

Archaeological Sites and Monuments in Bangladesh:

Bangladesh is a country considerably rich in archaeological wealth, especially of the medieval period both during the Muslim and pre-Muslim rules, though most of it is still unexplored and unknown. In archaeological fieldwork and research this area was very much neglected for a long time for various reasons, not the least of which are its difficult geography and climate and remoteness from the main centres of the subcontinent. With the independence of Bangladesh in 1971 the Government has undertaken a number of field projects including a comprehensive survey and exploration of the hitherto unexplored areas and a fairly ambitious scheme of excavations on selected sites. Though work at present is carried out on a limited scale, the discoveries already made have been significant. While new information and fresh evidence are coming out gradually. These fresh explorations are likely to add substantially to our knowledge of the history and chronology of ancient Bangladesh and various aspects of her life and culture. The earlier history of Bangladesh reveals that Buddhism received royal patronage from some important ruling dynasties like the great Pala rulers, the Chandras and the Deva Kings. Under their royal patronage numerous well-organized, self-contained monasteries sprang up all over the country. The major archaeological sites are described below.

- [Paharpur](#)
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1. **Paharpur** is a small village, 5 km. west of Jamalganj in the greater Rajshahi district. This 7th century archaeological monument that covers approximately area of 27 acres of land. The entire establishment, occupying a quadrangular court; measuring more than 900 ft. externally on each side, has high enclosure-walls about 16 ft. in thickness and from 12 ft. to 15 ft. in height. With elaborate gateway complex on the north, there are 45 cells on the north and 44 in each of the other three sides with a total number of 177 rooms. The architecture of the pyramidal cruciform temple is profoundly influenced by those of South- East Asia, especially Myanmar and Java.

A small site-museum built in 1956-57 houses the representative collection of objects recovered from the area. The excavated findings have also been preserved at the Varendra Research Museum at Rajshahi.

The antiquities of the museum include terra-cotta plaques, images of different gods and goddesses, potteries, coins, inscriptions, ornamental bricks and other minor clay objects.

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2. **Mahasthangarh**

Mahasthan, the oldest archaeological site of Bangladesh is on the western bank of river Karatoa 18 km. north of Bogra town beside Bogra-Rangpur Road. The spectacular site is an imposing landmark in the area having a fortified. Rectangular enclosure measuring 5000 ft. by 4500 ft. with an average height of 15 ft. from the surrounding paddy fields. Beyond the fortified area. other ancient ruins fan out within a semicircle of about five

miles radius. Several isolated mounds, the local names of which are Govinda Bhita Temple, Khodai Pathar Mound, Mankalir Kunda, Parasuramer Bedi, Jiyat Kunda etc. surround the fortified city.

This 8th century archaeological site is still held to be of great sanctity by the Hindus. Every year (mid-April) and once in every 12 years (December) thousands of Hindu devotees join the ceremony on the bank of river Karatoa. A visit to the Mahasthangarh site museum will open up for you wide variety of antiquities, ranging from terra-cotta objects to gold ornaments and coins recovered from the site.

For visiting Paharpur and Mahasthangarh, the visitors may enjoy the hospitality of Parjatan Motel at Bogra. Mahasthangarh and Paharpur are only 18 km. and 75 km. respectively from Bogra town.

Rajshahi is famous for pure silk. Silk processing industry of the Seri-Culture Board is just ten minutes walk from Parjatan Motel at Rajshahi. Besides the Seri-Culture Board, a visit to Varendra Research Museum at the heart of the city for archaeological finds, would be most rewarding.

3. Mainamati

An isolated low, dimpled range of hills, dotted with more than 50 ancient Buddhist settlements of the 8th to 12th century AD known as Mainamati-Lalmai range are extended through the centre of the district of Comilla.

Salban Vihara, almost in the middle of the Mainamati-Lalmai hill range consists of 115 cells, built around a spacious courtyard with cruciform temple in the centre facing its only gateway complex to the north resembling that of the Paharpur Monastery.

Kotila Mura situated on a flattened hillock, about 5 km. north of Salban Vihara inside the Comilla Cantonment area is picturesque Buddhist establishment. Here three stupas are found side by side representing the Buddhist "Trinity" or three jewels i.e. the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

Charpatra Mura is an isolated small oblong shrine situated about 2.5 km. north-west of Kotila Mura stupas. The only approach to the shrine is from the East through a gateway which leads to a spacious hall.

The Mainamati site Museum has a rich and varied collection of copper plates, gold and silver coins and 86 bronze objects. Over 150 bronze statues have been recovered mostly from the monastic cells, bronze stupas, stone sculptures and hundreds of terra-cotta plaques each measuring on an average of 9" high and 8" to 12" wide.

Mainamati is only 105 km from Dhaka city and is just a day's trip by road on the way to Chittagong.

4. Lalbagh Fort

The capital city Dhaka predominantly was a city of the Mughals. In hundred years of their vigorous rule successive Governors and princely Viceroys who ruled the province, adorned it with many noble monuments in the shape of magnificent palaces, mosques, tombs, fortifications and 'Khatras' often surrounded with beautifully laid out gardens and pavilions. Among these, few have survived the ravages of time, aggressive tropical climate of the land and vandal hands of man.

But the finest specimen of this period is the Aurangabad Fort, commonly known as Lalbagh Fort, which, indeed represents the unfulfilled dream of a Mughal Prince. It occupies the south western part of the old city, overlooking the Buriganga on whose northern bank it stands as a silent

sentinel of the old city. Rectangular in plan, it encloses an area of 1082' by 800' and in addition to its graceful lofty gateways on south-east and north-east corners and a subsidiary small unpretentious gateway on north, it also contains within its fortified perimeter a number of splendid monuments, surrounded by attractive garden. These are, a small 3-domed mosque, the mausoleum of Bibi Pari the reputed daughter of Nawab Shaista Khan and the Hammam and Audience Hall of the Governor. The main purpose of this fort, was to provide a defensive enclosure of the palatial edifices of the interior and as such was a type of palace- fortress rather than a siege fort.

5. **Shait-Gumbad Mosque, Bagherhat**

In mid 15th century, a Muslim colony was founded in the inhospitable mangrove forest of the Sundarbans near the sea coast in the Bagherhat district by an obscure saint-General, named Ulugh Khan Jahan. He was the earliest torch bearer of Islam in the south who laid the nucleus of an affluent city during the reign of Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah (1442-59), then known as 'Khalifatabad' (present Bagherhat). Khan Jahan adorned his city with numerous mosques, tanks, roads and other public buildings, the spectacular ruins of which are focused around the most imposing and largest multidomed mosques in Bangladesh, known as the Shait-Gumbad Masjid (160'x 108'). The stately fabric of the monument, serene and imposing, stands on the eastern bank of an unusually vast sweet-water tank, clustered around by the heavy foliage of a low-lying countryside, characteristic of a seacoast landscape.

The mosque roofed over with 77 squat domes. including 7 chauchala or four-sided pitched Bengali domes in the middle row. The vast prayer hall. although provided with 11 arched doorways on east and 7 each on north and south for ventilation and light. presents a dark and sombre appearance inside. It is divided into 7 longitudinal aisles and 11 deep bays by a forest of slender stone columns. from which springs rows of endless arches, supporting the domes. Six feet thick, slightly tapering walls and hollow and round, almost detached corner towers, resembling the bastions of a fortress, each capped by small rounded cupolas. recall the Tughlaq architecture of Delhi. The general appearance of this noble monument with its stark simplicity but massive character reflects the strength and simplicity of the builder.

6. **Sonargaon**

About 27 km. from Dhaka. Sonargaon is one of the oldest capitals of Bengal. It was the seat of Deva Dynasty until the 13th century. From then onward till the advent of the Mughals, Sonargaon was subsidiary capital of the Sultanate of Bengal. Among the ancient monuments still intact are the Tomb of Sultan Ghasiuddin (1399-1409 AD). the shrines of Panjpirs and Shah Abdul Alla and a beautiful mosque in Galdi village.

(Panam City, also known as “the lost city” a historic place & important archaeological site in Bangladesh. Situated in Sonargaon Upazila of Narayanganj District. The structures are older than around 400-500 years. Panam Nagar, The Golden City of Sonargaon, Bangladesh, built blending the Indo-European architectural styles, reflect the socio-economic condition and lifestyle of rich Hindu cloth merchants and the elite class in British colonial period. By the 14th century Sonargaon became a commercial port. Trade activities were mentioned by travelers like Ibn Batuta, Ma Huan and Ralph Fitch. Maritime ships travelled between Sonargaon and southeast/west Asian countries. Muslin

/ MUSLIN (a loosely-woven cotton fabric – became very popular at the end of the 18th century in France) was produced in this region.

Location: Sonargaon, Narayanganj, Dhaka)

7. Kantanagar Temple, Dinajpur

The most ornate among the late medieval temple of Bangladesh is the Kantanagar temple near Dinajpur town. which was built in 1752 by Maharaja Pran Nath of Dinajpur. The temple. a 50' square three storied edifice, rests on a slightly curved raised plinth of sandstone blocks, believed to have been quarried from the ruins of the ancient city of Bangarh near Gangarampur in West Bengal. It was originally a navaratna temple, crowned with four richly ornamental corner towers on two floors and a central one over the third floor. Unfortunately these ornate towers collapsed during an earthquake at the end of the 19th Century. In spite of this. the monument rightly claims to be the finest extant example of its type in brick and terra-cotta, built by Bengali artisans. The central cella is surrounded on all sides by a covered verandah. each pierced by three entrances. which are separated by equally ornate dwarf brick pillars. Corresponding to the three delicately caused entrances of the balcony, the sanctum has also three richly decorated arched openings on each face. Every inch of the temple surface is beautifully embellished with exquisite terra-cotta plaques, representing flora, fauna, geometric motifs, mythological scenes and an astonishing array of contemporary social scenes and favourite pastimes.

7. Sitakot Vihara

Situated in village Fatehpur Maras under Nowabgonj thana of Dinajpur District, the site has yielded the impoverished remains of a brick-built Buddhist monastery. It is medium in size, roughly 65.5m each side, and has yielded a number of movable antiquities, i.e. bronze sculptural pieces of Mahayana origin, iron dagger, terracotta net-sinker, terracotta cone, carved brick, potteries of early medieval origin etc.. On ground of style they are datable to the circa 7th-8th century AD.

8. Bagha Mosque, Rajshahi

Built in 1523 A.D. by Sultan Nusrat Shah, son of Hussain Shah, it is a richly decorated monument originally roofed over with 10 domes which collapsed long ago but recently rebuilt carefully to their original form. The superb terracotta decoration on the central mihrab represents floral frame work and jali rosettes. The whole outer surface of the mosque is beautifully embellished with fine terracotta art motifs.

9. Bara Katra

Bara Katra an architectural relic of Dhaka city. It is situated to the south of Chawk Bazar close to the bank of the river Buriganga.

Originally, the Katra enclosed a quadrangular courtyard with 22 rooms on all of its four sides. Two gateways were erected, one each on the north and south. The ruins consist of an edifice having a river frontage.

The southern wing of the structure was planned on a grand scale and was marked with an elaborate three-storied gate containing an octagonal central chamber. The remaining portion was two-storied and encased by projected octagonal towers.

The gateway structure is rectangular in plan. It is lofty in height and its fronton is projected towards the river. A tall alcove rising to the second storey reduces the mass of this projection. The wall surface is relieved with panels that are square as well as rectangular and that contain a variety of decorations of four-centered, cusped, horseshoe and flat arches. Above the apex of the alcove open the windows of the third storey. Under the alcove is the main arched entrance which leads to the guardroom. Furthermore, as one passes through two successive archways, one comes across an octagonal domed hall, the ceiling of which is plastered and bears various net-patterns and foliated designs. The double storied structure resolves on both sides of the central entrance into a row of five vaulted rooms in the ground floor and livingrooms with a continuous corridor on the upper one. Likewise, the upper floors of the entrance are furnished with rooms. The three storied corner towers are hollow and can be approached from the subsidiary structures.

Following the traditional pattern of the caravan-sarai of Central Asia, the Bara Katra was highly fortified and was embellished with all the features of the imperial Mughal style.

The Bara Katra contains two inscriptions in Persian: one records that it was built in 1053 AH (1643-44 AD) and the other contains the date 1055 AH (1645-46 AD) and confirms that SHAH SHUJA gave the building to Mir Abul Qasim to be used as a Katra on the condition that the officials in charge of the endowments (waqf) should not take any rent from any deserving person alighting therein.

It should be noted here that more than half of the Katra building has already been destroyed and the building as a whole is in a dilapidated condition. It could not be taken over by the Department of Archaeology owing to the resistance of its owners. The owners have made several alterations to the original character of the building and have also started construction of a new multi-storied building in the area. Nevertheless, the surviving ruins stand as one of the most important monuments of Bengal. It is perhaps the most magnificent Mughal edifice of Bangladesh which has a monumental central archway.

(10) Chhota Katra

Chhota Katra, Dhaka is situated about around 183 meter east of the bara katra at hakim habibur rahman lane on the bank of the river Buriganga in Mughal (old) Dhaka.

The Katra is rectangular in plan, 101.20 m × 92.05m externally and 81.07m 69.19 m internally. The thickness of the outer walls is 0.91 to 1.00m and the maximum thickness of the bastion walls is 1.22m. It is similar in plan to that of the Bara Katra, but is smaller in size. There are two gateways, one on the north and the other on the south. The southern one is the main entrance. Both the gateways, though much altered recently, are still in situ. In the two outer corners of the south wall of the structure there are two octagonal towers. The structures around the open courtyard have undergone much renovation, reconstruction and repair. Many modern extensions were also added to the original building. The three storied gateway on the river side has assumed some colonial features. The triple windows and the lofty angle towers reflect the colonial influence during subsequent restoration.

The Chhota Katra is believed to have been built by Shaista Khan in about 1664 AD. It is also said that the Katra was constructed to accommodate some officials and also a part of Shaista Khan's expanding family.

It is evident that the structure has lost much of its original look through indiscriminate alterations and unworthy restoration, though they have given it some durability. The two Katras of Dhaka have not been taken under the protection of the Department of Archaeology, and the specimens of this type of architecture in Bangladesh are on the verge of total extinction.

10. **Ahsan Manzil Museum:** On the bank of the river Buriganga in Dhaka the pink majestic Ahsan Manzil has been renovated and turned into a museum recently. It is an epitome of the nation's rich cultural heritage. Today's renovated Ahsan Manzil a monument of immense historical beauty. It has 31 rooms with a huge dome atop which can be seen from miles around. It now has 23 galleries in 31 rooms displaying of traits, furniture and household articles used by the Nawab.

What are some geographical features of Bangladesh?

[Bangladesh](#) is a low-lying, [riverine](#) country located in South Asia with a largely marshy jungle coastline of 580 km (360 mi) on the northern [littoral](#) of the [Bay of Bengal](#). Formed by a delta plain at the confluence of the [Ganges \(Padma\)](#), [Brahmaputra \(Jamuna\)](#), and [Meghna Rivers](#) and their tributaries, Bangladesh's [alluvial soil](#) is highly fertile, but vulnerable to [flood](#) and [drought](#). Hills rise above the plain only in the [Chittagong Hill Tracts](#) in the far southeast and the Sylhet division in the northeast. Straddling the [Tropic of Cancer](#), Bangladesh has a tropical [monsoon](#) climate characterized by heavy seasonal rainfall, high temperatures, and high humidity. Natural disasters, such as floods, [tornadoes](#), and [tidal bores](#) affect the country yearly. Bangladesh also is affected by major [cyclones](#), on average 16 times a

Physical geography

The [physical geography](#) of Bangladesh is varied and has an area characterized by two distinctive features: a broad [deltaic plain](#) subject to frequent [flooding](#), and a small hilly region crossed by swiftly flowing rivers. The country has an area of 147,610 square kilometres (56,990 sq mi) and extends 820 kilometres (510 mi) north to south and 600 kilometres (370 mi) east to west. Bangladesh is bordered on the west, north, and east by a 4,095 kilometres (2,545 mi) land frontier with [India](#) and, in the southeast, by a short land and water frontier (193 kilometres (120 mi)) with Burma ([Myanmar](#)). On the south is a highly irregular deltaic coastline of about 580 kilometres (360 mi), fissured by many rivers and streams flowing into the [Bay of Bengal](#). The [territorial waters](#) of Bangladesh extend 12 nautical miles (22 km), and the exclusive economic zone of the country is 200 nautical miles (370 km).

Roughly 80% of the landmass is made up of fertile alluvial lowland called the Bangladesh Plain. The plain is part of the larger Plain of Bengal, which is sometimes called the Lower Gangetic Plain. Although altitudes up to 105 metres (344 ft) above sea level occur in the northern part of the plain, most elevations are less than 10 metres (33 ft) above sea level; elevations decrease in the coastal south, where the terrain is generally at sea level. With such low elevations and numerous rivers, water—and concomitant flooding—is a predominant physical feature. About 10,000 square kilometres (3,900 sq mi) of the total area of Bangladesh is covered with water, and larger areas are routinely flooded during the monsoon season.

The only exceptions to Bangladesh's low elevations are the [Chittagong Hills](#) in the southeast, the Low Hills of Sylhet in the northeast, and highlands in the north and northwest. The Chittagong Hills constitute the only significant hill system in the country and, in effect, are the western fringe of the north-south mountain ranges of Burma and eastern India. The Chittagong Hills rise steeply to narrow ridge lines, generally no wider than 36 metres (118 ft), with altitudes from 600 to 900 metres (2,000 to 3,000 ft) above sea level. At 1,052 metres (3,451 ft) altitude, the highest elevation in Bangladesh is found at [Mowdok Mual](#), in the southeastern part of the hills. Fertile valleys lie between the hill lines, which generally run north-south. West of the Chittagong Hills

is a broad plain, cut by rivers draining into the Bay of Bengal, that rises to a final chain of low coastal hills, mostly below 200 metres (660 ft), that attain a maximum elevation of 350 metres (1,150 ft). West of these hills is a narrow, wet coastal plain located between the cities of Chittagong in the north and Cox's Bazar in the south.

About 67% of Bangladesh's nonurban land is arable. Permanent crops cover only 2%, meadows and pastures cover 4%, and forests and woodland cover about 16%. The country produces large quantities of quality timber, bamboo, and sugarcane. Bamboo grows in almost all areas, but high-quality timber grows mostly in the highland valleys. Rubber planting in the hilly regions of the country was undertaken in the 1980s, and rubber extraction had started by the end of the decade. A variety of wild animals are found in the forest areas, such as in the Sundarbans on the southwest coast, which is the home of the [royal Bengal tiger](#). The alluvial soils in the Bangladesh Plain are generally fertile and are enriched with heavy silt deposits carried downstream during the rainy season.

Climate

Bangladesh has a [tropical monsoon climate](#) characterized by wide seasonal variations in rainfall, high temperatures, and high humidity. Regional climatic differences in this flat country are minor. Three seasons are generally recognised: a hot, muggy summer from March to June; a hot, humid and rainy monsoon season from June to November; and a warm-hot, dry winter from December to February. In general, maximum summer temperatures range between 38 and 41 °C (100.4 and 105.8 °F). April is the hottest month in most parts of the country. January is the coolest month, when the average temperature for most of the country is 16–20 °C (61–68 °F) during the day and around 10 °C (50 °F) at night.

Winds are mostly from the north and northwest in the winter, blowing gently at 1 to 3 kilometers per hour (0.6 to 1.9 mph) in northern and central areas and 3 to 6 kilometers per hour (1.9 to 3.7 mph) near the coast. From March to May, violent thunderstorms, called northwesterners by local English speakers, produce winds of up to 60 kilometers per hour (37.3 mph). During the intense storms of the early summer and late monsoon season, southerly winds of more than 160 kilometers per hour (99.4 mph) cause waves to crest as high as 6 meters (19.7 ft) in the Bay of Bengal, which brings disastrous flooding to coastal areas.

Heavy rainfall is characteristic of Bangladesh causing it to flood every year. Except for the relatively dry western region of Rajshahi, where the annual rainfall is about 1,600 mm (63.0 in), most parts of the country receive at least 2,300 mm (90.6 in) of rainfall per year. Because of its location just south of the foothills of the Himalayas, where monsoon winds turn west and northwest, the region of Sylhet in northeastern Bangladesh receives the greatest average precipitation. From 1977 to 1986, annual rainfall in that region ranged between 3,280 and 4,780 mm (129.1 and 188.2 in) per year. Average daily humidity ranged from March lows of between 55 and 81% to July highs of between 94 and 100%, based on readings taken at selected stations nationwide in 1986.

About 80% of Bangladesh's rain falls during the monsoon season. The monsoons result from the contrasts between low and high air pressure areas that result from differential heating of land and water. During the hot months of April and May hot air rises over the Indian subcontinent, creating low-pressure areas into which rush cooler, moisture-bearing winds from the Indian Ocean. This is the southwest monsoon, commencing in June and usually lasting through September. Dividing against the Indian landmass, the monsoon flows in two branches, one of which strikes western India. The other travels up the Bay of Bengal and over eastern India and

Bangladesh, crossing the plain to the north and northeast before being turned to the west and northwest by the foothills of the Himalayas.

Natural calamities, such as floods, tropical cyclones, tornadoes, and tidal bores—destructive waves or floods caused by flood tides rushing up [estuaries](#)—ravage the country, particularly the coastal belt, almost every year. Between 1947 and 1988, 13 severe cyclones hit Bangladesh, causing enormous loss of life and property. In May 1985, for example, a severe cyclonic storm packing 154-kilometre-per-hour (95.7 mph) winds and waves 4 meters (13.1 ft) high swept into southeastern and southern Bangladesh, killing more than 11,000 persons, damaging more than 94,000 houses, killing some 135,000 head of livestock, and damaging nearly 400 kilometers (248.5 mi) of critically needed embankments.

Annual monsoon flooding results in the loss of human life, damage to property and communication systems, and a shortage of drinking water, which leads to the spread of disease. For example, in 1988 two-thirds of Bangladesh's 64 districts experienced extensive flood damage in the wake of unusually heavy rains that flooded the river systems. Millions were left homeless and without potable water. Half of Dhaka, including the runway at the Shahjalal International Airport—an important transit point for disaster relief supplies—was flooded. About 2,000,000 tonnes (2,204,623 short tons; 1,968,413 long tons) of crops were reported destroyed, and relief work was rendered even more challenging than usual because the flood made transportation of any kind exceedingly difficult. [A tornado in April 1989](#) killed more than 600 people, possibly many more.

There are no precautions against cyclones and tidal bores except giving advance warning and providing safe public buildings where people may take shelter. Adequate infrastructure and air transport facilities that would ease the sufferings of the affected people had not been established by the late 1980s. Efforts by the government under the Third Five-Year Plan (1985–90) were directed toward accurate and timely forecast capability through agrometeorology, marine meteorology, oceanography, hydrometeorology, and seismology. Necessary expert services, equipment, and training facilities were expected to be developed under the United Nations Development Programme.

Cold weather is unusual in Bangladesh. When temperatures decrease to 8 °C (46 °F) or less, people without warm clothing and living in inadequate homes may die from the cold.

Major Festivals in Bangladesh:

Festivals have always played a significant role in the life of the people of Bangladesh. Those are parts and parcels of Bangalee culture and tradition. Brief account of the major and regular festivals are given below.

Pahela Baishakh

The advent of Bengali New Year is gaily observed throughout the country. The Day (mid-April) is a public holiday. Most colorful daylong gatherings along with arrangement of cultural program and traditional *Panta* at Ramna Park, Dhaka is a special feature of Pahela Baishakh. Tournaments, boat races etc. are held in cities and villages amidst great jubilation. Many fairs are held in Dhaka and other towns and villages.

Independence Day

March 26 is the day of Independence of Bangladesh. It is the biggest state festival. This day is most befittingly observed and the capital wears a festive look. It is a public

holiday. The citizens of Dhaka wake up early in the morning with the booming of guns heralding the day. Citizens including government leaders and sociopolitical organizations and freedom fighters place floral wreaths at the National Martyrs Monument at Savar. Bangla Academy, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy and other socio-cultural organizations hold cultural functions. At night the main public buildings are tastefully illuminated to give the capital city a dazzling look. Similar functions are arranged in other parts of the country.

21st Feb, the National Mourning Day and World Mother Language Day

21 February is observed throughout the country to pay respect and homage to the sacred souls of the martyrs' of Language Movement of 1952. Blood was shed on this day at the Central Shahid Minar (near Dhaka Medical College Hospital) area to establish Bangla as a state language of the then Pakistan. All subsequent movements including struggle for independence owe their origin to the historic language movement. The Shahid Minar (martyrs monument) is the symbol of sacrifice for Bangla, the mother tongue. The day is closed holiday. Mourning procedure begin in Dhaka at midnight with the song *Amar vaier raktay rangano ekushay February* (21st February, the day stained with my brothers' blood). Nationals pay homage to the martyrs by placing floral wreaths at the Shahid Minar. Very recently the day has been declared World Mother Language Day by UNESCO.

Eid-e-Miladunnabi

Eid-e-Miladunnabi is the birth and death day of Prophet Muhammad (s). He was born and died the same day on 12th Rabiul Awal (Lunar Month). The day is national holiday, national flag is flown atop public and private houses and special food is served in orphanages, hospitals and jails. At night important public buildings are illuminated and *milad mahfils* are held.

Eid-ul-Fitr

The biggest Muslim festival observed throughout the world. This is held on the day following the Ramadan or the month of fasting. In Dhaka big congregations are held at the National Eidgah and many mosques.

Eid-ul-Azha

Second biggest festival of the Muslims. It is held marking the Hajj in Mecca on the 10th Zilhaj, the lunar month. Eid congregations are held throughout the country. Animals are sacrificed in reminiscence of Hazrat Ibrahim's (AM) preparedness for the supreme sacrifice of his beloved son to Allah. It is a public holiday.

Muharram

Muharram procession is a ceremonial mournful procession of Muslim community. A large procession is brought out from the Hussaini Dalan Imambara on 10th Muharram in memory of the tragic martyrdom of Imam Hussain (RA) on this day at Karbala in Iraq. Same observations are made elsewhere in the country.

Durga Puja

Durga Puja, the biggest festival of the Hindu community continues for ten days, the last three days being culmination with the idol immersed in rivers. In Dhaka the big celebrations are held at Dhakeswari Temple, where a fair is also held and at the Ram Krishna Mission.

Christmas

Christmas, popularly called "Bara Din (Big Day)", is celebrated with pomp in Dhaka and elsewhere in the country. Several day-long large gatherings are held at St. Mary's Cathedral at Ramna, Portuguese Church at Tejgaon, Church of Bangladesh (Protestant) on Johnson Road and Bangladesh Baptist Sangha at Sadarghat Dhaka. Functions include illumination of churches, decorating Christmas tree and other Christian festivities.

Rabindra & Nazrul Jayanti

Birth anniversary of the noble laureate Rabindranath Tagore on 25th Baishakh (May) and that of the National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam on 11th Jaystha (May) are observed throughout the country. Their death anniversaries are also marked in the same way. Big gatherings and song sessions organized by socio-cultural organizations are salient features of the observance of the days.

Tagore is the writer of our national anthem while National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam is famous as Rebel Poet.

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The biggest Muslim festival observed throughout the world. This is held on the day following the Ramadan or the month of fasting. In Dhaka big congregations are held at the National Eidgah and many mosques.

Eid-ul-Azha

Second biggest festival of the Muslims. It is held marking the Hajj in Mecca on the 10th Zilhaj, the lunar month. Eid congregations are held throughout the country. Animals are sacrificed in reminiscence of Hazrat Ibrahim's (AM) preparedness for the supreme sacrifice of his beloved son to Allah. It is a public holiday.

Muharram

Muharram procession is a ceremonial mournful procession of Muslim community. A large procession is brought out from the Hussaini Dalan Imambara on 10th Muharram in memory of the tragic martyrdom of Imam Hussain (RA) on this day at Karbala in Iraq. Same observations are made elsewhere in the country.

Durga Puja

Durga Puja, the biggest festival of the Hindu community continues for ten days, the last three days being culmination with the idol immersed in rivers. In Dhaka the big celebrations are held at Dhakeswari Temple, where a fair is also held and at the Ram Krishna Mission.

Christmas

Christmas, popularly called "Bara Din (Big Day)", is celebrated with pomp in Dhaka and elsewhere in the country. Several day-long large gatherings are held at St. Mary's Cathedral at Ramna, Portuguese Church at Tejgaon, Church of Bangladesh (Protestant) on Johnson Road and Bangladesh Baptist Sangha at Sadarghat Dhaka. Functions include illumination of churches, decorating Christmas tree and other Christian festivities.

Rabindra & Nazrul Jayanti

Birth anniversary of the noble laureate Rabindranath Tagore on 25th Baishakh (May) and that of the National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam on 11th Jaystha (May) are observed throughout the country. Their death anniversaries are also marked in the same way. Big gatherings and song sessions organized by socio-cultural organizations are salient features of the observance of the days.

Tagore is the writer of our national anthem while National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam is famous as Rebel Poet.

Culture society in Bnagladesh

"Bangladesh" is a combination of the Bengali words, *Bangla* and *Desh*, meaning the country or land where the Bangla language is spoken. The country formerly was known as East Pakistan.

Location and Geography. Bangladesh straddles the Bay of Bengal in south Asia. To the west and north it is bounded by India; to the southeast, it borders Myanmar. The topography is predominantly a low-lying floodplain. About half the total area is actively deltaic and is prone to flooding in the monsoon season from May through September. The Ganges/Padma River flows into the country from the northwest, while the Brahmaputra/ Jamuna enters from the north. The capital city, Dhaka, is near the point where those river systems meet. The land is suitable for rice cultivation.

In the north and the southeast the land is more hilly and dry, and tea is grown. The [Chittagong Hill Tracts](#) have extensive hardwood forests. The vast river delta area is home to the dominant plains culture. The hilly areas of the northeast and southeast are occupied by much smaller tribal groups, many of which have strongly resisted domination by the national government and the population pressure from Bangladeshis who move into and attempt to settle in their traditional

areas. In 1998 an accord was reached between the armed tribal group Shanti Bahini and the government.

Demography. Bangladesh is the most densely populated nonisland nation in the world. With approximately 125 million inhabitants living in an area of 55,813 square miles, there are about 2,240 persons per square mile. The majority of the population (98 percent) is Bengali, with 2 percent belonging to tribal or other non-Bengali groups. Approximately 83 percent of the population is Muslim, 16 percent is Hindu, and 1 percent is Buddhist, Christian, or other. Annual population growth rate is at about 2 percent.

Infant mortality is approximately seventy-five per one thousand live births. Life expectancy for both men and women is fifty-eight years, yet the sex ratios for cohorts above sixty years of age are skewed toward males. Girls between one and four years of age are almost twice as likely as boys to die.

In the early 1980s the annual rate of population increase was above 2.5 percent, but in the late 1990s it decreased to 1.9 percent. The success of population control may be due to the demographic transition (decreasing birth and death rates), decreasing farm sizes, increasing urbanization, and national campaigns to control fertility (funded largely by other nations).

Linguistic Affiliation. The primary language is Bangla, called Bengali by most nonnatives, an Indo-European language spoken not just by Bangladeshis, but also by people who are culturally Bengali. This includes about 300 million people from Bangladesh, West Bengal, and Bihar, as well as Bengali speakers in other Indian states. The language dates from well before the birth of Christ. Bangla varies by region, and people may not understand the language of a person from another district. However, differences in dialect consist primarily of slight differences in accent or pronunciation and minor grammatical usages.

Language differences mirror social and religious divisions. Bangla is divided into two fairly distinct forms: *sadhu basha*, learned or formal language, and *cholit basha*, common language. Sadhu basha is the language of the literate tradition, formal essays and poetry, and the well educated. Cholit basha is the spoken vernacular, the language of the great majority of Bengalis. Cholit basha is the medium by which the great majority of people communicate in a country in which 50 percent of men and 26 percent of women are literate. There are also small usage variations between Muslims and Hindus, along with minor vocabulary differences.

Symbolism. The most important symbol of national identity is the Bangla language. The flag is a dark green rectangle with a red circle just left of center. Green symbolizes the trees and fields of the countryside; red represents the rising sun and the blood spilled in the 1971 war for liberation. The national anthem was taken from a poem by Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore and links a love of the natural realm and land with the national identity.

Since independence in 1971, the national identity has evolved. Islamic religious identity has become an increasingly important element in the national dialogue. Many Islamic holy days are nationally celebrated, and Islam pervades public space and the media.

History and Ethnic Relations

Emergence of the Nation. The creation of the independent nation represents the triumph of ethnic and cultural politics. The region that is now Bangladesh has been part of a number of important political entities, including Indian empires, Buddhist kingdoms, the Moghul empire, the British empire and the Pakistani nation.

Until 1947 Bangladesh was known as East Bengal province and had been part of Great Britain's India holding since the 1700s. In 1947, Britain, in conjunction with India's leading indigenous political organizations, partitioned the Indian colony into India and Pakistan. The province of

East Bengal was made part of Pakistan and was referred to as East Pakistan. West Pakistan was carved from the northwest provinces of the British Indian empire. This division of territory represented an attempt to create a Muslim nation on Hindu India's peripheries. However, the west and east wings of Pakistan were separated by more than 1,000 miles of India, creating cultural discontinuity between the two wings. The ethnic groups of Pakistan and the Indian Muslims who left India after partition were greatly different in language and way of life from the former East Bengalis: West Pakistan was more oriented toward the Middle East and Arab Islamic influence than was East Pakistan, which contained Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, and British cultural influences.

From the beginning of Pakistan's creation, the Bengali population in the east was more numerous than the Pakistani population in the western wing, yet West Pakistan became the seat of government and controlled nearly all national resources. West Pakistanis generally viewed Bengalis as inferior, weak, and less Islamic. From 1947 to 1970, West Pakistan reluctantly gave in to Bengali calls for power within the government, armed forces, and civil service, but increasing social unrest in the east led to a perception among government officials that the people of Bengal were unruly and untrustworthy "Hinduized" citizens. Successive Pakistani regimes, increasingly concerned with consolidating their power over the entire country, often criticized the Hindu minority in Bengal. This was evident in Prime Minister Nazimuddin's attempt in 1952 to make Urdu, the predominant language of West Pakistan, the state language. The effect in the east was to energize opposition movements, radicalize students at Dhaka University, and give new meaning to a Bengali identity that stressed the cultural unity of the east instead of a pan-Islamic brotherhood.

Through the 1960s, the Bengali public welcomed a message that stressed the uniqueness of Bengali culture, and this formed the basis for calls for [self-determination](#) or autonomy. In the late 1960s, the Pakistani government attempted to fore-stall scheduled elections. The elections were held on 7 December 1970, and Pakistanis voted directly for members of the National Assembly. The Awami League, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was largely a Bengali party which called for autonomy for the east. Sheikh Mujib wanted to reconfigure Pakistan as a confederation of two equal partners. His party won one of 162 seats in the East Pakistan provincial assembly and 160 of the three hundred seats in the National Assembly. The Awami League would control national politics and have the ability to name the prime minister. President Yahya, however, postponed the convening of the National Assembly to prevent a Bengali power grab. In response, Sheikh Mujib and the Awami League led civil disobedience in East Pakistan. West Pakistan began to move more troops into the east, and on 25 March 1971, the Pakistani army carried out a systematic execution of several hundred people, arrested Mujib, and transported him to the west. On 26 March the Awami League declared East Pakistan an independent nation, and by April the Bengalis were in open conflict with the Pakistani military.

In a 10-month war of liberation, Bangladeshi units called *Mukhti Bahini* (freedom fighters), largely trained and armed by Indian forces, battled Pakistani troops throughout the country in guerrilla skirmishes. The Pakistanis systematically sought out political opponents and executed Hindu men on sight. Close to 10 million people fled Bangladesh for West Bengal, in India. In early December 1971, the Indian army entered Bangladesh, engaged Pakistani military forces with the help of the Mukhti Bahini, and in a ten-day period subdued the Pakistani forces. On 16 December the Pakistani military surrendered. In January 1972, Mujib was released from confinement and became the prime minister of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh was founded as a "democratic, secular, socialist state," but the new state represented the triumph of a Bangladeshi Muslim culture and language. The administration degenerated into corruption, and Mujib attempted to create a one-party state. On 15 August 1975 he was [assassinated](#), along with much of his family, by army officers. Since that time, Bangladesh has been both less socialistic and less secular.

General Ziaur Rahman became martial law administrator in December 1976 and president in 1977. On 30 May 1981, Zia was assassinated by army officers. His rule had been violent and repressive, but he had improved national economy. After a short-lived civilian government, a bloodless coup placed Army chief of staff General Mohammed Ershad in office as martial law administrator; he later became president. Civilian opposition increased, and the Awami League, the Bangladesh National Party (BNP), and the [religious fundamentalist](#) party Jamaat-i-Islami united in a seven-year series of crippling strikes. In December 1990, Ershad was forced to resign.

A caretaker government held national elections early in 1991. The BNP, headed by Khaleda Zia, widow of former President Zia, formed a government in an alliance with the Jamaat-i-Islami. Political factionalism intensified over the next five years, and on 23 June 1996, the Awami League took control of Parliament. At its head was Sheikh Hasina Wazed, the daughter of Sheikh Mujib.

National Identity. Bangladeshi national identity is rooted in a Bengali culture that transcends international borders and includes the area of Bangladesh itself and West Bengal, India. Symbolically, Bangladeshi identity is centered on the 1971 struggle for independence from Pakistan. During that struggle, the key elements of Bangladeshi identity coalesced around the importance of the Bengali mother tongue and the distinctiveness of a culture or way of life connected to the floodplains of the region. Since that time, national identity has become increasingly linked to Islamic symbols as opposed to the Hindu Bengali, a fact that serves to reinforce the difference between Hindu West Bengal and Islamic Bangladesh. Being Bangladeshi in some sense means feeling connected to the natural land–water systems of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and other rivers that drain into the Bay of Bengal. There is an envisioning of nature and the annual cycle as intensely beautiful, as deep green paddy turns golden, dark clouds heavy with monsoon rains gradually clear, and flooded fields dry. Even urban families retain a sense of connectedness to this rural system. The great poets of the region, [Rabindranath Tagore](#) and Kazi Nurul Islam have enshrined the Bengali sense of the beauty and power of the region's nature.

Ethnic Relations. The most significant social divide is between Muslims and Hindus. In 1947 millions of Hindus moved west into West Bengal, while millions of Muslims moved east into the newly created East Pakistan. Violence occurred as the columns of people moved past each other. Today, in most sections of the country, Hindus and Muslims live peacefully in adjacent areas and are connected by their economic roles and structures. Both groups view themselves as members of the same culture.

From 1976 to 1998 there was sustained cultural conflict over the control of the southeastern Chittagong Hill Tracts. That area is home to a number of tribal groups that resisted the movement of Bangladeshi Muslims into their territory. In 1998, a peace accord granted those groups a degree of autonomy and self-governance. These tribal groups still do not identify themselves with the national culture.

Urbanism, Architecture, and the Use of Space

Bangladesh is still primarily a rural culture, and the *gram* or village is an important spatial and cultural concept even for residents of the major cities. Most people identify with a natal or ancestral village in the countryside.

Houses in villages are commonly rectangular, and are dried mud, bamboo, or red brick structures with [thatch](#) roofs. Many are built on top of earthen or wooden platforms to keep them above the flood line. Houses have little interior decoration, and wall space is reserved for storage. Furniture is minimal, often consisting only of low stools. People sleep on thin bamboo mats. Houses have verandas in the front, and much of daily life takes place under their eaves rather than indoors. A separate smaller mud or bamboo structure serves as a kitchen (*rana ghor*), but during the dry season many women construct hearths and cook in the household courtyard. Rural houses are simple and functional, but are not generally considered aesthetic showcases.

The village household is a patrilineal extended compound linked to a pond used for daily household needs, a nearby river that provides fish, trees that provide fruit (mango and [jackfruit](#) especially), and rice fields. The village and the household not only embody important natural motifs but serve as the locus of ancestral family identity. Urban dwellers try to make at least one trip per year to "their village."

Architectural styles in the cities show numerous historical influences, including Moghul and Islamic motifs with curved arches, windows, and minarets, and square British colonial wood and concrete construction. The National Parliament building (Shongshad Bhabon) in Dhaka, designed by the American architect Louis Kahn, reflects a synthesis of western modernity and curved Islamic-influenced spaces. The National Monument in Savar, a wide-based spire that becomes narrower as it rises, is the symbol of the country's liberation.

Because of the population density, space is at a premium. People of the same sex interact closely, and touching is common. On public transportation strangers often are pressed together for long periods. In public spaces, women are constrained in their movements and they rarely enter the public sphere unaccompanied. Men are much more free in their movement. The rules regarding the gender differential in the use of public space are less closely adhered to in urban areas than in rural areas.

Food and Economy

Food in Daily Life. Rice and fish are the foundation of the diet; a day without a meal with rice is nearly inconceivable. Fish, meats, poultry, and vegetables are cooked in spicy curry (*torkari*) sauces that incorporate cumin, coriander, cloves, cinnamon, garlic, and other spices. Muslims do not consume pork and Hindus do not consume beef. Increasingly common is the preparation of *ruti*, a whole wheat circular flatbread, in the morning, which is eaten with curries from the night before. Also important to the diet is *dal*, a thin soup based on ground lentils, chickpeas, or other legumes that is poured over rice. A sweet homemade yogurt commonly finishes a meal. A typical meal consists of a large bowl of rice to which is added small portions of fish and vegetable curries. Breakfast is the meal that varies the most, being rice- or bread-based. A favorite breakfast dish is *panthabhat*, leftover cold rice in water or milk mixed with *gur* (date palm sugar). Food is eaten with the right hand by mixing the curry into the rice and then gathering portions with the fingertips. In city restaurants that cater to foreigners, people may use silverware.

Three meals are consumed daily. Water is the most common beverage. Before the meal, the right hand is washed with water above the eating bowl. With the clean knuckles of the right hand the interior of the bowl is rubbed, the water is discarded, and the bowl is filled with food. After the meal, one washes the right hand again, holding it over the emptied bowl.

Snacks include fruits such as banana, mango, and jackfruit, as well as puffed rice and small fried food items. For many men, especially in urbanized regions and bazaars, no day is complete without a cup of sweet tea with milk at a small tea stall, sometimes accompanied by confections.

Food Customs at Ceremonial Occasions. At weddings and on important holidays, food plays an important role. At holiday or formal functions, guests are encouraged to eat to their capacity. At weddings, a common food is *biryani*, a rice dish with lamb or beef and a blend of spices, particularly saffron. On special occasions, the rice used is one of the finer, thinner-grained types. If biryani is not eaten, a complete multicourse meal is served: foods are brought out sequentially and added to one's rice bowl after the previous course is finished. A complete dinner may include chicken, fish, vegetable, goat, or beef curries and dal. The final bit of rice is finished with yogurt (*doi*).

On other important occasions, such as the Eid holidays, a goat or cow is slaughtered on the premises and curries are prepared from the fresh meat. Some of the meat is given to relatives and to the poor.

Basic Economy. With a per capita gross national product (GNP) of \$350 and an overall GNP of \$44 billion, Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world. The only significant natural resource is natural gas.

Approximately 75 percent of the workforce is involved in agriculture, and 15 percent and 10 percent are employed in the service and industrial sectors, respectively. Bangladesh has been characterized as a nation of small, subsistence-based farmers, and nearly all people in rural areas are involved in the production or processing of agricultural goods. The majority of the rural population engages in agricultural production, primarily of rice, jute, pulses, wheat, and some vegetables. Virtually all agricultural output is consumed within the country, and grain must be imported. The large population places heavy demands on the food-producing sectors of the economy. The majority of the labor involved in food production is human- and animal-based. Relatively little agricultural export takes place.

In the countryside, typically about ten villages are linked in a market system that centers on a bazaar occurring at least once per week. On bazaar days, villagers bring in agricultural produce or crafts such as water pots to sell to town and city agents. Farmers then visit kiosks to purchase spices, kerosene, soap, vegetables or fish, and salt.

Land Tenure and Property. With a population density of more than two thousand per square mile, land tenure and property rights are critical aspects of survival. The average farm owner has less than three acres of land divided into a number of small plots scattered in different directions from the household. Property is sold only in cases of family emergency, since agricultural land is the primary means of survival. Ordinarily, among Muslims land is inherited equally by a household head's sons, despite Islamic laws that specify shares for daughters and wives. Among Hindu farmers inheritance practices are similar. When agricultural land is partitioned, each plot is divided among a man's sons, ensuring that each one has a geographically dispersed holding. The only sections of rural areas that are not privately owned are rivers and paths.

Commercial Activities. In rural areas Hindus perform much of the traditional craft production of items for everyday life; caste groups include weavers, potters, iron and gold smiths, and carpenters. Some of these groups have been greatly reduced in number, particularly weavers, who have been replaced by ready-made clothing produced primarily in Dhaka.

Agriculture accounts for 25 percent of GDP. The major crops are rice, jute, wheat, tea, sugarcane, and vegetables.

Major Industries. In recent years industrial growth has occurred primarily in the garment and textile industries. Jute processing and jute product fabrication remain major industries. Overall, industry accounted for about 28 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 1998.

Trade. Exports totaled \$4.4 billion in 1996, with the United States consuming one-third of those exports. Primary export markets are for jute (used in carpet backing, burlap, and rope), fish, garments, and textiles. Imports totaled \$7.1 billion and largely consisted of capital goods, grains, petroleum, and chemicals. The country relies on an annual inflow of at least \$1 billion from international sources, not including the humanitarian aid that is part of the national economic system. Agriculture accounted for about 25 percent of the GDP in 1998.

Division of Labor. The division of labor is based on age and education. Young children are economically productive in rural areas, hauling water, watching animals, and helping with postharvest processing. The primary agricultural tasks, however, are performed by men. Education allows an individual to seek employment outside the agricultural sector, although the opportunities for educated young men in rural areas are extremely limited. A service or industry job often goes to the individual who can offer the highest bribe to company officials.

Social Stratification

Classes and Castes. The Muslim class system is similar to a caste structure. The *ashraf* is a small upperclass of old-money descendants of early Muslim officials and merchants whose roots are in Afghanistan, Turkey, and Iran. Some ashraf families trace their lineage to the Prophet Mohammed. The rest of the population is conceived of as the indigenous majority *atraf*. This distinction mirrors the Hindu separation between the Brahman and those in lower castes. While both Muslim and Hindu categories are recognized by educated people, the vast majority of citizens envision class in a more localized, rural context.

In rural areas, class is linked to the amount of land owned, occupation, and education. A landowner with more than five acres is at the top of the socioeconomic scale, and small subsistence farmers are in the middle. At the bottom of the scale are the landless rural households that account for about 30 percent of the rural population. Landowning status reflects socioeconomic class position in rural areas, although occupation and education also play a role. The most highly educated people hold positions requiring literacy and [mathematical](#) skills, such as in banks and government offices, and are generally accorded a higher status than are farmers. Small businessmen may earn as much as those who have jobs requiring an education but have a lower social status.

Hindu castes also play a role in the rural economy. Hindu groups are involved in the hereditary occupations that fill the economic niches that support a farming-based economy. Small numbers of higher caste groups have remained in the country, and some of those people are large landowners, businessmen, and service providers.

In urban areas the great majority of people are laborers. There is a middle class of small businessmen and midlevel office workers, and above this is an emerging entrepreneurial group and upper-level service workers.

Symbols of Social Stratification. One of the most obvious symbols of class status is dress. The traditional garment for men is the *lungi*, a cloth tube skirt that hangs to the ankles; for women, the *sari* is the norm. The *lungi* is worn by most men, except those who consider themselves to have high socioeconomic status, among whom pants and shirt are worn. Also indicative of high standing are loose white cotton pajama pants and a long white shirt. White dress among men symbolizes an occupation that does not require physical labor. A man with high standing will not be seen physically carrying anything; that task is left to an assistant or laborer. *Saris* also serve as

class markers, with elaborate and finely worked cloth symbolizing high status. Poverty is marked by the cheap, rough green or indigo cotton cloth saris of poor women. Gold jewelry indicates a high social standing among women.

A concrete-faced house and a ceramic tile roof provide evidence of wealth. An automobile is well beyond the means of most people, and a motorcycle is a sign of status. Color televisions, telephones, and electricity are other symbols associated with wealth.

Political Life

Government. The People's Republic of Bangladesh is a parliamentary democracy that includes a president, a prime minister, and a unicameral parliament (*Jayitya Shongshod*). Three hundred members of parliament are elected to the 330-seat legislature in local elections held every five years. Thirty seats are reserved for women members of parliament. The prime minister, who is appointed by the president, must have the support of a majority of parliament members. The president is elected by the parliament every five years to that largely ceremonial post. The country is divided into four divisions, twenty districts, subdistricts, union *parishads*, and villages. In local politics, the most important political level is the union in rural areas; in urban regions, it is the municipality (*pourashava*). Members are elected locally, and campaigning is extremely competitive.

Leadership and Political Officials. There are more than 50 political parties. Party adherence extends from the national level down to the village, where factions with links to the national parties vie for local control and help solve local disputes. Leaders at the local level are socioeconomically well-off individuals who gain respect within the party structure, are charismatic, and have strong kinship ties. Local leaders draw and maintain supporters, particularly at election time, by offering tangible, relatively small rewards.

The dominant political parties are the Awami League (AL), the BNP, the Jatiya Party (JP), and the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI). The Awami League is a secular-oriented, formerly socialist-leaning party. It is not stringently anti-India, is fairly liberal with regard to ethnic and religious groups, and supports a free-market economy. The BNP, headed by former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, is less secular, more explicitly Islamic in orientation, and more anti-India. The JP is close to the BNP in overall orientation, but pushed through a bill in Parliament that made Islam the state religion in 1988. The JI emphasizes Islam, Koranic law, and connections to the Arab Middle East.

Social Problems and Control. Legal procedures are based on the English common-law system, and supreme court justices and lower-level judges are appointed by the president. District courts at the district capitals are the closest formal venues for legal proceedings arising from local disputes. There are police forces only in the cities and towns. When there is a severe conflict or crime in rural areas, it may take days for the police to arrive.

In rural areas, a great deal of social control takes place informally. When a criminal is caught, justice may be apportioned locally. In the case of minor theft, a thief may be beaten by a crowd. In serious disputes between families, heads of the involved kinship groups or local political leaders negotiate and the offending party is required to make restitution in money and/or land. Police may be paid to ensure that they do not investigate. Nonviolent disputes over property or rights may be decided through village councils (*panchayat*) headed by the most respected heads of the strongest kinship groups. When mediation or negotiation fails, the police may be called in and formal legal proceedings may begin. People do not conceive of the informal procedures as taking the law into their own hands.

Military Activity. The military has played an active role in the development of the political structure and climate of the country since its inception and has been a source of structure during crises. It has been involved in two coups since 1971. The only real conflict the army has encountered was sporadic fighting with the *Shakti Bahini* in the Chittagong Hill Tracts from the mid-1970s until 1998, after which an accord between the government and those tribal groups was produced.

Social Welfare and Change Programs

Bangladesh is awash in social change programs sponsored by international organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, Care, USAID, and other nations' development agencies. Those organizations support project areas such as population control, agricultural and economic development, urban poverty, environmental conservation, and women's economic development.

Nongovernmental Organizations and Other Associations

The Grameen Bank created the popular microcredit practice, which has given the poor, especially poor women, access to credit. This model is based on creating small circles of people who know and can influence each other to pay back loans. When one member has repaid a loan, another member of the group becomes eligible to receive credit. Other nongovernmental organizations include the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, Probashi, and Aat Din.

Gender Roles and Statuses

Division of Labor by Gender. Women traditionally are in charge of household affairs and are not encouraged to move outside the immediate neighborhood unaccompanied. Thus, most women's economic and social lives revolve around the home, children, and family. Islamic practice reserves prayer inside the mosque for males only; women practice religion within the home. Bangladesh has had two female prime ministers since 1991, both elected with widespread popular support, but women are not generally publicly active in politics.

Men are expected to be the heads of their households and to work outside the home. Men often do the majority of the shopping, since that requires interaction in crowded markets. Men spend a lot of time socializing with other men outside the home.

The Relative Status of Women and Men. The society is patriarchal in nearly every area of life, although some women have achieved significant positions of political power at the national level. For ordinary women, movement is confined, education is stressed less than it is for men, and authority is reserved for a woman's father, older brother, and husband.

Marriage, Family, and Kinship

Marriage. Marriage is almost always an arranged affair and takes place when the parents, particularly the father, decide that a child should be married. Men marry typically around age twenty-five or older, and women marry between ages fifteen and twenty; thus the husband is usually at least ten years older than the wife. Muslims allow polygynous marriage, but its occurrence is rare and is dependent on a man's ability to support multiple households.

A parent who decides that a child is ready to marry may contact agencies, go-betweens, relatives, and friends to find an appropriate mate. Of immediate concern are the status and characteristics of the potential in-law's family. Generally an equal match is sought in terms of family economic status, educational background, and piousness. A father may allow his child to choose among five or six potential mates, providing the child with the relevant data on each candidate. It is customary for the child to rule out clearly unacceptable candidates, leaving a slate of candidates from which the father can choose. An arrangement between two families may be sealed with an

agreement on a dowry and the types of gifts to be made to the groom. Among the educated the dowry practice is no longer prevalent.

Divorce is a source of social stigma. A Muslim man may initiate a divorce by stating "I divorce you" three times, but very strong family pressure ordinarily ensures that divorces do not occur. A divorce can be most difficult for the woman, who must return to her parent's household.

Domestic Unit. The most common unit is the patrilineally-related extended family living in a household called a *barhi*. A *barhi* is composed of a husband and wife, their unmarried children, and their adult sons with their wives and children. Grandparents also may be present, as well as patrilineally-related brothers, cousins, nieces, and nephews. The oldest man is the authority figure, although the oldest woman may exert considerable authority within the household. A *barhi* in rural areas is composed of three or four houses which face each other to form a square courtyard in which common tasks are done. Food supplies often are shared, and young couples must contribute their earnings to the household head. Cooking, however, often is done within the constituent nuclear family units.

Inheritance. Islamic inheritance rules specify that a daughter should receive one-half the share of a son. However, this practice is rarely followed, and upon a household head's death, property is divided equally among his sons. Daughters may receive produce and gifts from their brothers when they visit as "compensation" for their lack of an inheritance. A widow may receive a share of her husband's property, but this is rare. Sons, however, are custom-bound to care for their mothers, who retain significant power over the rest of the household.

Kin Groups. The patrilineal descent principle is important, and the lineage is very often localized within a geographic neighborhood in which it constitutes a majority. Lineage members can be called on in times of financial crisis, particularly when support is needed to settle local disputes. Lineages do not meet regularly or control group resources.

Socialization

Infant Care. Most women give birth in their natal households, to which they return when childbirth is near. A husband is sent a message when the child is born. Five or seven days after the birth the husband and his close male relatives visit the newborn, and a feast and ritual haircutting take place. The newborn is given an amulet that is tied around the waist, its eye sockets may be blackened with soot or makeup, and a small soot mark is applied to the infant's forehead and the sole of the foot for protection against spirits. Newborns and infants are seldom left unattended. Most infants are in constant contact with their mothers, other women, or the daughters in the household. Since almost all women breastfeed, infant and mother sleep within close reach. Infants' needs are attended to constantly; a crying baby is given attention immediately.

Child Rearing and Education. Children are raised within the extended family and learn early that individual desires are secondary to the needs of the family group. Following orders is expected on the basis of age; an adult or older child's commands must be obeyed as a sign of respect. Child care falls primarily to household women and their daughters. Boys have more latitude for movement outside the household.

Between ages five and ten, boys undergo a circumcision (*musulmani*), usually during the cool months. There is no comparable ritual for girls, and the menarche is not publicly marked. Most children begin school at age five or six, and attendance tends to drop off as children become more productive within the household (female) and agricultural economy (male). About 75 percent of children attend primary school. The higher a family's socioeconomic status, the more likely it is for both boys and girls to finish their primary educations. Relatively few

families can afford to send their children to college (about 17 percent), and even fewer children attend a university. Those who enter a university usually come from relatively well-off families. While school attendance drops off overall as the grades increase, females stop attending school earlier than do males.

Higher Education. Great value is placed on higher education, and those who have university degrees and professional qualifications are accorded high status. In rural areas the opportunities for individuals with such experience are limited; thus, most educated people are concentrated in urban areas.

Bangladesh has a number of excellent universities in its largest urban areas that offer both undergraduate through post-graduate degrees. The most prominent universities, most of which are state supported, include: Dhaka University, Rajshahi University, Chittagong University, Jahngirnagar University, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, and Bangladesh Agricultural University. Competition for university admission is intense (especially at Dhaka University) and admission is dependent on scores received on high school examinations held annually, as in the British system of education. University life in Bangladesh can be difficult. A four-year degree may actually require five to eight years to complete due to frequent university closings. The student bodies and faculties of universities are heavily politicized along national political party lines. Protests, strikes, and sporadic political party-based violence are common, as student groups play out national political agendas on their campuses and vie for members. Virtually every university student finds it easier to survive the system by becoming a member of the student wing of a political party.

While the universities are the scenes of political struggle, they are also centers of intellectual and cultural creativity. Students may obtain excellent training in all fields, including the arts, law, medicine, and engineering. Universities are also somewhat like islands where some of the ordinary rules of social interaction are relaxed. For example, male–female interaction on campuses is more open and less monitored than in society as a whole. Dance and theater presentations are common, as are academic debates.

Etiquette

Personal interaction is initiated with the greeting *Assalam Waleykum* ("peace be with you"), to which the required response is, *Waleykum Assalam* ("and with you"). Among Hindus, the correct greeting is *Nomoshkar*, as the hands are brought together under the chin. Men may shake hands if they are of equal status but do not grasp hands firmly. Respect is expressed after a handshake by placing the right hand over the heart. Men and women do not shake hands with each other. In same-sex conversation, touching is common and individuals may stand or sit very close. The closer individuals are in terms of status, the closer their spatial interaction is. Leave-taking is sealed with the phrase *Khoda Hafez*.

Differences in age and status are marked through language conventions. Individuals with higher status are not addressed by personal name; instead, a title or kinship term is used.

Visitors are always asked to sit, and if no chairs are available, a low stool or a bamboo mat is provided. It is considered improper for a visitor to sit on the floor or ground. It is incumbent on the host to offer guests something to eat.

In crowded public places that provide services, such as train stations, the post office, or bazaars, queuing is not practiced and receiving service is dependent on pushing and maintaining one's place within the throng. Open staring is not considered impolite.

Religion

Religious Beliefs. The symbols and sounds of Islam, such as the call to prayer, punctuate daily life. Bangladeshis conceptualize themselves and others fundamentally through their religious heritage. For example, the nationality of foreigners is considered secondary to their religious identity.

Islam is a part of everyday life in all parts of the country, and nearly every village has at least a small mosque and an imam (cleric). Prayer is supposed to be performed five times daily, but only the committed uphold that standard. Friday afternoon prayer is often the only time that mosques become crowded.

Throughout the country there is a belief in spirits that inhabit natural spaces such as trees, hollows, and riverbanks. These beliefs are derided by Islamic religious authorities.

Hinduism encompasses an array of deities, including Krishna, Ram, Durga, Kali, and Ganesh. Bangladeshi Hindus pay particular attention to the female goddess Durga, and rituals devoted to her are among the most widely celebrated.

Religious Practitioners. The imam is associated with a mosque and is an important person in both rural and urban society, leading a group of followers. The imam's power is based on his knowledge of the Koran and memorization of phrases in Arabic. Relatively few imams understand Arabic in the spoken or written form. An imam's power is based on his ability to persuade groups of men to act in conjunction with Islamic rules. In many villages the imam is believed to have access to the supernatural, with the ability to write charms that protect individuals from evil spirits, imbue liquids with holy healing properties, or ward off or reverse of bad luck.

Brahman priests perform rituals for the Hindu community during the major festivals when offerings are made but also in daily acts of worship. They are respected, but Hinduism does not have the codified hierarchical structure of Islam. Thus, a Brahman priest may not have a position of leadership outside his religious duties.

Rituals and Holy Places. The primary Islamic holidays in Bangladesh include: *Eid-ul-Azha* (the tenth day of the Muslim month *Zilhaj*), in which a goat or cow is sacrificed in honor of Allah; *Shob-i-Barat* (the fourteenth or fifteenth day of *Shaban*), when Allah records an individual's future for the rest of the year; *Ramadan* (the month *Ramzan*), a month-long period of fasting between dawn and dusk; *Eid-ul-Fitr* (the first day of the month *Shawal*, following the end of *Ramzan*), characterized by alms giving to the poor; and *Shob-i-Meraz* (the twenty-seventh day of *Rajab*), which commemorates the night when Mohammed ascended to heaven. Islamic holidays are publicly celebrated in afternoon prayers at mosques and outdoor open areas, where many men assemble and move through their prayers in unison.

Among the most important Hindu celebrations are *Saraswati Puja* (February), dedicated to the deity Saraswati, who takes the form of a swan. She is the patron of learning, and propitiating her is important for students. *Durga Puja* (October) pays homage to the female warrior goddess Durga, who has ten arms, carries a sword, and rides a lion. After a nine-day festival, images of Durga and her associates are placed in a procession and set into a river. *Kali Puja* (November) is also called the Festival of Lights and honors Kali, a female deity who has the power to give and take away life. Candles are lit in and around homes.

Other Hindu and Islamic rituals are celebrated in villages and neighborhoods and are dependent on important family or local traditions. Celebrations take place at many local shrines and temples.

Death and the Afterlife. Muslims believe that after death the soul is judged and moves to heaven or hell. Funerals require that the body be washed, the nostrils and ears be plugged with cotton or

cloth, and the body be wrapped in a white shroud. The body is buried or entombed in a brick or concrete structure. In Hinduism, [reincarnation](#) is expected and one's actions throughout life determine one's future lives. As the family mourns and close relatives shave their heads, the body is transported to the funeral *ghat* (bank along a river), where prayers are recited. The body is to be placed on a pyre and cremated, and the ashes are thrown into the river.

Medicine and Health Care

The pluralistic health care system includes healers such as physicians, nonprofessionally trained doctors, Aryurvedic practitioners, homeopaths, fakirs, and naturopaths. In rural areas, for non-life-threatening acute conditions, the type of healer consulted depends largely on local reputation. In many places, the patient consults a homeopath or a nonprofessional doctor who is familiar with local remedies as well as modern medical practices. Professional physicians are consulted by the educated and by those who have not received relief from other sources.

Commonly, people pursue alternative treatments simultaneously, visiting a fakir for an amulet, an imam for blessed oil, and a physician for medicine.

A nationally run system of public hospitals provides free service. However, prescriptions and some medical supplies are the responsibility of patients and their families.

Aryurvedic beliefs based on humoral theories are common among both Hindus and Muslims. These beliefs are commonly expressed through the categorization of the inherent hot or cold properties of foods. An imbalance in hot or cold food intake is believed to lead to sickness. Health is restored when this imbalance is counteracted through dietary means.

Secular Celebrations

Ekushee (21 February), also called *Shaheed Dibash*, is the National Day of Martyrs commemorating those who died defending the Bangla language in 1952. Political speeches are held, and a memorial service takes place at the *Shaheed Minar* (Martyr's Monument) in Dhaka. *Shadheenata Dibash*, or Independence Day (26 March), marks the day when Bangladesh declared itself separate from Pakistan. The event is marked with military parades and political speeches. *Poila Boishakh*, the Bengali New Year, is celebrated on the first day of the month of *Boishakh* (generally in April). Poetry readings and musical events take place. May Day (1 May) celebrates labor and workers with speeches and cultural events. *Bijoy Dibosh*, or Victory Day (16 December), commemorates the day in 1971 when Pakistani forces surrendered to a joint Bangladeshi–Indian force. Cultural and political events are held.

The Arts and Humanities

Support for the Arts. Artists are largely self-supporting. The Bangla Academy in Dhaka provides support for some artists, particularly writers and poets. Many artists sell aesthetic works that have utilitarian functions.

Literature. Most people, regardless of their degree of literacy, can recite more than one poem with dramatic inflection. Best known are the works of the two poet–heroes of the region: Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nurul Islam. Tagore was awarded the [Nobel Prize for Literature](#) in 1913. Although from West Bengal, he is respected as a Bengali who championed the preservation of Bangla language and culture. His poem "Golden Bengal" was adopted as the national anthem.

The most famous contemporary writer is Taslima Nasreen, whose novellas and essays question the Islamic justification for the customary treatment of women. Conservative religious authorities have tried to have her arrested and have called for her death for blasphemy. She lives in exile.

Graphic Arts. Most graphic arts fall within the domain of traditional production by Hindu caste groups. The most pervasive art form throughout the country is pottery, including water jugs and bowls of red clay, often with a red slip and incising. Some Hindu sculptors produce brightly painted works depicting Durga and other deities. Drawing and painting are most visible on the backs of rickshaws and the wooden sides of trucks.

Performance Arts. Bengali music encompasses a number of traditions and mirrors some of the country's poetry. The most common instruments are the harmonium, the tabla, and the sitar. Generally, classical musicians are adept at the rhythms and melodic properties associated with Hindu and Urdu devotional music. More popular today are the secular male–female duets that accompany Bengali and Hindi films. These songs are rooted in the classical tradition but have a freer contemporary melodic structure. Traditional dance is characterized by a rural thematic element with particular hand, foot, and head movements. Dance is virtually a female-only enterprise. Plays are traditionally an important part of village life, and traveling shows stop throughout the countryside. Television dramas portray family relationships, love, and economic advantage and disadvantage. Plays in the cities, particularly in Dhaka, are attended by the educated young.
