
Abu Rushd - 379, 382  
Abu Sayeed Ayub - 380  
Abu Sayeed Talukder - 349  
Abu Taher - 345  
Abu Zafar Obaidullah - 381  
Abul Fazal - 378, 379, 383

Abu'l Hundayl - 306  
Abul Husain - 378  
Abul Mansur Ahmad - 379  
*abwab* - 208, 209, 210, 227, 228, 229, 231  
*Abyssinian Sultans* - 2  
Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray - 246  
Achintyakumar Sengupta - 377  
Act, Government of India, 1935 - 139, 218, 278  
Adamjee Jute Mills - 247  
*adbiars* - 231  
*Adi Brahmo Samaj* - 149  
Adina Masjid - 37, 100, 334  
*adl* - 305  
Advaita Mallaburman - 380  
*Advayavajra* - 328  
Agartala Conspiracy Case - 198, 199, 200  
*Agnibina* - 375  
*Agomoni kharcha* - 227  
Agra - 117, 335  
Agrarian Relations - 236, 237, 264  
Agrarian Society - 226, 231, 232, 245  
Ahmed Shah - 154  
Ahmed Shah Abdali - 154  
Ahmed Sharif - 382  
Ahmed Sofa - 383  
Ahsan Habib - 379, 381, 406  
Ahsan Manzil - 339  
Ajit Datta - 377  
Ajit kumar Chakravarty - 376  
Akbar - 108, 109, 110, 111, 115, 116, 117, 123, 336  
Akhtaruzzaman Elias - 382  
Akram Khan - 209, 279, 371  
Akram-ud-dowla - 114  
Aksaykumar Baral - 370  
Akshay Kumar Datta - 148  
Akshaykumar Dutta - 167  
al- Ashari - 307  
*al Hadi* - 304  
Al Mahmud - 381  
*al Mansur* - 304  
*Alaler Gharer Dulal* - 367  
Alam Chand - 113, 119

- Alamgir - 346, 369  
 al-amin - 289  
 Alaol - 121, 362  
 Al-Ashari - 307, 308, 309  
 Alauddin Al Azad - 382  
 Ala-ud-dowla - 113  
 Alaul - 100  
 Ali Mardan Khalji - 97  
 Ali, M. - 184, 406  
 Alibaba - 369  
 Alivardi Khan, Nawab - 113, 114, 119, 120, 124, 126, 160, 161, 241  
*Allah Khoda Gosain* - 3  
 Allen Ginsberg - 379  
 All-India Congress - 136, 189  
 All-India Muslim League - 185, 189  
 All-Party Students Action Committee - 199  
 al-Mamun - 304  
 Almsgiving - 295, 321  
 Aloke Roy - 349  
 Alokesh Ghosh - 345  
*Alpana* - 343, 347, 417  
 Altaf Mahmud - 406  
 Amalendu Basu - 380  
*aman* - 232  
*Amar Jivani* - 370  
*Amar Jivanir Jivani* - 370  
 Amherst Lord - 272  
*Amin* - 116  
 Aminul Islam - 345, 146  
*amirs* - 102, 156, 338  
 Amirul Momenin - 347  
 Amiya Chakravarty - 377  
*Amiyadbara* - 370  
 Amrital Basu - 391  
 Ananda-lahari - 218  
 Anada Mohan Bose - 149  
 Analprabha - 374  
*Ananda* - 31, 33, 34, 63, 331, 363  
 Ananda Vihara - 31, 33, 34, 63, 331  
 Ananda deva - 33, 34, 63  
 Anandamohan Basu - 389, 390  
*Anandamangal* - 363  
*Anandamath* - 367  
 Ananta Manikya - 109  
*anda* - 331  
 Andhra - 71  
 Anga Chittra - 417  
 Anglo-Vedic School and College - 150  
 Aniruddha - 71, 85  
 anitta - 325  
 Anjuman-i-Islam - 168, 188  
 Anjuman-i-Islam  
 Annadashankar Ray - 178  
 Annie Besant - 151  
 Antones - 339  
 Antyajas - 72, 74  
 Anwar Jahan - 348  
*Anwara* - 374  
 Anwarul Huq - 344  
*Apabramsa* - 84  
*Aparajeyo Bangla* -  
*Aparajita* - 378  
 Arab - 2, 13, 63, 95, 155, 174, 175, 243, 301  
 Arabic Philosophy - 301  
 Arabs - 11, 63, 95, 121, 243, 290, 291, 301, 335  
 Arguments for God's existence - 297  
*artha* - 312, 366  
 Arts Department - 344  
 Arun Mitra - 377  
 Arya Samaj - 150  
*Aryanisation* - 54  
 Aryans - 13, 54, 67, 68, 69  
 Aryasaptasati - 80, 82, 83, 86, 90, 84  
 Asad - 199, 204  
 Asadhu Siddhartha - 377  
*Asar* - 409, 410  
*Asbariyas* - 301, 307, 308, 309  
 Ashkar Ibne Shaikh - 382  
 Ashraf Siddiqui - 383  
 Ashrafpur - 331  
 Ashrafuddin Chowdhury - 220  
 Ashrumala - 370  
 Asiatic Society of Bengal - 342  
 Asiatic Society, the - 6, 14, 93, 94, 341, 342, 350  
 Asimuddin Ahmed - 220  
 Asoka - 24, 87,  
 Asoke Karmakar - 346  
*Asraymirnay* - 366  
*astangika-marga* - 326  
*Astasahasrika Prajnaparamita* - 331  
*asuras* - 67  
 Ataur Rahman Khan - 203, 279  
 Atisa Dipankara - 85, 328  
 Atisha Dipankara Sree Jnana - 1  
 Atiya Masjid - 336

*Atmajijnasa* - 366  
*atman* - 325  
*Atmiya Sabha* - 148  
*Attalikakara* - 73  
Attributes of God - 302, 304, 305, 308  
*Atul Chandra Gupta* - 376  
*Atulprasad Sen* - 391, 396, 397, 398, 400, 406  
*Auckland Lord* - 131, 275  
*Aurangzeb* - 23, 40, 111, 112, 116, 117, 118, 336  
*aus* - 232, 238, 239  
*Avalokitesvara* - 30  
*Awami League* - 4, 193, 195, 196, 197, 198, 200, 201, 203, 281, 263,  
*Ayna* - 379  
*Ayub Khan* - 200, 201, 238  
*Ayub regime* - 197, 200  
*Azam Khan Koka*- 112, 117, 124

**B**

*Baba Adam's Mosque* - 37, 334  
*Babu* - 368, 369, 387  
*Badadidi* - 375  
*Badal Sarkar* - 380  
*Badkamta* - 62  
*Badruddin Tayabji* - 170  
*Badshabs* - 335, 338  
*Badu Candidas* - 361, 364  
*Bayati* - 409, 410  
*bagchasis* - 231  
*Bagerhat* - 231  
*Bagha Masjid* - 334  
*Baha-Allah* - 159  
*Baharistan-I-Ghaibi* - 120  
*Bainayak Sen* - 245  
*Baitul Mukarram Masjid* - 339  
*Bakhtiyar Khalji* - 64, 66, 95, 97, 104, 333,  
*Bakhtiyar Khilji* - 2, 22  
*Bakhtyar Khalji* - 103, 108  
*Balaichand Mukhopadhyay* - 378  
*Balaka* - 372  
*Balendranath Tagore* - 373  
*Balibati Palace* - 339  
*Bamboo* - 74, 218, 219, 221, 409, 413, 416, 426, 428  
*Bamsidas* - 363  
*Banalata Sen* - 377

*Banaphul* - 378  
*Banaphuler Galpa* - 378  
*Bandir Vandana* - 377  
*Banesvar Danga* - 69  
*Banga Lakshmi Cotton Mills* - 246  
*Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman* - 5, 201, 406  
*Bangabhavan* - 339  
*Bangarh* - 78, 82, 84, 331  
*Bangadesher Mela* - 431, 433  
*Bangla Academy* - 6, 195, 360, 411, 429, 433  
*Bangladesh National Museum Campus* - 348  
*Bankim Chandra* - 367, 368, 370, 372, 375  
*Bankim Chandra Chatterji* - 367  
*Bankura* - 54, 87, 109  
*Banngarb-Kotivarsha* - 74  
*Bentham Jeremy* - 147, 165  
*Baptism* - 320  
*Baqা* - 310  
*Baya* - 419  
*Bayazid Karrani* - 109, 111  
*Bara* - 39, 42, 109, 110, 111, 334, 336, 337, 339  
*Bara Bhuiyas* - 336  
*Bara Katra* - 39, 42, 337  
*Bara Kuthi* - 339  
*Bara Sona Masjid* - 334  
*Barakar* - 87  
*Bararamas* - 83  
*Barbak Shah* - 101, 361  
*Barbara Hepworth* - 348  
*bargadars* - 215, 216, 219, 222, 229, 230, 231, 232, 237, 261  
*Bari Masjid* - 333  
*Barin Datta* - 222  
*Barind Tract* - 11  
*Basantaranjan Roy* - 361, 376  
*Bash Taranga* - 419  
*Basic features of Islam* - 287  
*Basic Principles Committee* - 193, 196  
*Battle of Palashi* - 241, 242  
*Battle of Palassey* - 108  
*Baul* - 121, 365, 382, 386, 392, 393, 396, 397, 398, 407, 408  
*Baul Dance* - 408  
*Baul songs* - 121, 365, 382, 408  
*Bauma* - 369  
*Bayazid* - 109, 111  
*Beatific Vision* - 302, 304, 306, 309

- Bede* - 302, 304, 306, 309  
*Begin Chandler Pal* - 177  
*Belbai Madrasa* - 334  
*Believers* - 70, 223  
*Bengal Chemicals* - 246  
*Bengal Hosiery Co.* - 246  
*Bengal Jotedars'* - 209  
*Bengal Landholders Society* - 165, 177  
*Bengal Local Self-Government Bill* - 217  
*Bengal Money-Lenders Act* - 190  
*Bengal Pact* - 136, 182, 189, 216  
*Bengal Pact in 1923* - 189  
*Bengal Rural Primary Education Act, 1932* - 217  
*Bengal School of painting* - 344  
*Bengal Tenancy Act* - 208, 215, 217, 223, 230  
*Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885* - 208  
*Bengal Tenancy Act of 1928* - 230  
*Bengal under Dyarchy* - 133  
*Bengali language* - 84, 102, 106, 107, 120, 122, 129, 180, 270, 271, 275, 328, 359, 360, 376, 406  
*Bengali script* - 369, 380  
*Bengal-Mughal style* - 343  
*Bentinck Lord William* - 131, 152, 153, 166, 183, 268, 274  
*beparis* - 234  
*Bergson* - 372  
*bhadra* - 62, 70, 85, 87, 331, 424  
*Bhadralok* - 4, 169, 182, 207, 208, 209, 211, 215, 217, 218, 219, 221, 222, 223, 228, 246  
*Bhadrarjun* - 368  
*Bhagvat Gita* - 311, 112, 313  
*Bhangar Gan* - 375  
*Bharata's Natyashastra* - 83  
*Bharatcandra Roy* - 363, 364  
*Bharatchandra Ray* - 368, 371  
*Bharate Musalman Sabhyata* - 371  
*Bhasani* - 197, 199, 200, 201  
*Bhasu-Vihara* - 330, 331  
*Bhatiali* - 407, 408  
*Bhatta* - 76, 85,  
*Bhavadeva* - 63, 71, 72, 76, 77, 84, 85, 86, 90  
*Bhavadeva Bhatta's* - 86  
*Bhavakadevi* - 92  
*Bhavananda* - 361  
*Bhawaiya* - 407, 408  
*Bhiksuni* - 85, 92  
*bhiksus* - 92  
*Bhilla* - 74  
*Bhima* - 28, 68  
*Bhoja Vihara* - 63  
*Bhrantibilas* - 367  
*Bhudev Mukherji* - 367  
*Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay* - 378  
*Bibi Bagnis* - 38  
*Bibi Kulsum* - 370  
*Bibi Pari* - 40, 41  
*Bidhayak Bhattacharya* - 378  
*bighas* - 236, 237  
*Bihar* - 4, 27, 44, 57, 58, 60, 61, 63, 64, 95, 96, 99, 101, 113, 114, 123, 125, 126, 132, 149, 157, 159, 161, 166, 177, 179, 183, 234, 268, 328, 329, 370, 372, 395, 408  
*Biharlal Chakravarti* - 370, 372  
*Biharsharif* - 96  
*Bijan Bhattacharya* - 378  
*bila kaifa* - 307  
*Bimal Mitra* - 380  
*Binay Ray* - 403  
*Biplobi Bangla* - 199  
*Bir Hammir* - 109  
*Birangana* - 369  
*Birbaler Halkhata* - 375  
*Birendra Chattopadhyay* - 379  
*Biru Dutta* - 119  
*Biru-pada* - 328  
*Biser Banshi* - 375  
*Bishnu Dey* - 377  
*Bishop's College* - 273  
*H.P. Blavatsky* - 151  
*Blue Mutiny* - 168, 183  
*ইসলাম, নজরুল* - 350  
*Bodhisathva* - 1, 5  
*Bogra* - 23, 24, 28, 37, 38, 55, 98, 224, 242, 283, 328, 331, 412, 417  
*Bogra Khan* - 98  
*Bonijul Huq* - 345  
*Boundary Commission* - 142  
*Borhanuddin Khan Jahangir* - 383  
*boro* - 232, 238, 239, 424  
*Bourgeoisie* - 196, 223, 259, 261, 263,  
*Brahaddharma* - 72  
*Brahma* - 315, 362, 388, 289, 393  
*Brahma Sangeet* - 388, 393  
*Brahmanas* - 69, 70, 71, 72, 76, 85  
*Brahmana Bhavadeva Bhatta* - 72  
*Brahman-Roman Katholik Samvad* - 366

- B**
- Brahmaputra - 10, 11, 21, 66, 67, 96, 109, 414  
*Brahmavaivarta* - 71, 72  
*Brahmavaivarta Puranas* - 71  
*Brahmin* - 2, 70, 89, 90, 104, 120, 121, 122, 147, 149, 152, 154, 245, 267, 322, 323  
*Brahmo Samaj* - 148, 149, 150, 367  
*Brajabuli* - 364  
*Brajangana* - 369  
*Brethren of Purity* - 307  
*Brhaddharma Purana* - 72  
*Britain* -  
*British Indian Association* - 167, 177, 181  
*British or European* - 343  
*British Raj* -  
*Broomfield* - 143, 190, 202, 224  
*Brtrasamhar* - 370, 371  
*Buddha* - 5, 25, 27, 32, 33, 34, 69, 72, 81, 83, 88, 288, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329, 342, 347, 424  
*Buddhadeva Basu* - 377, 380  
*Buddhadevacarit* - 369  
*Buddhananataka* - 81  
*Buddhist* - 12, 22, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 53, 57, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 68, 69, 70, 72, 75, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 92, 103, 104, 121, 151, 202, 211, 322, 326, 327, 328, 329, 330, 301, 332, 333, 342, 347, 360, 361, 384, 424  
*Buddhist Siddacharyas* - 328  
*Budha Saliker Ghade Ro* - 368  
*Bulbon Osman* - 347  
*Burdwan* - 54, 67, 68, 69, 74, 87, 140, 254  
*Bureaucracy* - 398, 409, 410  
*Burma* - 1, 85, 86, 87, 214, 375  
*Byathar Dan* - 375
- C**
- Charyapadas* - 328  
*C. R. Das* - 189  
*Caintanyarupaprapti* - 366  
*Cakrabak* - 376  
*Cakrapanidatta* - 86  
*Calcutta Agricultural Association* - 209  
*Calcutta Art School* - 343, 344  
*Calcutta Babus* - 343  
*Calcutta Corporation* - 135, 136, 137, 138, 139  
*Calcutta Killing of 1946* - 221
- Calcutta Medical College* - 274  
*Calcutta School* - 344  
*Calcutta School Society* - 268, 271  
*Calcutta School-Book Society* - 268, 271  
*Calcutta, the University of* - 360  
*Calicot* - 338  
*Candala* - 71, 72, 74  
*Candalika* - 373  
*Candidas* - 361, 364, 366  
*Candimangal* - 363  
*Candra* - 70, 72, 89  
*Candrabindu* - 375  
*Candragomi* - 86  
*Candraketugarh* - 78, 80  
*Candrashekhar* - 367  
*Candravati* - 362  
*Candravyakarana* - 86  
*Cane* - 73, 255, 413, 416  
*Capital of East Bengal* - 344  
*Capitalism* - 245, 253, 256, 357, 260, 265  
*Capitalist* - 243, 245, 246, 252, 253, 256, 257, 259, 260, 262, 263, 265  
*Car Adbyay* - 373  
*Carakadatta* - 373  
*Caritrabin* - 375  
*Car-iyari-katha* - 375  
*Carmakara* - 72  
*Carmichael College* - 339  
*Carr, Tagore & Company* - 245  
*Carya* - 81, 84  
*Caryagiti* - 360, 361  
*Caryapadas* - 82  
*Caturanga* - 372  
*Caturdashpadi Kavitavali* - 369, 370  
*Caturvarnas* - 69  
*CENTO* - 199  
*Central Board for the Development of Bangla* - 195  
*Chakravarty* - 30, 94, 346, 363, 376, 377, 379, 380  
*Chal Chitra* - 417  
*Chaleolithic* - 80  
*Chand Rai* - 109  
*Chandidas* - 122, 385  
*Chandina* - 339  
*Chandra* - 22, 31, 33, 35, 63, 64, 109, 123, 143, 149, 152, 153, 170, 246, 327, 328, 343, 345, 346, 367, 368, 370, 372, 375, 376, 377, 386, 388, 389, 402

- C**
- Chandra Sekhar De - 346
  - Chandra Shekhar De - 345
  - Chandragupta II - 56
  - Chandraketugarh - 55, 74, 75, 82, 83, 88
  - Chandras - 63, 64, 328, 343
  - char* - 34, 208, 236
  - Charging Freedom - 349
  - Charles Grant - 146, 269
  - Charles Macaulay - 246
  - Charpatra Mura* - 31, 32, 34, 87
  - Charya Geeti* - 385
  - Chati* - 420
  - chauchala* - 38
  - chau-chalas* - 340
  - Chaumohani* - 339
  - Chauri Chaura incident* - 212
  - Chayanat* - 376
  - chhatra* - 331
  - chhatri*s - 339
  - Chhau* - 408
  - Chhota Katra - 337
  - Chhota Pandua - 334
  - Chhota Sona Masjid - 334
  - China - 1, 55, 100, 101, 201, 244, 250
  - Chitta Ranjan Das - 136, 182
  - Chittagong - 2, 11, 12, 20, 42, 54, 63, 85, 99, 100, 103, 106, 111, 112, 116, 120, 131, 133, 156, 178, 184, 220, 247, 282, 283, 328, 339, 344, 347, 361, 421, 429, 433
  - Chittagong Oil Refinery - 247
  - Chittagong University - 344
  - Chor* - 30, 426
  - Chota* - 37, 38, 39, 67
  - Chota Sona Masjid - 38
  - Chunakhola - 28
  - Cirakumar Sabha* - 373
  - Citadel - 24, 25, 26, 334
  - Citra* - 372, 273
  - Citrakara - 73
  - Citrangada* - 373
  - Class Struggle - 213, 223
  - Clawson -
  - Climate - 9, 10, 43, 62, 109, 145, 147, 152, 243, 258, 331, 336
  - Coconut shell - 416
  - Cokher Bali* - 372
  - College of Art - 348
  - College of Fort William - 269, 366, 368
  - Colonialism - 130, 131, 187, 252, 253, 256, 261, 266, 267
  - Comercial & Other Institutions - 430
  - Comilla - 20, 30, 31, 33, 34, 36, 54, 56, 62, 63, 84, 85, 87, 89, 156, 208, 220, 283, 328, 331, 347, 413
  - Communal Award - 139, 218,
  - Communist Party of India - 218, 403
  - Communist Party of India (CPI) - 222
  - Concept of suffering in Islam - 298
  - Congress - 133, 135, 136, 137, 140, 151, 159, 170, 172, 173, 177, 181, 182, 183, 187, 189, 190, 202, 208, 211, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 390
  - Congress Party - 211, 217, 218
  - Conch - 78, 79, 413, 416, 419
  - Copper - 21, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 40, 56, 68, 69, 70, 78, 79, 80, 347, 349, 416, 433
  - Craft - 414, 417, 418, 421, 430, 431, 432
  - Crafts in Dhaka - 348
  - Crafts Foundation - 421, 430, 433
  - Creation of the world - 304
  - Currie - 76, 255, 264
  - Curzon Hall - 339
- D**
- D.L. Ray* - 395
  - Dabistan-i-Mazahib* - 145
  - dadan* - 233
  - dalals* - 234
  - Damama - 420
  - Damodar Sen - 87, 361
  - Damru - 419
  - Dara - 111, 337
  - Dara Begum's Tomb - 337
  - Darasbari Madrasa - 334
  - Darasbari Masjid - 334
  - dargah* - 25
  - Darpa Narayan - 118
  - Dar-ul Harb* - 155, 175
  - Dar-ul Ulum* - 159
  - Darwan fee* - 227
  - Das, Chittaranjan - 411
  - dasyus* - 67
  - Daud Khan Karrani - 108, 109, 110
  - Daulat Qazi - 121, 362
  - Daulat Uzir Bahram Khan - 362
  - Day of Judgment* - 287, 288
  - Dayabhaga* - 86, 90

- Debendranath Tagore - 148, 149, 167  
 Debesh Roy - 380  
 Debt Settlement Boards - 190, 209, 230, 235, 236  
*Debar* - 87  
*Dehal Chittra* - 417  
 Delhi - 14, 15, 22, 23, 37, 44, 94, 95, 97, 98, 99, 102, 103, 107, 109, 117, 118, 120, 123, 143, 145, 154, 202, 204, 225, 265, 329, 333, 335, 383  
 Delhi Sultan - 22  
 Delwar Hussain Ahmed - 179  
*Deoband* - 159  
 Deshbandhu Chitta Ranjan Das - 216  
 Deva dynasty - 32, 33, 62,  
*Devadas* - 375  
*devadasis* - 81, 83, 93  
 Devapala - 58, 59, 60, 61,  
 Devaparvata - 33, 62, 63, 74, 84, 93  
 Devaparvata-Mainamati - 74  
 Devdas Chakravorty - 345  
 Development of Bangla - 195  
 Devendranath Sen - 370  
 Devikota - 85, 92  
 Devikota Vihara - 85, 92  
*dewan* - 39, 181  
 Dhak - 419  
 Dhaka - 6, 14, 15, 21, 31, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 41, 42, 44, 55, 63, 65, 93, 94, 103, 107, 111, 113, 114, 115, 119, 120, 123, 133, 140, 143, 156, 158, 160, 174, 178, 184, 185, 189, 193, 194, 199, 202, 203, 204, 208, 213, 218, 220, 223, 224, 227, 228, 238, 239, 240, 274, 275, 277, 278, 282, 283, 284, 328, 329, 331, 336, 337, 339, 340, 341, 343, 344, 348, 349, 350, 360, 365, 366, 368, 376, 378, 379, 383, 396, 399, 403, 404, 405, 406, 411, 413, 414, 417, 422, 429, 430, 432, 433  
 Dhaka Museum - 331  
 Dhaka University Central Students Union (DUCSU) - 199  
 Dhaka University Mosque - 339, 399  
 Dhakeswari - 337  
 Dhali Al Mamun - 346  
*Dhamma* - 323  
*Dham-pada* - 328  
 Dhanmondi - 336, 339  
 Dhanmondi Idgah - 366  
*Dharma* - 32, 148, 288, 311, 312, 363, 364, 388  
*Dharmaditya* - 62  
*Dharmamangal* - 363  
 Dharmapala - 28, 58, 59, 60, 61, 328,  
*Dharmasastra* - 65, 71, 72, 76, 77, 86, 90  
*Dhol* - 419, 423  
*Dholak* - 419  
*dhobi* - 78  
*Dhoyi* - 65  
 Dhrupad - 385, 386, 387, 388, 389, 393, 384, 397  
*Dhumketu* - 375  
*Dhusar Pandulipi* - 377  
*Dhyani* - 34  
 Dianabandhu Mitra - 169  
 Dighapatia - 339  
 Dilip Kumar Ray - 402, 403  
 Dimdim - 419  
 Dinabandhu Mitra - 368  
 Dinajpur - 29, 36, 37, 85, 96, 97, 220, 222, 223, 242, 254, 283, 328, 331, 337, 347, 349, 417  
 Dineshranjan Das - 377  
 Dipa Huq - 347  
 Dipankara Srijnana - 85  
 Direct Action Day - 141, 221  
 Direct Action Day, 1946 - 141, 221  
 Discarding of Salat - 299  
 Discarding Zakat - 299  
 Disobedience to God - 299  
*Divaratrik Kavya* - 378  
 Divine Justice - 304, 305  
 Divine Spirit - 298  
 Divine Unity - 306  
 Divine Will - 302, 303, 310  
*Divya* - 61, 70  
 Diwan Rai Rayan - 113  
*Diwani* - 113, 117, 128, 129, 174, 242, 244, 338  
*Dobhasi punthis* - 370, 371  
*do-chala* - 337  
 Dohar - 409, 410  
*Dolancarpa* - 376  
 Doll - 414, 415, 427  
 Dom Antonio - 366  
*Domas* - 71  
*Domba* - 71  
*Dombipada* - 328  
*Dombis* - 82, 83  
 Do-tara - 218

Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah - 194, 382  
 Dr. Shamsuzzoha - 199  
*Dravida* - 67  
*Dravidian* - 2, 13, 14, 54  
 Drums - 32, 82, 419  
*Dubalhati* - 339  
 Dudu Mia - 165  
 Dufferin Lord - 162, 170  
 Dugdugi - 419  
*Dugi* - 408  
*dukkha* - 324, 325  
*dukkha-nirodha* - 325  
*dukkha-nirodha-gamini-patipada* - 325  
*dukkha-samudaya* - 324  
*dukula* - 79  
 Dunduvi - 419  
*Durga* - 77, 105, 314, 315, 386, 423  
 Durga puja - 314, 423  
*Durgeshnandini* - 367  
 Durlabh Mallik - 364  
 Durlabhrām - 119  
*dvadasa nidana* - 325  
 Dvija Madhav - 363  
 Dvijendralal Ray - 369  
 Dwarkanath Tagore - 148  
 Dwijendralal Ray - 370, 391, 395, 406  
 Dwijendranath Tagore - 389, 390

**E**

E.B Havel - 344  
 East India Company - 23, 108, 112, 114, 115, 125, 126, 127, 128, 130, 146, 156 157, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 168, 183, 242, 244, 245, 246, 257, 268, 269, 270, 338, 366  
 East Pakistan Awami Muslim League - 193  
 East Pakistan Industrial Development Corporation (EPIDC) - 247  
 East Pakistan Muslim Students League - 193  
 Eastern Bengal Ballads - 356  
 Education Extension Centre Mosque - 339  
 Egypt - 10, 308, 317  
 Eid Processions - 343  
 Eidgah - 39  
*Ek-tara* - 218  
*Ekei Ki Bale Sabhyata* - 368  
*Ekklesia* - 319,  
 Eklakhi Mausoleum - 37, 334

*Ektara* - 408  
*Ekteswar* - 87  
 Ekushe Padak - 348  
 Eleven-Point - 199, 200, 204  
 Eleven-Point programme - 199, 204  
 Eli Hecksher - 241  
 Emperor Akbar - 108, 111, 115  
 Enamul Haque Enam - 348  
 Engels - 250  
 Eternity of the Qur'an - 304, 305, 306, 309  
 Eucharistic Celebration - 320  
 Exodus - 317

**F**

*Fa-hsien* - 56  
 Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah, Sultan - 3, 22  
 Fakir Majnu Shah - 207  
 Fakir-Sannyasi Rebellions - 206, 207  
*Fana* - 310  
*Faraidhi* - 188  
 Faraidi Movement- 156, 160  
 Faraizi Movement - 207  
 Farida Zaman - 345, 347  
 Faridpur - 35, 160, 167, 174, 208, 213, 218, 227, 283, 337, 347, 429  
 Farrukh Ahmed - 379  
 Fateh Chand - 119  
*Faujdari* - 269  
 Fazlul Huq - 138, 139, 140, 182, 190, 196, 209, 219, 220, 221, 230  
 Fazlul Qadir Chowdhury - 221  
 Fazlur Rahman - 221  
*Ferdousi-Carit* - 370  
 Festivals - 77, 134, 190, 227, 314, 394, 413, 423, 424, 425, 430, 431, 432, 433,  
 Feudalism - 171, 193, 243, 244, 245, 253  
 Fidai Khan - 112, 124  
 Final Judge - 296  
 Firozpur - 37, 41, 336, 337  
 Five Pillars of Islam - 292  
 Floud Commission - 139, 210, 231, 236  
 Flute - 82, 218, 409, 421  
 Folk Crafts - 345, 413, 423  
 Folk Music - 392, 397, 407, 408, 409, 410  
 Folk Professionals - 413  
 Film Music - 398, 402  
 Fort William - 126, 128, 244, 269, 366, 368  
 Freedom Fighters - 348, 349, 406

Freedom of will - 302, 303, 305, 308  
 French - 23, 217, 242, 243, 338, 372  
 Fud Kanfarens - 379  
 Fukuoka Museum of Arts in Japan - 349

**G**

G C Gupta - 368  
 G.S. Kabir - 346  
 Gabriel - 289, 309  
 Gadadhar Chattopadhyaya - 150  
 Gaddalika - 378  
 Gaganendranath - 344  
 Gajir Pata - 343  
 Gana Sangeet - 403  
 Gandhi - 134, 135, 211, 212, 217, 375, 391  
 Ganesa - 314, 315  
 Ganesh - 37, 100, 333  
 Ganga - 347  
 Gangaridai - 55  
 Ganges - 3, 10, 11, 13, 20, 36, 39, 40, 55, 66,  
     67, 96, 103, 109, 111, 153, 327, 414  
 garbhagriha - 332  
 Gateways - 23, 24, 26, 36, 39, 40, 42, 75, 87,  
     331, 332, 334, 335, 337  
 Gauda - 3, 53, 57, 58, 62, 67, 94, 327  
 Gaudesara - 67  
 Gauna Kulin - 71  
 Gaur - 13, 36, 37, 38, 41, 44, 96, 100, 101,  
     102, 119, 334  
 Gautama Buddha - 5, 69, 72, 73, 288  
 Gambhira - 407, 409  
 Gaya - 322  
 Gazi Mazharul Anwar - 406-407  
 Gazi Miyar Bastani - 370  
 Gazi's pot - 218  
 Geeta Govinda - 384, 385  
 General Committee of Public Instruction -  
     270, 272, 275  
 George Bush - 251  
 Gerasim Lebedeff - 368  
 Ghanaram Chakravarty - 363  
 Ghare-Baire - 372  
 Ghasiti Begum - 114  
 Ghazal - 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402  
 Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah - 37, 334  
 Ghulam Mustafa - 379  
 Ghot Chittra - 417

Ghulam Mohammad - 196  
 Ghulam Murshid - 383  
 Ghuri Chittra - 417  
 Girishchandra Ghosh - 369  
 Gita Govinda - 82, 83, 86  
 Gitagovinda - 65  
 Gitanjali - 372, 392  
 Goda Kavi - 410  
 Gokul Chand - 119  
 Gokul Nag - 377  
 Gokulchandra Nag - 377  
 Golam Nabi - 387  
 Gopachandra - 62  
 Gopal Halder - 376  
 Gopala - 58, 59  
 Gopicandra - 89  
 Gopicandrer Sannyas - 364  
 Gora - 372  
 Gospel - 287, 318, 321  
 Govardhana - 65, 85  
 Govardhana Acarya - 85  
 Govardhanacarya - 86  
 Govinda - 24, 31, 35, 36, 82, 83, 86, 331, 339,  
     385, 388  
 Govinda Bhita - 24, 331  
 Govindacandra - 89, 364, 370  
 Govindacandra Das - 370  
 Govindachandra - 63, 390  
 Govindadas - 364  
 Gramsci - 205  
 Grass - 74, 76, 413, 416  
 Great Calcutta Killings - 141  
 Grhadaha - 375  
 Gunaraj Khan - 3, 122, 361  
 Gupta - 3, 24, 25, 28, 34, 35, 55, 56, 62, 69,  
     70, 87, 88, 89, 122, 327, 328, 347, 363, 368,  
     376, 377, 378, 387, 389, 404  
 Gupta idiom - 87  
 Gupta Period - 28, 69, 70, 327, 347  
 Gupta School of art - 88, 89  
 Gurjara Pratiharas - 59, 60  
 Guruprasad Sen - 396  
 Gupta - 87

**H**

H.S. Suhrawardy - 140, 182, 197, 201, 219, 221  
 H.H. Wilson - 271

Habib, I. - 243, 254, 264, 265  
 Habibullah, A.B.M - 350  
 Habibur Rahman - 347  
 Habshis - 101, 102, 333  
*Hadith* - 104, 105, 154, 300, 301, 302, 306, 307 309  
 Haji Ahmad - 113, 114  
 Haji Ilias - 99  
 Haji Khawaja Shahbaz - 336, 337  
 Haji Khwaja Shahbaz -  
 Haji Muhammad Mohsin - 274  
*Hajj* - 292, 395, 296  
*Halayudha* - 65, 71, 86  
*Halayudha's Brahmanasarvasva* - 86  
 Hamidul Huq Chowdhury - 221  
 Hamiduzzam Khan - 348, 349  
 Hamiduzzaman Khan - 348, 349  
*hammam* - 40, 41, 42, 43, 334, 335  
 Hamza Alavi - 197, 200, 204, 264, 265  
 Hangri Jenerashan - 379  
*Hansuli Bunker Upakatha* - 378  
*haptum* - 227  
 Haraprasad Shastri - 360, 376  
 Harikela - 31, 54, 63, 328  
 Hariscandra - 89  
*Harivamsa* - 361  
*harmika* - 331  
*Haroa* - 83  
 Harshavardhana - 57, 58  
 Hasan Azizul Huq - 382  
 Hasan Habib - 345  
 Hasan Hafizur Rahman - 381  
 Hasan, Perveen - 350  
 Hashem Khan - 345  
*Hashi Chakravorty* - 345  
 Hasnat Abdul Hye - 382  
 Hastings, Warren - 128, 130, 164, 245, 268  
 Hayat Mamud - 362  
*Hazrat Mahammader Jivancarit O Dharmaniti* - 371  
*Hazrat Mohammad Mostafar Jivancarit* - 371  
 Hazrat Pandua - 334  
 Hiuen Tsang - 330  
 Hemanga Biswas - 403  
 Hemchandra Banerji - 370  
 Henry Moore - 348  
 Hierarchical Society - 320  
 High Court Building - 339  
*hikmat* - 301, 302

*Hinayana* - 326, 327  
*Hinayanists* - 326  
 Hindu - 1, 2, 3, 4, 22, 29, 35, 36, 53, 61, 64, 65, 80, 86, 87, 90, 96, 97, 100, 103, 106, 107, 114, 118, 119, 121, 123, 129, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 156, 165, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 177, 180, 181, 182, 184, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 194, 204, 207, 208, 209, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 261, 268, 269, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 311, 312, 313, 315, 328, 329, 332, 333, 336, 340, 343, 361, 362, 364, 367, 368, 370, 374, 376, 378, 388, 389, 400, 401, 417  
 Hindu College - 174, 184, 268, 271, 272, 273, 275, 368  
*Hindu Mahasabha* - 140, 143, 216, 221  
*Hindu Mela* - 169, 177, 389  
 Hindu mythology - 37, 343  
*Hira* - 289  
 Hiuen - 23, 24, 27, 31, 58, 85, 327, 330  
 Hiuen Tsang - 23, 24, 27, 31, 85, 330  
 Hobsbawm - 205, 206, 224, 264  
*Holi* - 314  
 Holt Mackenzie - 166  
 Holy Spirit - 318, 319, 320, 321  
 Hooghly - 127, 142, 333  
 House of God - 296  
 Hritendra Sharma - 346  
 Hsuen Tsang - 57  
 Hume Allan Octavian - 170  
 Humayun - 119  
 Humayun Ahmed - 382  
 Humayun Kabir - 376  
 Hunter - 157, 187, 202, 276, 265  
 Huq, A.K. Fazlul - 138, 139, 140, 182, 190, 196, 209, 219, 220, 221, 230  
 Husain Shahis - 333, 334

## I

Ibrahim Khan - 42, 111, 112, 117, 120, 124  
 Ibrahim Khan Fatehjang - 120, 124  
 Idrakpur Fort - 337  
*Idul Azha* - 296  
 Ikhtiyaruddin Muhammad bin - 2

- Ikhwan-as Safa - 307  
 Iliyas Shahi - 333  
 Illah Bakhsh - 109  
*Iman* - 288, 291, 300  
 Imdadul Huq Milan - 382  
 Immigrants - 1, 4, 13, 104, 161, 173  
 Independent Bangladesh Radio Station - 406  
 India - 2, 4, 9, 13, 14, 15, 23, 37, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 66, 68, 69, 70, 88, 89, 91, 93, 95, 96, 97, 104, 108, 112, 114, 115, 119, 120, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 136, 139, 142, 143, 145, 146, 147, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 177, 178, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 189, 191, 192, 201, 202, 208, 209, 212, 218, 222, 224, 225, 226, 223, 234, 240, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 250, 251, 252, 254, 255, 256, 257, 259, 260, 261, 264, 265, 314, 315, 321, 323, 327, 328, 329, 332, 333, 334, 335, 337, 338, 340, 343, 347, 348, 366, 375, 379, 384, 385, 390, 391, 393, 395, 397, 398, 399, 403, 404, 405, 408, 433  
 Indian Association - 167, 170, 171, 177, 181  
 Indian Mohammedan Association - 189  
 Indian National Congress - 151, 159, 170, 172, 173, 177, 181, 183  
 Indian People's Theater Association - 403  
 Indo-Pak War, 1965 - 197  
 Indranath Banerji - 368  
 Industrialization - 241, 245, 247  
 Inner experience - 297, 298  
 Institute of Arts in 1948 in Dhaka - 350  
 Institute of Fine Art - 344, 348  
 Iraq - 211  
 Irfan Habib - 243, 264, 265  
 Isa Khan - 109, 110  
 Isa Khan Chishti -  
 Isa Khan Masnad-i-Ala - 109, 110  
 Ishwar Gupta - 389  
 Islam Khan Chishti - 109, 110, 115, 118, 120, 124  
 Islam Shah Sur - 110  
 Islamic Mysticism - 310  
 Islamic Philosophy - 301  
 Ismail Hossain Siraji - 374  
 Ismail Ragi al-Faruqui - 288  
 Israel - 317, 320  
 Iswarchandra Vidyasagar - 367  
 Itakhola - 34, 331  
 Itakhola Mura - 34, 331  
 Itimid-ud-dawla - 112  
 I-tsing - 24, 92, 327, 331  
 গুরু, মীহাররজন - 350  
 Iwaj Khalji - 97, 98
- J**
- J. M. Keynes - 241, 249, 250, 251, 252  
*Jabariyas* - 301, 303, 308, 309  
*Jabr* - 302, 303  
*Jadupata* - 373  
 Jafar Khan - 104, 113, 124  
 Jagaddala - 84, 86, 328  
 Jagaddala Mahavihara - 84, 86  
 Jagadish Bhattacharya - 380  
 Jagadish Chandra Bose - 376  
 Jagadish Gupta - 377  
 Jagat Seth - 113, 114, 119  
 Jaghanacapala - 92  
*Jagroto Chourangi* - 348  
 Jag-Jhampa - 420  
 Jahangir - 42, 109, 110, 111, 112, 115, 116, 117, 118, 120, 123, 124, 336, 364, 383  
 Jahangirnagar - 115, 281, 282, 343, 349  
 Jahm - 302, 303  
 Jahm Ibn Safwan - 302  
 Jajar - 419  
 Jajh - 419  
 Jalaluddin Muhammad - 37, 100  
 Jamal Ahmed - 345  
 Jamat-i-Islami - 160  
 James Mill - 272  
 Jami Masjid - 42, 336  
 Jamini Roy - 344  
*Jana* - 369  
*Janakiram* - 119  
*janapadas* - 53, 54, 67  
*Jangal* - 28  
*Jangam* - 378  
 Janmasthami Processions - 343  
*Jari Gan* - 407, 409  
 Jasimuddin - 377  
*Jataka* - 343  
 Jatindranath Sengupta - 374  
*Jatiya Gaurab Sampadani Sabha* - 177

- Jatiya Sabha* - 177  
*Jayadeva* - 65, 385  
*Jayanti Maitra* - 168, 183, 202  
*jayaskandhabvara* - 75  
*Jayat Kunda* - 26  
*Jesus Christ* - 148, 159, 288, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321  
*Jesus the Christ* - 316, 321  
*Jhapan* - 409  
*Jhara Palak* - 377  
*Jharkhand* - 96  
*Jhumur* - 401, 407, 409  
*Jimutavahana's* - 65, 85, 86, 90, 91  
*Jinnah, M.A.* - 140, 141, 142, 219, 220, 221, 405  
*Jivanananda Das* - 377  
*Jnanadas* - 364  
*Joan Robinson* - 248  
*Job charnock* - 126  
*John Stuart Mill* - 272  
*Johnson Road* - 339  
*Jor-Bangla* - 337  
*Joseph Lancaster* - 270  
*Jotedars* - 188, 209, 210, 211, 215, 216, 217, 219, 220, 260, 261  
*Judah* - 288  
*John Adam* - 165  
*Joy Dhak* - 419  
*Justice Hamoodur Rahman* - 280  
*Jyotindra Maitra* - 403  
*Jyotirindranath Tagore* - 369, 391, 392
- K**
- K.M.A. Quayyum* - 345  
*Kaba* - 296  
*Kabi-Kahini* - 372  
*Kabir Chowdhury* - 383  
*Kabiwalas* - 365  
*kaccha* - 78  
*Kafi'r* - 290, 291  
*Kahnu-pada* - 328  
*Kaikobad* - 370  
*Kaivarta* - 28, 61, 63, 70, 71  
*Kajangala* - 327  
*Kalachakrayana* - 328  
*kalasas* - 330  
*Kalhana* - 58, 81, 83  
*Kalidas Chattopadhyay* - 387  
*Kalidas Gajdani* - 110  
*Kalidas Karmaker* - 346  
*Kalidasa* - 86  
*Kalighata patas* - 343  
*Kalima* - 292, 293, 294, 295  
*Kaliprasanna Ghosh* - 376  
*Kallol* - 377  
*Kalyanachandra* - 63  
*kama* - 92, 312  
*Kamala* - 81, 315, 402  
*Kamalakanter Daptar* - 368  
*Kamalkumar Majundar* - 380  
*Kamini Ray* - 370  
*Kamruddin Ahmad* - 191  
*Kanak Chanpa Chakma* - 347  
*Kanbapada* - 360  
*Kantaji Mandir* - 349  
*Kantanagar* - 36, 337  
*Kanu* - 386  
*Kapalikas* - 71  
*Kara* - 419, 420  
*Karamat Ali Moulvi* - 175  
*Karanakayasthas* - 85  
*Karana-Kayasthas* - 70  
*Karbala* - 362, 370, 409  
*Karika* - 366, 430  
*Karma* - 103, 325, 430  
*Karna* - 68  
*Karnaphuli Paper Mill* - 247  
*Karnasuvarna* - 57, 328  
*Karranis* - 110, 333  
*Kartal* - 419  
*Kartalab Khan* - 39, 41, 336  
*Kartika* - 314  
*Kartikeya* - 314, 433  
*Karupalli* - 431  
*Kasb* - 308  
*Kasha* - 419  
*Kashiram Das* - 362  
*Kath Taranga* - 419  
*Kathopokathan* - 366  
*Katra* - 39, 42, 337  
*Kauravas* - 68  
*Kavigan* - 409, 410  
*Kaviyal* - 409  
*Kavita* - 373, 377  
*Kayasthas* - 70, 121, 122, 245  
*Kaylakuthi* - 377

- Kayseya* - 79  
*Kazi Abdul Baset* - 345  
*Kazi Abdul Mannan* - 383  
*Kazi Abdul Wadud* - 185, 378  
*Kazi Anwarul Qadir* - 378  
*Kazi Fakir Mahmud* - 174  
*Kazi Gias* - 345  
*Kazi Imdadul Huq* - 374  
*Kazi Nazrul Islam* - 387, 391, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 406  
*Kazi Salahuddin* - 347  
*Kdnbupada* - 84  
*Kedar Rai* - 109, 110  
*Kesavasena* - 64  
*Keshab Chandra Sen* - 149, 152  
*Ketakadas Kshemananda* - 363  
*Keynes* - 242, 249, 250, 251, 252  
*Kglaviveka* - 86  
*Khadga Kings* - 62  
*Khadijah* - 289  
*Khalia* - 337  
*Khamak* - 420  
*Khanjani* - 420  
*Khan Chishti* - 109, 110, 115, 118, 120, 124  
*Khan Jahan* - 37, 38, 104, 108, 123, 124  
*Khan Jahan Ali* - 334  
*Khan Jahan Bahadur* - 112  
*Khan Muhammed Mirdha* - 336  
*khangabs* - 333  
*Khartal* - 419  
*khas* - 236, 240  
*Khawaja Shafiq Ahmed* - 344  
*Kheyal* - 387, 395, 396, 397, 398, 401, 408  
*Kherua Masjid* - 336  
*Khilafat Movement* - 155, 206, 211, 212, 213  
*khodai* - 25  
*Khodai Pathar* - 25  
*Khondkar Fazli Rabbee* - 181  
*Khusru* - 118  
*Khwaaj Usman* - 109, 110, 111  
*Khwaja Nazimuddin* - 219, 221  
*Khwaja Usman* - 109, 110, 111  
*kinds of sufferings* - 298  
*Kingdom of God* - 316, 320  
*Kiran Sankar Ray* - 221  
*Kiritchand* - 119  
*Kirtana* - 83, 122, 385  
*Kirtimukha* - 35  
*Kismat Maria* - 368  
*Koka* - 112, 118, 123, 124  
*Kola* - 54, 74  
*Kotila* - 31, 32, 33, 35, 331  
*Kotila Mura* - 31, 32, 33, 35, 331  
*Kotivarsa-Bangarh* - 84  
*Krira Pot Chittra* - 417  
*Krishak Proja Party* - 219, 230  
*Krishak Samity* - 220  
*Krishak Sramik Party* - 195  
*Krishna* - 114, 122, 150, 159, 384, 385, 386, 387, 401, 402, 411  
*Krishna Narayan* - 118  
*Krpar Shastrer Artha Bhed* - 366  
*Krsna* - 68, 81, 83, 361, 364  
*Krsnadas* - 364, 366  
*Krsnakanter Uil* - 367  
*Krsnakumari* - 368  
*Krsnamangal* - 361  
*Krsnaram Das* - 364  
*Krttivas* - 361  
*Ksanika* - 372  
*Ksatriya* - 58, 70, 322  
*Ksauma* - 79  
*ksetrabhumi* - 73  
*Ksetrakaras* - 71  
*Ksirodprasad Vidyavinod* - 369  
*Kufr* - 291, 293  
*Kukkuri-pada* - 328  
*Kulinakulasaruvasva* - 368  
*Kulinism* - 71  
*Kulluka* - 77, 90  
*Kulluka Bhatta's* - 86  
*Kumar* - 94, 119, 127, 148, 314, 322, 376, 402, 403, 413, 414, 415  
*kundacaturthika* - 77  
*kundalas* - 78, 80  
*Kuruksetra* - 370  
*Kurundi Chittra* - 218  
*Kusana* - 78, 87, 88  
*Kushana periods* - 55, 347  
*Kushti Chittra* - 218  
*Kushumba Masjid* - 334  
*Kuthis* - 338, 339  
*Kutubuddin Aibak* - 97  
*Kutumbas* - 71

## L

- Ladahachandra* - 63  
*Lahore* - 140, 171, 184, 193, 197, 202, 220, 225

- Laila Mansur - 346, 347  
*lailatul qadr* - 289  
*La-kheraj* - 166  
Lakhnawati - 36, 37, 95, 96, 106  
Lakhnawti - 97, 98, 99, 103, 341  
Lakshindarer Medh - 26, 331  
Laksmanasena - 64, 65, 83, 84, 86  
*Laksmi* - 315  
Lakshmighat - 415  
Laksminkara - 92  
Lalan Shah - 365, 408  
Lalbagh Fort - 40, 41, 337, 429  
Lalmai ridge - 84  
Lama Taranatha - 84  
Land Revenue Commission - 139, 224, 231, 232  
*langotis* - 78  
Language Movement - 194, 195, 199, 203, 406  
Lao - 218  
*Layly-Majnu* - 362  
Legal Framework Order - 200, 204  
*Lilavajra* - 92  
Liturgical Year - 320, 321  
Liturgy - 320  
liwan - 334
- Lord Cornwallis - 129, 165, 226, 233, 242  
Lord Dalhousie - 131, 153  
Lord Minto - 270  
Lord Wellesley - 131, 153, 269  
*Luipada* - 84  
*Lui-pada* - 328  
*Lungi* - 78
- M**
- M A Bari - 281  
M Enamul Huq - 382  
M. A. Jinnah - 142, 219  
M. Qudrat-i-Khuda - 280  
Ma'bad al Juhaini - 303  
MacDonald, Romsay - 139  
Machine Tools Factory - 247  
*Madal* - 409  
*Madanavati* - 89  
*Madhumalati* - 362  
Madhupur Tract - 10, 11
- Madhusudan - 370  
*Madhyamika* - 327  
Madrasa - 100, 164, 174, 180, 267, 268, 269, 271, 273, 274, 275, 280, 281, 334, 335  
madrasahs - 333  
Magadha - 57, 58, 328  
*Maghs* - 2  
*Mahabharat* - 362  
*Mahabharata* - 3, 102, 122, 123, 311, 361, 362, 370  
*Mahacarya* - 85  
*Mahajana* - 385  
*Mahajana Padavali* - 385  
Mahammadan Association - 276  
Mahammadan Literary Society - 276  
*mahaparinirvana* - 326  
*Maba-Purohita* - 71  
*Maharam Sharif* - 370  
Maharsi Mansur - 370  
*Mahasanghikas* - 326  
*Mahashmashan* - 370  
Mahasthan - 11, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 44, 330, 331, 347, 412  
Mahasthana - 55  
Mahasthangarh - 55, 69, 74, 75, 78, 82, 85, 88, 331  
Mahasveta Devi - 69, 75, 78, 82, 85, 88, 331  
*Mahatantradhibikta* - 71  
Mahavihara - 28, 30, 60, 62, 84, 85, 86  
Mahavira - 69  
*Mahavira Vardhamana* - 69  
*Mahayana* - 22, 85, 326, 372  
Mahayana Buddhism - 22, 85  
*Mahayanists* - 326  
Mahbub-ul Alam - 379  
Mahbulul Amin - 346  
Mahbubur Rahman - 349  
Mahendra Gupta - 378  
*Mabi sasura* - 314  
Mahipala I - 59, 61  
Mahipala II - 28, 61  
Mahipal's rule - 343  
*Mahisbdal* - 69  
Mahmudul Huq - 382  
Mahtab Chand - 119  
*Maimansingha Geetika* - 365  
Mainamati - 11, 20, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 44, 63, 74, 78, 80, 83, 84, 86, 87, 88, 89, 93, 331, 341, 347, 349, 413, 433

- Mainamati Lalmai - 20, 63, 84  
 Mainamati's palace - 33, 89  
 Mainamoti - 328, 414  
 Mainul Ahsan Saber - 382  
*makara* - 78  
**Makkah** - 288, 289, 290, 292, 295, 296  
*maktab* - 104, 122, 139, 267  
**Maktul Hosen** - 362  
**Maladhar Basu** - 3, 361  
**Malay Ray Chaudhuri** - 379  
**Malda** - 115, 336  
**Manab-mukut** - 371  
**Manasamangal** - 363  
**Manashaghat** - 415  
**Manasi** - 372  
**Mancha** - 415  
*mandala of Srihatta* - 72  
*mandapas* - 29, 332  
**Mangalghat** - 415  
**Mangalkot** - 78  
**Mangal Kavya** - 121, 362, 363  
**Mangal Kavyas** - 123  
**Mangala Gan** - 368  
**Manik Bandyopadhyay** - 378  
**Manikganj** - 339  
**Manikram Ganguly** - 363  
**Manjusri** - 347  
**Mankalir Bhita** - 25  
**Manmatha Ray** - 378  
**Manoel-de-Assumpcaon** - 366  
**Manoj Mitra** - 380  
**Mansurul Karim** - 345  
**Mantryana** - 328  
**Manu** - 77, 89, 90, 91, 93, 152  
**Manusambhita** - 86  
**Manzurul Hai** - 348  
*maqsura* - 334  
**Martial Law** - 200  
**Marx** - 224, 250, 376, 378  
**Mary** - 317,  
**Mass** - 5, 26, 29, 133, 134, 135, 189, 197, 198, 199, 200, 207, 217, 220, 223, 255, 267, 290, 320, 344, 346, 371  
**Mass Upsurge Day** - 199  
**Mass Upsurge of 1969** - 200  
**Masum Khan Kabuli** - 110  
**Material experience** - 297  
*mathas* - 72, 85  
**Maticur** - 374  
**Matsyanyayam** - 58, 59  
**Maulana Akram Khan** - 209  
**Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanawtawi** - 159  
**Maulana Muniruzzaman Islamabadi** - 209  
**Maulvi Rajibuddin Tarafdar** - 209  
**Maurya** - 1, 24, 55, 327  
**Maurya Empire** - 1  
**Mausoleum of the Three Leaders** - 340  
**Mayar Khela** - 373  
**Mazharul Islam** - 383  
**Mazzini** - 169  
**Meda** - 71  
**Medhatithi** - 91  
*medhi* - 331  
**Medina** - 289  
**Megh-Dumbur** - 218  
**Meer Nisar Ali** - 156  
**Meghanadaravdh Kavya** - 369  
**Meghna** - 10, 11, 21, 22, 30, 31, 54, 56, 66, 109, 199, 414  
**Meherun-Nisa** - 114  
**Mekhala** - 85, 92  
**Melody of Ramprasad** - 386  
**Merchants** - 13, 23, 39, 63, 73, 75, 146, 147, 163, 165, 187, 213, 243, 252, 255, 256, 258, 261  
**Metal Instruments** - 419  
**Mica-coated Red Dolls** - 415  
**Michael Madhusudan Dutt** - 368, 369, 383  
**Middle** - 1, 3, 4, 12, 13, 21, 23, 24, 27, 31, 32, 33, 34, 38, 39, 40, 54, 56, 58, 59, 60, 61, 103, 106, 112, 138, 141, 142, 144, 146, 147, 150, 151, 162, 163, 164, 167, 168, 169, 170, 172, 177, 179, 181, 182, 189, 190, 193, 198, 200, 207, 211, 216, 219, 220, 223, 228, 246, 259, 280, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, 308, 323, 332, 335, 337, 338, 342, 360, 365, 398, 399, 408, 410, 420, 426  
*mibrabs* - 25, 38, 39, 334, 337  
**Milton Friedman** - 251  
**Minar** - 195, 333, 334, 340  
**Mir Habib** - 113  
**Mir Jafar** - 114, 115, 127, 128, 161  
**Mir Jumla** - 41, 42, 112, 120, 124  
**Mir Mohammad Ali** - 167  
**Mir Mosharraf Hossain** - 173, 183, 370  
**Mir Muhammad Said** - 112  
**Mir Qasim** - 161

*Mirat-ul Akhbar* - 165  
**Mirza Ghias Beg** - 112  
**Mirza Gholam Ahmed Quadian** - 160  
**Mirza Hussain Ali** - 159  
**Mirza Lutfullah** - 113, 120  
**Mirza Mumin** - 110  
**Mirza Nathan** - 120  
*Mithpukur* - 38  
*mlecchas* - 67  
**Mohamad Kibria** - 346  
**Mohammad Akram Khan** - 279, 371  
**Mohammad Lutfar Rahman** - 374  
**Mohammad Maniruzzaman Islamabadi** - 371  
**Mohammad Meherullah** - 371  
**Mohammad Mohsin** - 345  
**Mohammad Moniruzzaman** - 381  
**Mohammad Moslem Mia** - 347  
**Mohammad Naimuddin** - 371  
**Mohammad Najibur Rahman** - 374  
**Mohammad Wazed Ali** - 379  
**Mohammed** - 287  
**Mohammed Kibria** - 345  
**Mohammed Younus** - 346  
**Mohini Mills of Kushtia** - 246  
**Mohit Chattopdhyay** - 380  
**Mohitlal Majumdar** - 374  
*Moksa* - 312, 315  
*Momener Jabanbandi* - 379  
**Mominul Reza** - 345  
**Momtazuddin Ahmed** - 382  
**Mondira** - 419  
**Monastery** - 1, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 60, 84, 96, 330, 332  
**Moneylenders Act (1940)** - 230, 235, 236  
**Moneylenders' Bill** - 223  
**Mongol-Timurid** - 335  
**Moni Singh** - 220  
**Monirul Islam** - 345, 346  
**monotheistic** - 147, 148, 287, 288, 296, 304, 367  
**Mookerjee, Shyama Prasad** - 140, 141  
**Moqbul Mia** - 220  
**Morocco** - 99  
**Mosque of Musa Khan** - 336  
**Mosques** - 23, 36, 37, 38, 39, 44, 96, 101, 102, 104, 112, 122, 136, 190, 216, 333, 334, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340  
**Mostafa Carit** - 371  
**Mozammel Huq** - 370, 371

**Mridanga** - 415  
*Mrtynjaj Vidyalankar* - 366  
**Mughal style** - 41, 335, 343, 344  
**Muhammad Abdul Hai** - 382  
**Muhammad Azam** - 40, 112, 117, 124  
**Muhammad Azim-ud-din** - 112, 124  
**Muhammad Kabir** - 362  
**Muhammad Khan** - 113, 120, 121, 124, 362  
**Muhammad Muslims** - 300  
**Muhammad Reyazuddin Ahmed** - 371  
**Muhammad Shahidullah** - 194, 382  
**Muhammadan Literary and Scientific Society** - 174  
**Muhammadanism** - 148, 288  
*Muharram* - 343  
**Mukanda Ram** - 121  
*Mukhalasa* - 308  
*Mukhya Kulin* - 71  
**Muklesur Rahman** - 220  
**Mukul De** - 344  
**Mukunda Chakravarty** - 363  
**Mukush Chitra** - 218  
**Mumin** - 110, 123, 290, 291  
**Mumtaz Mahal** - 112  
*Munafiq* - 290, 291  
**Mundell-Fleming model** - 249  
**Munier Chowdhury** - 382  
**Munim Khan** - 336  
*muqarnas* - 337  
**Mura** - 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 87, 331  
**Murad** - 38, 111  
**Murshid Kuli Khan** - 242  
**Murshid Quli Khan** - 41, 113, 115, 118, 119, 120, 123, 124, 126, 241, 254  
**Murshida Arzoo Alpana** - 347  
**Murshidabad** - 57, 101, 113, 114, 115, 120, 127, 142, 145, 147, 181, 267, 274, 337, 343  
**Murshidabad style of painting** - 343  
**Murtaza Baseer** - 345  
**Musa Khan Masnad-i-Ala** - 109, 110, 336  
**Music of Bangladesh** - 404  
**Music of West Bengal** - 403  
**Muslim** - 2, 3, 4, 22, 23, 25, 26, 33, 35, 36, 37, 44, 53, 64, 66, 95, 96, 97, 98, 100, 101, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 117, 119, 120, 121, 122, 129, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 145, 146, 147, 150, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 163, 164, 165, 167, 168, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174,

- 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 202, 203, 207, 208, 209, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 227, 230, 246, 247, 261, 266, 268, 269, 271, 273, 274, 275, 276, 278, 282, 283, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 293, 295, 296, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 310, 312, 332, 333, 335, 336, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 347, 364, 365, 367, 370, 371, 374, 376, 378, 380, 381, 399, 404, 423
- Muslim League - 139, 140, 141, 185, 189, 190, 193, 195, 196, 203, 208, 209, 219, 221, 222, 223, 230, 261
- Muslim Philosophy - 300, 301, 302, 310
- Muslim Sahitya Samaj - 378
- Muslim theology - 305
- Mustafa Nurul Islam - 383
- Mustamin-ul-Mulk - 113
- Mutazilas* - 155, 301, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309
- Mukunda Das - 391
- Myanmar - 11, 12, 14, 60
- Mymensingh - 38, 99, 109, 131, 208, 209, 213, 214, 218, 220, 224, 225, 282, 283, 339, 417
- N
- Nachi - 404
- Nagarjuna - 328
- Nagori - 339
- Naib Nazim - 114
- Nakara - 420
- Nalanda Mahavihara - 85
- Namaz* - 158, 222, 293, 294, 295
- Nand Kumar - 119
- Nandalal Basu - 344
- Naogaon - 28, 30, 60, 331, 339
- NAP - 199, 200, 201
- Napoleon - 162
- Narada* - 91, 329
- Narayan Gangopadhyay - 380
- Narayanalacchi* - 92
- Narendranath Datta - 150
- Narendranath Mitra - 380
- Naresh Guha - 379
- Naropada* - 328
- Narottama Thakur - 386
- Nasir Jang - 113
- Nasiruddin Mahmud - 98, 101
- Nasrin Begum - 347
- Nasrullah Khan's - 362
- Nata Nartaka - 72
- Nath literature - 364
- National Memorial* - 339, 340
- National Muhammadan Association - 177, 178, 181, 184
- National anthem - 393, 407
- National Society - 169, 177
- Nationalism - 4, 153, 161, 164, 169, 177, 184, 186, 187, 191, 194, 195, 198, 200, 201, 202, 203, 212, 220, 222, 223, 251, 339, 367, 373, 381, 406
- Natore - 339
- nature of evil - 304, 306
- Navagopal Mitra - 390
- Nava-paryay* - 378
- Navavidhan* - 149
- Navin Chandra Sen - 370
- Nawab Khwaja Salimullah - 208, 209
- Nawab Sarfaraz Khan - 120
- Nawab Sirajuddoula - 338
- Nawab Syed Nawab Ali Chaudhury - 209
- Nawab Syed Shamsul Huda - 209
- Nawabzada Hasan Ali Khan - 220
- Nawazish Muhammad - 114
- Nazmul Karim - 202, 215, 225
- Nazrul Islam - 342, 375, 378, 387, 391, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 406
- Neel-Darpan* - 169
- Ne-Tuang - 1
- Nicholas Tolentino - 339
- Nidhu Babu - 387
- Nihar Ranjan Ray - 376
- Nil Darpan* - 368, 369
- Nilanguriya* - 378
- Nilufar Chaman - 346
- Nine-domed Mosque - 334
- Niranjana* - 322
- Nirmalendu Goon - 381
- Nirvana - 5, 322, 324, 326, 384
- Nisa alias Ghasiti Begum - 114
- Nisada* - 79
- Nisar Hossain - 346
- Nitun Kundu - 349
- Nizami - 345, 350

Non-Cooperation - 135, 201, 206, 211, 212, 213, 375  
 Northern India - 37, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 67, 70, 95, 153, 154, 158, 160, 168, 185, 332, 335, 337  
 Novera Ahmed - 348, 349  
*Nripati Tilak* - 3, 102  
 Nur Jahan - 40, 112, 117, 120  
 Nurjahan - 369  
*Nur-nama* - 3  
 Nurul Amin - 221  
 Nurul Momen - 382

**O**

Octagonal Tomb - 42  
*Odantapuri* - 96, 328  
 Olcott H.S. - 151  
 Old Highcourt Building - 339  
 Omi Chand - 119  
 Orissa - 22, 57, 60, 87, 98, 99, 109, 112, 113, 114, 120, 125, 161, 166, 183, 234, 332

**P**

Pabna - 36, 208, 213, 224, 227, 229, 260, 337  
*Padavali Kirtana* - 385  
 Padma - 3, 55, 67, 109, 199, 315  
*Padmanadir Majhi* - 378  
*Padmavati* - 362  
*Pagla Bridge* - 337  
*Paglapul* - 337  
 Paharpur - 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 44, 328, 331, 347, 412  
 Painting - 62, 80, 84, 86, 88, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 348, 350, 417, 418  
 painting in Bangladesh - 342, 345, 346  
 Pakhoaj - 419  
 Pakistan - 4, 5, 14, 44, 66, 94, 95, 141, 142, 159, 160, 184, 186, 187, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 236, 238, 241, 242, 246, 247, 253, 261, 264, 265, 279, 280, 282, 284, 344, 379, 380, 398, 403, 404, 405, 406  
*Pakistan Observer* - 193,  
*Pala* - 1, 2, 3, 22, 24, 26, 28, 58, 59, 60, 61,

62, 63, 64, 70, 71, 87, 94, 104, 327, 328, 342, 343, 407,  
 Pala dynasty - 1, 2, 28, 59, 60, 61,  
*Pala Gan* - 407  
 Pala Period in Bengal - 343  
 Pala school - 62, 87  
 Palas - 22, 24, 59, 61, 63, 64, 71, 342, 347  
 Palasey - 338  
 Palashi, Battle of - 241, 242  
*pancha* - 36  
*Pandavas* - 68,  
*Pandita Vihara* - 328  
*Pandu Rajar Dhibi* - 54, 55, 66, 68, 69, 74, 75, 82, 83, 88  
*Panjora* - 339  
 Panju Shah - 365  
*Pagla Kanai* - 365  
*Pank* - 377  
 Parameswar Das - 361  
 Parashuram - 378  
*Parousia* - 318  
 partition of Bengal in 1905 - 189  
 Partition of Bengal, First - 132, 137, 142, 189, 208, 209, 223, 344, 390, 391, 393, 396  
*Parvati* - 314  
*Patas* - 343, 345  
*Path O Patheya* - 371  
*Pather Dabi* - 375  
*Pather Pancali* - 378  
*Pathik* - 377  
*pathshalas* - 284  
*paticcasamuppada* - 325  
*Patni* - 73, 90, 91  
*patra* - 34  
*Pattikera* - 31, 34, 35  
 Pattikeraka Vihara - 84,  
*Patua* - 343, 344, 414, 415, 417  
 patuas - 343, 344,  
 Pearichand Mitra - 367  
 Peasant Revolts - 255  
 Peasantry - 134, 138, 156, 164, 165, 167, 169, 174, 197, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 222, 223, 230, 235  
 People of Unity - 305  
 People's Music - 403  
 Permanent Settlement - 129, 130, 139, 144, 163, 165, 166, 167, 168, 187, 207, 209, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 233, 236, 240, 245, 246, 247, 257, 258, 260, 264, 265

Permanent Settlement (1793) - 187,  
*Persia* - 147, 335  
 Peter Bertocci - 192  
 Philip Hartog - 277  
*Philosophical Schools in Islam* - 302  
*pida* - 87, 331  
 pilgrimage to Makkah - 292, 295  
 pillar of Islamic faith - 293  
 Piri Chittra - 417  
 Pitambar - 109  
 Pitt's India Act - 128  
 Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus - 302  
 Portuguese - 338  
 Pot Chittra - 417  
*Po-shi-po* - 330  
 pottery in Bangladesh - 349  
*Prabhas* - 370  
 Prabhakumar Mukhopadhyay - 374, 376  
*Prabodh-Candrika* - 366  
*Prafulla* - 246  
*Prajna* - 326  
*Prakrtas* - 84  
*Pralay Shikha* - 375  
*Pramatha Chawdhuri* - 375  
*Pramathanath Bishi* - 376  
*Prarthana Samaj* - 150  
*Pratham Alo* - 380  
*Prativasisi* - 71  
*Prayascittaprakaranam* - 86  
 Premendra Mitra - 377, 402  
 Presidency College - 174, 176, 179, 184, 185, 275  
 Prince Azim-ud-din - 119  
 Prince Muhammad Azam - 124  
 Prince Shah Shuja - 111  
 Profesor Shamsul Huq - 281  
 Professor Mofizuddin Ahmed - 281  
 Proja Party - 209, 219, 230  
 Proletariat - 258, 259  
 Property - 91, 92, 112, 118, 152, 153, 163, 174, 227, 244, 245, 254, 255, 257, 258, 259, 260, 295, 299  
*Protimas* - 348  
*puja* - 227, 314, 393, 417, 423, 424,  
*Puja Kharcha* - 227  
*Pujas* - 314, 348, 425,  
*Pukkasa* - 72  
*Pulinda* - 54, 68, 74, 79  
*Punasca* - 372

*Pundra* - 3, 53, 67, 68, 77  
*Pundranagar* -  
*Pundranagara* -  
*Pundravardhana* -  
*Paudua* -  
*Pundranagar* - 24, 55, 412  
*Punthi* - 342, 365, 370  
*Punuaba nazar* - 227  
*Purabi* - 372  
*Purana* - 72  
*Puranas* - 71, 122, 311, 314  
*Purba-Pascim* - 380  
*Purobita* - 71  
*Purulia* - 87  
*Puthia* - 36, 339  
*Putul* - 415, 427  
*Putulnacer Itikatha* - 378

## Q

*Qadam Rasul* - 334, 335  
*Qadariyas* - 301, 303  
*qadr* - 289, 303  
 Qasim Khan Chishti - 118  
 Qasim Khan Juyuni - 119  
 Qatlu Khan - 109, 110  
 Qazi Motahar Hossain - 378, 383  
 Qazi Nazrul Islam - 375  
*qibla* - 25, 334  
 Qoreshi Magan - 362  
 Quamrul Hasan - 344, 345, 346  
 Quasim Khan - 111, 124  
 Quayum Chowdhury - 345  
*Qur'an* - 154, 158, 159, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 294, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 309, 310,  
 Qutbud-din Khan Koka - 118, 124

## R

Rabindranath Tagore - 371, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 397, 403, 404, 406, 407, 408  
 Race Course - 201  
*Radha* - 53, 67, 68, 69, 83, 391, 364, 369, 384, 385, 386, 387, 401  
*Radhiya* - 71

- Rafiq Azad - 381  
 Rafiqunnabi - 345, 346  
 Rag pradhan gan - 401  
*Ragatarangini* - 82  
*Raghunandan* - 118  
*Ragmalas* - 343  
 Rahim Khan - 112  
 Rai Durlabh - 115, 127  
*Raishahi* - 339  
*Raiyat* - 227, 229, 230, 224  
 Raj Ballabh - 114, 115, 127  
 Raja Ganesh - 37, 100  
 Raja Kandarpa Narayan - 109  
 Raja Lakshman Manikya - 109  
 Raja Mansingh - 110  
 Raja Mukunda - 109  
*Raja O Rani* - 373  
*Raja Pandita* - 71  
 Raja Pratapaditya - 109, 366  
*Raja Pratapaditya Carit* - 366  
 Raja Radhakanta Deb - 275  
 Raja Rammohun Roy - 171  
 Raja Ram Chandra - 109  
 Raja Sasanka - 343  
 Raja Satrajit - 109  
 Raja Todar Mal - 116  
*Rajassekhara* - 92  
*Rajataranigini* - 81  
 Rajmahal - 40, 67, 96, 108, 110, 111, 115, 120, 327  
 Rajshahi University - 123, 199, 282  
 Rajshahi University Campus - 349  
 Rajshekhar Basu - 378  
*Rajsimha* - 367  
*Raktakarabi* - 373  
*Rama* - 68, 150  
 Rama Krishna Mission - 150  
 Ramacarita - 75, 82, 84  
 Ramacarita of Sandhyakaranandi - 82  
 Ramacharitam - 62  
*Ramadan* - 289, 294  
 Ramai Pandit - 363  
 Ramapala - 59, 61, 64  
 Ramavati - 75, 82  
*Ramayana* - 68, 122, 123, 311, 361, 369  
 Ramendrasundar Trivedi - 374  
 Ramesh Chandra Dutt - 368  
 Rammohun Roy - 145, 146, 148, 152, 153, 158, 164, 171, 177, 367, 378  
 Rampal - 334  
 Ramprasad Sen - 365, 386  
 Ramram Basu - 365, 366  
 Ramram Singh - 119  
 Ramranayan Tarkaratna - 368  
 Ramsay Muir - 277  
*ramz* - 294  
*Rana Shinga* - 417  
 Ranesh Dasgupta - 383  
 Rangpur - 28, 96, 106, 220, 222, 223, 225, 242, 339, 408  
 Ranjit Das - 346  
 Ranjit Singh - 155  
*Ranur Pratham Bhag* - 378  
 Rashid Chowdhury - 345  
 Rashid Karim - 382  
*Rashtrakutas* - 59  
*rasulullah* - 292  
*Rasulvijay* - 362  
*Rasul-vijay* - 362  
 Ratan Majumder - 347  
*ratna* - 36, 365, 331  
 Ratnavati - 370  
 Raymangal - 364  
 Raynandini - 374  
 red-stones - 347  
 Regulating Act of 1773 - 128  
*rekha* - 87, 331  
 Relic Stupa - 331  
 Religious Buildings - 331, 334, 336, 339  
 Religious Festivals - 134, 190, 423  
 Rent Law Commission - 228  
 Reyaz-al-Din Ahmad Mashhadi - 371  
 Reza Khoda - 38  
*riwaq* - 334, 340  
 Ripon Lord - 176, 276  
 Robert Clive - 115, 128  
 Robert May - 270  
*Rokeya Sultana* - 347  
 Rokunuddin Kaikaus - 98  
 Rome - 79, 88, 127  
 Ronaldshay - 209  
*Ronvijoypur* - 38  
*Ronvijoypur Mosque* - 38, 334  
 Rudra Mohammad Shahidullah - 381  
 Rupagoswami - 366  
*Rupasi Bangla* - 377  
*Rupban* - 33, 34  
 Ruplal House - 339  
 Rupram Chakravarty - 369

- Ruqayyah Sakhawat Hossain - 374  
 Rural Indebtedness - 258  
 Rural Primary Education Bill - 258  
 Rustam Jang - 113, 120  
 Ryots' Association - 209
- S**
- S M Sharif - 279  
 S. Wazed Ali - 379  
 S.M Sultan - 346  
 Saadat Ali - 175  
*Sabara* - 54, 68, 79  
*Sabarahapada* - 84  
*Sabaras* - 71, 77, 78  
*Sabujpatra* - 375  
 Sacraments - 320  
*Sada* - 377  
*Sadharan Brahmo Samaj* - 149  
*Sadharvar Ekadashi* - 369  
*Sadher Asan* - 370  
 Sadler Commission - 277, 278, 282  
*Saduktikarnamrta* - 75, 81, 86, 92,  
 Safiuddin Ahmed - 344, 345, 346  
*Sahajayana* - 84, 328  
*Sahajayogini Cinta* - 92  
*sahn* - 334, 340  
 Said Ahmad Khan - 114  
*Saifulkulk Badiujjalamal* - 362  
*Sailajananda Mukhopadhyay* - 377  
 Sajahan - 369  
*Sakhi* - 409  
*sakti* - 314, 328  
*Salat* - 282, 293, 299  
 Salban Vihara - 20, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 63, 331  
 Salil Choudhuri - 403, 404  
 Salimullah Muslim Hall - 339  
*Samacharadeva* - 62  
*Samadbi* - 326  
*Samaj O Sangkarak* - 371  
 Samar Sen - 377  
 Samaresh Basu - 380  
 Samaresh Majumdar - 380  
 Samarjit Roy Chowdhury - 345  
*Samasya O Samadhan* - 371  
*Samatata* - 11, 22, 31, 34, 35, 53, 56, 58, 62,  
     63, 67, 331  
 Samir Ray Chaudhuri - 379
- Samma Ajita* - 362  
*Samma Kammantha* - 326  
*Samma Samadbi* - 326  
*Samma Sankapa* - 326  
*Samma Sati* - 326  
*Samma Vacā* - 326  
*Samma Vyama* - 326  
*Sammaditti* - 326  
*Samskrita* - 69, 84  
*Samskṛita* - 84  
*Samudragupta* - 56  
*Samyabadi* - 375  
*Sanatana Dharma* - 288, 311  
 Sanaul Huq - 381  
 Sandhyakar Nandi - 23, 330  
 Sandhyakara Nandi - 24, 44, 62  
*Sandhyakaranandi's Ramacarita* - 75  
*Sandhyasamgit* - 372  
 Sandstones - 347  
*Sangha* - 32  
*sangharamas* - 330  
*Sangshaptak* - 349  
 Sanhai - 418  
*sankara* - 69  
*Sankhya* - 313  
*Sannagara Vihara* - 85  
 Sanskrit College - 268, 271, 272, 274, 275  
*Santideva* - 63  
*Santiniketan* - 278  
*Sapta Paikar* - 362  
*Sara Chittra* - 417  
*Saradamangal* - 370  
*Sar-Sangraha* - 418  
*Saraha* - 328  
*Sarahapada* - 84  
*Sarana* - 65, 86  
*Sarasvati* - 315  
 Sarat Bose - 182, 221  
*Sarbahara* - 375  
*Sardah* - 339  
 Sarfaraz Khan - 113, 120, 124  
*sari* - 78, 79, 93  
*Sari gan* - 410  
*Sarinda* - 418  
*Sarvananda's Tikasarvasva* - 86  
*Sasanka* - 3, 343  
 Sat Masjid - 41, 336  
*Sataisghara* - 334  
*Satananda* - 86

**Sati** - 65, 122, 127, 152, 153, 326, 362  
**Satyapir** - 29, 343, 364  
**Satyasatya** - 378  
**Satyen Sen** - 282  
**Satyendranath Datta** - 374  
**Satyendranath Tagore** - 389, 390  
**Saundika** - 72  
**Saurantika** - 327  
**Savar** - 11, 282  
**Savara** - 74  
**Sayeed Ahmed** - 382  
**Sayyid Ahmed Khan** - 157, 158, 159  
**Sayyid Ahmed of Rae Barely** - 155  
**Sayyid Sultan** - 121  
**Scheduled castes** - 139  
**Sculpture** - 78, 86, 87  
**SEATO** - 199  
**Secular Buildings** - 331, 333, 334, 337, 338, 339  
**Secular Festivals** - 424  
**Secular songs** - 387  
**Sei Samay** - 380  
**Selim al-Deen** - 382  
**Salim Khan** - 109  
**Selina Hossain** - 382  
**Sena** - 2, 3  
**Sena Dynasty** - 64  
**Senas** - 2  
**Serajul Islam Chowdhury** - 383  
**Serampur College** - 268  
**Sergeant Zahurul Huq** - 199  
**Shabarid Khan** - 362  
**Shabash Bangladesh** - 349  
**Shabor-pada** - 328  
**Shachin Sengupta** - 378  
**Shadinota Sangram** - 349  
**Shah Abdul Aziz** - 155, 157  
**Shah Alam Bahadur Shah** - 118  
**Shah Jahan** - 116, 118, 119, 120  
**Shah Muhammad Sagir** - 362  
**Shah Niamatullah Wali** - 41  
**Shah Shuja** - 111, 117, 120  
**Shah Waliullah** - 145, 154, 155, 157  
**Shahabuddin** - 346  
**Shahadat Hossain** - 379  
**Shahed Ali** - 328  
**Sheebed Minar** - 195  
**Shahi Bangalah** - 99, 333  
**Shahid Minar** - 340

**Shahid Quadri** - 381  
**Shahidullah Kaiser** - 382  
**Shahnama** - 371  
**Shahzada Azim-ud-din** - 117  
**Shaikh Abdur Rahim** - 371  
**Shaikh Jamiruddin** - 371  
**Shaikh Salim** - 110, 117  
**Shaikh Salim Chishti** - 110, 117  
**Shaista Khan** - 40, 42, 112, 117, 119, 120, 124, 336  
**Shaista Khani style** - 336  
**Shait Gumbad Masjid** - 37  
**Shakta padavali** - 365  
**Shaktapada Sangeet** - 386, 387, 388  
**Shakuntala** - 367  
**Shambhu Mitra** - 380  
**Shamim Sikder** - 348, 349  
**Shams Khan** - 109  
**Shamsuddin Abul Kalam** - 382  
**Shamsuddin Firoz Shah** - 99  
**Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah** - 3, 23  
**Shamsuddin Muzzaffar Shah** - 101  
**Shamsuddoha** - 245  
**Shamsul Islam Nizami** - 345  
**Shamsur Rahman** - 381  
**Sharatchandra Chatterjee** - 375  
**Sharif Commission** - 279  
**Sharif Commission Report** - 279  
**Shariatullah Haji** - 146, 160, 165, 173  
**Sharmistha** - 368  
**Shashi Lodge** - 339  
**Shashibhusan Dasgupta** - 361  
**Shaswata Banga** - 376  
**Shat Gumbad Mosque** - 334  
**Shawkat Jang** - 114  
**Shawkat Osman** - 379  
**Sheikh Faizullah** - 364  
**Sheng-chi** - 92  
**Sher Shah** - 110, 117  
**Shes Lekha** - 372  
**Sheser Kavita** - 373  
**Shesprashna** -  
**Shihab-ud-din Talish** - 375  
**Shinga** - 418  
**Shiran Khalji** - 97  
**shirk** - 293, 299  
**Shirsenu Mukhopadhyay** - 380  
**Shishir Bhattacharya** - 346  
**Shivnath Shastri** - 389

- Shoparjito Shadinota* - 349  
 Shola - 414, 416, 418  
 Shova Singh - 112  
 Shri Chaitanya Deva - 122  
 Shri Chaitanya - 122, 385  
 Shri Krishna Kirtana - 385  
*Shrikanta* - 375  
 Shrikumar Bandyopadhyay - 376  
 Shuja-ud-din - 113, 119, 124  
 Shujauddin Khan - 241  
 Shuj-ud-din Muhammad Khan - 120  
*Shyama* - 140, 141, 373  
*Siam* - 292, 294  
 Sibnarayan Roy - 380  
*Siddhacaryas* - 84, 360  
*Siddhacaryas Kanhupa* - 84  
*Sifatyas* - 305  
*Sikandarnama* - 362  
 Sikandar-us-Sani - 99  
 Sikander Abu Jafar - 381  
*sikhara* - 87  
*Sila* - 326  
*Silabhadra* - 85  
*Silpasastras* - 87  
*Sindhu-hillol* - 376  
 Singar - 38  
 Sinhala king Vatta Gamini - 326  
 Sir Charles Wood - 275  
 Sirajul Alam Khan - 199, 200  
 Sirajul Islam - 160, 241, 243, 245  
*Sita* - 369  
 Sitakat Vihara - 29  
 Sitakot Vihara - 29, 331  
*Sitar Banabas* - 367  
*Sitara* - 339  
*Siva* - 70  
 Sivram Chakravarty - 380  
 Six-Point demand - 199  
 Six-Point movement - 4, 199  
 Six-Point programme - 197, 198  
 Somapur Vihara - 331  
 Somapura Mahavihara - 60, 62, 84  
*Somapuri Vihara* - 29, 87, 328  
 Sompuri Vihara - 30  
 Sonakanda Fort - 42, 337  
*Sonar Tari* - 372  
 Sonargaon - 10, 13, 22, 37, 41, 99, 100, 103, 106,  
 Sonargaon Bridge - 337  
 Sonatola - 38  
 South Asian (Indian) Subcontinent - 347  
 South-East Asia - 332  
 Spiritual Experience - 297, 298  
*sradhya* - 314  
*Sri* - 315  
 Srihol - 419  
 Sri Bhavadeva Mahavihara - 84  
 Sri Caitanya - 3, 364  
 Sri Chaitannya Dev - 102  
 Sri Hari - 110  
 Sri Vatudasa - 86  
 Sricandra - 72, 85  
 Srichandra - 63  
 Sridharadasa - 65, 86  
*Sribhatta* - 72  
*Sribhattamandala* - 85  
*Srikar Nandi* - 361  
*Srikrsnakirtan* - 361  
*Srikrsnavijay* - 361  
 String Instruments - 418  
*Srotriya* - 71  
 St. Thomas Aquinas - 155  
 Stagnation - 59, 61, 234, 235, 238, 240, 258  
 Sthavira School - 330  
 Straw - 416  
 Stridhana - 92  
 Students League - 193, 199, 203  
*stupa* - 27, 32, 34, 87, 331  
*Subah Bangla* - 343  
 Subahdar Ibrahim Khan - 112, 120  
 Subahdar Man Singh - 115  
 subahdars - 112, 117, 119, 120, 123, 336, 338  
*Subhasitaranakosa* - 75  
 Subodhchandra Sengupta - 376  
*Suddhi* - 150, 216  
 Sudhindranath Datta - 377  
*Sudra* - 72, 90, 322  
*Sufi* - 3, 5, 99, 100, 102, 105, 110, 147  
 Sufism - 6, 107  
 Sukanta Bhattacharya - 377  
 Sukumar Ray - 374  
 Sukumar Sen - 359, 375, 376  
 Sulaiman Khan - 110  
 Sultan Daud Khan Karrani - 108  
 Sultan Ghias-ud-din Mahmud Shah - 110  
 Sultanate - 25, 37, 38, 95, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 112, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 333, 335, 337, 338, 339

Sultani - 38, 334, 337, 338, 343  
 Sultani Period - 38, 337, 343  
*Sumha* - 67  
*Sunga* - 55, 87, 88  
 Sunil Gangopadhyay - 380  
 Suniti Kumar Chatterji - 376  
 Supreme Being - 147, 150  
 Supreme Intelligence - 304  
 Supreme Reality - 296  
 Surendranath Banerjee - 169  
 Suresvara - 86  
*Suris* - 333  
*Sutradhara* - 73  
*Sutta Pitaka* - 326  
*Suvarnakara* - 72  
 Swadeshi Movement - 208, 372, 391, 393  
 Swami Daynanda Saraswati - 150  
 Swami Vivekananda - 150, 151  
 Swaraj - 211, 212, 213, 216, 218  
 Swarajya Party - 135, 136  
 Syama Prasad Mookerjee - 221  
 Syed Abdullah Khalid - 348  
 Syed Ahmed Brelvi - 208  
 Syed Ahmed Khan - 158, 160, 170, 171, 175, 176, 181  
 Syed Ali Ahsan - 379, 381, 382  
 Syed Amir Ali - 157, 158, 175, 177, 180, 184  
 Syed Husain - 101  
 Syed Jahangir - 345  
 Syed Mujtaba Ali - 380  
 Syed Mustafa Siraj - 380  
 Syed Shamsul Huq - 382  
 Syed Sultan - 362  
 Syed Waliullah - 379, 381  
 Syria - 221

## T

*Tabakat-i-Nasiri* - 84  
 Tabla - 419  
 Tabligh and Tanzim - 150  
 Tagore - 148, 149, 167, 176, 257, 278, 369, 371, 373, 376, 380, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 397, 400, 401, 403, 404, 406, 407, 408, 425  
*Tahkhana* - 41, 337  
 Tajhat - 339  
*Taksan* - 73

*Taksana* - 72  
 Tamizuddin Khan - 221  
*Tamluk* - 56, 75, 78, 83  
 Tamralipti - 22, 55, 56, 61, 75, 88, 328, 329  
 Tantric - 43, 62, 92, 93  
 Tantric Buddhism - 92  
 Tap-Kheyal - 395  
*Tapas-Kahini* - 370  
*Tappa* - 387, 388, 395, 397, 402  
*taqwa* - 294  
 Taracaran Sikdar - 368  
*Taraka* - 314  
*Taranatha* - 58, 84  
 Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay - 378  
 Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi - 98  
 Tarinicaran Mitra - 366  
 Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya - 188  
 Tariqa-I-Muhammadiya - 155, 160  
 Taslima Nasrin - 383  
*Tatta bodhini Patrika* - 148  
*Tawhid* - 293  
 Tawney - 205, 224  
*Tebagha* - 232  
*Telakupi* - 87  
 Teliagharpass - 96  
 Temple - 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 43, 87, 122, 150, 176, 330, 331, 332, 335, 336, 337, 339  
 Tenancy Act Amendment Bill - 215, 217, 218  
 Tenancy Amendment Act (1938) - 230  
 Tenancy Amendment Bill - 210, 215  
 Tenancy Bill of 1923 - 215  
 Terracotta - 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 36, 37, 38, 39, 55, 60, 62, 63, 68, 69, 74, 75, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 86, 87, 88, 94, 332, 334, 335, 337, 349, 412, 414, 415, 433, 434  
 The Brahmo Samaj of India - 149  
 The Englishman - 179  
*The eternity of the Qur'an* - 305-306, 309  
 The Indian Mirror - 181  
 The International Monetary Fund - 248  
 The Moslem Chronicle - 179, 181, 182, 183, 185  
 the Musselman - 179  
*The nature of evil* - 304, 306  
 The Oriental Fabulist - 366  
 Theodore Beck - 172, 173  
 Theodore Morrison - 173  
 Theosophical Society - 151

*Theravadins* - 326  
 Tibetan - 1, 58, 84, 85, 328, 360  
 Tilak Bal Gangadhar - 154, 172  
*Tillopada* - 328  
*Tillottamasambhab Kavya* - 369  
 Tikara - 420  
*Tipitaka* - 326  
 Titu Mir - 156, 165, 173, 208  
 Tofael Ahmed - 199  
*Tohfa* - 362  
 Tombs - 26, 101, 102, 334, 335, 337  
 Traikutaka Vihara - 85  
 Trailokyachandra - 63  
 Trailokynath Mukherji - 368  
 Traditional Games - 425, 426  
 Tribal Arts - 420  
 Tribal Development Program - 422  
 Tribal Festivals - 425  
 Tribeni - 104, 333  
 Tribes - 1, 67, 68, 81, 93, 97, 153, 290, 420, 421  
 Trinity - 32, 318, 319  
*tri-ratna* - 35  
 Tubri - 419  
 Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin - 145  
 Tulsi Lahiri - 378, 401, 402  
 Tumburu - 82  
 Turkey - 101, 104, 119, 211  
 Turks - 13, 98, 121  
 Twenty-one point programme - 195

**U**

*Udasin Pathiker Maner Katha* - 370  
*Uma* - 314  
*Umapatidhara* - 65, 85, 91  
 Ummid Rai - 119  
 Unbelievers - 290, 309  
 Underdevelopment - 257, 260, 263, 264, 265, 266  
 United Indian Patriotic Association - 172, 183  
 University of Dhaka - 14, 329, 341, 344  
*Upadhyayas* - 72  
*Upanisads* - 311, 367  
 Usman - 109, 110, 111  
 Utpal Datta - 380

**V**

*Vaibhasika* - 327  
*Vaidyas* - 85, 121  
 Vaishnava Bhakti Cult - 3  
 Vaishnavite-Brahmanic - 347  
*Vaishya* - 322  
*Vaisnav lyrics* - 364, 365  
*Vaisnavas* - 364, 365  
*Vaisyas* - 71  
*vajrakundalas* - 71  
*Vajrasattva* - 34  
*Vajrayana* - 85, 328  
*Vallallasena* - 64, 65, 71  
*Valmiki Pratibha* - 373  
*Vanga* - 2, 3, 53, 55, 57, 58 62, 63, 67, 68, 72, 76, 94  
*Vanga janapada* - 67  
*Vangadhipati* - 67  
*Vangala* - 67, 68  
*Vangala Janapada* - 67  
*Vangasena* - 86  
*Vangla* - 67  
*Vanikas* - 73  
*Vardhamana* - 69  
 Varendra - 21, 22, 23, 28, 67, 71, 96, 342, 429  
 Varendra Research Museum - 342, 429  
 Varendri - 67, 71, 82  
 Varman dynasty - 63  
 Varmans - 63, 64  
*varnas* - 72  
*Varnasrama* - 70  
*Vasagara* - 76, 93  
*Vasagarika* - 76, 93  
*Vastu* - 74  
*Vastubhumi* - 73  
*Vasu* - 27, 85, 122  
*Vasu-Vihar* - 85  
*Vatsyayana's Kama Sutra* - 92  
*Vedas* - 84, 103, 121, 122, 147, 148, 150, 311  
*Vedic Sastras* - 72  
*vedis* - 34, 35  
*verandah* - 30, 31, 41, 334  
*Vetalpancabimshati* - 367  
 vicegerent - 116, 117, 293  
*Viceroy*s - 335, 338  
*Vidrohi* - 375  
*Vidya* - 92, 364

*Vidyakara* - 86, 93  
*Vidyapati* - 364  
*Vidyasundar* - 368, 369  
*Vijay Gupta* - 3, 363  
*Vijayasena* - 61, 64  
*vikaccha* - 78, 79  
*Vikatanitamba* - 92  
*Vikramapur* - 63  
*Vikramasila* monastery - 60  
*Vikramsila Vihara* - 328  
*vina* - 81, 82, 83, 315  
*Vinaya* - 82, 326, 327  
*Vinaya Pitaka* - 326  
*Vinaya Texts* - 92  
*Vinodini* - 377  
*Vipradas* - 363  
*Viradeva* - 63  
*Visad Sindhu* - 370  
*Visarajan* - 373  
*Visavrksa* - 367  
*Vishnu Chakravarti* - 388  
*Vision of God* - 306, 309  
*Visvarupasena* - 64  
*Viswa Bharati* - 278, 279  
*Vividha Prabandha* - 368  
*Votive Stupa* - 331

## W

*W. W. Hunter* - 157, 76, 265  
*Wahhabi* - 160, 206, 207, 208, 212, 213  
*Wahiduzzaman (Thanda Mia)* - 221  
*War of Liberation in 1971* - 346, 406  
*Warren Hastings* - 128, 130, 164, 245, 268  
*Wasil-bin Ata* - 304  
*West Asia* - 106, 333  
*West Bengal* - 5, 21, 36, 53, 54, 56, 57, 64, 66, 67, 68, 69, 74, 85, 87, 98, 99, 101, 132, 147, 156, 165, 179, 242, 258, 259, 333, 334, 369, 363, 379, 384, 398, 403, 404, 408, 409, 410  
*West Dinajpur* - 331  
*Wheel of the Law* - 323  
*Wilberforce* - 269  
*William Adam* - 268, 283  
*William Bentinck* - 131, 152, 153, 166, 183, 245, 268, 274  
*William Carey* - 366, 367  
*Wood Instruments* - 419

*Worship* - 5, 102, 105, 106, 121, 147, 150, 288, 293, 294, 297, 312, 314, 315, 320, 328, 329, 363, 386, 388, 393  
*Wounded Freedom Fighter* - 349

## Y

*Yahya Khan* - 200, 201  
*Yakub Ali Chowdhury* - 371  
*yana* - 326  
*Yasuf Shah* - 101  
*Yazid bin Walid* - 304  
*Yoga* - 313, 364, 365  
*Yogacara* - 327  
*Yogayog* - 372  
*Yogesvara* - 86  
*Young Bengal* - 177  
*Youngest Religion* - 288  
*Youth League* - 193  
*Yugabani* - 375  
*Yusuf Ali Chowdhury (Mohun Mia)* - 221  
*Yusuf Ali Khan* - 120  
*Yusuf-Zulekha* - 362

## Z

*Zafar Khan Ghazi* - 333  
*Zahir Raihan* - 382  
*Zainuddin* - 362  
*Zainul Abedin* - 344, 345, 346, 430  
*Zakat* - 292, 295, 299, 300  
*zamindars* - 35, 97, 111, 117, 118, 129, 130, 134, 139, 144, 156, 165, 166, 167, 168, 173, 177, 183, 191, 208, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 220, 221, 227, 228, 229, 231, 236, 244, 245, 247, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 260, 267, 336, 338, 340, 432,  
*Ziauddin Ahmed* - 277  
*জরকদাৰ, ম. র.* - 350  
*Zillur Rahman Siddiqui* - 383  
*Zinda Pir* - 38  
*Zinjira Fort* - 337

