

MAHMUD  
SHAH  
QURESHI



CULTURE  
AND  
DEVELOPMENT

Dr. Mahmud Shah Qureshi, currently Professor of Cultural and Intellectual History at the Institute of Bangladesh Studies, Rajshahi University, taught for about a decade in the University of Chittagong where his last positions were Associate Professor of Bengali, Part-time Lecturer in French, Head of the Department of Languages; earlier he was in Paris for another decade; at the Sorbonne, he took his doctorate degree ( 1965 ) with *mention tres honorable* and served as the first *Conferencier and Repetiteur de Bengali* ; for a short period, he was Visiting Professor at the University of Stockholm.

During the days of Liberation war, Dr. Qureshi was Co-ordinator of Artists and Intellectuals' Resistance Committee at Chittagong and Special Envoy for Arab countries. He travelled over 50 countries covering East and West Europe, North America, Middle East, West Africa, South and South-East Asia including China.

Having interest in the study of various aspects of humanities and social sciences, Dr. Qureshi's range of publication is wide and spectacular. His two major books are, however, in French : *Etude sur l' evolution intellectuelle chez les Musulmans du Bengle*. 1957 1947 ( C. N. R. S. Mouton, Paris, 1971 ) and *Poemes mystiques Bengalis* ( UNESCO, Ed. St. Germain des Pres, Paris, 1977 ).

He worked with the Unesco on different occasions and was visiting Fellow of the Organization in 1962. He has the honour to be a member of the Presidium, Xth International Congress of Linguists (Bucharest, 1967 ); President, Asian Committee and Member, International Committee, AUPELF ( World French Universities Association). Strasbourg, 1977 ) and to receive a French Govt. award of *Chevalier dans l' Ordre des Palmes Academiques*.

Personal Copy

Mahmud Shah Qureshi

Culture  
and  
Development

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# Culture and Development

MAHMUD SHAH QURESHI  
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# CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

Mahmud Shah Qureshi

Preface by Dr. A. R. Mallick

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CULTURE  
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DEVELOPMENT

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*"Here I am restored  
to my native shore  
There is no history but of soul."*

SAINT JOHN PERSE

*'...the literary is ineluctably a historical fact...its  
historicity is a fact in our aesthetic experience'*

LIONEL TRILLING

To  
PROFESSOR SYED ALI AHSAN  
Father, Friend and Teacher  
on his sixtieth birthday  
26 March 1982,  
M. S. Q

There is no doubt that  
to my mind  
I am not a  
man of letters

The history of the Bengali  
renaissance is a story of  
struggle and sacrifice  
for the sake of the  
motherland

PROFESSOR  
Lal Mohan Ghosh  
D. Litt., B. Litt., M. A.  
D. Sc., F. R. S. E.  
D. Litt., B. Litt., M. A.  
D. Sc., F. R. S. E.

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PREFACE

The author of this book of essays, Dr. M. S. Qureshi is quite a well known figure in the academic circle of Bangladesh. After obtaining his M. A. degree from the University of Dhaka, he went to France for post-graduate studies and successfully defended a magistral thesis at the University of Paris (Sorbonne). While at Paris, he had the unique opportunity of studying with, and working under three outstanding academicians Professor Louis-Renou, the Indologist, Professor Charles Pellat, the Islamologist, Editor, Encyclopaedia of Islam, and Professor Andre Martinet, the Linguist. With this background, he took up teaching as his profession and joined the Department of Bengali, University of Chittagong as an Assistant Professor in 1968 when I was Vice-Chancellor of that University. He is currently Professor of Cultural and Intellectual History at the Institute of Bangladesh Studies, University of Rajshahi. During all these years from 1968 to 1982, I have had ample opportunity to know Dr. Qureshi personally and well, to watch his career as a teacher and to assess his academic achievements first as Vice-Chancellor, Chittagong University and then as a Member, Board of Governors, Institute of Bangladesh Studies, Rajshahi University. Professor Qureshi has, by now, established himself as an effective teacher and a serious academician.

The five essays contained in Dr. Qureshi's present book deal with some aspects of cultural and intellectual history of Bangladesh, beginning, of course, with the Muslim Situation in Bengal. The first essay is on the Bengal Renaissance and the role of the Muslims in the events and socio-economic and cultural movements of the time. A number of books and articles have, during the last few decades, appeared on

this fascinating aspect of the history of Modern Bengal, but a very few, indeed, deal adequately with the whole story of Muslim participation in the historical events and cultural development of the 19th—20th century Bengal. The studies in this field made by scholars like Amit Sen, Kazi Abdul Wadud, Dr. A. F. S. Ahmed, Dr. M. N. Islam, Dr. Safiuddin Joarder, Dr. Muinuddin Ahmed Khan and others are undoubtedly praiseworthy. In my book, *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal* ( Published in 1961 ), I had also tried to assess the educational, social, economic and political development of the Bengali Muslims, during the first one hundred years of British rule. Here, the British policies—administrative, land management and educational—down to 1856, were, on the basis of available materials, analysed and the causes of the backwardness of Muslims, as compared to other communities were, as far as possible, clearly brought out. Dr. Sufia Ahmed's book *Muslim Community in Bengal*, published a few years ago, also deals with the course and character of the development of the Muslim Community between 1884 and 1912 fairly well. There are quite a few other, who, I know, are currently working in this fascinating field. But then, a detailed, well-documented, and coherent story of the social and cultural development of the Bengali Muslims during the Nineteenth and the Twentieth centuries still remains for us, an objective. A co-operative or joint venture of scholars working in this and allied fields can, possibly, achieve this end.

It has to be frankly admitted that there are a lot of gaps in our knowledge of the subject and the field, is still open for further investigation. Dr. Qureshi's first essay may be considered to be a serious and conscious attempt to fill up one of these existing gaps. His analysis of the situation down to 1857 is remarkable objective and the reasons he advances for Muslim absence from the national scene, during the period, appear quite convincing—fortifying

further the findings of some previous scholars working in this and allied fields. He further argues, and quite meaningfully, that one can understand and appreciate the situation better if one attempts at describing the activities of the Muslims under two clear-cut phases, following the nature and course of their historic consciousness. The two phases are the Seizure of Consciousness and the Seizure of Position : the first covering the period, 1857 to 1905 and the second dealing with the period, 1905 to 1947. The approach fully conforms to the standard methodology of studying intellectual history.

The second article on Lalan, whom the author considers as an *avatar* of a folk religion, is a well-documented and interesting piece of work, full of insight and details and, as such, may be considered, in many respects, to be more informative than the author's previous work in French. The reference added to the article clearly demonstrates that the author has left no significant literature on the subject unattended.

The third paper on Tagore and the development of modern Bengali literature, perhaps, deserved more care and attention than it has received. Written in 1961, at the request of the UNESCO, and meant for foreigners, it required, perhaps, a little more updating. But then, even in its present shape, it is quite interesting and informative.

The fourth article on Bangladesh cartoons is very much a useful study in that it is, perhaps, the first serious article of its kind, dealing with this hitherto neglected side of an art-form in Bangladesh. It would have been much more helpful to readers if some examples of cartoons could have been incorporated within the framework of the paper.

The fifth article on *Kantha* as folk art and its possible role in rural development is suggestive and informative. The subject



has its anthropological side which the author has not ignored, It deserves, very well, the attention of specialists in the field.

From the comments I have made above, it is quite clear that Professor Qureshi's present publication is not a comprehensive research work dealing with any particular theme ; nor is it a book telling us a coherent story of the cultural development of a people over a particular period of time. It is a book of essays or a collection of papers, prepared at different times on a few aspects of our vast cultural history and should be treated as such. I have, however, valid reasons to hope that this small but significant book will considerably help the readers to understand and appreciate better the problems and issues to which their attention have been invited by Prof. Qureshi. I also hope that the essays presented by the author will help to arouse the much-needed and much-desirable interest of our scholars for further research and investigation on various aspects of our intellectual and cultural history.

I congratulate Professor Qureshi for his present work, *Culture and Development*, which I consider to be quite valuable and thought-provoking.

Dhaka  
15 January, 1983

A. R. Mallick  
Professor of History  
Jahangirnagar University

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No fruitless attempt is made here to define culture. The author would rather like to view culture as a moving equilibrium and not as a storehouse of accumulated riches. In the Bangladesh context, despite poverty, illiteracy and technological under development a definite intellectual evolution has had taken place, on the basis of its heritage of the past, since late Nineteenth century through the mid-Twentieth ; and for the period, 1947-1971, an age of socio-cultural transformation could also be discerned. Thereafter, it is the era of "revolutions." No one would doubt that cultural designs become special factors in the process of development.

*Culture and Development*, this first book of mine in English contains five essays written on occasions described below ; the essays, however, deal with aspects of cultural and intellectual history of Bangladesh and attempts to provide its readers certain hitherto unobserved perspectives and precise information.

The first essay on the role of Muslims during the "Bengal Renaissance" was presented at Rajshahi University Institute of Bangladesh Studies (IBS) seminar in 1976. It was included in the "IBS seminar volume—1" : Safiuddin Joarder & David Kopf ( eds. ) : *Reflections on Bengal Renaissance*, ( Dhaka, Bangladesh Book International, 1977, pp. 90-102 )

The second essay, "Lalan Shahi Order of Bangladesh : Perspectives in Folk Religion" is a slightly revised version of a paper presented at the International Seminar on Folk Culture held at Cuttack, Orissa (1978) under the auspices of the Institute of Oriental and Orissa Studies with Dr. Ruth Inge Heinze of the University of California as Chairperson. I am indebted to my Institute for acceptance of my research

project on the topic whose field data have been used in this paper. My thanks are due to all associated with the IBS and the Ford Foundation. I am also grateful to the Bangladesh Shilpakala (Fine Arts) Academy authorities for its inclusion in their English journal, *Shilpakala*, (vol. 3, 1980 pp. 30-40), along with a few photographs on matters described in the text.

The third essay in order, "Tagore and Modern Bengali Literature" is the first that I have ever written in a foreign language and has an interesting history behind. In 1961, the late regretted Professor Pierre Meile commissioned me to contribute a paper on the subject in a grand meeting to be held in his prestigious National School of Living Oriental Languages as part of the French National Commemoration during Tagore Centenary all over the world. I wrote the paper in French and presented it in the conference presided over by H. E. the Nawab Ali Yavar Jang, Indian Ambassador to France. Dr. J. K. Balbir of Unesco and Professor A. Guimbretiere of the Sorbonne were the two other paper readers. Later, through the courtesy of M. Roger Caillois, the then Director of Literary section of the UNESCO <sup>in reached</sup> and at the desk of Mr. Sandy Koffler, Editor of the *Unesco Courier* who wanted that I must also do the English version. The paper was then published in the 8-language editions of the *Unesco Courier* (Dec., 1961). Some might feel that the article is dated. My answer is that I wanted to keep distance from the heroes and events of an immediate history and to stop vaguely at 1947.

The fourth essay is on an unusual subject, "Cartoons : Mirror of Bangladesh Society." *The Asian Culture* magazine No. 25, January, 1980 quarterly journal of the Asian Cultural Centre for Unesco, Tokyo, published the paper along with several cartoons supplied by me.

~ written for a special  
issue  
Cartoon number of

The fifth essay, "Folk Art as Means of Rural Development : The Case Study of Kantha in Bangladesh" was prepared for the Indian Folklore Congress : 1980 ( scheduled to be held at Annamalai University, Tamilnadu ) out of the materials of a collaborative research project developed chiefly by Dr. Raymond Lee Owens, at that time visiting Professor of Anthropology at my Institute. The Congress was postponed but I had the opportunity to present its succinct at the 1981 conference of the Institute of Social Research and Applied Anthropology, Calcutta, held in its field station at Bidisha, Midnapore (West Bengal, India). The paper has also been published in an earlier version with many colour photographs in *Bangladesh Quarterly*, (vol. I No. 2, December, 1980, pp. 4-11) showing R. L. Owens as co-author. Dr. Owens had presented a similar paper at the American Anthropological Association Meetings, held at Washington in December, 1980 with me as co-author. For that paper, responsibilities are his and for this mine.

Many other name occur in my memory, for the help I received at various stages of writing and publishing the essays. I wish to record here my gratitude to Professor Syed Ali Ahsan and Mr. Ivan Kats (who used to encourage me a lot when I met them many a times in Paris during the early years of the Sixties and have continued their support for me till now. I am also grateful to Dr. A. R. Mallick, Professor Emeritus of History, Jahangir Nagar University, Dhaka for kindly providing a preface at a very short span of time.

Syed Ali Kazem, Assistant Director of Research and Publication, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, Dhaka, has given hard labour in seeing through the phases of publication of the book. Ms. Shahida Perveen, a research student of mine, has assisted me with the index.

For inclusion of quotations in the book either with prior permission or not, acknowledgement is due to their respective authors and publishers.

Despite our all-out efforts we cou'd not avoid errors and mistakes which finally flourished due to our earlier intention to keep Indic orthographs but ultimately print the text without diacritical marks.

Institute of Bangladesh Studies  
Rajshahi University  
August, 1983.

Mahmud Shah Qureshi

### SEIZURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND POSITION : ROLE OF MUSLIMS IN THE BENGAL RENAISSANCE

Although on a different philosophical perspective, the renowned French writer Albert Camus (1913-1960) found himself before a dilemma from which he could never free himself. This has been expressed very lucidly : 'L'homme n'est pas entierement coupable, il n'a pas commence l'Histoire ; ni tout-a-fait innocent, puisqu'il l'a continue'.<sup>1</sup> I suggest at the outset that the Bengali Muslims—who are both Bengalis and Muslims—might find themselves in a similar dilemma : they are not entirely guilty for they had not started the Bengal Renaissance ; nor are they altogether innocent, for they have continued it. This dilemma is perhaps akin to the problems of human existence, individually and collectively—hence, matters of History. The Bengali Muslims, after passing the good old days of mid-eighteenth century suddenly discovered that they have not only lost the political and economic position but also social consciousness. The historical drama, which was being created and played since the early nineteenth-century, had for some time no significant role to offer them ; they were rather searching for an appropriate role.

Let me present some cases of parallel examples with their immediate neighbour, the Hindus. Here perhaps an explanation is needed regarding the entity of the Bengali Muslims. It should be noted that during the epoch-making historical phases of the years between 1857-1905, we see almost no tentatives for considering the Hindus and Muslims to bind into one Bengali society, nor do we observe any significant occasion where the two great communities jointly participated in historical events. During this period, their social evolution followed their own ways, that is to say, without much regard for a futuristic *national* interest. Besides, Hindu entrepreneurs, traders, middlemen, teachers got enthusiastically involved in the British efforts to establish their rule over India. They found this beneficial to themselves for the present with a better prospect for the future. The Muslims, on the other hand, could not reconcile themselves from the shock caused by the changes in the administration, and for about one hundred years (1757-1857), they were almost totally absent from the national scene of British India. Far-reaching changes were being introduced by the new rulers (the diarchy in 1765, change of the capital from Murshidabad to Calcutta in 1768, the famine in 1769, the Permanent Settlement in 1793, the Resumption Proceedings, the change of Persian as the court language in 1837 and the like) which caused definite threats to their existence but which they had to accept reluctantly or with passive resistance. As A. F. Salahuddin Ahmed aptly said: "Bereft of power and glory, without the means to retrieve their dignities, many Muslims turned introspectively to the solace of the spirit and sought refuge in religion."<sup>2</sup> Wahabi inspired Faraidi, Tariqiya and similar movements gained ground during these years following the general belief that only pristine Islam could save the Muslims from their present downfall. A spirit of rebellion persisted and British-dominated India was declared *Dar-al-Harb* (abode of War). Professor Ahmed maintains that these movements were almost wholly confined to the lower

orders. The poor weavers and peasants—the illiterate folk—fell easy victims to fanatical propaganda. The leadership also came from the poorer classes.<sup>3</sup>

But what happened to the *ashraf*—the feudal nobility and those who had attachment with it and the theologians? Proud of their foreign blue blood, happy with their knowledge of sacred languages, they would prefer to direct their intellectual efforts rather in Arabic, Persian, Urdu and even in English. But they would undertake no effort to learn Bengali; nor would they carry on their daily discourses in this local language. We must not forget what a noted sociologist said: "In the nineteenth century and in the early part of the twentieth century, the *Sharif* (nobles) Muslims in Bengal tried their utmost to maintain their caste-pride by practicing a sort of endogamy among themselves and by abstaining from interdining or mixing on equal terms with the lower classes."<sup>4</sup>

Another factor is to be considered which would further explain the precarious situation of the Muslims in Bengal. For any significant social, political and cultural development, it is well-known that each nation develops some economic and cultural centres<sup>5</sup>. After the destruction of Muslim cultural centres like Murshidabad and Dacca, Calcutta was steadily being developed into a great metropolis. This coastal city had never known Muslim domination; Nawab Siraj-ud-Dowla seized it for a brief period in 1756 and gave it a short-lived Muslim name, Alinagar. However, Calcutta had never been a Muslim stronghold. Apart from the *Madrasa* established by Warren Hastings as early as 1781, the city has had no significant Muslim edifice until the Grand Mosque which was built in 1842 by Prince Ghulam Muhammad, son of Tipu Sultan. Hence, the slowly and poorly developing Muslim middle class of Bengal could never find during its existence a foundation, a *terre d' election* in Calcutta and it is amidst great difficulties that it could

undertake to elevate itself intellectually.<sup>6</sup> Both this class and the leading aristocracy formed a class structurally and functionally different from middle-class Hindus who were deeply engaged in a total social renewal, popularly known as the Bengal Renaissance. In one of our earlier studies,<sup>7</sup> we preferred to call this phenomenon of Bengal Renaissance under two epithets namely, Hinduist reformism and Rebirth or revitalization of Bengali Letters. Following Professor Davia Kopf,<sup>8</sup> we can, however, accept the term *Renaissance* for Bengal's over-all development which could be viewed as a global process of historic consciousness of a people. Needless to say that this constitutes a recent factor of modern history i. e., to rediscover oneself on the basis of one's remote and immediate past. In the context of Bengal this had been an exclusive affair of the Hindus for the whole of the nineteenth century and even during the first twenty years of the twentieth century when the Bengal Renaissance according to its historians, had lost its creative forces.

The characteristic Hindu view in this regard is expressed in two very lucid opinions formulated by two highly reputed intellectuals during the last quarter of the past century; Rajnarayan Bose, author of *Hindu Dharmar Shresthatva Bisayak Prastab*, (An Exposition concerning the superiority of the Religion of the Hindus, Calcutta, 1873) wrote: "We shall participate, as far as possible with the Muslims and other Indians as regards to political and other aspects of life. But just as a peasant cultivates a small portion of selected land and not the entire country, our field of activity shall be the Hindu society. We shall consecrate our life for the fraternal reunion of the Bengalis, the Hindusthanis, the Punjabis, the Rajputs, the Marhattas and the Madrasis for forming a Hindu soul and to find the way to liberate ourselves"<sup>9</sup>. In the same vein Bhudev Mukhopadhyaya wrote: "With the passing of time, it is quite possible that the Muslims will be identified as a caste of the Hindu society;

as a matter of fact, the Jains and Sikhs shall also be considered that way". The last named intellectual eulogized the egalitarian forces of Islam and prophetically observed that the Muslims may, however, form exclusive 'self-defence association' (*Atma-Raksini Sabha*) because they are ever in possession of the living memories of their past glory and their domination in India), they entertain an extra-ordinary sympathy among themselves"<sup>10</sup>.

With these preliminaries, it may now be possible to understand why we would like to put the Muslims vis-a-vis the Bengal Renaissance into two clear-cut phases following the nature of their historic consciousness and their role in shaping the history itself. These two phases are:

1857—1905 as Seizure of consciousness

1905—1947 as Seizure of Position

Despite the obvious schematization of this division, the two phases correlate each other as phases of social, economic, religious, political, educational and literary evolution among the Bengali Muslims and this has utmost relevance in the study of their intellectual history.

The Muslims had a great stake in the upheaval of 1857 though it was not limited to any particular community<sup>11</sup>. Although the intellectual movements started few years later, this was the date which ushered in a new year, for it marked a change of policy.<sup>12</sup>

Immediately, a different course of action was to be initiated; the Muslims had to have a basis for reconciliation which was found in the *fatwa* (religious decree) of Maulana Karamat Ali (died in 1873) made under the good offices of Nawab Abdul Latif (1828-1893). The *Fatwa* declared that India was *dar al-Islam* (abode of peace) where the holy war was not a religious necessity. It was published in the *Abstract of the proceedings of the Muhammedan Literary Society of Calcutta on Wednesday 23rd November, 1870. Being a*

*Lecture by Maulana Karamat Ali of Jaunpur on a Question of Muhammadan Law, involving the duty of Muhammedans in British India towards the Ruling Power* (Calcutta, 1871.) The celebrated civilian-writer on Indian problems, Dr. W. W. Hunter recommends this work to those who, to quote him, "doubt about the intellectual acumen of the Bengali Muslims".<sup>13</sup>

Nawab Abdul Latif, through his Muhammedan Literary Society and through his untiring action for English education brought a certain degree of consciousness for modern Western education and ideals among the Muslim aristocracy and to some extent to the other classes. Within four years of its foundation, the Literary Society could count five hundred members and would meet monthly at its founder's Calcutta residence to discuss the importance of history, history of civilizations, discovery of America, development of Commerce and Management, fundamental laws of Islam and various other subjects. The transactions used to take place in Urdu, in English, sometimes in Persian and in Arabic; only after 1880, it rarely used Bengali but it left no Bengali publication.<sup>14</sup>

Another significant personality was Sayeed Amir Ali (1849-1928). A longtime judge in the Calcutta High Court, he founded the Central National Mohammedan Association in 1876 with certain political aims and aspirations. His educational policies were more radical as he advocated for the suppression of *Madrassas* by creating Anglo-Muslim Colleges. Amir Ali, however, left lasting legacy through his writings on Islam—its history, law, ethics and, above all, its spirit.

Two central Indian leaders of Urdu-speaking Muslim community, namely, Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan (1815-1898) and Maulana Shibli Numani (1851-1914) exercised great influence towards the end of this phase and more specifically in the next phase.

Writings and debates of religion-oriented intellectuals of the period reveal the primordial aspect of the seizure of consciousness among the Muslims. Either in their individual efforts or group contributions, Mohammad Naimuddin (1832-1908; *Zobdat-al-Machael*, 1873), Shaikh Abdus Subhan (*Hindu-Mussalman* 1888), Shaikh Abdur Rahim (1859-1931; *Hazrat Muhammader Jivan-Charit O Dharmaniti*, Pandit Reazuddin Mashhadi (1859-1919; *Samaj-O-SangsKarak, AgniKukkut*), etc. Munshi Reazuddin Ahmad (1861-1933; *Amar Sangsar Jivan*), Munshi Meherullah (1861-1907; whom Professor Muhammad Abdul Hai called, with a little exaggeration no doubt, "Rammohun of Muslim Bengal")<sup>15</sup> and John Jamiruddin left a considerable legacy of communal awareness.

Periodicals like *Islam-Tattva*, *Sudhakar*, *Akhbare Islamiya*, *Ahmadi*, *Islam Pracharak*, *Koh-i-Noor*, *Pracharak*, *Lahari*, *Noor-ul-Iman*, *Mihir*, *Mihir-O-Sudhakar*, *Hafiz*, *Nava-Noor* and few others had definitely more positive and lasting influence over its even-gowing readers than what can ordinarily be expected from any such publication.

Individualistic expression of the seizure of consciousness could be found among the creative writers like Meer Musharraff Hussain (1860-1933), Mozammal Huq (1860-1933), Shaikh Fazlul Karim (1882-1936), Kaykobad (1857-1951) and Hamid Ali (1874-1950) who flourished during this phase. Glorification of the past and the problems of the present made it difficult for them to think clearly about their future at least upto the arrival of the poet-soldier, Kazi Nazrul Islam just after the World War-I in which he had taken part. Although the larger idea of progress and synthesis was absent in most of them, the state of the seizure of consciousness is markedly present in their deeds or writings. Examples from two eloquent intellectuals would clarify this. An urbanized intellectual in the person of Abdul Karim, Deputy Inspector of Public Instruction of Bengal, Member of the Asiatic

Society and a Fellow of the University of Calcutta had expressed himself in this way :

"Indeed the English Government has proved a great blessing to the Mussalmans as well as to all other nationalities inhabiting this country.

"Experience should have taught the Mussalman leaders that the Mussalmans had less cause to fear conversion through education than any other community in India. Islam is founded on principles that are too strong to be easily shaken. It has been less affected by Western education and civilisation than any other system."<sup>16</sup>

Another intellectual, Munshi Muhammad Reazuddin Ahmad who travelled from his home in Barisal to Calcutta in 1883 to settle there until his death in 1933 left a significant passage about his village in his autobiographical essay, *Amar Samgsar Jivan* :

"If, at this time (during these days) after dusk (evening), somebody had passed through one of these Muslim villages, it would have attracted his sight and his ears by witnessing in every house people discussing moral codes, religious topics, practical teachings, worldly progress, national development, unity and fraternity, methods of prayer and fasting, religious lesson, cultivation of knowledge through reading and writing, sounds of recitation from the *Qur'an*, some kind of artistic (artisanal) enterprises. In the bygone days one would hear rarely an *Azan* (call for prayer) before *Namaz* (daily prayers) from any village but now the sweet sounds of *Azan* would penetrate in the depth of the ears from almost all the villages. Now one does not see or hear about the trouble and danger of the thieves, robbers, cheats and similar antisocial elements or the vulgar musical medleys of perverted youths. Valuable objects are left outside and nobody touches them. Even the *cowboys* (shepherds) do not utter any lies or vulgar

words during these days. In the past, many ladies would send *Sinni* (offerings) to the tombs of *Pir* (spiritual leaders); but these prejudices and anti-religious activities have completely been vanished. Now everybody talks about religion, duties, about earning money by legal means, about fellow feeling and fraternal atmosphere among each other, about agriculture, commerce and industry, about development in the field by education, about the aspects to be known profitably from the Islamic religious codes. One would not hear from them any discussions regarding others or blasphemous bogus stories or rumours. Previously, seventy-five percent of the Muslims in the country would not put caps on their heads but now not a single elderly person would be seen without a cap. In the past many peasants would wear only *loincloth* which proved their utter uncivilized manners. In lieu of that, now the poor ones, have started wearing coarse *gamcha* (a kind of towel). Many foppish Muslims have opted for *lungi* and *tahband* leaving *Dhuti* (Hindu dress). No gentleman would now remain barebodied—they wear almost always *pirhan* and *kurta* (long shirts).

"There have been more uses of *binama* (exchange registration) than before. If somebody is in danger, everyone would feel that it is his own danger. If somebody is sick, Muslims of his own village or the neighbourhood would take care of him. If somebody faces any financial trouble, well-to-do people would offer him *Karze Hasana* (loan whose repayment is not binding unless the receiver is solvent enough). On the other hand, the receiver of the loan himself remains vigilant to repay it at the earliest opportunity. Nobody plans to cheat other. Everyone behaves well even with the Hindus. Learned Hindus have been extremely happy to see such unprecedented change among the Muslims. But in the eyes of Hindus with selfish and complicated mentality this scene is very painful. They used to treat Muslims as slaves, to befool them by cheating and to forfeit their fortunes.

For the good reason that this could not be practised any further, there has been heart burning among this type of narrow-minded Hindus. In the past, the Muslims who could not put straw on his roof, have already constructed houses of corrugated iron sheet. One would be enchanted with joy to see the neatness and cleanliness of these houses<sup>17</sup>.

Although one would be tempted to question the validity of this idyllic picture of Bengali Muslim village life by one of the prominent intellectuals having religious bent of mind, the argument can however be advanced that certain significant social changes did take place due to cross-currents of cultural and social ideas and events.

The next four decades of Muslim history in Bengal could be put under the epithet of *Seizure of Position*. The period covers more precisely the years, 1905-1947. Space does not permit a full analytic description of this contemporary phase; instead, a synoptic view of how one can organize the study of the historical development of events and ideas through the last days of British Raj may be indicated. During this period, the situation of the Muslims of Bengal was not much different from those of other parts of India in general and the period itself can be sub-divided into three phases often mixed with each other: Political Participation (i. e. political co-operation with the British administration which lasted until World War-I), Altruist Adventure (i. e. search for community identification either *pan Islamic* or *all-Indian*) and the crisis at the Hour of Decision (due to social, political and constitutional differences among the groups involved during the years, 1928-1947)<sup>18</sup>.

Changes in the realm of ideas are specially significant and these occurred in many cases, as consequences of the socio-political events. We have already mentioned the name of Kazi Nazrul Islam, who, in fact brought a new lease to

the moribound ideals of the so-called Bengal Renaissance on the one hand and the Muslim socio-political renewal on the other. Actually, during this period an ever-increasing number of Muslim writers and intellectuals came forward in the world of letters with renewed vigour and freshness. While in the previous period, i. e. before 1905, the contributions of the Muslim writers could be divided into two parallel trends: one could easily be termed as Muslim Literature (although not having separatist ideals) and the other in the domain of the typical new-literature of the time with certain anachronistic marks. But no one writer would have followed one trend categorically. This may be attributed to the absence of liberal ideas among these individuals. The twentieth century, however, offered them ample vision of progress but their inert dynamism and the complicated Indian political situation led them again to religious, doctrinal and ideological conflicts. The paradox starts again, for, their literature still pretends to be *Muslim*. It is, therefore, legitimate to analyse the Muslim works by classifying the literary personalities according to their personal tendencies; four groups may be enumerated thus:

1. Those who concentrated on Islamic themes—Sayyid Ismail Hussain Shiraji (1880-1931), Maulana Akram Khan (1868-1967) and Maulana Muniruzzaman Islamabadi (1878-1950) are the three outstanding personalities in this category;

2. Those who drew their inspiration from Bengali traditions mainly; Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1969), Jasimuddin (1904-1976), Kazi Abdul Wadud (1894-1969) and the Kemalists (i. e. participants or followers of *Buddhir Mukti Andolan* or the *Shikha-Panthei* intellectuals) who conscientiously carried out the spirit of the so-called Bengal Renaissance;

3. Those who balanced or equivocated between the above two of schools of thought; there can not be a long list, to name



a few : Lutfar Rahman (1889-1936), Begum Rokeya (1880-1932), Kazi Imdadul Huq (1882-1926), Golam Mostafa (1895-1964), Shahadat Hussain (1893-1953), S. Wajed Ali (1890-1951), Muhammad Wajed Ali (1888-1954), Abdul Karim Shahitya-Visharad (1896-1963) and Muhammad Shahidullah (1885-1969) ;

4. Those who attempted to relate a more universal modern culture to the local traditions—Humayun Kabir (1906-1969), Abu Sayeed Ayyub and Syed Mujtaba Ali, Syed Waliullah (1922-1971) are the four best representatives of this type.

This kind of grouping may be found to be unhappy, but it serves as an introduction to the problem of studying an intellectual history. Chronologically speaking, it has some relevance with the reality as the first group flourished during first and second decade chiefly, the second group made themselves noteworthy during the second and third decades of the century ; the third group subsisted during the whole period in question and the fourth group, finally, was revealed at the beginning of the World war II.

At this time or a little later (1942), two younger groups started, simultaneously at Calcutta and Dacca, an intellectual and literary movement avowedly to generate a cultural renaissance and to put the ideals of *Pakistanism* into national consciousness. The Calcutta group styled their forum as *Purba Pakistan Renaissance Society* and the men behind it were three noted journalist-writers Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, Mujibur Rahman Khan and Abul Mansur Ahmed. The Dacca team was under the banner of *Purba Pakistan Sahitya Sangsad* and its chief organisers and enthusiasts were Syed Sajjad Hussain, Syed Ali Ahsan, Mazharul Hoque, Abdul Razzak, Syed Ali Ashraf, Sardar Fazlul Karim, and Munir Chowdhury who had assiduously been trying to invent creative designs and cultural values for growing Muslim intelligentsia.<sup>9</sup> These two associations worked until 1947 and their influence diminished after the creation of Pakistan ; but the birth of a new consciousness

contributed to the psychological formation of the following generations of Pakistan *elite* intellectuals of East Bengal. This attitude has been put to test in the movements of 1948, 1952 and 1954 in favour of their mother tongue and their political autonomy.

The whole Pakistan period upto 1971 could also be viewed in the similar way where the intellectual life had developed as rapidly as before and it could neither get rid of the complexity of the socio-political conjecture nor the repercussions of the economic situation. Consequently, the thought-currents remained confused and undecided ; the intellectual evolution itself, despite enormous socio-cultural transformation in recent years, presents lesser creative forces than it seems at the first sight. Acceptance of humanism in its wider perspectives, the idea of progress and secularization in life and art remain even now as problematic for Muslim intellectuals as it had been for their Hindu counterparts even at the peak period of the so-called Bengal Renaissance.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Man is not entirely guilty because he has not started History ; he is not altogether innocent because he continued it.
2. A. F. Salahuddin Ahmed, *Social Ideas and Social Changes in Bengal 1818-1885*, (Leiden : E. J. Brill, 1965).
3. *Ibid* p. 18.
4. A. K. Nazmul Karim, *Changing Society in India and Pakistan, A Study in Social Change and Social Stratification* (Dacca, 2nd ed ; 1961), pp. 135-36.
5. Jacques Le Goff : *Les Intellectuals au Moyen Age* (Paris, 1960 ; Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (London, 1938).
6. According to N. Karim and other sociologists, this class was actually developed after 1906.
7. *Etude sur L'evolution intellectuelle chez les Musulmans du Bengale 1857-1947* (Paris : Mouton, 1971) ; see, for example, pp. 36, 39-40.
8. *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance* (Berkeley : The University of California Press, 1969) ; "The Bengal Renaissance :

- Hindu Genesis and the Question of Muslim Participation" and other articles.
9. Quoted by Kazi Abdul Wadud, *Banglar Jagaran* (Calcutta, 1956), p. 127.
  10. *Samajik Pravandha* (Calcutta, 1892) ; See especially pp. 9-12.
  11. Julien Vinson, *L'Inde et le mahometisme* (Paris, 1906). p. 21.
  12. Andre Guimbretiere, "*Le Reformisme Musulman en Inde*", *Orient* (Paris, 1960), 4e trim. no. 16, p. 15.
  13. *The Indian Muslims* (London, 1971), p. 113.
  14. About Nawab A. Latif one may profitably consult, F.D. Bradley-Birt, *Twelve Men of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century* (Calcutta, 1910) and two recent studies by Enamul Huq and Mohar Ali. It seems that Muhammedan Literary Society did not receive the attention it deserved from the scholars in this field. Founded in 1863, it remained quite active until the death of its founder and gained a fresh lease of life during the anti-partition agitation of 1905 by trying to keep the Muslims out of it (cf. Julien Vinson, "*Le mouvement Swadeci*" *Revue du monde Musulman*) Paris, Nov. 1906). During the twenties, the Society transformed itself into Muslim Institute and started publishing a periodical *Muslim Review* under the editorship of S. Khuda Baksh, the renowned Islamologist.
  15. *Bangla Sahityer Itibritta* (Dacca : Dacca University Press, 1956), pp. 16, 125 and 128-129.
  16. *Muhammedan Education in Bengal* ; (Calcutta, 1900) ; p. 5.
  17. Quoted in *Adhunik Gadya-Sahgraha* (Dacca ; Bangla Academy, 1369 B. S.), pp. 26-27.
  18. The most appropriate references for this question from this angle are perhaps the two studies of two Qureshis both published by Mouton at the Hague (1962) and Paris (1971) : Ishtiaq Hussain Qureshi's *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Sub-Continent* (610—1947) ; *A Brief Historical Analysis* is a more general study and the present author's already cited work (cf. footnote 7) apper- tains to Bengal's cultural and intellectual history (pp. 99-125).
  19. For further details, one can consult the monthly review *Mohammadi*, Vol. 17, nos. 10-11, the entire issue was on this question ; also, M. S. Qureshi, *Etude, etc. op. cit.* pp. 156—158.

## LALAN SHAHI ORDER OF BANGLADESH : PERSPECTIVES IN FOLK RELIGION

The classical definition of mysticism as 'the immediate experience of oneness with Ultimate Reality'. (Encyclopaedia Britannica : 1966 ; 15/1129) may be said to be exemplified through the extraordinary development of mystic orders in Bangladesh. From time immemorial, this country has witnessed the birth and death of numerous popular religions which expressed rather exquisitely the intense feeling of their mystic adherents. It is well-known that during the middle ages, Islam penetrated deep into this land more through the *Sufi* saints than the invaders and traders. (Arnold : 1961, 280). Legacies of over eight hundred years of contact between Arabo-Persian and Hindu-Buddhist mystic orders left its bearing on the cultural and intellectual history of Bangladesh. Some of the mystic sects of higher religions and most of the schools of syncretist ideals have not been systematically studied, and by now many of them already disappeared or integrated with the influential neighbouring communities like Hindu or Muslim or might have lost creative forces. Even today we do not have detailed study of minor but

important mystic orders. One of such is *Lalan Shahi* order which during its century-old existence since the middle of the past century may be said to have a record of sufficient contribution to our spiritual and cultural life.

### The Baul Riddle

Like most of the mystic schools of local origin, the *Lalan Shahi* order has no literature, no records of its own except several hundred eloquent, esoteric and exquisite songs of Fakir Lalan Shahi and perhaps of a few other disciples of the master. But as Lalan is widely acclaimed as 'the most reputed of *baul* composers' (Das Gupta : 1962 : 160) and his followers as ardent members of the *baul* community, it becomes necessary to pass through the riddle to establish its autonomous existence to show the apparent relation between the different aspects of what we may term 'folk religion'. This means that we have to explain expressedly who are *bauls* and what is *baulism* and redefine its scope.

Traditionally, the *baul* would be identified as a group of unlettered village bards and mystic singers who as Das Gupta would say "belong to the lower ranks of both the Muslim and the Hindu communities of Bengal and they are composed partly of house holders and mainly of mendicants. The *bauls* belonging to the Hindu community are generally *Vaisnavite* in their faith and those belonging to the Muslim community are generally *Sufi-istic* and in both the schools the emphasis is on the mystic conception of divine love" (Ibid).

The word *baul* is a very confusing one among the Bengali mystic jargons, and it has at least half a dozen legitimate definitions. Literally, 'mad', 'impatient', 'affected by wind-disease', 'detached to worldiness', 'one of the *Vajra-Yani* school', 'a seeker of Truth', the *baul* appears to a Bengali, as a sympathetic singer who, through his search for 'the Man of the Heart' (*Maner Manus*) reveals many

secrets of being in this world of short-lived existence ; even now-a-days, one would find a *baul* in a train or in a ferry-boat singing in an evocative crying voice : 'Pray Lord, carry me to the other bank', or 'Reach me to the destiny' and so forth. These evocations with double or triple meaning—i.e. apparent or plebeian; literary/symbolic and esoteric suggestions have a kind of magical action on popular sentiments ; they are instantly transcended as much for the words as for the accompanying music of stringed instruments, *Ektara*, *Dotara*, and *Gubgubi*.

Rabindranath Tagore was greatly impressed by the haunting melody and simple *baul* expression of unparalleled beauty. He often used *baul* themes in his poetry, music, novels, short stories or philosophical essays. He never kept it a secret, rather felt proud of this discovery, this return to sources. As early as on 21st April, 1921, while visiting Paris he pronounced a discourse in English entitled, 'A Popular Religion of India : The Bauls' (1921 : 33). The poet once humorously used the epithet of 'Rabindra Baul' to designate himself and there are many others at home and abroad to consider him as 'the greatest Baul of Bengali' (Dimock : 1959, XIX) but these assertions along with the fact that Rabindranath took many other courses to publicize the *baul* ideas and *baul* songs do not convince us as whole truth. Tagore's *Sadhana* was identical but not, however, the same.

The *baul's* nonconformism in social and religious matters along with a spontaneous and poetic diction would attract any one to him. But the *baulism*, as it would appear through research and discussion during the last half century or more constitutes a set of non-Vedic belief and practices which had been coloured with mediaeval synchctonsim, itself an offshoot of Islamic interference with local Bhaktism (Qureshi : 1977).

Nearer to the 15th Century Indian mystics, the *bauls* cannot, however, be compared along with masters like Kabir, Rajjab

Dadu or those who had been their predecessors in their own country. The baulism which appeared under the traits of a folk religion having its origins from the past common sources of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam, reposes mainly on Tantrism for its ascetic practices. But can we hold this view any longer? Of late, the question has arisen in the minds of many whether so many different sects or subjects with divergent rituals and practices can be grouped under one denomination. This has actually been accentuated by the experiences gathered during our field trips, although we ignore the generalist and tendentious writings about these mystic sects. The Fakirs, Rasik Vaisnabas, and the devotees who are called bauls do not really constitute one religious sect; they rather belong to several folk religions despite certain global traits of baulism in them. Sudhir Chakrabarty (1974, 482), discusses three such "branches" (still meaning *one* folk religion of Bengal?)—*Kartabhaja*, *Sahebghani*, *Balarami* who, in his opinion, are not bauls at all. The importance of the local environment, as particularly available in a district like Nadiya which was divided in 1947 with the Great Divide resulting the subdivision of Kustia forming part of erst-while East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, has also been emphasized by various writers on the subject. Chakravarty (*ibid*), however, enumerated no less than five 'important' folk religions which flourished in the soil of Nadiya. The five folk religions are in the general baul vein as they remain syncretic par excellence: The *Kartabhaja* of Goshpara, supposed to have, as its preceptor, one Muslim Aule *Chad*; *Sahebghani* or *Dindayaler Ghar*, another order of mystics was said to have been started by a Muslim lady; *Khushi Bishvasi* order also founded by a Muslim guru of the same name; *Balarami* order founded by a low caste *Hadi* of the same name; then, of course, our *Lalan Shahi* order. Interestingly enough, all these folk religions rose and developed almost at the same time i.e., in the 19th Century. Although some may have originated in the 18th Century or earlier and may still show their vigorous presence at the time

of yearly *Mahotsab* (grand celebrations), it is during the last century that most of the poet-prophets of these popular religions appeared and literally flooded our folk with their creation and kept them in ecstatic feat. Paradoxically, this coincided with a period in our history called Bengal Renaissance where, it is needless to mention, these preceptors would have no place.

The term 'baul' has been employed and can still be employed for those who do not find themselves functionally grouped by dogma, temple, or any holy scripture. The pantheistic and mystic attitude of such people makes one search for a master (*murshid/guru*) who initiates him and lets him pass some tests before considering as a devotee. It is, therefore, legitimate to think that a sort of social stratification has been established where a famous *guru* and his disciples are united. Singing may be considered as the basic mode of *prayer* of one or the other group but certain songs having 'baul' characteristics may not be accepted by them as ideal or proper to their *sadhana* although they may listen to them or even sing them at times. During our field researches we observed that most of the members of *Lalan Shahi* Order do neither confirm nor deny that they are bauls; in the localities of their frequency they are contemptuously called as 'nedar fakir' or 'beshara fakir' ('Head-Shaven' fakirs or irreligious fakirs) and they name their songs as *bhav-gan* (metaphysical songs), *murshida-gan* rather than *baul sangit* (songs); so, calling them sufi as some would prefer to do now to look them more 'Muslim', appears to be improper; they are, in fact, Lalan Shahi fakirs.

#### Lalan and his Doubles

Like his two famous predecessors in the Bengali literary history—Candidas and Alaol, the situation of Lalan is quite complicated. For long time, a debate went on about how many Candidas's had there been or what was the birth-place of Alaol—Chittagong or Faridpur. As days go by, the myth

of Lalan Shah prevails and all aspects of his life and teaching are debated. In the place of a historical personality of rather recent origin, Lalan and his doubles are there to counteract any investigation on scientific lines to determine the origin and the nature of this mystic order. At the outset, therefore, we would like to advance the idea that myth, legend and enigma should be very carefully treated while discussing a folk religion. Following W. D. Hammond Tooke (1977: 76) we can stress that 'as Roland Barthes (1974:121) has suggested (and here he is in accord with Levi-Strauss) the function (of the myth) is to distort and the relation which unites the concept of the myth to its meaning is essentially a relationship of *deformation* (1974:122, original emphasis)'.

Lalan was of humble origin but he died a famous *Sai* (from *Svami*) or *Shah* (originally a respectful epithet for a Muslim mystic saint, *shah* literally means 'Emperor'; in the 20th Century it is a common surname for most bauls and fakirs). He left behind him a few Akhdas (sanctuaries) the principal being the one at Cheudiya, about a mile from Kustia railway station. This has been recorded in an obituary article in a local fortnightly journal (*Hitakari* 1890, Oct 31). The number of his followers had been estimated as not less than ten thousand. It has been indicated that the master had followers in far-off places as in Chittagong in the east, Jessore in the south, Rangpur in the north, and distant areas in West Bengal.

During the second decade of this century one *Edict for the Extermination of the Bauls* published by a conservative Muslim mentions that the number would be from 6 to 7 million. This estimate appears to be on the basis of only Muslim adherents of different folk cults and seems to be quite exaggerated to us. Later a round figure of 300,000 was advanced for the entire British Bengal during the end of the *raj* (Ahmad Sharif, 1964, 29). On our part, we do not like to share in the speculation of the total

number of adherents of various mystic groups in Bangladesh, but from an impression of several field trips we can state that the present number in the Lalan Shahi order would be around 10,000, the estimated number of about one hundred years earlier. No fall and no increase in number may be because of several reasons which one can only advance hypothetically. We do not like to linger on this point further.

The most important thing for us to understand is the nature of Lalan's songs, which are not only the gems of Bengali folklore, but also used as sacred hymns of his mystic school. Individual and institutional efforts of Rabindranath, and Mansuruddin, of Calcutta University and Bangla Academy of Dacca made it possible to collect different versions of about 600 songs. While some of these collector of songs might have been composed by his disciples and other followers, there can be little doubt that some *Lalan-gitis*, particularly the early compositions, might have been lost, some of the songs bear marks of omission and interpolation by the bards and the editors.

There are speculations regarding the number of songs Lalan composed. Lalan experts and Lalan Shahi fakirs would increase it from 2,000 to 90,000 which is absurd. One should not allow the idea that the master had composed more than one thousand songs. It is not the quantity, however, but the quality—the richness in imagery, wit, folk erudition, spiritual insight—of their composition and a very suitable, original tunes to each song which makes Lalan's songs so adorable to the posterity.

Two more aspects of Lalan myth puzzle the admirers of the master: one is the birth-place and the early life of the vagrant baul; the other is the question of his religious or communal identity: was he a Muslim or a Hindu? Dozens of articles and even a few books have been written by enthusiastic partisans of either aspects of these questions

(one can refer to a recent summing up by Ma. Maniruzzaman, 1978). A good number of legendary stories prevail in and around Kustia and Jessore, the two neighbouring districts that claim him as their own son. Each of these stories are equally believable and unbelievable. One would enter into same riddle to answer the question whether he was a Hindu or a Muslim. Believer in syncretism, a practical mystic, Lalan enjoyed during his lifetime watching other people being puzzled with such a question. He has, therefore, composed a good number of songs to reply to the obsessed ones. Despite veiled or open attack, the listeners though mostly imbued with communalism, like these songs ; at least no protest had ever been recorded even today. During two field trips, I could record three such songs which the fakirs started singing as overtures at their own wishes, i.e. without being requested to sing those particular songs. These songs are :

1. *Sab loke kay Lalan ki jat sangsare*  
*Lalan bale Jatir ki rup dekhlam na e najare ; etc.*  
 (Translation : Every one asks, what is the community (religion) of Lalan ? Lalan says, I have never seen its manifestation with my own eyes).
2. *Jait geia jait gela bale eki ajab karkhana*  
*Satya patbe keu nay raji sub dekhi ta na na*  
*Jakhan tumi bhabe ele takhan tumi ki jat chile*  
*Ki jat haba jabar kale se katha khule balana*  
 (Translation : What a hue and cry in the name of community (religion) which is supposed to have been doomed.  
 None is ready to accept the true path—all want to play foul.  
 When you came to his world, what religion did you have ?  
 What religion you would have when you have got to depart ?)

3. *Sab loke kay Lalan Fakir Hindu ki Javan*  
*Ami bali amar ami na jani sandhan*  
 (Every one asks, "Is Lalan Fakir a Hindu or a Muslim" ?  
 I say, of myself, I do not know the origin, etc).

It is interesting to note that while the first two songs are sung by two known *sadhakas* of Lalan Shahi order, the third one was sung by one who is not even a novice (initiate) but having some musical talent and some interest in baulism he frequents the fakirs. He was present at Lalan sanctuary on the occasion of the death anniversary of the master, on 19 October 1978. The song was recorded at noon in the three-side-open *Atithishala* (guest house) where many fakirs had assembled from different parts of the country. When the traditional musical soiree (function) started at 7.30 p.m., this singer was also present on the dias. For some time he played an instrument. But he never sang or he was not allowed to sing. This may be a mere incident and without attempting to establish correlation between the song and the singer, I have, however, considerable doubt regarding the authenticity of this particular song ; use of words, phrasing pattern, inherent meaning, underlying significance even the melody of this song appear to be pretentious. A different version of the signature line of the song—*Lalan se khatnar jat ekkhan* (Lalan is one of the circumcized community) had already created controversy and suspicion among Lalan experts of interpolation (Anwarul Karim, 1966, 14 ; A. H. Chowdhury, 1974, 82).

Despite controversy one can yet comfortably support the viewpoint of the earlier biographers and collectors (Pal, Mansuruddin, Upen Bhattacharya) which would relate Lalan to a Hindu Kyastha family of Bhadada—Chapda of Kustia and stressing the point that most of his grown-up life (he had a very long life of 112/116/126 years as per legends)

was spent among fakirs of Muslim origin and he died as such despite his very strong non-committal and acommunal status. As the myth of Lalan would still continue, following statement of a senior Lalan Shahi fakir may be of some relevance. In course of discussion, the fakir said, 'nobody can know when and where the Saiji (i.e. Lalan) appeared on the earth. Who knows how Muhammad, the prophet appeared in Makka and resided at Madina...(suddenly in a singing tone)—

*"Bhave ke tahare cinite pare  
Ase Madinay tariq je janay e-samsarve  
Sai amar manus rupe ghurefere"* (INTERVIEW/GS/22.8.78)

(Translation : who can recognize Him in this world—he who, arriving at Madina informed the human race the modes of *tariques* (ways of salvation). My Lord moves around in the guise of man).....The allusion is all too clear. The Lalan Shahi fakirs conceive the Lalan formula that *Ahad* (i. e. Allah—the unique) and *Ahmad* (i. e. the Prophet) are basically same and the cult of *avatar* continues up to Lalan himself.

Whatever may be his origin, there cannot be any doubt that Lalan had association with a number of Muslim fakirs and theologians. Many of his songs bear the signature lines identifying him as a humble disciple of Siraj Sai. Time has kept no trace of this master of the master although many consider him as a composer too. (Abdul Wali...) It may be noted here that Lalan makes references to many Muslim scriptures both classical and mystical. He, uses with care the rich treasure of Hindu traditions, too. But he seems to be rather choosy and he limits himself within the Vaisnabite school of thought and criticizes the teachings of Veda and holy literatures quite often.

### The Dancing Dervishes—Their Exotic and Esoteric Practices

Lalan Shahi fakirs are not really dancing dervishes although a singing devotee or a listening one would dance occasionally out of emotion (the sentiment known in Bengal as *bhababeshi*). Continuous singing of *mahater gan* (i.e songs of the great) would ultimately make them *bhabonmad*, emotionally intoxicated to look/feel like mad. Whatever may be the state of affairs, the profane onlookers or the initiates would expect and appreciate this unsteady excited state of the performer ; presentation of a "baul" programme today by these fakirs either at built-in stage of Lalan sanctuary at Cheudiya or at any other place with microphones and loud-speakers cannot always reflect their real mood ; only occasionally one would discover their true self particularly when they are singing to themselves in the *Akhda* and the singer or a listener dervish would start dancing.

Discussing about the two types of baul songs (of Lalan Shah, in particular), Anwarul Karim (1977 : 126) notes that while in *Dannya Pada* (i.e. lines on submission themes) the note is melancholic, in *prabarta* (i.e. initiation) it is mixed. Here, quite often, the singer dances while singing. One would agree with Guru Saday Dutta (1954, 71) the I.C.S. who was a great lover of Bengali Folk Culture when he says: "The most striking feature of the baul dance and of the tune is a spirit of joyous self-forgetfulness and fluidity of rhythmic movement which is in complete accord with the sentiments of the songs. The baul tune with its ripples of rise and fall resembles the surface of a large tank or lake wrinkled by the spring breeze".

Traditionally, the fakir sings alone with an *ektara* or *dotara* which he plays in accompaniment. Such other instruments as *gubgubi*, *dugi*, *khamak*, *jurri prem-juri*, *khajani*, *khol* may also be used in the folk orchestra. Anwarul Karim (1977 : 124) rightly observes that the baul music played at Lalan *Akhda* is 'gentle, calm and sonorous' while in the case

of nomadic bauls it is 'very much vigorous, high-pitched and strong.'

On the singing sessions, one after another song is presented by each artist/fakir theoretically. On one occasion, however, a chorus was heard. It was during the induction of Ghulam Yasin Shah, the elderly and the highly esteemed fakir at *Lalan* sanctuary. The date is 20th October, 1978 at about 1 p. m. The night before, he sang two songs before the audience assembled to pay homage to Fakir Lalan on his death anniversary. After the performance which was extraordinary due to his gentle trained voice and communicative expression, Yasin Shah at 75 was yet found energetic and fresh. He recorded an interview with me where he declared that he learned music from Bholai Shah, a direct disciple of the master; but to my utter surprise he added that he was not a *guru*. His mystic smile on this occasion was understood when we saw him, unwarrantedly, being elevated to the position of a *guru* and accepting *khelafat* (i.e. status of a mendicant, symbolically wearing coffin dress and a cloth bag on the shoulder). The ceremony was being conducted under the presidency of the *guruma* (the mother *kamal* or *kamala*, wife of the late *guru* fakir Wakil Shah. She is a blind woman of over 80). One *Mullah* type man named Nizam Shah administered the oath with certain sufi-istic litany in Arabic. This was followed by a chorus: '*Amar e rajya ar Ka(r) jya nai|Aj amar|Tumi dekha Bharati Gosai|Aj amar|Fakir habo menge khabo|Amar e raiya ar Ka (r) jya nai.* (Translation: I have on more 'business' within this 'kingdom'/Today is mine.../You see, *Bharati Gosai*? Today is mine/I shall be a Fakir/I shall 'live' by alms).

Then in the form of a procession the fakirs made tour around the *Lalan* mausoleum seven times singing all along. We are fortunate enough to record these unique ceremony in photographs and tapes.

Like the fakirs, the other initiates who were present at the *Lalan* sanctuary are not much different in dress or behaviour than the village folks of the locality. Normally, a fakir dresses himself with a *kurta* and a *lungi*—all white but not very clean. Many fakirs are seen with long hairs, some with *babri* style of hair cutting. It is reported that previously they had *juti* i. e. part of the hair binded together on the rear top of the scalp and dressed with *gerua* (saffron/ocre) robes. As they fell easy victims at the hands of orthodox *mullas*, they preferred in course of time to go without these external marks.

The idea of plain living and high thinking had been pronounced more than once in many of the songs the master composed. It seems that *Lalan Shahi* fakirs assiduously try to follow the path. To speak the truth is another precept which the fakirs must observe at any cost. They use, however, a number of mystic vocabulary to avoid complications. Honesty and gentility are two commonly observed virtues in these apparently ordinary folks. They possess an extraordinary presence of mind for they aptly use the quotations from the verses, the sayings of their gurus and the guru of all guru, the great *Saiji* *Lalan Shah*. Despite their extreme obedience to their guru, they do not forget about their duties as man. Excepting few mendicants most of them play a full social role. But this is the exotic part of their life. They have a secret life of meditation and of esoteric practices. They believe that the meditation through music and certain sexo-yogic exercises would relieve them from sufferings and would make them feel an extreme beauty because of the presence of the Lord Supreme who is none else but his *alter ego*. *Lalan Shah* speaks elaborately, sometimes symbolically about the stages of this existence in over one hundred songs. Yet no one can learn these practices or understand their significations from the songs, or from their descriptions alone (Qureshi, 1977:35). One has to find a guru and to be initiated through the rigorous process. We do not possess necessary knowledge or means of investigation



to analyse and judge the myths and the mysteries which englobe the truth on this subject. The question has been raised whether or not the bauls in general and Lalan Shahi fakirs in particular practise sexual rites (Preinhaelterova, 1978...). Earlier Upen Bhattacharya, (1957) Dimock (1966), Capwell (1974) and Qureshi (1977) confirmed that they do. On the basis of his musicological field research Capwell (1974:263) advanced the hypothesis which deserves consideration: 'the bauls are a humanistic sect characterized by the performance of a ritual coitus reservatus during menstruation for the purpose of experiencing the bliss of non-phenomenal consciousness, in which they greatly resemble their probable ancestors in late tantrik Buddhism; like the sects of the latter, they have undergone varying degrees of change due to the influence of Gauriya Vaisnavism and Sufism which may have resulted in the abandonment of the sexual Sadhana by some of their number'.

During our field researches, we could not make much headway in this regard. Two Lalan Shahi fakirs, however, revealed certain secrets of their sadhana in one unrecorded interview (MS/21.8.78) and another recorded interview (SS/20.11.78). Until further information is received silence should be considered golden.

#### Summary and Conclusion

Lalan Shahi order of Bangladesh constitutes an important mystic group whose immediate experience of oneness with Ultimate Reality as emanated through their songs is shared by both illiterate folks and the *elite intellectuelle* of the country. Lalan had long been considered as the most famous baul but the baulism, as it appears today, would designate a conglomerate of humanistic folk religions rather than one obscure religious cult; hence Lalan's emergence to the status of the poet-prophet of a folk religion than a *sadhaka* of a heterodox sect or a sufi of *Chistiya* order appears to be more logical. The

exoteric and the esoteric belief and practices of Lalan Shahi fakirs put this group's position in a unique Bengali syncretism. Further investigation is, however, needed to ascertain different aspects.

The greatest contribution of the order to Bangladesh culture is undoubtedly its music. The repertory of available 600 songs of the master is rich in words and melody. It exercises two parallel functions: one of speculative hymn and the other of folklore with philosophical tendency. The delicate question may then be raised how the signed songs of some hundred to hundred fifty years by a religious personality could be considered in the domain of folklore? The traditional folklorist's point of view would naturally deny its acceptance. Such dogmatic approach is to be seen in Ashutosh Bhattachary (1973, 60). But considering the very special conditions in Bengal its literary and religious history, most of the critics—from Tagore to Shahidullah would admit that the intrinsic characteristics of the baul songs (*Lalan-giti* forming the major part) are very much of folk songs; these songs are the standard bearers of traditional tune and thought; most of the composers and singers are illiterate. Even Lalan was thought to be an illiterate until the recent discovery of a property document having an officially authenticated signature of the master. In any case, there cannot be any doubt that the mystic poet had no or very little formal education and he never actually wrote those songs. He rather composed out of emotion and ecstasy. He instantly sang them or taught his disciples to sing them for him. For long time the disciples kept them in memory and at a very later period one or two adepts with little education from among the thousands of poor peasants and weaver followers of the master started copying them. Golam Saklayen (1974, 201) made a commendable survey of different points of view concerning the question whether the baul songs are folklore or religious literature—(*tattvakatha*). Sudhir Chakravarti (1974, 479) advanced certain convincing arguments and treated the question

in relation to the development of folk religions in Bengal and demanded a new definition of folklore. The eminent folklorist, Alan Dundes, has just tried to do this in his *Analytic Essays in Folklore*. Reviewing the book, G. B. Milner (1977, 545) writes, 'In Dundes's view... what is needed is a catholic definition of folklore, no longer to be limited to peasants, or to rural or uneducated people, as is still the case in many European circles. 'Folk' can refer to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor, be it occupation, language, residence, interest, generation, etc. Folklore need no longer be restricted to oral tradition since in some forms (e. g. epitaphs and graffiti) it may be written and in others it may be transmitted visually instead of orally (e. g. dances, games and crafts).'

Apart from the changing attitudes of folklorists and others in humanistic and social sciences, one must not ignore certain time-honoured traditions in Bengal. While anonymity is common with folktales, Bengali poetry—whether folk or classical possesses signature lines which inform us about the poet or his patron. From *Caryapada*, i. e. the earliest mystic songs hitherto discovered to the *proverbs* (of *Dak* and *Khana*), the ballads or devotional poems. both oral and written literatures abound with marks of the poets' personal references. But to a closer scrutiny this tradition is not followed for its explicit reason i. e. to reveal the identity of the poet. It is mostly used to tell us the circumstances which led the poet to write the piece, to express his state of mind or some other ideas not contained in it. In the case of *Lalan. giti*, which are the most popular among the baul *genre* and which have been meticulously imitated by many, the true identity of the master is far from anybody's imagination excepting that was Lalan an 'idiot'/unwise/mad disciple of Seraj Sai, whose life is even more shrouded with mystery. Metaphysical ideas have all along been common place with the peoples of Bengal. Various folk cults and folk religions have been in vogue here from pre-historic time to present day.

Louis Renou (1955, 1 ; 29), the famous French Indologist put it lucidly : Tout ce qui s'est fait en Inde, litterairement parlant, a ete conditionne par la religion (translation : what happened in India, to express in a literary way, has been conditioned by religion). It is so in Bengal. It had actually accentuated more here since the advent of Caitanya (1415-1533). Bengal cultural scene has long been dominated by him. As an avatar of Radha, who is enamoured by Krisna and who is determined to conquer him, he in fact, personified Love in himself. Post-Caitanya period gave birth to many folk religions of which the so-called baulism stands predominant. And in the last analysis, baulism does not identify a religious sect but a social group of different orders of madcaps or pseudo-mads. This identification is perhaps due to what John K. White (1975, 16) confirms. 'In folk wisdom and literature, it has long been recognized that divinity lies next to madness'.

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## TAGORE AND MODERN BENGALI LITERATURE

Among the modern thinkers of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent Tagore is undoubtedly the most widely known to Western intellectuals. The reason is obvious: he himself translated his exquisite thought into English just as other writers rendered it in divers tongues.

The award to him of the Nobel Prize in 1913 was probably of little importance in the West, but for the Oriental intelligentsia its effect was considerable. It was not Tagore—a poet of the East or of Asia, of India or of Bengal—who was honoured, but rather a regional literature which, although the most developed among its Indian contemporaries, remained unnoticed by the world until this dramatic recognition of its maturity.

In fact, since the early nineteenth century Bengal spurred by the impact of Western civilization was heading towards a "Renaissance", reflected particularly in its literature. Now,

after eight-hundred years of a predominantly agrestic character, Bengali literature acquired a fresh sophistication.

The literary efforts of Ishwarchandra Vidyasager, Michael Madhusudhan Dutt, Dinabandhu Mitra, Tekchand Thakur, Bankimchandra Chatterji and Mir Musharraf Hussain not only satisfied the new Bengal middle class but are still regarded as the classics of its literature.

Bengal had already adopted Western literary forms which it employed to give a new vitality to Indian thought. Born in one of the families of Calcutta which was active in furthering this Renaissance, Tagore directly understood that it was his task to create a synthesis between old and new, between Eastern thought and Western expression. This mission he brilliantly discharged.

The living avatar of the "Bengal Renaissance," Tagore naturally drew his inspirations from its old literature, from its religious and folk songs and Sanskrit classics, but he also remained assiduously aware of modern Western thought.

What did Tagore add to this rich heritage in the course of a literary career protracted for more than sixty years ?

He wrote more than one thousand remarkable poems, more than two thousand enchanting songs, nearly two dozen plays, eight novels, eight or more volumes of short stories in addition to several travel books and innumerable essays on literary, cultural, political, philosophical or philological subjects.

Besides his humanitarian or educational services, Tagore started painting at the age of sixty-seven and left over two thousand paintings and sketches.<sup>1</sup> The abundance and variety of his work evoke for Bengali critics the three universal geniuses : Leonardo da Vinci, Goethe and Victor Hugo.

Every one has his personal predilection for Tagore as poet or prose writer. Nevertheless his prose writings such as the memorable short stories in *Galpagucha*, novels like *Gora*, *Ghare-Baire* (The Home & The World), *Char Adhyaya* (Four chapters) *Shesher Kabita* (The Last Poem) are epochal events in Bengali literature. The rich personality of Tagore, his warm human sympathies, his narrative gifts are to be found only in his short stories.

Deriving inspiration from Tagore, the novelist Sharat-Chandra Chatterji was to give a new orientation to the craft of fiction writing. Sarat Chandra and his followers had the signal advantage of greater intimacy with the Bengal middle class and thus could depict the insistent reality of its sufferings and joys better than Tagore whose aristocratic upbringing constituted in this respect a serious obstacle.

Among others who gave or are giving new directions to Bengali prose literature, a few important names may be mentioned : Pramatha Chowdhury (a great admirer of French literature who exhorted Bengali prose writers to follow French literary precedents), Rajshekhar Basu, Bibhuti Bhushan Bandyopadhyaya (author of *Pather Panchali*, and *Aparajita*), Banaphul, Tarashankar, Humayun Kabir, Annada Shankar Ray, Manik Bandyopadhyaya and Kazi Abdul Wadud.

In the domain of the novel and short story, Bengali literature seeks to attain a level comparable with that of the West. Yet it must be admitted quite frankly that the greater part of its corpus lacks major stature because of a certain sentimentality and an unduly restricted vision of life.

Let us return to Tagore. This time let us observe the mystery world of his poetry. All Tagore's life constituted an immense creative effort to communicate his most sublime intuitions to the world. The manifold variety and profound depth of his poetic

universe are so remarkable that it seemed he was "redeeming the debt of the world," a world which induced all the anguish and ecstasy of creation. It is not enough to have read *Gitanjali* or *Balaka* (The Swan) to understand this mysterious world; it is also necessary to read the poems that reflect the different phases of his poetic career.

In addition to his personal experience and the association of his great father, Debendranath, who had a profound understanding of the Persian mysticism, it is the influence of the Upanishads which left the decisive imprint upon his poetic vision—his love of nature, search for truth and for humanity; to him these are nothing but the characteristic signs of the Infinite.

This quest for the Infinite, as revealed in the Upanishads —"Bhumaiva sukama nalpe sukhamasti" (Beatitude reposes in the Infinite, not in the Finite)—became the key-note of his poetic philosophy. It is astonishing to discover that Tagore's patriotism under the influence of the Upanishads, was frequently at variance with public opinion. His predecessor Bankim-chandra said :

*Do not forget that love of one's countrymen ranks above all religion.*

Rabindranath wrote :

*Build high the throne of your nation  
But remember it is not higher than truth  
If you really love your country,  
You must not rise above it,  
Not place your country above humanity.<sup>2</sup>*

In his last years Rabindranath understood that with all his philosophical pretensions and poetic illusions he was inhabiting an ivory tower and suddenly felt the need to draw closer to plebeian reality. Now he wrote :

*Sweet is the earth, sweet the dust of it,  
I've taken it in my heart,  
This great hymn  
Is the precept of my life.  
Day after day, I've received  
The gift of the truth,  
And its sweetness has no end...*

Or,

*On the shores of Rupanarayan  
I awoke  
And I realized the world  
Is not a dream.  
I beheld my image  
In letters of blood.  
And I came to know myself  
Through profound wounds  
And through countless sufferings<sup>3</sup>...*

Although *Balaka* had been written in a new style and published before the First World War, Tagore realized that all he had written before then was highly conventional. Thus, with the changing situation, he started writing prose-poems on unconventional but quotidian subjects.

This new direction Tagore gave to Bengali poetry by his later writings served as a model for the young writers while the writers of his generation were still imitating his earlier style. Because of their conventional style and poor poetic techniques they were soon eclipsed by the brilliant achievement of Tagore.

Nonetheless two poets—Satyen Dutt and Mohitlal Majumdar (also a great critic)—deserve particular mention. Satyen Dutt, besides his innumerable poems on nature and patriotism which reveal extraordinary metrical skill, translated more than

five hundred poems from different languages retaining most of their initial flavour and content. His translations of Victor Hugo, Ezra Pound, Verlaine, Maeterlinck, Baudelaire, Valery, among others, preserve the original rhyme and rhythm yet offer the savour and qualities of true Bengali compositions. Satyen Dutt also re-introduced many Arabo-Persian words which are currently used in modern society or once were in mediæval literature. This gave new vitality to poetry, particularly in the passionate poems of Mohitlal Majumdar.

The new literary fashion reached its height with the advent of a soldier-poet, Kazi Nazrul Islam, who accomplished a synthesis between the revolutionary tradition of Islam and the cult of Shakta (worship of the Hindu god of power). These two thought-currents are absent in Tagore. Yet, with the true generosity of genius, he acclaimed young Nazrul. Indeed, Nazrul set off a veritable explosion in the halcyon sweetness of Bengali poetry. The new awareness which he reflected quickly gained the attentive respect of the young writers. Thus he expressed himself in his famous poem *Vidrohi* (The Rebel):

*I am a rebel, a hothead,  
I do what my heart desires,  
Good, bad, true or false  
I grapple with Satan himself  
I welcome death with a song  
I am the rebel, weary of struggle  
Still I will not rest till the day  
The aggressor's sword be sheathed  
In the field of battle  
And the cries of the oppressed  
No Longer rend the air, etc.<sup>1</sup>*

In addition to a great number of poetic works, short stories and journalistic writings, Nazrul composed more than

three thousand songs which are still extremely popular.

Jivanananda Das and Buddhadeva Bose, two great modern poets, derived their first inspiration from Nazrul. The genius of Tagore, in fact, offered an insuperable challenge to the young writers of the thirties. Yet thanks to the example of Nazrul and to the new poetic creations of Tagore, they finally articulated a mature poetic idiom which is still in vogue. Western symbolism certainly has occupied a prominent place in the new poetry. Bishnu Dey, Sudhin Dutt and Samar Sen are names indissolubly linked with this movement. Besides these examples, Amiya Chakravarty in the tradition of Tagore, Jasimuddin<sup>2</sup> in the folklorique style and Farrukh Ahmad in the footsteps of Iqbal<sup>3</sup> added new chapters in the history of Bengali poetry.

In spite of that, whether in day-to-day activities or in intellectual pursuits, the Bengalis still remain dazzled by the luminous achievement and magnificent personality of Tagore. For the Bengali speaking intelligentsia of South Asia perhaps Tagore's greatest contribution lies in the universal intellectual citizenship this achievement has so lavishly conferred upon their literature.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. It is still a matter of controversy whether Tagore started painting at the age of 65 or 70. However, the above definitive idea was advanced by Sudhin N. Ghose in an article published in *Two Cities*, Paris, No. 5, Autumn, 1960, p. 35.
2. Cf. Kazi Abdul Wadud, *Creative Bengal*, Calcutta, Thacker Spink & Co. 1950; p. 6-7.
3. The French version of the last poems of Tagore, translated by Mahmud Shah Qureshi and Andie Guimbretiere was published in the *Revue Generale Belge*, Brussels, June, 1961.

4. Luce Claude Maitre in "Les Poetes Rebelles du Bengale" (Revue Europe, May 1954), dealt with Nazrul and some other young poets.

5. Two poems of Jasimuddin have been translated into French by Jacques Stepowski. An English translation under title, *The Field of the Embroidered Quilt* was published by Oxford University Press. Another book will constitute a Unesco Translation Project.

6. Muhammad Iqbal (1873-1938) is the greatest Urdu poet and an original thinker of modern Islam in South Asia.

## CARTOONS : MIRROR OF BANGLADESH SOCIETY

Cartoons are a mirror of contemporary culture, in both its lighter and more serious sides, and the nine short years of Bangladesh's journey into being are perhaps more memorably captured in cartoons than in any other medium. Although cartoons did appear during the British and the Pakistan period, to fill up a gap on a page, to illustrate some funny sketches, to accompany a juicy narrative, they were never accepted as a "serious" form of expression or as a regular feature in any magazine. The situation has substantially improved since the foundation of Bangladesh. Particular credit goes to a weekly review called *Bicitra* and to a talented young artist named Ra ãqun Nabi, who signs as "Ranabi".

Even so, it is possible to excavate in literary archives various precursors of the Bangladesh cartoon. Although journals have been published in this part of the former British Empire since the early nineteenth century, it was not until World War I that pictures including a few cartoons found their way to journals and periodicals to any extent. For the



most part the drawings that are found in these publications are all too serious; sombre portrayals of the gifts of nature and landscapes, were their forte, a somewhat melodramatic illustration of the newly acquired tragic sense of life. Then, three literary publications suddenly appeared as a counterfoil to such sobriety, i. e. Rajshekhar Basu's *Goddalika*, Abul Mansur Ahmad's *Ayna* (The Mirror) and the *Food Conference* which are amply illustrated with comic pictures opening for the first time this dimension to the connoisseurs. The illustrations in the first two books are based on foibles of human nature and the disjunctions of society, but they so well pinpoint certain emotional aspects of Bengali society that they are still popular, along with the masterpieces of humorous writing they accompany. The third book, the *Food-Conference*, dealing with the politics which caused the great famine of 1942-43 enjoyed widespread success, and its illustrator, Kazi Abul Kasem started contributing cartoons to daily and weekly journals. This was a hay day for politics. The future of the British in India was being determined and an intellectual elite was beginning to take shape among the Bengali Muslims. The creation of Pakistan and of Bangladesh were just a matter of time. Kazi, using the pen-name "Dopeyaza", became very popular. One of his earlier drawings, "Hungry Bengal and Famine Commission", published in *Daily Azad's* Eid special number of 1944 shows a donkey symbolizing Hungry Bengal pursuing carrots on a stick that will never reach its teeth. The carrots stand for the Commission constituted by the Government to solve the food problem, which to be sure it never solved. The same issue, which was published in the form of a magazine, printed many other cartoons and comic drawings, mainly by Qamrul Hasan, then a young artist who has now become a celebrated living master. Qamrul used the pen-name of "Bhimrul" (meaningt he bee) and his cartoons often do carry sting. Also during World War II Zainul Abedin, who was to become later the *doyen*

of fine arts in Bangladesh, first gained fame for his stirring sketches on the Bengal Famine of 1943. Later on, he drew some caricatures of the political events of the day. Following Abedin's example, Qamrul Hasan, Rashid Chowdhury, Murtaja Baseer, Debdas Chakravarty, Mizanur Rahim and others drew cartoons and caricatures which often found use as posters to incite patriotic fervour during the liberation struggle. A few pioneer cartoonists deserve special mention—Mostafa Aziz (Aziz), Qayyum Chowdhury (Qa-Chow), Mahmud Zamir, Subhas Dutt (Mitaji), Kalam Mahud (Birbal), Hashem Khan (Chabi Khan), Nazrul Islam (Nazrul), Rafiqun Nabi (Ranabi), Titu, Serajul Huq (Sarda) and Banizul Huq (Baniz). All produced memorable cartoons during the last decade.

The publishing of cartoons as a feature started earlier. The daily *Morning News* of Dacca introduced in the 1950's cartoons and comic strips. Two good cartoonists with a common name Aziz had been attached to the paper at that time. One of them was a Bengali. Both of them, although unidentified as single artist, became very popular for thier political cartoons. Charles Schulz's American strip "peanuts" was also reprinted regularly at that period and inspired several similar series in Bengali. Later on, one series called "Pratidvandvi" (the rivals) was published for some time in the daily *Bangla*. Another "Tokai", featuring conversation between a middle-class boy and a shrewdly perceptive street-urchin is now regularly appearing in the weekly *Bicitra*. Two famous Western strips "Barbarella" and "James Bond" have recently been published in the two weeklies *Bicitra* and *Sacitra Sandhani* respectively which perhaps demonstrates the participation of Bangladeshis in a collective international fantasy life. "Barbarella" has been re-illustrated by a local artist, Syed Lutful Huq; but "James Bond" the symbol of international intrigue, has been left with his original round-eyed pallor and bootcamp beefiness.

Social criticism in the form of small "pocket cartoons" has become very popular. These, framed in a small, one column wide box on the front page of newspapers, comment on problems of day-to-day life and contemporary events. Cartoons by Arup appeared regularly for sometime in the daily *Bangla*. Pocket cartoons by other artists, appear in a few other dailies and weeklies. One such artist, Nazrul, has done a caricature of himself overwhelmed by the ready supply of subject-matter in Bangladesh which bears the caption: "After drawing so many gags, I am still gagging" (*cartoon ankte ankie nijei cartoon haye gechi*). One sees the hapless face of the artist blotting the startled upper-class admirer whom he has started to draw with a bamboo-sized brush. Cartoons hanging on the wall bear titles like "Unemployment Problem", 'Population Problem', 'Food Problem', 'Flood Problem', 'Nepotism Problem', 'Nutrition Problem', 'Canvas Problem', 'Colour and brush Problem', etc. He is standing on a sheet entitled 'Society...', and another with the title, 'Mountain of Problems'. Nazrul's cartoon appeared in *Bicitra* on 14 September, 1974.

*Bicitra*, a magazine offshoot of the daily *Bangla*, has played the major role in popularizing cartoons in Bangladesh. Its awareness of the role it plays in mixing a few objective chuckles with the solemn business of nation-building is shown by an advertisement it used to carry: "Don't read *Bicitra* if you are not free from prejudices". The means for exposing such prejudices is frequently a cartoon. *Bicitra* has published more than a dozen issues with full-page cartoons on the cover and quarter-page cartoons elsewhere, as required. These illustrate national problems in the field of education, electricity supply, administration, airlines, food policy, price hikes, smuggling, hoarding, research activities and so on. Politics has been more marginally, though not superficially, touched on by the cartoonists. The affairs of general and

presidential elections, the voters' dilemma, and the conflict between bureaucrats and politicians have received attention from several cartoonists—most significantly from Nazrul and Ranabi during the years following liberation (1971). Their criticism, however, is cautious and muted, perhaps showing more what publishers will risk publishing than what cartoonists would like to draw. Many of these cartoons seem to project a kind of frustration instead of instantly touching our funny bone. They only succeed in producing a muttered response of "All too true".

Four artists, all graduates in Fine Arts, have been associated with *Bicitra*. They are Kalam Mahmud (who sometimes uses the pen-name "Birbal"), Syed Lutful Huq (Lutful), Nazrul Islam (Nazrul) and Rafiqun Nabi (Ranabi). At present, it is Ranabi who is featured most often. His "Tokai" mentioned above, is published weekly in editorial page. The pronouncements of his street-wise urchin are often witty and insightful in depicting Bangladesh society. Rafiqun Nabi, now forty-one, has been drawing cartoons since 1964, when he was associated with the daily newspaper *Purbadesh*. Because of his prolific production and regular appearances on television he is now the most popular cartoonist in Bangladesh. He is a skilled water-colourist and has also taken training in making wood-cuts in Athens. He now teaches at the Bangladesh College of Arts and Crafts. *Bicitra* has published an album of his cartoons, and this year one of his cartoons (along with one from Nazrul) found a place in the exhibition of the International Pavillion of Humour at Montreal.

Following the success of *Bicitra*, the weekly *Sacitra Sandhani* also started publishing cartoons as a regular feature. One of its artists, Titu, appears to have very promising future. Mention may be made of Enam Tagar who contributes frequently in the Sunday issue of the *Barta*, the national daily from Rajshahi. Having no formal training of art school, Enam, an economist by profession is a social critic by conviction.

The cartoon in Bangladesh is still in its infancy, but it is developing very quickly. Not only readers, but even TV watchers, are now regularly exposed to cartoons, showing the importance given to them. Recently, a Bengali equivalent of *Mad* magazine called *Unmad* ("Mad" in Bengali), has appeared. Its first four issues attained considerable success. The group of seven young artists who are drawing the cartoons to illustrate the grotesque and bizarre stories of *Unmad* seem well on their way to a big success. Clearly, Bangladesh has not lost her sense of humour despite her problems and poverty. Bangladesh was once a land of opulence. Her people were playful and knew the niceties of life even as they were serious and seekers of knowledge. It is to be hoped that the developing wit of her cartoonists can be seen as a harbinger of good things to come for the country as a whole, and that her leaders will show tolerance to these public jestors and permit them free sailing. It has always been the character of great political leaders to be able to laugh at themselves. It is said of Charles de Gaulle that every Wednesday morning during his tenure as French Head of State, he used to wait eagerly to read, *Le Canard Enchaîné*, the famous satirical weekly. The serious General is supposed to have especially enjoyed the journal's cartoons and criticism, which primarily caricatured his personality. It does not seem surprising that the man who brought France the greatest political maturity and international respect it had enjoyed in more than a century should have also had such a great sense of humour. We are encouraged to hold similar hopes for the future of Bangladesh.

## FOLK ART AS MEANS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT : THE CASE STUDY OF KANTHA IN BANGLADESH

"... Contemplation of human culture is specially touched with wonder and hope because ... one learns to trust ordinary men as well as to wait for genius ...."

Margaret Mead

### Introduction

Art objects created by rural folks have been variously designated as primitive art, ethnic art, tourist art, airport art, etc. Whatever their present designation they are of interest to anthropologists, art historians and other scholars because they were initially and essentially created by and for folks. We, therefore, prefer to use the broad term "folk art" in discussion, for it calls attention to its close relationship with all of the folklore of an area, as a part of the same coin, juxtaposing its relevant functional and aesthetic sides with folk music, folktales, folk

religion, and folk history. We have found, for instance, that Mithila painting in Bihar and Kantha embroidery in Bangladesh have both thrived on a symbiotic, mnemonic, relation with wedding songs and *Baromasyas* (the songs of twelve months spent in the absence of the beloved) of the women folk of these regions\*. In Mithila, the painter's art of ritualistic and folkloric imagination have found their way into the sophisticated market of art collectors and dealers in the western world, particularly in England, France and the U. S. A. (R. L. Owens, 1979).

We would like to argue here that the same future awaits the *kantha*, a kind of elaborately embroidered quilt, acknowledged by many to be the finest folk art of Bangladesh. To make possible such a future, we are now undertaking in-depth research as a backdrop to an international exhibition of *kanthas*. Our research will also inform the marketing efforts of the Ethnic Arts Foundation, a non-profit corporation which is stimulating a *kantha* revival by proposing to pay high "art" prices to the most skilled producers (R.L. Owens, 1980b). We feel that our interpretive studies will contribute both to the sophisticated marketing which can maintain *kantha* art as a living tradition, as well as to cross-cultural aesthetic understanding. (We will explain later why we prefer to classify *kanthas* as 'art' rather than as a 'craft'.) Let us first examine *kantha* art in its historico-anthropological context.

#### Evolution of Kantha

Derived from sanskrit *kantha*, the Bengali word *katha* (anglicized *kantha*) traditionally indicates a "cover" or "quilt" made of several cloth stitched together. References to *kantha* are found as far back as in the *Rgveda* (N. Zaman, 1980: 2), and *kanthas* have been used in Bengal from the pristine past to the present time by all kinds and sorts: Buddhist monks, Hindu yogies, Muslim fakirs, syncretist Bauls and

just ordinary folks (M. Rahman, 1976:91). It is not known when and where on the South Asian subcontinent *kanthas* first originated, but their usage in Bengal appears to be as ancient as the Bengalis themselves. It has in fact been synonymous with their existence: it is indeed their ethnic art *par excellence*.

The identification of *kantha* with Bengali ethnicity derives from its functional ubiquity—rich and poor alike use *kanthas* as a coverlet ideally suited to the mild tropical climate of the region. It should also be mentioned here that Bengal traditionally lacked wool. On the other hand, the basic raw materials for *kanthas*, cotton both used and unused, are readily and inexpensively available to all; so distinction have been primarily on the basis of artistic imagination and skill. Over time the operation of the latter have gradually transformed the *kantha* from a utilitarian craft to a work of art, hence the word *Nakshi Kantha* "artistic quilt" or embroidered quilt came into use. Somehow the obligation of making quilts for the family became an act of pleasure, a pastime, a hobby which tapped the deepest wells of inborn artistic creativity. Bengali women, particularly the women in North, South and East Bengal (now Bangladesh), took to this so earnestly that many distinctive styles of *kantha* began to appear. While remaining a functional covering the sketches and designs on the *kantha*, its ritualistic motifs and different sizes for different uses, exemplify a skill and imagination which can only be called art.

Examination of museum collections in Dacca and Calcutta, published literature and field surveys reveal an extremely rich array of motifs: bright abstract 'carpet motifs' as well as pictorial and non-figurative folk traditions—Hindu and Muslim, and reflections of regional flora and fauna. The survey to date has been in many ways the examination of a splendid relic, upset by cheap modern substitutes for some of the

multiple traditional function of kanthas and even more so by the demands on women's time, which formerly could be devoted to making kanthas in a very impoverished economy. But the tradition does live on like the ragged and patched kantha of the famous poem, "*Nakshi Kathar Math*" (The Field of the Embroidered Quilt) published in 1929 by Jasimuddin. This celebrated poem caught imagination of the Bengali *elite* in their nostalgia for the village and instantly invoked a fervour for folk-art itself. In the poem, kantha symbolically represented the village life of eternal peace and struggle. We too in our hopes for kantha art see also hope for village development in Bangladesh.

Unfortunately, references regarding kantha do not abound in literature. Research on the subject is also too scanty. During the late thirties a number of scholars began to take interest in it. D. C. Sen, the literary historian, wrote about kantha in *Vrihat Vanga* with his usual rhapsodic eloquence. Guru Saday Dutt, the I. C. S. with great love for Bengal folk tradition made an enormous contribution by collecting a good number of old, exquisite kanthas, now preserved in the museum which bears his name in Calcutta. Stella Kramrisch, the American art historian and Professor at Calcutta University in the 1930's and 1940's wrote about them and included many noteworthy examples in her famous exhibition and catalogue, *Unknown India*. The last three decades or so since Independence have been marked by political and social turmoil which allowed little attention for the collection and study of kantha. A few collections were, however, made here and there. One such noteworthy collection was made by the *doyen* of Bangladesh artists, Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin in 1955, and is maintained by his widow. In addition to the premier collection of kantha mentioned earlier at the Guru Saday Museum in Calcutta, a very fine collection is maintained at the Ashutosh Museum at Calcutta University. Smaller contemporary collec-

tions are maintained at the Dacca Museum and at the Bangla Academy Museum. All these collection provide an opportunity to view authentic and antique kanthas in most regional varieties. It is, however, regrettable that there exists no collection which is older than 1850 (N. Zaman, 1980 : 2). On going use of the artifact itself and the unfavourable climatic condition of Bengal are undoubtedly responsible for this.

It is anticipated that the literary record is much older and more complete, but this is still being explored. While references in mediæval literature are yet to be discovered, we can, however, cite at least two short stories by Bangladesh authors—Shaokat Osman and Abdul Momen in recent times to suggest this point. The continuity of time-honoured traditions is also found in proverbs; two of which seem to show inner aspects of Kantha-makers. One, which does not require comment, goes "*Kono Kaj na-thakleo thake katha selaiyer Kaj* (if no work is left available yet there remains the work of kantha embroidery). Another proverb, pinpointing the apparent absurdity of day-dreamers goes "*Chera Kathay Shuye Lakh takar Svapna dekha*" (i. e. dreaming of 'millions' while lying on a worn-out kantha). This has a corollary in another saying: "*Adar byaparir jahajer khabor rakha* (i. e. a ginger dealer need not to keep information regarding a merchant ship.....). Export officials say, jokingly though, that the ginger dealers of to-day are more interested in shipping news than any others, because ginger has turned out to be one of the most profitable export items. Although kantha-makers may not have dreamed of 'million' yet, but some middle-men are now making hundreds or even thousands by selling kanthas to the diplomatic enclaves of Dacca or by exporting them abroad. One of the aims of the author of this paper is to see that kantha makers receive their due, an honourable remuneration for their labour, based realistically on what was once the 'worn out' kantha tradition of Bangladesh.

### Folk Art and Development

Our projection from the trial marketing the Ethnic Arts Foundation (EAF, N. Y.) have undertaken in New York suggests sufficient returns to assess general rural development while also paying artists two to four times what they now receive for their work. We feel hopeful that EAF marketing efforts can thus: (a) revitalize kantha art and certainly help save it from decline and (b) provide funds and the organizational structure to improve the quality of life and general condition of the poorest economic segment upon which we will concentrate our work. We gain hope in this prospect from the achievement of ethnic art or folk art marketing operations in both Canada and in India.

### The Canadian Example

In the northern provinces of Canada about fifty Eskimo cooperatives now earn an annual income of \$6.5 million primarily from the sale of soap stone carvings and prints. This is more than four times the annual sales from the jute works, the most successful handicraft export operation in Bangladesh, and more than double the total export earnings from all handicraft sales in Bangladesh. The effort on individual production is even more impressive. Every fourth Canadian Eskimo now carves at least occasionally and produce more drawings and prints. The income of these Eskimos in the thirty years since the art marketing began has increased an average of 600% to now average \$150 per month, per family, fifteen to forty-five times what the makers of jute handicrafts in Bangladesh now earn. (R.L. Owens, 1980b). (We shall discuss below the contrast between a "craft" and "art" approach which account for these disparities).

Some of the best Eskimo artists earn up to \$30,000 per year. This is more than the Canadian government has spent in the region in the last thirty years. A knowledgeable

Canadian official estimates that with the decrease in game and the retreat of Eskimos from areas where game can still be found, almost all the present members of the Eskimo cooperatives would be on welfare were it not for the programme that markets their ethnic arts. However, instead of that deplorable and personally disintegrating situation, Eskimos have high self-esteem and good incomes. (Stiegelbauer, 1979a).

The cooperatives have been in existence for up to thirty years and all still have non-Eskimo art advisors whose salaries are paid by the cooperatives they serve and who provide a critical linkage with the series of institutions which assure quality control, help select other art advisors, set prices, prepare exhibitions and interpretive materials, and wholesale Eskimo art to galleries inside and outside of Canada. The Canadian experience has clearly shown that a well-planned, long term effort by artists, scholars and sophisticated marketing specialists can have immense economic and social benefits to communities of artists who would otherwise certainly be counted among the poorest of the poor.

### The Mithila Experience

Following the Canadian model, a promising start has already been made with Mithila folk painting in India since 1976 (R.L. Owens, 1979). The EAF (more in the next paragraph) work there has built upon that of the All India Handicrafts Board (AIHB) which beginning about ten years ago commercialized Mithila painting. Unfortunately the policy of marketing has vacillated somewhat between a massive "craft" and selective "art" approach. From the fall of 1976, the AIHB began to close down its marketing operation, leaving producers at the mercy of "craft" oriented middlemen, who promptly cut the prices they had been paying to artists in half. More than half of the three hundred

household in the principal painting village of Jitwarpur derive a significant portion of their incomes from painting and at least as many painters live in several dozen villages scattered around the region, so the drop in the market had a severe impact. One consequence of sharply reduced prices for paintings was competition among artists to produce more and more paintings of deteriorating quality. This was evident even among the best painters, though they were less immediately affected for a few tourists were still buying from them. At the same time high quality Mithila paintings in shops in London were still priced at about \$440 and in France from \$500 to \$600. The artists, however, got only the nearest fraction of this (about 100th) at the "craft" prices they were paid.

It was at this point that Ethnic Arts Foundation (EAF) a non-profit corporation run by anthropologists, art historians, and others, came into existence to help assist directly to set up a marketing operation where artists got the highest possible return for their work. The philosophy behind this Foundation is that there is no denying that crafts are more democratic than arts, but it is a democracy under which all may become poorly paid "sweatshop" labourers. In contrast, there was evidence that an elitist, master craftsmen type (following the Canadian model) approach could actually help all the artists (R. L. Owens, 1979:8) This would also provide a base for promoting broad economic development in the community as a whole with general literacy campaign and other programmes funded through earnings of export sales.

The Foundation also aimed at professionalizing artists through paying high prices for their very best work within the context of general economic situation in the region. Artists marketed through EAF now earn about six times what they could earn through "craft" channels, and other development work is underway. A library is now being built in Jitwarpur

as decided by the members of MCAM themselves from their earning. A comprehensive village development plan is being worked out. A functional literacy programme (in Mithila, womens literacy is about 10% and for men it is 30%) is getting underway in the line of BRAC in Bangladesh. (BRAC, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee is a ten year old indigenous voluntary organization with considerable success to its record; its founder-director Fazle Hasan Abed had recently obtained Magasasay Award). On the Agricultural plane, the cultivation of high yielding winged bean (*psophocarpus Tetragonoiohus L.*) has been started on the experimental basis. Plans are also being made to initiate a two-month course to train women in nutrition, hygiene and family planning, and to set up a ceramic industry, using Mithila designs, as well as a hand-made paper plant. Besides, other efforts are being made to give artists true appreciation of their best work and an incentive to produce even better work. All these projects are just getting underway, delayed by the inexperience of EAF people who have had to learn as they go but definitely moving in a direction that gives one confidence that the approach is working.

#### The Nawabganj Experiment

It is against the backdrop of the Canadian experience and that in Mithila that we have begun our present work on a proposed action research project. We may start with the fact we learned from our preliminary investigation that the *Naksui Khantha-s* are made in more than a dozen major styles, paralling the dialect divisions of Bangladesh. Among these, kanthas of Jessore, Pabna, Faridpur, Jamalpur and Chapai Nawabganj regions are particularly outstanding. While the first four varieties are made in running stitch, the Chapai Nawabganj kanthas are created following a rather modern cross-stitch medium and as an ethnic art expert observed these kanthas, "like the carpets in the tents of the central

Asian ancestors of some Bangladesh Muslims, are the most impressive art objects to be found in the mud villages where 90% of the population live (R.L. Owens, 1980a).

During our preliminary work in Nawabganj the past year we have gathered baseline data which suggests that the making of kanthas gives only very meagre remuneration to the artists. It is probably, because kanthas can be embroidered in spare time by women living in purdah conditions, and because of their great love of the art they are still made at all. Those women who have had to depend on the income from the sale of kanthas have been forced to make more and more kanthas, hastily and repetitiously, with less and less of the reflection, intuition, and inventiveness on which art thrives. Yet forays into interior villages, where kanthas are made only for love and not for money, reveal that the vitality of the tradition is still there. It is upon that vitality that our work will depend.

We are not, however, alone in this undertaking. Kantha has had a kind of revival with the growth of Bengali nationalism during the late sixties. However, it was not until the mid-seventies, following the Bangladesh liberation war, that production was significantly developed. Voluntary organizations like Kalyani Mahila Sangsad, and Jatiya Mahila Samiti of Chapai Nawabganj, the Swedish Swallows at Thanapara, Sarda, the Adarsha Palli Unnayan Sangstha at Kandail, Ahmednagar, BRAC at Jamalpur, and individuals and private groups at Jessore and Faridpur, all now help produce significant numbers of kanthas. Although there are many groups of women who make kanthas or are willing to make them, no group is yet served by a sophisticated marketing programme which would enable the artists to receive even a fraction of what their kanthas are worth or even what might be considered a minimum wage in Bangladesh. Being intrigued with the complex situation and with the urge to do "something" four academics—

Naomi Owens, Niaz Zaman, R. L. Owens and the author of this paper decided (1) to engage themselves co-operatively in studying this particular folk art within their social and cultural contexts over the next three years time, and (2) to form Bangladesh Ethnic Arts Foundation (BEAF) to operate along the lines discussed above with certain modifications to adjust with local circumstances.

Several individual and group field trips have been undertaken since October, 1979. Frequent visits and closer contacts were made with kantha-makers and producers at Chapi-Nawabganj, which is a small subdivisional town on the bank of Mahananda. It is about 30 miles from Rajshahi University having road and railway link. Throughout the whole region fine quality kanthas are found and there are more than a sufficiency of under-employed women exist ready to make them, if there is demand. It has more kantha artists than the other regions of Bangladesh combined. The foremost women's organization of the locality Kalyani Mahila Sangsad (KMS) registered in 1972, has about one hundred women members who would supply kanthas to the center when there are orders to be filled. Their market has been very uneven. In 1975, they sold 200 kanthas but only 100 in 1978 and 50 in 1979. Our investigation suggests that they service an area within a radius of about one to two miles of their center, while there are very fine kantha makers within a radius of ten miles or more. Consequently, it is expected that there is a potential supply of kanthas approximately twenty-five times of what the KMS had obtained. This would make the figure of production per year to 5,000.

It seems clear from our field experiences that one of the reasons that some of the finer Jessore, Pabna and Faridpur style of kanthas are not made in greater quantity commercially is that there simply has been no market. Even where a market for these kanthas exists, as in Chapai



Nawabganj, remuneration is less than what can be earned from any sort of work. In addition, with the steady impoverishment of the lower strata of the population in Bangladesh, increasing numbers of women are seeking employment. They no longer have the spare time.

To produce a cross-stitch standard sized kantha at Chapai Nawabganj, we are told, three women work together in their spare time for a month, or one woman works singly for three months, (generally during after-launch to dusk hours). If one figures conservatively at about three hours (women told us, it is about five) of spare time per day per woman, then it would take 270 hours to make one kantha for a remuneration of Taka 80.00 (according to some artists or about 35 paisa per hour or about 2 U.S. cents per hour). Assuming the time figures given are approximately correct, EAF marketing would increase the possible earnings of women three to four times over current options; and for the best artists the increase would still be higher. Moreover, such work could be done with much greater dignity than other work, within their own homes, which naturally enhances its appeal. For all these reasons, there should be a plentiful supply of kanthas of increasingly high quality as the EAF programme gets put into effect.

To add a summary of our baseline data, we may state here that we pay about \$18.00 for a kantha from KM3. The cost to BEAF from a best quality kantha including its expenses to New York would be about \$60.00 whereas the import and marketing cost to EAF at New York would be around \$125.00. At present, New York wholesale price would be \$200 which would definitely rise in future due to art collector's awareness following International exhibitions to be held and books and catalogues to be published within next few years.

In January 1980, preliminary trial marketing of Chapai Nawabganj kanthas was carried out by EAF in Washington D.C.; this created considerable interest which is now being pursued further. One dealer with a gallery in a New York resort area seems confident that he can sell two to three hundred kanthas in a summer season wholesaled to him by EAF at approximately \$200 each.

The net surplus of \$75 from New York sale would be distributed as follows:

50%	Plus	50%	= 100%
\$37.50		\$37.50	
To BEAF		To EAF, N. Y.	
50%	50%	100%	
(to artist)	(for development)	(for development)	

We have calculated that with the rise in wholesale price the artists' earnings could rise to seven times current earnings but which may not be a stable situation all the time. It is, however, the intention of EAF to gradually expand the artist's share to 25% of the wholesale price. For that goal to be achieved, BEAF must establish more personal contact, devise quality control measures, and marketing structure, and prepare explanatory materials.

As mentioned earlier, funds for development work are being reserved by EAF, N.Y. and BEAF to be awarded to promising projects, either to groups of artists or to projects in the communities where artists live. Self-financing development may be planned for the villages of Kantha producers on the model of what is now underway in Mithila including functional literacy, health care, revolving credit funds, rural industries and agricultural programmes targeted at the "poorest of the poor." It is one thing to heat up development in villages with large inputs from outside. It

is quite another to design a means by which villagers can supply the economic heat themselves to solve their own problems. It is the aim of the action research project (BEAF) to get such a self-fueling fire started.

### Conclusion

Following the Canadian example and the Mithila Experience, the Ethnic Arts Foundation started to explore similar possibilities for Bangladesh kanthas, by paying artists on the basis of quality and not just by the piece, treating the kantha makers as "artists" instead of mere craftsmen. This has met with a beautiful response.

We firmly believe that the tradition can recapture all of its former vitality. Certainly, there is much to be done in terms of research that will illuminate the tradition and present it through catalogues, exhibitions, films, books, and articles to sophisticated buyers at home and abroad assuring thereby a steady demand for the finest kanthas at the prices they deserve.

By using part of the earnings generated from the sale of kanthas we should be able to provide for rural development programmes. It is being planned that regional master crafts men's association eventually would be formed but until then, operations will be conducted where possible with existing organizations. However, just as BEAF wishes to channel money back to artists on the basis of performance (the quality of their work), so also do they intend to process funds through organizations for development according to the quality of their work. That is to say, they do not wish to make the developmental project funds a built-in, automatic thing. Proposals for the use of these funds from various groups of artists will be accepted and assessed by the Foundation board, and monitored by their research assistant-cum-field staff. The amount of money available to any one group potentially will be approximately equal to the portion of the net surplus received by

artists within that group. Thus we cannot only provide the means for artists to better themselves economically, but to more broadly assist the human and social development of their communities. Much of this is still scheme and dream, but the Canadian achievements and the Mithila experiments arouse hope that it can become a reality. New horizons would then be opened; for folk art as means of rural development shall reaffirm its position—more markedly than hitherto advanced arguments.

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**Excerpts from the comments on  
Other works by the same author :**

1. *Etude sur l'EVOLUTION INTELLECTUELLE chez les  
MUSULMANS du BENGALÉ : 1857-1947.*

(A Study on the Intellectual Evolution among the Musalmans of Bengal, 1857-1947 : by Professor Dr. Mahmud Shah Qureshi : Paris and The Hague, Mouton & Co. 1971 : Pages 208)

This is a fine book for which the author is certainly to be congratulated. He has written this book in French, and this brings additional *kudos* to the scholarship of Muslim Researchers in Bengal, who are manifesting an admirable interest in different branches of study and extending the horizon of learning in the sub-continent of India, consisting of the independent lands of *India-Bangladesh-Nepal-Pakistan*. Prof. Qureshi is a well known scholar who has been long connected with the University of Chittagong in Bangladesh. ...A full history of the cultural and intellectual evolution which has been going on in India during the period from the 8th century A.D. onwards right up to the present age (end of the 20th century) is a subject of paramount interest, and the intellectual evolution of the Musalmans of Bengal is just a section of it. But the proper study of this can easily become encyclopaedic ; and portions of these from different aspects have been attempted, and frequently attempted successfully by scholars both Indian (Hindu and Muslim) as well as British and other Europeans.

Prof. Qureshi modestly limits himself to a study of the intellectual evolution of the Bengali Muslims. But even this subject is quite vast, and his performance in this line shows quite a comprehensive and a brilliantly successful attempt....

...This is a very well thought-out work, and the matter, as it can be easily seen has been treated by a scholar who has an atmosphere of modernism in his mind. There is a lot of precise information about Bengali writers who helped in the intellectual evolution of the Muslims. It is easy to see that his reading of the subject has been quite extensive- and I am inclined to think that it is much more extensive than in any other work of a similar type which I have seen. ...

November 20, 1972.

**Suniti Kumar Chatterji**  
National Professor of India  
in Humanities  
Calcutta

This is a valuable book for it permits the non-Bengali reader to trace the development of Bengali—Muslim self-awareness to its manifestation in Pakistan and Bangladesh. As far as this reviewer knows, no other published study in a European language contains the same information. The value of the work is enhanced by an up-to-date bibliography containing nearly 1500 items and extensive footnotes. Within the bibliography are lists of the major published works of all the principal writers discussed in the text...

**B. M. Morrison**  
*Pacific Affairs*  
An International Review  
of Asia & the Pacific  
University of British  
Columbia, Vancouver.  
Vol 45 no 3 pp. 448-449.

The subject on which you have written is very important. I have been very favourably impressed by his portions that I have read.

R. C. Majumdar

11. 3. 76

Your book is so valuable...you have provided so much important details regarding Bengali Muslim intelligentsia that we should all know.

Niharranjan Ray

10. 2. 1974

2. *Poemes Mystiques Bengalis-Chants Bauls*  
(Collection Unesco d'oeuvres representatives-Serie Bangladesh). Edition St. Germain-des-Pres, Paris, 1977).

...Quite original in several respects .....

Qureshi's anthology is a remarkable and worthwhile book edited with good taste and providing the reader with an aesthetic experience as well as reliable information.

Hana Preinhaelterova

*Archiv Orientalni, Prague*

4 Vol 46, 1978 pp. 374-375.

3. *Parallele* (edited & translated). Alliance Francaise, Chittagong, 1976.

...Un joli et precieux petit livre.

Eugene Guillevic

10. 10. 1977

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E. C. ... ..  
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