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2. Willem Van Schendel, 'Economy of the Working Classes'. Sirajul Islam (ed.), *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, Vol. II, (Economic History), (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh 1992), pp. 542-99.
3. W.H. Morris-Jones, "Pakistan Post-Mortem and the Roots of Bangladesh", *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 18 (April-June), 1972, pp. 187-200.

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THE ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BANGLADESH
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**THE PERFORMERS WHO PLAY WITH THE NOTION OF TIME:
READING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC INSCRIPTIONS ON THE
MEMBRANOPHONE *BĀDYAKAR* OF BANGLADESH***

Syed Jamil Ahmed**

Abstract

This essay seeks to demonstrate how the socio-economic determinants, i.e., the determinants ‘of, relating to, or involving a combination of social and economic factors’ (Merriam-Webster), impinge on the sign of the membranophone *bādyakar* (instrumentalist), more specifically, the traditional drummer in Bangladesh, to significantly affect the capacity of a nation to be interpretatively ambiguous regarding its playful engagement with the fluxing, pulsing notion of time. In delving into this question, this empirical study proceeds in four stages. The first of these delineates the social significance of the act of drumming in performative contexts of Bangladesh; the second and the third draw on field-level investigations on folklore to examine the socio-economics of the *bādyakar* at the community and the individual levels, respectively, and the fourth reads the significance of the sign of *bādyakar* against the contemporary macro socio-economics of Bangladesh.

If life can be perceived as a rhythm, a pulsation of beats that incessantly recurs in each living being, then surely the performative act of drumming signifies the transformation of ‘nature’ into ‘culture’ by playfully engaging with the elusive notion of time. The elusive notion of time refers to the part of a fundamental intellectual structure of the humans, which ‘keeps everything from happening at once’ (Cummings 2005: 46). Characteristically, the intricacies and emotionality of the performative act of drumming hinge on its ‘capacity to be interpretively ambiguous’ because, ‘[u]nlike singing, reciting, and melodic rendering of songs, drumming derives little semantic import from verbal texts’ (Wolf 2000: 82), and instead, at least in South Asia, ‘speaks’ in various configurations of the mnemonic syllables (*bol*). This paper seeks to demonstrate how the socio-economic determinants “of, relating to, or involving a combination of social and economic factors” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary), impinge on the sign of the

* The paper presented at the Munshi Aftabuddin and Abdul Hafiz Trust Fund Lecture, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 25 November 2014

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membranophone¹ *bādyakar* (instrumentalist), more specifically, the traditional drummer in Bangladesh, to significantly affect the capacity of a nation to be interpretatively ambiguous regarding its playful engagement with the fluxing and pulsing notion of time. In delving into this topic, this empirical study proceeds in four stages. The first section it delineates the social significance of the act of drumming in performative contexts of Bangladesh. The next two sections draw on field-level investigations on folklore to examine the socio-economics of the membranophone *bādyakar* at the community and the individual levels, respectively. The fourth section discusses the significance of the sign of the membranophone *bādyakar* against the contemporary macro socio-economics of Bangladesh. In this endeavour, the notion of significance will denote both ‘importance’ and ‘meaning’ (Oxford English Dictionary).

The Performance of the Membranophone *Bādyakar*: Social Significance

The sign of membranophone *bādyakar* in Bangladesh – invariably inscribed on a male body² – denotes the potentiality of weaving magical patterns of rhythm with his body swaying to music. The sign of the performer, intricately enmeshed with the sign of the instrument he plays in a performative field, produces such a highly charged significance of ambiguous interpretations of the rhythm of life, that Yeats’s celebrated riddle posed in his poem “Among School Children”, rephrased to ask how we can know the drummer from the drum, must be answered with a sphinx-like smile and a simple ‘we cannot.’ Fascinated with the ‘interpretively ambiguous’, the ethno-linguist community of the Bengalis evolved 33 distinct types of traditional membranophones over the past 12 centuries (Wahab 2008: 465-524).

Some of these instruments such as the *dhāk* and the *khol* have been locally fashioned, while others such as the *tavil*, the *dugdugi* and the *dhol*, have been assimilated by cultural interaction facilitated by intricate processes of history

1 The *Nātyashāstra* (Chapter XXXIII) describes the membranophone as *avanaddha* (Rangacharya 1996: 299-329).

2 The reason, according to Dasharath Das, a renowned *bādyakar* in Bangladesh, is that the playing of the Membranophone requires tremendous strength and energy, especially in the ability to strike the membranes hard. The women, he believes, lack this ability (interview by the author held at Dhaka on 17 November 2012). According to Binoy Banshi, one of the most renowned *bādyakars* of Bangladesh, playing of the *dhol*, one of the most popular membranophones in Bangladesh, requires it to be struck with great energy (Jaladas 2004: 63).

(Wahab 2008: 420, 476, 478, and 482). Although many of the 33 instruments are extinct today, the *dhāk*, *dhol*, *khol*, and *dugdugi* continue to articulate the pulsation of life of the Bengalis by playfully engaging with the elusive notion of time. The play of the *bādyakar* and the instrument has produced artistic performative genres such as the *dhākinrtya*, and the *dholinrtya*, in which the *dhāk* and the *dhol* players perform in fusion with their instruments and their pulsating rhythm. A few indigenous communities including the Manipuris have adopted the membranophones of the Bengalis such as the *khol*. Nevertheless, many ethnic communities have also fashioned distinct membranophones of their own. For example, the Usui community uses *khāing*, the Tripuras *khā-am*, the Marmas *peh* (Khan 1994: 229), and the Santals *mādal*.

The presence of the *dhol* (a barrel drum with two usable membranes, No. 211.222 in the Hornbostel–Sachs system of musical instrument classification), and its variants, the *dholak* and *Bangla dhol*, and its *bādyakar*– the *dhuli*–is ubiquitous in the contexts of traditional musical soirée, traditional dance and theatre, especially *kabigān*, and various forms of sports including the *bolikhelā*, a traditional form of wrestling inscribed with a history of anti-colonial resistance. It is also a traditional part of varying forms of sports such as football, *lāthi-khelā* (a form of martial art), and fulfillment of a *mānasik* rituals.³ During various auspicious ceremonies such as *annaprāsan*,⁴ rites of passage such as *gāye-halud* and marriage processions,⁵ and religious festivals such as *zikir* in anurs,⁶ *dhol* performance is widely used. This performative act is also a part of life in Bangladesh during processions such as Muharramer Michil,⁷ as well as secular festivals such as new year celebration), and even in performances of daily life such as processions of political parties, proclamations, and announcements (Rashid and Amin 2012: 251). Perhaps it won't be an exaggeration to claim that the *dhol* is the most popular and most widely used traditional membranophone in Bangladesh, employed both in religious as well as secular social events by the Hindus as well as the Muslims.

3 *Amānasik* is an offering promised to a deity or a *sufi* saint on condition that one's prayer be granted.

4 *Annaprāsan* is the traditional ceremony of giving rice to a child for the first time.

5 *Gāye-halud* is a ritualized turmeric bathing and is a part of an elaborate series of celebrations constituting the Bengali wedding.

6 Urs is the death anniversary of a *sufi* saint.

7 Muharramer Michil is the procession taken out by the Shia Muslims in the month of Muharram, commemorating the battle of Karbala fought on 10 October 680 AD.

On the other hand, the presence of the *dhak* (a barrel drum with oneusable membrane, No. 211.221 in the Hornbostel–Sachs system), its variants the *jay-dhak* and *dankā*, and its player the *dhaki* are generally restricted to the contexts of Hindu rituals such as public worship and auspicious ceremonies (such as public worship of Durgā), annual year-ending festivals such as *gājan*,⁸ and rites of passage such as processions related to marriage celebrations. Importantly, the *dhak* is invariably played with the *kāshi* (bell-metal disc). Even though music produced from synthetic sounds generated with synthesizers, samplers, drum machines or music sequencers is available today, the physical presence of the *dhak* played by a *dhaki* is considered indispensable in the Hindu ritual context.

The *khol* (and its variants known as *shrī-khol* and *mṛdanga*) is a double-conical drum with two usable membranes (No. 211.232 in the Hornbostel–Sachs system), and is believed to be entirely indigenous to Bangladesh (Wahab 2008: 478). The presence of the instrument with its player, the *khol-bādak*, is indispensable in Bengali Hindu public worship and religious performances (such as *kīrtan*), and performances of the Manipuri (Hindu) community such as the *rāsnṛtya* (Ahmed 2000: 43-50; Goswami 1985: 172).

Yet another membranophone, the *dugdugi*, (the *damaru* or the hour-glass drum, No. 211.242.1 in the Hornbostel–Sachs system) is significant because it has been almost completely decontextualized from ritual settings. As testified by ancient and medieval literary texts such as the *charyā-padas* and the *mangal-kābya*, the instrument was extensively used by the *siddhyāchāryas* initiated in the Sahajiyā doctrine as well as the Shaivites. On rare occasions, as among the Bauls of Dinajpur district in northern Bangladesh, this instrument is still used in ritual and artistic performance contexts (Huq 2012: 230). In some other isolated rural pockets, the instrument is used during the rendition of songs at the *gājan* festival (Ahmed 2003: 408). Today, its use is restricted mostly to the *sāpude*, *bede* and *bājīkar* communities and their performance with snakes, bears and monkeys, respectively (Wahab 2008: 498; Goswami 1985: 302; and Rashid and Amin 2012: 253).

In sum, this article has so far discussed the social significance of four popular and well-known membranophones. It is necessary to note that the significance, i.e., ‘importance’ as well as ‘meaning’ of the *dhak* and the *khol* are deeply embedded in the religious context of the Hindu community. The significance of the *dhol*, on

8 *Gājan* is a Hindu year-ending festival associated with Shiva.

the other hand, is wider, for it is embedded in Hindu religious as well as Hindu and Muslim secular contexts. By contrast, the *dug-dugi* is almost an outcaste, capable of anchoring importance and meaning only among the subaltern classes and their marginalized secular contexts.

The Socio-Economic Inscriptions on the Membranophone *Bādyakar* Community

Even if the drummer cannot be known from the drum he plays in performance contexts because the significance (i.e., the ‘meaning’ as well as ‘importance’) of the two signs of the *bādyakar* and his membranophone is necessarily – already always – interdependent, the significance of the *bādyakar* and his drum in daily-life performance still resonates with the curse of the sages described by Bharata in the *Nāṭyashāstra*: indeed they are still ‘treated as Shudras’ (Rangacharya 1996: 342). As Shamsuzzaman Khan observes, the condition of the *bādyakar* is wretched, they lack professional dignity in the society, and earn a meager amount from performance (1994: 226). Indeed, the situation is symptomatic of the entire South Asia where ‘traditional artists are typically of relatively low rank’ and even ‘written accounts created by an educated elite do not necessarily encompass the perspectives of such artists [...] of lower social status’ (Ghosh 2003: 686). Field level research on folklore in Bangladesh, conducted by Bangla Academy in 2011-12 reveals, a complex, heterogeneous and fluid identity of the *bādyakar* when the parameter is set by the socio-economic determinants.

For example, in Lohagoda sub-district under the Norail district in western Bangladesh, there are about fifty traditional *bādyakar* families. Locally known as *bājundār*, they are Muslims by faith. Over the past 20 to 25 years, most of these *bājundār*s have abandoned their profession because the demand for their performance has slackened. Hence, many have migrated to trade, commerce and public or private services for earning their livelihood. For the few who are still in the profession, drumming is a part-time source of livelihood. For example, Nasir Bādyakar (age 34) and his brother Polun Bādyakar from Itna village are now craftsmen of bamboo and rattan works. They occasionally play the *dhak* and the *dhol*. Another *bādyakar*, Moni Miah (45), has taken up farming as a profession. Concurrently, as the Muslim *bādyakar*s have abandoned their hereditary profession, members of the ‘low-caste’ Hindu *rishi* community, who have been working as cobblers and bamboo-rattan craftsmen, have been filling up the vacancy. For them, too, drumming is a part-time profession. For example,

Pramatha Biswas (aged 45), who lives in Lohagora Bazar in the town of Lohagora and has been a *bādyakar* of the *dhol* for the past 25 years, has chosen a career in the retail trading of rice. Sumon Biswas (28), a resident of Gopinathpur village under Lohagora municipality and a *bādyakar* of the drum (Western) as well as the *dholak*, works as a cobbler (Ali 2012: n.p.).

The condition in Narail Sadar sub-district under the Narail district is worse. There are 25 to 30 traditional *bādyakar* families in Ratandanga village (under Chandibarpur union) but only one person, a cornet player named Abdul Malek, is still active as a performer. In Gobra village of Singasholpur union, there were numerous *bādyakar* families in the past. Currently, only three or four families still live there but none are active in the profession of drumming. The situation is slightly better in Bhatia village adjacent to Narail town. It is believed that the traditional *bādyakar* families have been residing here for the past three hundred years. Although there are 20 to 25 traditional Muslim *bādyakar* families in the village, only about ten performers are still active in playing musical instruments. Out of them only two, briefly discussed below, are membranophone players. Mohammad Saheb Ali (born in 1956), who plays the traditional instrument of the *dhol* as well as ‘Western’ instruments such as the big drum, the side drum and the kettle drum when he is called on, has taken up handicrafts (basket and fan making) as his primary means of subsistence. In addition, Obaydur Rahman (born in 1967), another *bādyakar* from Bhatia village, also plays the *tablā*, conga, nine-set drum and top drum, and is a full-time professional. He has won the first prize in a competition held in Navaron town in 2000, in which 105 traditional membranophone players participated (Ali 2012: n.p.).

The socio-economics of the *bādyakar* in other parts of Bangladesh is not too dissimilar. For example, in Dhankuda village under Shaturia sub-district of Manikganj district in central Bangladesh, the *bādyakar* quarters (*pādā*) are composed of about thirty Hindu families. Half of them have completely migrated to other professions, while the remaining half continues to perform but have adopted supplementary means of livelihood. In Daohata village under the Mirzapur sub-district of Tangail district in central Bangladesh, out of twenty-five traditional *bādyakar* families, all Hindus by faith, about ten have permanently migrated to various services as their means of livelihood.⁹

9 Interview by the author of Dasarath Dash and Sib Nath Sib, two renowned *bādyakars* in Bangladesh, who hail from Dhankuda and Daohata villages, respectively, held at Dhaka on 17 November 2012.

In sharp contrast to the Bengalis, the Manipuris, a tiny ethnic community with a population of around 55,000 settled in the northeastern region of Sylhet, do not envision a social system constituted by a distinct stratum of professional performers, because artistic performance is deemed to be a communal rite. However, membranophone performers who achieve distinction for their performance are known as *dākulās*. None of them are full-time professionals. They are engaged either in farming or in government/private service as their primary means of livelihood.

In this review of the socio-economics of the *bādyakar* community, the current demographic profile demonstrates marginalized bands in terms of class, and Hindus as well as Muslims in terms of religion. Although the *Vṛhaddharma Purāṇa* (12th–14th century) determines that the Hindu *bādyakars* are to be organized into a separate endogamous community (*jāti*) of the *naṭa* (a sub-caste of the middle level of Shudras), whose distinct occupation is to be artistic performance (Ray 1994: 195), such is no longer the case in Bangladesh today. Interestingly, a family of the *naṭa* caste still lives in the *bādyakar* quarters (*pādā*) of Dhankuda village in the Shaturia sub-district of Manikganj district. Among the Muslim *bādyakars*, a few bear non-Muslim names, as in Ratanganga village of Narail district (Ali 2012: n.p.). It appears that these Muslim *bādyakars* adopted Hindu names when the Hindus were the dominant community during the colonial period, in order to facilitate their participation in Hindu rituals.¹⁰

Considering the socio-economics of the *bādyakars* at the community level, it is necessary to note that most of them possess very little cultural, social or symbolic capital. Many have already migrated from their hereditary professions by acquiring cultural capital in the form of higher education or directing their human capital in the form of competence and effort in labour to alternative professions. This aspect of social mobility among the *bādyakars* in Bangladesh is vertical as well as horizontal. At a few places, such as in Lohagoda sub-district under the Narail district, human capital associated with leather, has enabled the *rishi* community to be signified by low-level symbolic capital as measured by honor, prestige or recognition to fill up the gap left behind by the migration. Those traditional *bādyakars* who remain are part-time professionals. They earn between

10 Personal communication received from, Professor Raoshan Ali, Principal, Bir Shrestha Noor Muhammad College, Narail and Chief Coordinator, Folk Culture of Bangladesh Project (Narail District), Bangla Academy.

tk. 700 (US\$ 8.6) and tk. 1,200 (US\$ 14.75) for each performance and can expect to be engaged for about 150 performances a year.¹¹ However, this income is extremely uncertain if it is remembered that they are freelance practitioners who are left with no socio-economic safety nets to guard against political unrest and natural disasters such as famine, draught and cyclone. Thus, because financial resources are limited and seasonal, the traditional membranophone *bādyakars* subsist in vulnerable economic situations. Most of them play multiple instruments and many of them have acculturated non-traditional instruments such as the big drum and conga. Indeed this form of human capital, i.e., the capacity to play multiple instruments, enables a membranophone *bādyakar* to survive as a full-time professional, as is the case with Obaydur Rahman from Narail district.

The Socio-Economic Incriptions on Individual Membranophone *Bādyakars*

Having examined the socio-economic background of the membranophone *bādyakars* at the community level, it is now necessary to attend to individual cases in order to ascertain how specificities of socio-economics may lead to success or failure in life. Ramesh Chandra Ray (b. 1949), who is proficient in playing membranophones such as the *tablā*, *dhol*, *khol* and conga, a few aerophones and concussion idiophones, is a well-known *bādyakar* in the northern district of Thakurgaon, and has also performed in traditional theatre such as the *jātrā*. He obtained first division in the Secondary School Certificate examination,¹² but had to discontinue higher education because of famine. Besides performance, his means of subsistence depended on 6 acres of land that he owned and the service that he rendered to the local union council in realizing land tax. He was forced to migrate to India in 1967 on the advice of local political leaders and friends who felt that as a minority Hindu he risked losing his life in communal violence. Nevertheless, he overcame fear and returned to his homeland after nine months. In 1985, he joined Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS), a development NGO working to empower the rural poor in northern Bangladesh, to serve as a *bādyakar*. Today, he has lost his job and all of his land, and earns a meager living by leasing the land of others as a share-cropper and performing occasionally. To add to his misery, he has lost his eyesight because of cataract,

11 Personal communication received from Muhammad Raoshan Ali, Principal, Bir Shreshtha Noor Muhammad College, Narail, and Chief Coordinator, Folk Culture of Bangladesh Project (Narail District), Bangla Academy, 27 November 2012.

12 The Secondary School Certificate (SSC) is equivalent to the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in the British education system.

which he could not have had operated because of poverty (Hossain and Ghani 2012: 114, 393-395).

If the story of Ramesh Chandra Ray denotes failure at the local level, that of Binoy Banshi (1912-2002) generates success at the national level. Banshi's father was also a renowned *bādyakar*. Born in the marginalized caste of the fishers (*kaivarta*) in Boalkhali sub-district under the Chittagong district, where acute poverty and social exclusion are naturalized and unquestioned facts of everyday life, Binoy Banshi bore no inscription of institutional education and was orphaned at the age of eight. Poverty forced him to take up performative career as a female impersonator in the indigenous theatre of *jātrā* when he was only twelve years old. Subsequently, at the age of 23, he began to earn the living for his family of widowed mother and two brothers as a fisher and *bādyakar*. At this stage he had formed his own *thobā* (group) of five *bādyakars* and would perform in marriage celebrations, religious rituals (*nām-sangkirtan*), indigenous theatre performances (*gāzīrgān*), soirees of mystic songs (*bhāndārigān*), and the dance of the *nāuṭṭāpoyā* (female impersonators). In 1936, he teamed up with Ramesh Sheel, the legendary *kabiyāl* of Bengal, to perform as the *bāyen* (percussionist) in his *kabirladāi* performances.¹³ The teaming up was eventful, because, Ramesh Sheel's fame and demand as a performer made it possible for Binoy Banshi to be economically stable, embrace drumming as his full-time profession, and at the same time, hone his skill to emerge as one of the prominent *bāyens* of undivided Bengal. By this time he had achieved proficiency in a few other membranophones (*mrdanga* and *tablā*), chordophones (*dotārā* and violin), aerophones (*shehnāi* and harmonium) and idiophones (*kāsā* and *kartāl*) as well as in singing (Jaladas 2004: 26-65).

Ramesh Sheel's retirement from performance in 1963 led to decline in Binoy Banshi's demand as a *bāyen*, and hence, also his economic sustenance. Consequently, he was forced to go back to fishing as a major source of income. Binoy Banshi's state of acute deprivation was aggravated further by the politico-economic instability of post-Liberation years in the newly-independent country of Bangladesh (1971-1975) and the famine of 1974. It was only when he could enhance his social capital by linking up with prominent cultural activists such as

13 *Kabirladāior kabigānis* an indigenous form of contestual performance in Bangladesh, in which two *kabiyāls* (minstrels), accompanied by their troupes, engage in improvised debate set in music.

Milon Chowdhury (b. 1950) of Chittagong and cultural organizations such as Udichee,¹⁴ and NGOs such as Bangladesh Institute of Theatre Arts (BITA),¹⁵ that Binoy Banshi could emerge again as the most honoured and sought after *bāyen* in Bangladesh (Jaladas 2004: 83-121). Nevertheless, Binoy Banshi could not attain the level of economic sustenance that he had acquired during his association with Ramesh Sheel from 1936 to 1963. Although he could again focus entirely on performance from 1976 till his death, his children had to support his family by means of their ancestral profession of fishing.¹⁶ During this period, however, Binoy Banshi had acquired greater level of symbolic capital. Shortly before his death in 2002, the government conferred on him the Ekushey Padak, one of the highest civilian awards in Bangladesh (Jaladas 2004: 122-130).

As this examination of the socio-economic factors impinging on two *bādyakars* in Bangladesh demonstrates, social capital plays a vital role in ascertaining the level of significance a *bādyakar* attains. As in the case of Binoy Banshi, his association with Ramesh Sheel from 1936 to 1963, and with prominent cultural activists and organizations from 1976 to 2002, played a pivotal role in helping him to overcome social marginalization and attain symbolic capital, i.e., prestige, honor, attention, and hence, social, if not economic significance. Quite the opposite is true for Ramesh Chandra Ray. The assertion made above is further substantiated by the testimonies of Dasharath Dash and Shib Nath Shibu, two prominent membranophone *bādyakars* in Bangladesh.

Dasharath Dash is a renowned *bādyakar* in Bangladesh. He acknowledges the contribution of Proshika, one of the largest NGOs of Bangladesh, with which organization he was associated since its inception in 1976, and which employed him as a *bādyakar* from 1995 to 2010. Kiron Chandra Roy and Chandana Majumdar are two renowned folk singers in Bangladesh, with whom Dasharath Dash performed on numerous occasions since 2002. These sources provided a steady economic support, vital for Dasharath Dash to disentangle himself from

14 Udichee, or Bangladesh Udichee Shilpigosthi (established in 1968), is a leading cultural organization in Bangladesh, with a network spread all over the country. It is engaged in generating the notion of non-communal and progressive culture and believes in using music for political purposes.

15 BITA, a prominent NGO of Bangladesh based in Chittagong, is committed to the national development through the improvement of cultural heritage of disadvantaged population

16 Personal communication received from Babul Jaladas, son of Binoy Banshi, on 25 November 2012.

poverty. Today, he earns between tk. 5,000 (US\$ 61.46) and tk. 10,000 (US\$ 122.92) per performance, and can expect to be engaged in about 250 performances per year. More importantly, by means of these sources, he accrued social capital, which in turn enhanced his symbolic capital. Similarly, Shib Nath Sibhu, another prominent *bādyakar* in Bangladesh, acknowledges the economic support and sustenance he received from Bengal Creative Media (a reputed multimedia production company) where he has been employed since 1998, and from Kanganini Sufia, another famous folk singer in Bangladesh, with whom he has performed since 1995. Mention must also be made of the role of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy (the National Academy of Fine and Performing Arts), the principal state-sponsored national cultural center of Bangladesh, in enhancing the symbolic capital of these membranophone *bādyakars* by instating them as members of cultural delegation.¹⁷ Clearly, then, social capital is a key factor in the socio-economic significance of the life of a membranophone *bādyakar* in Bangladesh.

Reading Significance against the Macro Socio-Economics of Bangladesh

Extending an area of over 56,977 square miles (or over three times the size of Bhutan), Bangladesh is the eighth most populous country in the world with 157,667,716 (December 2014 estimate, BBS 2014a). In this tiny yet densely populated country, 89.5% of the inhabitants are Muslims, and 9.6%, Hindus; in ethnic terms, 98% are Bengalis, and the remaining 2% is constituted by 45 ethnic communities (CIA 2014; Kamal 2007: xxiii-xxxi). This data pertaining to the current demographic profile of Bangladesh can be more meaningful when read in the light of the country's immediate past. The Hindu-Muslim ratio within the territorial limits of what today constitutes Bangladesh was 28% against 70.3%, respectively, in 1941, before the independence of Pakistan.¹⁸ Since then, Hindu population has been dropping at an alarming rate: 22% Hindus against 76.9% Muslims in 1951, and 13.5% Hindus against 85.4% Muslims in 1971. The trend of decline has continued even after the independence of Bangladesh in 1971: 12.2% Hindus against 86.6% Muslims in 1981, and 9.5% Hindus against 89.58% Muslims in 2001 (Heitzman and Worden 1989: 255; BBS 2007: xiv). Because, as

17 Interview by the author with Dasarath Dash and Sib Nath Sibhu, held at Dhaka on 17 November 2012.

18 Pakistan emerged as a sovereign state in 1947 after British India was partitioned. The landmass now known as Bangladesh constituted its eastern wing.

observed earlier, the *dhak* and the *khol* are deeply embedded in religious context of the Hindu community, decline in the population of the community has seriously affected the significance of *bādyakars* of these two membranophones. The *khol* may survive in Bangladesh because it is used quite extensively in contemporary Bengali music scenario in the urban areas. However, the *dhak* appears poised for demise. So far as available information on the *dhak* players suggests, many of them migrated to India after the partition of 1947 (Khan 1994: 226). This trend continues today.

When the signifying social determinants at the macro level are not too heartening, the macro-economic factors impinging on the sign of the *bādyakar* tend to signify quite an opposite state of affairs. 'Despite widespread political demonstrations in Bangladesh ahead of national elections in January 2014, gross domestic product (GDP) growth in Fiscal Year 2014 (ended 30 June 2014) is estimated at 6.1%', reports Asia Development Bank, and projects growth at 6.4% FY2015 (ADB 2014). Having moved decisively to embrace globalization in the first half of the 1990s by increasing the integration of its national economy with the world economy through exchanges of commodities and labour (Osmani 2005: 1), Bangladesh today is enjoying positive impact on its economy. The per capita income has shot up to US\$ 1,190 in 2014 from US\$130 in 1983, and the literacy rate to 57.7% in 2014 from 29.2% in 1981.¹⁹ The population growth has been reduced to 1.6%, the average life expectancy of the people today is 69.4 years, and the middle class has burgeoned to 31.3%. At the same time, the size of urban population has grown from 15% in 1980 to 28.4% of the population in 2011 (Byron, 2012; *The Daily Star* 2012a; *The Daily Star* 2012c; *The Daily Star* 2014; CIA 2014; World Bank 2012; bdnews24 2014). The major engines for this change are micro-credit serviced by the NGOs,²⁰ remittance made by Bangladeshi workforce engaged abroad,²¹ the export of the garment industry,²² and

19 Definition of literacy: age 15 and over can read and write.

20 A recent study in Bangladesh found 1.8 million microcredit borrowers (or 9.4 million people including family members), See, Fazlur Rahman 2011.

21 The remittance stood at US\$ 12.846 billion in 2011 (*Daily Star* 2012b), and is expected to reach \$15.05 billion in 2014 (Byron 2014). Almost 8.6 million workers from Bangladesh are currently working abroad (97.4 percent of whom are males), and the country is among the top ten remittance receiving countries in the world (BBS 2014b: xix, xxi, 1).

22 Garment exports from Bangladesh totaled \$24491.88 million in 2013-14, which is 81.13 percent of the country's total export. The industry employs 4 million workers in 4536 factories (BGMEA 2014).

proliferation of information technology. For example, eighty percent of the farmers in Bangladesh now own mobile phones which they use to estimate market demand for their crops (Daily Star, 2012c).

In such an economic context, both the Marxist and the neo-liberal economists, following the base-superstructure model and the doctrine of free-market economy, respectively, will agree that a booming cultural industry is in the offing in Bangladesh. Already, there are 24 private and two state-run television channels catering to the needs of the home population as well as the Bangladeshi diaspora. These and countless other nodes of multimedia production houses, radio stations, and live cultural events will surely gather momentum, and trickle down to enhance the economic foundation of the membranophone *bādyakars* in Bangladesh.

What is disturbing in the macroeconomic scenario, though, is that although the poverty rate has dropped to 26.4 percent in 2013, from 31.5 percent in 2010 and 51 percent in 1996, while about 25 million people still live in extreme poverty (Rahman 2014),²³ and income inequality has risen alarmingly from 25.9 in 1984 to 32.1 in 2010 (World Bank 2014a and 2014b). These indicators, coupled with large-scale migration of the membranophone *bādyakars* from their hereditary profession, intrusion of Western instruments at indigenous performative contexts, and signs of demise of such instruments as the *dhak*, and *dugdugi*, depict a not-too-rosy picture of the future of the traditional membranophone *bādyakars* in Bangladesh. The overall situation forebodes further gloom when one adds the phenomenon of Islamism and concomitant religious intolerance that haunts the country. At the same time, the impact of cultural globalization or coca-colonization, if you will, can definitely be expected to erase the cultural identity of Bangladesh and its people by accelerating the encroachment of a homogenized consumer culture. Faced with such a process of the transfiguration of worldwide diversity by economic-darwinism.com where only the digitally fit will survive (Gómez-Peña 2001: 10), membranophone *bādyakars* in Bangladesh may soon be a lost species, or, at best, a rare bird propped up by life-support system.

Nevertheless, ‘tradition’, as Fanon (1968: 224) has argued, is ‘fundamentally unstable and shot through by centrifugal tendencies.’ As Glassié (1995: 395)

23 Income at \$1.25 per day is the standard poverty line.

observes, tradition is '[a] continuous process situated in the nothingness of the present,' which creates the future out of the past by 'linking the vanished with the unknown.' If we accept the definitions of 'tradition' provided by Fanon and Glassié, which focuses on continuity, then it is necessary to trust the resilience of the people for whom traditional culture acts as a web of signification to make meaning in the world they live – live in order to live better. All the instruments that the people of Bangladesh have known in the past evolved at a definite period of time. As some scholars believe, the *dhol* may have been imported to South Asia by the Mughals from Persia (Muhammad Shahidullah cited in Wahab 2008: 482). Even if the *dhak* and other membranophones become extinct in future, the pulsation of life that the people articulate by playfully engaging with the elusive notion of time will continue to evolve and to give rise to hybridization, amalgamation and evolution of newer instruments.

What is necessary, though, is making sure that the rural economy is invigorated at a faster pace, that poverty is reduced further if its elimination is an impossible dream, and that income inequality is lowered. These economic changes may revitalize the traditional culture of the rural population, which constitutes 72% of the total inhabitants of Bangladesh. At the same time, it is imperative that the dominant social ideology in contemporary Bangladesh recognize and celebrate plurality, hybridity and difference by acknowledging the 'minoritarian' propensities of life, which subjects any normative abstract standard to continuous variation. Undeniably, it is a tall order. But then, the stakes are high too. For, each *bādyakar* who gives up his profession, and each type of membranophone that ceases to exist is another tolling of the bell that John Donne suggests us not to ask for whom it tolls, because each tolling signifies the demise of a divergent manner of transformation of 'nature' into 'culture', each loss is the loss of the entire humanity's capacity for yet another approach to interpreting the ambiguous notion of time.

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**TEXT WITHIN TEXT: THE SHAPING OF SUNETRA
GUPTA'S *MEMORIES OF RAIN***

ASM Maswood Akhter*

Abstract

Instead of venturing into the more expected readings of Sunetra Gupta's debut novel *Memories of Rain* (1992) – which won her prestigious national literary award in India, the Sahitya Akademi Award for 1996 – as embodying the author's intricate writing style or diasporic angst or desire of conveying her ideas and thought about Calcutta to a Western audience, this paper seeks to raise the issue of intertextuality in the novel. It shows how this novel is immersed in conversation with the expanse of literature produced in different periods and diverse cultural settings. Gupta's extremely literary– even canonical– sensibility is revealed in the centrality and profusion of allusions and references that range from Euripides to Tagore. The paper argues that for a more nuanced understanding of *Memories of Rain* it is important to be aware of the influence and interplay of diverse texts providing the novel its context and meaning as well as shaping its narrative and characters.

With all its lyrical evocation of the 1970s' Calcutta¹ and its haunting memories, Sunetra Gupta's *Memories of Rain* (1992) remains rather a complex fictional narrative. Readers are at once intrigued by its sustained interior monologues, figurative language and sensuous poetic imagery, its warped chronology alternating flashbacks and fantasy with the present, or its linguistic experiments resulting in paragraph-stretched sentences conjoined by commas and overflowing grammatical halts. This paper, however, engages itself with a different issue: the importance and implications of the abundance of intertextual references and allusions in the novel.² I aim to look into the overwhelming canonical shadows lurking through the text to argue that this eclectic range of allusions and literary

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1 Since 2001 *Calcutta* was transformed into *Kolkata*. In this paper, however, I retain the older spelling of the city, considering that Gupta herself has used it in her novel that reminisces about 1970s' Calcutta.

2 For help with shaping this paper I am indebted to Ipsita Sengupta of the Centre for English Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

inspirations need not necessarily be construed as any conscious attempt on the part of the author at cultural integration, or at offering any thesis attesting to the universality of human experience recorded in literatures irrespective of age and culture; it is rather, while revealing Gupta's extremely literary sensibility, mostly functional instead of theoretical: much of the meaning as well as development of the narrative and the characters depend upon its intertextuality, its convergence with and deviation from the shadow of those intertexts. "Intertextuality," of course, is one of the most commonly (mis)used terms in contemporary critical vocabulary. Lest the use of the term should create any confusion here, let me clearly mention at the very outset that this paper does not base itself upon the concerted theoretical postulations of intertextuality by Julia Kristeva and others. The term intertextuality here is used in general to indicate the shadows of different texts in the given text of Gupta, and I am particularly interested not in their larger theoretical and philosophical implications, rather in the narrative function of those shadows within the novel itself.

There are at least two classic texts used as metaphor or pre-texts to this novel. One of them has been openly acknowledged – it is a contemporary revision in the Irish context of the Greek tragedy, Euripides' *Medea*:

The starting point for *Memories of Rain* was a production I saw of *Medea*, translated by Brendan Kennelly. I'd always wanted to write about a quiet, intelligent and extremely dignified Bengali woman – a kind of womanhood almost prescribed as an ideal by Tagore, and something I had aspired to myself once – who comes to live in this country as someone's wife rather than on her own terms. Watching *Medea*, I was moved by her dependence on Jason, and particularly how he defined this dependence as being beneficial not just to him but also to her. Eventually, it widened into an exploration of the Bengali culture itself as I had experienced it ...³

The other has only been subtly owned. It is a classic Bengali text, Maitreyi Devi's *Na Hanyate*⁴ (The title is taken from a verse in *Katha Upanishad*; the Sanskrit phrase "na hanyate" roughly means "indestructible") about a young Bengali woman who has moulded herself according to Tagore's ideals of womanhood; she idolizes the poet and has a tumultuous but tragic love-affair with a white student of her father, Mircea Eliade.

3 Sunetra Gupta, "Review of *Memories of Rain*", *Home Page*, Accessed 15 April 2012, <<http://www.sunetragupta.com/Memoriesofrain.asp>>.

4 Maitreyi Devi, *Na Hanyate* (Kolkata: Dey's Publication, 1974).

In *Memories of Rain*, Gupta brings together two youngsters, Anthony and Moni, from disparate worlds in a Calcutta rainstorm in 1978. Anthony is English who has come to Calcutta in order to research on Bengali theatre. He is intelligent, artistic, assured, and hopelessly promiscuous. Moni is an undergraduate student of English for whom England is a collage of the romantic imagery of her textbooks. This bright and young Bengali woman has led a sheltered life, is steeped in traditional cultural protocol, sensitive to taboos and fond of Jane Austen and the songs of Tagore. She finds herself both repelled and fascinated by this classmate of her brother, a visitor from across the seven seas, the Europe of her fevered literary imagination. They fall in love, apprehending unconsummated passion and years of unsatisfying, sorrowful memories; instead, they are able to marry and make their home in London. A fairy-tale comes true but only to meet a sordid end. The intense but silent Moni meets disappointment once she arrives in "cold" London. Caught in the clash of two cultures, their marriage becomes mired in the pain of infidelity and non-communication. She encounters prejudices, sexism and betrayal by the husband who had seemed so captivated by her beauty and virginal purity. Her emotions are accentuated by the gray British weather, the drab buildings and the bewildering pace of life in a new country. The fecund warm beauty and tender squalor of faraway home are contrasted with the bleak circumstances in which Moni now finds herself. When Anthony begins to stray – even when his mistress becomes practically a member of the household – Moni believes his divided heart will accommodate her, but she cannot bear the hurt when his manner changes to kindness and indifference. The main action of the novel takes place during a single weekend, when Moni, despondent over Anthony's infidelity, secretly plans to take their child and return to Calcutta on their daughter's birthday.

Memories of Rain thus becomes an elegy for Bengali culture and for the genre of romance. Apparently it is about a middle-class Bengali romantic dream come true – a young sensitive girl married to and carried off across the seven seas by the white prince of her dreams. The novel is a rather anti-romantic sequel to the last line of this fairy-tale – "And they lived happily ever after". The favourite fantasy translated into reality spells trauma for the girl, since the prince neither cares for nor respects her; the medieval genre of romance and its myth of true love become a weird joke in the context of Moni and her promiscuous husband. In this, it has quite a few connections with *Medea*, the play which engages with the end of the romance between Jason, the Greek and hence "civilized" hero of the quest in the

ship Argo, and Medea, enchantress and princess of the exotic Colchians. She deceives her father, murders her brother and abandons her homeland in order to fulfill Jason's quest and flees with him over the seas. She gives up all and expects in return a perfect love. Jason is however too shrewd to fit in the role of the ideal lover. His first love is power and fame, and when Creon the king of Corinth offers his only daughter and kingdom to the exiled Jason, he does not refuse. The untamed Medea has by that time become an embarrassing burden, and she and her two sons are condemned to exile by Creon, not much to the chagrin of Jason. Medea's love and suffering, poisoned to intense hatred for Jason, prompt her to plan an extreme revenge: she kills both Creon and his daughter and her own children, in order to relish Jason's pain. Thus what unites Medea and Moni in the first place is their fragile position as an ambiguous foreigner, with their homelands abandoned/betrayed. Anthony's friends echo his benign chauvinism and superiority in assuming that he has transported her from the barbaric East to the enlightened West: "For she had come to this island, this demi-paradise, from a bizarre and wonderful land, so Anthony's friends called it, was it true, they asked, that they still burn their wives, bury alive their female children?"⁵ This is not very far from Jason's proud declaration: "A good Greek land hath been/Thy lasting home, not barbary. Thou hast seen/Our ordered life and justice..."⁶

Both Moni and Medea – wronged women trapped in a foreign land – have crossed the threshold. Both are, to quote the epithet given by the chorus in Euripides' play, "woman without a city."⁷ And both eastern dreamers bitterly repent their homelessness – Medea with her furious words, Moni with her equally articulate silence:

But I, being citiless, am cast aside
By him that wedded me, a savage bride
Won in far seas and left-no mother near,
No brother, not one kinsman anywhere
For harbour in this storm.⁸

5 Sunetra Gupta, *Memories of Rain* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1992), p.6. Subsequent references to the novel are from this edition and indicated throughout the paper only by bracketed page numbers.

6 Euripides, "Medea", ll. 537-39, *Collected Plays of Euripides*, Trans. Gilbert Murray (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1954), pp. 1-96.

7 Euripides, "Medea", l. 650.

8 Euripides, "Medea", ll. 256-260.

Like Jason, whose first love was Argo and hence fame and power, Anthony's is his success, creativity and analytical powers, which become a neat justification of his adultery, since Anna finally seems to him intellectually adequate to gauge his thirst. His "tropical lust" (84) fades in colder British climes.

Finally, both texts are about the unbearable sadness of a dead love. Like Medea, Moni too contemplates killing the child in order to relish his pain and gives her wedding-sari to Anna for wearing at her child's birthday party, knowing very well that she is going to take the child back home with her. She hopes Anna would suffer the child's absence and the "cruel gold threads of the garment lent to her" (189) – a parallel to Medea's gift of the poisonous dress to the king's daughter. And she wants to see her husband destroyed by grief, so much so that she sacrifices the child in tearing her away from the "cocoon of peace" (160) of an indulgent father and a privileged fatherland. This is quite similar and almost an equivalent to Medea's murder of her child: "She feels no compassion for the sorrowful eyes from which she is rushing away at a speed beyond that of thought ... he will wander, a defeated ghost, among the ruins of the surreal birthday party, like the skeleton of a play he might have written" (193). In *Memories of Rain*, Gupta thus seems to present, as one critic goes to the extent of saying, "a rewriting of *Medea*."⁹

Now, *Memories of Rain* appears to take as prequel the text *Na Hanyate*, a more idyllic version of some of the favourite Bengali obsessions – for example, the obsession with *adda*, with the undebatable greatness of Tagore or with the old manic Anglophilia. *Adda*, a favourite pastime of Bengalis, is usually the evenings of "violent emotional discourse"¹⁰ where topics may range from literature, culture, society and taboos to sports, radical politics to anything on the earth. *Adda* has long been upheld not only as a necessary marker of Calcutta culture, but as a vibrant promoter of free intellectual and social discussions among the youth. The addiction to *adda* or prolonged discursive sessions in the Bengali social life of the 1920s and 1930s is one of the themes of *Na Hanyate*.¹¹ Amrita's

9 Shashi Tharoor, "Out of India: A Thirst for the Past", *Book World* (29.3.1994), p. 3.

10 *Ibid.*, p.40.

11 Here I may refer to Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Rev. ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). Of special significance is the chapter, "Adda: a History of Sociality" (pp. 180-213) in which Chakrabarty discusses the refreshing and formidable influence of *adda* in Bengali life during the British colonial rule.

father's house is filled with guests across cultures – a Russian magician couple, white professors and students, eminent *desi* colleagues of her father like Prafulla Ghosh, famous editors of Bengali magazines, the dancer Uday Shankar and Tagore himself. Discussions on philosophy and politics as well in the lighter vein were in plenty. In *Memories of Rain* Moni's generation inherits this *adda*-culture; her brother belongs to an avant-garde theatre group whose members discuss everything – from cinema and taboos to literature – in their daily ritual of intellectual *adda*.

There are some other obvious parallels between the two texts. The hypnotic fascination for the white young guest is one. The kissing sequence in the library between Mircea and Amrita – the moment when her virginal purity is explored by the desired stranger – parallels the passionate kisses Anthony plants on Moni's frightened lips behind the tank on the night of fire and thunder, the Kali puja festival. Mircea's exoticization of the land and the woman can be compared to Anthony's unreal expectations of Calcutta and Moni. Anthony imagines Moni's purity as his refuge from compulsive promiscuity and deep unease, just as he thinks "that perhaps the answers to all his questions about life and art lay concealed in the mired metropolis" (138). Moni becomes metonymic of Calcutta. When she fails to live up to these unreal demands, Anthony quickly gets bored. This immature yet loaded response is strikingly similar to Mircea's. Calcutta is apparently his panacea, the city of his dreams. When old, he confesses to Amrita that he had wanted to fantasize her as an enigma incarnate, as a Hindu goddess – Kali or Durga – whose actions were inexplicable. Both Moni and Amrita were thus finally fantasies in the imaginings of their white husband/lover, who refuse to accept them as human beings proper.

Anthony had come to Calcutta wearing the white man's complacent mask of the "gentle anthropologist" (38), eager to be acquainted with rural Bengal and its horrors and to study Bengali theatre as a dissertational curiosity. This mask can hardly hide his post/pro colonial smugness of playing the detached observer kind enough to rescue Moni from a sterile existence back in the diseased city, or the "enchanted benefactor" capable of translating into reality her naive literary wanderlust for Europe: "He had given her the world, the countless trips to Europe, would she ever have seen France, but for him, home to the language she had worshiped ... he had seen her move, as in a dream through the Louvre" (45). His unfinished thesis becomes metonymic of his futile bent for the well-worded

abstraction with which he tries to explain everything, ranging from his infidelity and Moni's trauma to the anarchic city. He does not relate to the city, just as he does not relate with his wife once she fails to fit into his fantasized role of the Bengali muse of his thesis and stories. He can only relish from a distance the occasional "exotic aroma" (121) of her fond memories of Calcutta unleashed by pains. For him, she is a wasted orchid incapable of flourishing in his British home: "he has sheltered her within his palms as the bud he had plucked, untimely, intoxicated by its incomplete scent, he had treasured in his glass house until he found that she would not bloom in her surrounds ..." (81-2). And Calcutta becomes a tired souvenir of "the brittle shell of their tropical lust" (84). On failing to shape her destiny as his ideal woman/dream or to fit Calcutta into his fantasy of amniotic *shanti*, Anthony rejects Moni and Calcutta as intellectually inadequate.

The pervasive presence of Tagore is yet another continuous leitmotif. An unmistakable Bengaliness pervades this novel, especially the expression of Moni's anguished passion and "dark" thoughts, articulated through Tagore's songs. For *Na Hanyate*'s Amrita located in the 1930s, Tagore is a living god, the ideal beloved to whom she dedicates her poems, her suffering and her being and whose songs set the rhythm to her world. Exasperated, Mircea asks, "Will that one man do everything for your race?" And Amrita retorts in delight: "Yes, yes, that one man sprawls across our skies, shapes our language and our thoughts, nurtures our love, it is because of him that stars bloom every night and flowers wake each morning in the forests."¹² Likewise, we see, even decades later, Moni still cannot fumble out of such ominous influence; she adapts Tagore's songs to her unspeakable anguish and sorrow in cold England. She has completely personalized the emotions implicit in his compositions and relied upon them for emotional sustenance.

Now, both *Memories of Rain* and *Na Hanyate* engage with image-clusters vital to the life and ethos of the middle-Calcuttan Bengali. However, while *Na Hanyate* validates many of these habits and practices from a rather innocent and romantic perspective, *Memories of Rain* broods over and challenges many of these cultural axioms. For example, the broken relationship between Amrita and Mircea seems to throb with the potential of fulfillment had it been given a chance. But the marriage of Anthony and Moni scripts a tortured footnote to this fairytale.

12 Maitreyi Devi, *Na Hanyate*, p. 11. My translation.

If *Medea* and *Na Hanyate* are the two major co-texts of this novel, then innumerable references to intertexts in multiple languages are sprinkled throughout. Both Anthony and Moni are bibliophiles. Especially Moni's world, including the England of her dream and her ideal lover, has been fashioned by books, her first love. Hers is a highly literary imagination. Even Anna belongs to the artistic circle; her father had been a minor poet. Moni had herself been employed in libraries, as an amateur assistant to Gayatri at the library of the small film institute with a diploma course run by a missionary Father back in Calcutta and later in a public library in London. A glimpse at Moni's bookshelf reveals an eclectic range of romantic texts in both English and Bengali. *Wuthering Heights* has shaped her notion of doomed and passionate, though naively pure, love: "She had loved Heathcliff before she loved any man ... she had convinced herself amid the long shadows of a tropical summer evening that she would never be able to leave any man that had loved her, that she had once loved ..." (177). The canonical Great Romantic poets, part of her curriculum, are among her favourites. Keats' sonnet "After Dark Vapors have Oppressed Our Plains" (165) makes her discover a certain romantic angle to her respiratory problems during her youth; she feels an elating kinship with this slowly withering, iconic consumptive poet. Her sensibility, influenced greatly by the canon of English literature as represented in the Calcutta University undergraduate syllabus, learns to languish for surrender and death. John Keats is an oft-quoted poet in this novel; his "Ode on Melancholy" frames the dark evening of her first encounter with Anthony in monsoon-ravaged Calcutta. British texts have helped her map the sacred geography of London, the imaginary homeland of many cultured Bengalis' intellectualism and acquired literary taste. That is how Moni could visualize the "chalk cliffs of Shakespeare's demi-paradise" (157) Wessex or Bristol where Rammohan Roy lay buried, long before she had geographically visited these sites.

Moni is, however, a more intimate insider to the Bengali canon – both romantic and modernist. When she was twelve she had fed upon the romanticism of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's novels deeply influenced by Victorian fiction. As newly-wed Anthony caresses Moni's dark hair in tender ecstasy, she remembers Jibanananda Das's "untranslatable line" from the poem "Banalata Sen": "And her hair is a long-lost night of the ancient kingdom of Bidisha" (159); and as he makes furious love – with his lust for Anna in mind – to her, she can only compare the distant moon to Sukanta Bhattacharya's notoriously anti-romantic image of "charred bread in the eyes of the hungry" (89).

Moni had of course also devoured the popular junk fiction gifted to her on birthdays; melodramatically realistic stories of kidnapped children maimed and sent out to beg in the streets till the maudlin moment of recognition when a hapless boy calls after his mother, "it is your very own son" (156). Epic myths from her own land also crowd her imagination, as do absurd Bengali folktales heard during childhood: "She remembers many nights of discomfort at the thought of monsters dismembered conveniently by plucking the wings off a bee, buried in a cask under a deep, deep lake, of birds condemned to blindness unless their eyes be anointed by drops of princely blood" (156). Archetypal myths from the epic *Mahabharata* – e.g. that of Satyabati the ferrywoman who got rid of the strong odour of fish that clung to her since birth and emerged lotus-fragrant from her illicit love with sage Parashar (162) – haunt Moni, as she looks at Anna who is flushed with love for her husband. The estranged couple's emotions are in the end connected through T.S. Eliot's "Marina"; Anthony remembers identical lines from the poem in order to capture the well of emotion within himself when his daughter is born, which Moni ironically does after six years to bask in his imagined pain on losing the child.

Besides her personal favourites, Moni also has had a fair exposure to diverse cinema and literatures, being a behind the scene assistant in her brother's experimental theatre group. Thus she can empathize with the terrible desolation of Sophocles' King Oedipus who tries to retain his human dignity and an undying sense of pain and beauty when destroyed by fate, or with the sad absurdity of the land of Bombagarh evoked in Sukumar Ray's poem. Cinema like Satyajit Ray's *Satranj Ke Khiladi* – also on the absurd agony of defeat of an art-obsessed king by the conniving British – or the Russian director Sergei Eisenstein's 1925 silent film *Battleship Potemkin*, and directors like Fellini are regular topics for her brother's *adda* and thus part of her intellectual horizon.

Anthony gifts Moni a bilingual copy of Rimbaud in order to have some excuse to ask for her, when he cannot bear not to see her any longer during their embarrassed courtship in Calcutta. The *sahib* is teasingly compared by her brother to one of those disheveled lovelorn alcoholic heroes of Sarat Chandra Chatterjee like Devdas. This further kindles Moni's passion, for she always expected her lover to emerge out of a book. The missionary Father in the novel presented Anthony with a copy of Tagore's *Red Oleanders*, an English translation of his *Rakta Karabi*, possibly to provide him an insight into the host culture. Finally, more than Heathcliff, it was perhaps Tagore's

couplet on fated love in his novel *Char Adhyay (Four Chapters)* that pushed Moni to take the leap, to surrender to Anthony's fevered passion perfumed with potential disaster: "In the dying light of that March day/I saw in your eyes, my doom" (25). Tagore is, literally, a major context and co-text of this novel.

Canonical texts and historical and cultural icons echo in her other novels as well – *The Glassblower's Breath* (1993)¹³ has something of the quality of myth; her narrator, like T. S. Eliot's Tiresias, floats freely through every character's mind. *Moonlight into Marzipan* (1995)¹⁴ is inspired by *Oedipus* and *The Great Gatsby*, *So Good in Black* (2009)¹⁵ by historical accounts of the trial of Warren Hastings and *A Sin of Colour* (1999)¹⁶ by *Rebecca* and the whispered rumour of the incest between Rabindranath Tagore and his sister-in-law. All these texts of Gupta abound in intertextual references. For example, in *A Sin of Colour*, Niharika's friend and aspiring suitor Rahul stages a Bengali version of the play "The Three Penny Opera" and Daniel Faradey whistles the theme of the play as Niharika finds him waiting for her after a gap of six long years. Again Niharika's mother, the beautiful and aloof Reba plays Medea – "a woman stunned beyond reason by the failure of love."¹⁷ In *The Glassblower's Breath*, too, "you" enjoys reading *Anna Karenina* and remembers her conversation with John Sparrow on Rilke's *Duino Elegies*.

When so many writers jostle within the limited print space of the text, can the self-reflexive subject of writing itself be far behind? For Gupta, writing her first novel *Memories of Rain*, was like touching "a part of yourself" as she said to an anonymous interviewer in 1996.¹⁸ It renders Gupta's looking back at a city and culture to which she has intensely belonged, as she confesses, the temptation of (authentic) representation of her culture to a foreign audience was initially too great to resist: "I think I am lucky in not feeling that I need to write for a particular audience ... [but] at first I was a little bit interested in conveying my ideas and thoughts about Calcutta to a Western audience."¹⁹ Many of the principal

13 Sunetra Gupta, *The Glassblower's Breath* (London: Orion, 1993).

14 Sunetra Gupta, *Moonlight into Marzipan* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1995).

15 Sunetra Gupta, *So Good in Black* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2009).

16 Sunetra Gupta, *A Sin of Colour* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1999).

17 *A Sin of Colour*, p. 161.

18 Somdatta Mandal, "Sunetra Gupta", in Fakrul Alam (ed.), *South Asian Writers in English* (Detroit: Thomson Gale 2006), p.165.

19 Ranjan Ghosh and Christane Schotte, "... nobody likes to be bracketed": Interview with Sunetra Gupta, *Critical Practice*, Vol. 11(2), 2004, p. 122.

characters in Gupta's texts are successful or at least aspiring writers, or, like Promothesh in *Moonlight into Marzipan*, struggle to tease out a coherent plot from disjointed pieces of self-narrative. Moni admires her friend Sharmila's beautiful English and maintains a journal in secret in her red-vinyl-bound diary. She even writes letters, though only to her exclusive reader Sharmila, while she is away to stay with her headmistress aunt in rural Bengal: "She wrote long letters to Sharmila from the village, half in English, half in Bengali ... sounds of violent pond side laundry would lend rhythm to the torrent of emotions that she laid bare on the faded blue of inland letter forms ... as she scribbled furiously..." (25). Moni loves to write, provided it is not public/published; that she takes writing quite seriously is evident from the way she sulks to write her journal or her letters in anything but black ink. She had stopped maintaining a journal since meeting Anthony, "since she had found it embarrassing, difficult, and certainly too dangerous to record her meetings with Anthony..." (26). Anthony seems to complain about Moni stifling his creativity and intellectual life; but it is Moni who is initially overwhelmed and then too numbed by pain to pour out her shock in a journal; she stops writing and chokes her imaginative life, paralyzed by Anthony's betrayal.

Anthony too is an aspiring writer but with more professional aims. His notes on Bengali theatre kept in thick journals in India had been interspersed with declarations of his love for Moni. In the early days of their love, he had thought of dedicating his thesis to her, "his tropical dream" (82), and sending her a copy by sea-mail. He had considered featuring in her bookshelf rather than in her boudoir: "she would treasure it among her volumes of poetry" (82). Till then Moni had remained a harmless exotic muse, who could be evoked in melancholic citations from Romantic poetry – "she dwells with Beauty – Beauty that must die" (82). But Moni had failed to play his virginal muse: his thesis remained unfinished, the sheaves of paper gathered dust in redundant cartons and the typewriter lay unused in the corner. Anna slipped into the role: "It was Anna who had led him back into the world to which he belonged, taught him to breathe richly, again, of life ... he had found his way, through her, into the circles to which he had always aspired ... he had longed for success, more than the love of a woman" (83).

Only one of Anthony's works found its way to print – a short story on his sister's suicide, a story begun in Calcutta when he had to fit the devastating details of his sister's death to suit Moni's naïve emotions of peace and beauty, and later, in a

cathartic spell, had “retched the soiled memories that he had concealed from her upon the turbid sheets” (115). He finally finished it in London, inspired by his affair with Anna. He read out the manuscript not to Moni but to Anna on a stolen weekend in Brittany. Roused from his intellectual stupor after meeting Anna, he even wrote a play which, however, remained unpublished in Anna’s desk drawer, along with other mementos of their togetherness.

Narratives – whether scripted or oral – have been projected as the healing-space in Gupta’s texts, particularly in *Memories of Rain*. For Anthony writing is clearly a release. And for Moni, it is only after she decides to end her unworded suffering in coping with Anthony’s unabashed promiscuity, that she could break her silence and unleash her pain in a torrent of anecdotes the day before she leaves with her child. Moni was transplanted to England when young as Anthony’s dependent, and hence remains less mature than Gupta’s other protagonists like Niharika in *A Sin of Colour*. What is merely a bashful and private hobby for Moni becomes a fulltime engagement for Niharika – the history of a pygmy exhibited as an anthropological curiosity in a zoo in the USA who later commits suicide is the subject of both her Oxford D.Phil. and debut novel. Niharika later returns to her house in Calcutta in order to write a book on the disappearance of her enigmatic uncle Debendranath. Writing provides a partial release from the unbearable pain of her love for Daniel Faradey who has left her for Australia. Promothesh in *Moonlight into Marzipan* seeks to retrieve his dignity by scribbling down shreds of his life or by narrating them to his biographer Alexandra. The otherwise unhomed “You” in *The Glassblower’s Breath* irregularly contributes Bengali poems to a Calcutta-based literary magazine and later, inspired by her father, plans to write a novel about her friend John Sparrow.

If writing be one of the vital concerns in Gupta’s texts, must not then the iconic writer of the Bengali canon, Rabindranath Tagore, take a front seat in *Memories of Rain* which remains planted in that culture? Tagore, indeed, is an overwhelming presence in this text. So much so that Moni, who remains inarticulate as much in her brother’s circle as later in Anthony’s, chooses to voice her unspoken emotions through Tagore’s songs. Her emotions and fantasies have been shaped to a large extent by Tagore’s works, intensely personalized by a section of the Bengali community. As Gupta herself says:

My novel *Memories of Rain* is an examination of the *dependence of Bengali culture on the towering figure of the poet Rabindranath Tagore*. At the time that I wrote the book, I saw it as a relationship which was extremely enriching and

nourishing and yet tragically also somewhat confining. The original title of the novel *The Dregs of a Poet's Dream* (naturally instantly rejected by the publishers) was meant to reflect how the culture itself had also failed him.²⁰

Memories of Rain then explores in a highly romantic idiom the often anti-romantic and even awry outcome of this cultural overdependence on the poet. Tagore had tall dreams about the Bengali race (that is, of course, not to say that Tagore was never uncritical of the Bengali race) but they seem to have lapsed into an over-sophisticated rhetoric largely inspired by his poems, and a graceless passivity. Gupta seems to think that its parasitical leaning on Tagore has ironically largely spelled the present decadence of Calcutta.²¹ The Bengalis have chosen to ignore his "urgent visions" regarding politics and education and thereby reduced the poet's dreams to its dregs, clutching on obsessively to over-stylized versions of his romantic songs and poems:

So pervasive and absolute was his [Tagore's] philosophy that when I was child I easily misconceived him as a divine being on account of 'Tagore' (or Thakur as it is properly pronounced) translating as 'Lord'.... And yet later I came to see Calcutta as representing the dregs of this poet's dream, came to feel that we had betrayed Tagore precisely by enslaving ourselves to his poetry. In fact, Tagore was an intensely practical man as well as a poet, considered the pursuit of earthly beauty as an essential process of the refinement of the spirit. I feel closer to his philosophy [in London] than amid the babble of a people ritually perfecting their imitation of his style in their prose, their poetry and their everyday speak. I cannot entirely ascribe the decay of the culture to the unhealthy dependence upon the vision, albeit grand and broad, of a single literary genius, but I am certain it had a major part to play.²²

Like the author, Moni too idolizes Tagore and even deifies him: "he, whom she had thought, for the greater part of her childhood, to be one of the gods ... she recognized then [on discovering that he was a mortal!] that a mortal may command more reverence than the gods themselves..." (137). She finds it "faintly obscene" (137) to imagine her Poet dabbling with the modern hybrid medium of cinema. When she was young and darkly certain about her unfulfilled love for Anthony, she had even contemplated seeking lonely refuge at the poet's idyllic school in Santiniketan, eerily resembling the desperation with which Amrita of *Na Hanyate* repeatedly rushes to seek solace in the live presence of the poet after her tragic separation from Mircea: "She [Moni] had seen herself then, growing

20 Sunetra Gupta, "Review of *Memories of Rain*". Emphasis added.

21 For detail on the issue see my article, "Sunetra Gupta's *Memories of Calcutta and Tagore*" in *South Asian Review*, Vol. 32(2), 2011, pp. 85-112.

22 Sunetra Gupta, "Introduction to *Calcutta* by Benoit Lange", *Home Page*, Accessed 13 Nov. 2012, <<http://www.sunetrugupta.com/essays3.asp>>.

old without him, upon the red soil of the poet's home, that was where she resolved to spend the rest of her days, at the poet's school, she would hold her memories close in the dry Birbhum cold ..." (181).

Tagore is a religion for Moni and for the culturally inclined, middle-class Bengalis she represents. Every year her family would make a pilgrimage to the poet's house in Jorashanko in north Calcutta. This journey was to commemorate Tagore's birthday in the middle of the summer heat. His prophetic presence in the being of Bengalis is evident in the way Moni thinks that his love for an older brother's wife has permanently infused the race "with the deep tragedy of incest" (196). The novel itself is replete with Gupta's poetic translations of Tagore's songs – mostly evoking monsoon but also related to love and puja – used to articulate its central emotions. Gupta thinks that the essence of Bengaliness post-Tagore is captured in his monsoon songs:

The terrible beauty of the rains never failed to resonate within us ... Indeed I believe my expectations of romantic love – in my youth, at least – were largely conditioned by my experience of monsoon, or perhaps more by its poetic treatment not only in the hands of Kalidasa and Tagore but also some of our lesser known writers ... Life, death, and love – all seemed to be united by the rhythm of rain, and the perfect translocation of it into song. To this day I do not know whether it was that Tagore had managed to capture and express the complex response of the Bengali psyche to rain or whether we – and I would be such a victim – had completely internalized what was actually his very personal response and made it our collective response. Whatever the case, they are his songs of rain that evoke for me most completely the essence of Bengal.²³

Moni, herself an accomplished singer of Tagore's songs, possibly shares all of these sentiments with her author. It was on such a rain-soaked evening that Anthony had come to her house. Tagore's songs provide her a magnificent and exaggerated metaphor for her adolescent pain, romanticism and sexuality. Anthony first hears her sing the morning after his arrival, a song rendered even more enigmatic in that it is not translated: "And so he woke ... to the sound of her windy voice, unfamiliar halftones, words he would never understand" (10). The song, apparently belonging to the genre of nature-songs, also invokes the mood of invitation and longing for the unknown beloved, weaving the ambience of Moni's fascination for Anthony. Later, during their tour in France, when Anthony discovers his heady lust for Anna, both can hear Moni singing by the window another Tagore song about the poet's resolve to resist the intoxicating spring night and wait, wakeful, for his Beloved. Ironically, it is her "foreign lament"

²³ Sunetra Gupta, "Introduction to *Calcutta*".

(11) that further enchants Anthony and Anna and fuels their passion. Finally, the song is infused with Moni's private emotions of *abhimaan*²⁴ and *biraha*²⁵ for her husband, as she can hint the love between them which promises to become more than a fleeting affair. She plays the powerless Medea – an enchantress who casts a spell (here with her song) to her own confusion and disadvantage.

Anthony's many obsessions with women make Moni remember Tagore's song about losing only to rediscover his beloved in a slightly ironic context. She comes up with a personal revised adaptation as she remembers his lasting *leela*²⁶ (the word is in the corresponding song of Tagore: "Tomai natun kore pabo bole harai khane khan."²⁷) with Anna. While the others were illusory/impermanent tricks hatched to play hide-and-seek with her, now Moni was sure of losing him forever: "I lose you my beloved, and you will remain among the shadows that will be my world" (50). The translated version of the original runs: "I lose you, my beloved ... You remain invisible, yet you are not of the shadows" (50). The anguish of the poet shapes the desolation and misery of her own charred passion. Her untranslated songs mourn their lost love and the terrifying possibility of a life spent without love, as in "If you did not give me love" (97). And finally it is a Tagore song that echoes one of the core themes of the novel – memories as an autonomous healing-space privileged with the sanctity of forgiveness. For, after all that has happened between them and however estranged they might presently be, Moni still does not disown their past togetherness. Only memories could unwind her, or serve as the medium of reaching out to Anthony without bitterness through a Tagore song: "Even so, remember me/If I should move far away, even so/If the old love should be lost in the mazes of a new passion/Even so, remember me" (197).

Moni refuses to translate her songs, as if the sanctity of the songs or of her pain would be violated/adulterated through translation. Even during their courtship, she sang a Rabindrasangeet²⁸ adapted to her own confused adoration for Anthony,

24 An emotion that can be proximally translated as gentle scornful reproach for a loved one.

25 A state of separation from the beloved mingled with the pain and vivid waiting which usually accompany such a situation.

26 "Leela" means a playful prank tinged with naughtiness.

27 For a representative compilation of Tagore songs in their originals see Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitabitan* (Calcutta: Visva-Bharati, 1960).

28 There are, from Tagore, more than two-thousand songs in all, which are known by the collective title of the Rabindrasangeet.

but leaves the words unexplained: “Tears well up in her eyes, she has always wished to be able to address someone with her song ... she had hoped it would be one who would grasp the beauty of the poet’s words, not a stranger who ... gropes among the unknown words, the unfamiliar half-tones, for an answer to his mute caress” (57).

Anthony struggles to comprehend the mood of her song and begs for a translation; but the trance of incomprehension remains, for the lights come back and Amrita’s translation of Moni’s song remains unfinished. Later, during the sad years of their marriage, the “excruciating grief of her untranslated songs” (17) communes to him her silent misery. She tries translating the first song he has heard her sing but he does not listen to her eager, nervous efforts, wrapped up as he is in the memory of his secret afternoon with Anna. The translation proves futile. It is as if Tagore’s songs present a sacred and original poetics and language in themselves, which defy copies/ translations. As author, however, she does translate – sometimes in both prose and poetry– a number of Tagore songs that are central to her sensibilities in *Memories of Rain*, undercutting Moni’s resistance to translation. Tagore’s songs resonate through the subtext of *A Sin of Colour* as well, voicing the unspoken angst and desire of Debendranath and Niharika.

The Bengalis in the Calcutta of *Memories of Rain* – mainly represented by Moni’s brother and his experimental theatre group – play Beethoven on the record player are obsessed with Tagore, wear long Punjabi shirts to their *addas* and forbid trashy commercial Hindi/Bengali films for their younger siblings. They prefer *Citizen Kane* and are more comfortable in film societies showing Western classics, rather than in the squalid Calcutta fish market. They stage well-rehearsed and costumed Greek plays like *Oedipus* and *Antigone*, revel over forbidden food like beef, undertake journeys to obscure parts of the city, read out and criticized each other’s theatre manuscripts and sometimes prefer awed silence while listening to Moni’s renderings of Tagore’s songs. It is here that fresh ideas gain currency, where Moni’s brother can propose a theatre without props or costume for performance on the streets in which both actors and audience become co-participants.

For Moni as for her brother, London was mapped by literary coordinates. She had fancied roaming with a Heathcliff-like beloved upon English moors. As Moni leaves, she remembers walking “upon the very streets that Dickens, Hardy, Virginia Woolf had trod” (148); the actual geographical points of Tottenham

Court Road, Gower Street or University College Hospital become more like a dream. Her emotional geography of London cluttered by Big Ben and literary personae, sites and myths do not correspond to the aloof and uncaring city. She remains a stranger to both London and the language where she finally feels strangely trapped. Clearly, then, Moni could not belong to London. For her home is the Calcutta she had abandoned for Anthony, an irretrievable home frozen in time and space that can now be visited only in memory: "she is seized by an overwhelming desire to return to that world, although she knows it is there for her no longer" (15). By her marriage, she has been reduced to the status of an insider-outsider in her own home; like Medea she has subtly betrayed her brother and kin and her place. Her brother makes clear the stake by suggesting on the eve of her marriage that there could be "no back to Bengal" (178) for her: "Later that night, her brother came up with her onto the roof terrace, where a crisp layer of night lay above the smoky lights of the city, and looking out onto the sea of night smoke, their impenitent city, he reminded her, this is what you are giving up, this is what you will be leaving, forever" (22). In ten years, she had been a visitor to Calcutta only once for four weeks and her family had been formally distant to her. No one had even asked her to sing a Rabindrasangeet. It is to this home now that she plans to return. Whilst Moni is apprehensive about the possibility of rejection by her maternal city, her return to Calcutta is nevertheless rendered in mythical terms and enshrined by the ritualistic Durga Puja ceremony in Bengal, a ceremony which enacts a welcome for Devi Durga to this earth, her father's home. She has accidentally timed her ticket on the eve of the Puja. The mythic parallel pre-empted a healing possibility of the unconditional acceptance of a daughter come home, in spite of all humiliation and pain.

Ironically, as Moni leaves London, she carries the city with her in a series of nostalgic images – "watercress in the window, wild heath pond fringed by luminous rushes, ducks, foul geese among the violent yellow of new daffodils, the woman upon Oxford Street crushing ice cream cones to feed the pigeons" (172). She is freed of her bitterness for Anthony and London by remembering her togetherness with both. On the eve of her departure, she floods Anthony and Anna with her hysterical "torrent of anecdotes" (123) based on memories of Calcutta that provides her a cathartic domain where she can fully inhabit her culture without inhibition or embarrassment and flaunt her resistance to integration into the British cultural mainstream. The playfulness and violence latent in these accounts free her from playing the blonde angel. She regales them

on that eve with literal translations of Bengali proverbs e.g. “picked snake gourd” meaning “died” or “moon of a moonless night” meaning “someone we do not see very often or with funny local superstitions – e.g. with the rats’ blessing, children could have sharp rodent teeth sprouting once their milk teeth fell (154). Unfocused and uncensored memories – personal as well as cultural – release her from the pain of a long-sustained suppressive elegant silence and provide her with moments of pure rebellion as well. Moni had been plucked prematurely from her city and for ten long years, surrendered to Anthony’s hurting will with full passivity. But in the end, she did manage to transform a traditional tale of woman’s victimhood and retaliation – the myth embodied in Medea – into one of agency without bitterness where nostalgia and compassion had been possible. And perhaps herein lies an indication that, while *Memories of Rain* is in active dialogue with other texts, and while it derives much of its narrative, context, and meaning from the shadow of those intertexts, it finally has its own tale to tell.

WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION THROUGH EDUCATION IN 19TH CENTURY EASTERN BENGAL: PRIVATE ENTERPRISE OR GOVERNMENT AGENCY?

Asha Islam Nayeem*

Abstract

One of the main themes of feminist research has been the exploration of the roots of the dichotomous relationship women have with the home and the outside world. To navigate between these two worlds, and to negotiate for space within the various forms of patriarchal control, the primary tool for women's agency has been their access to formal education. With that conviction in mind, nineteenth century Bengal has to be revisited time and again to understand the dynamics of women's emancipation and the beginnings of women's agency. The indifference of the colonial government towards social progress and the determination of indigenous forces to achieve it appears as a recurring phenomenon. This paper is an addition to the narrative of the process of emancipation through the rise of formal educational institutions in the region we now call Bangladesh. It studies the contribution of the *zamindars* and local philanthropists who have made a difference in the lives of our foremothers and laid the foundations for further emancipation in the twentieth century. The paper concludes with a definitive reassurance about the power of private enterprise over government agency in bringing about social change for the better.

Introduction

Throughout history women were central to creating social wealth. But they ended up becoming marginalized through a process of systematic exclusion from the public space where the production of material resources and knowledge took place. Women, as occupants of the domestic space, eventually became disadvantaged as a group through this exclusion. The utilitarian purpose of education did not apply to women as no professions were open to them. Despite that, emancipation has seldom been an issue with working class women who have always contributed to the economy through menial work in the field, in the cottage industries, in small businesses and in the market. It is the privileged daughters and wives of the upper class who have faced the compulsions of maintaining family dignity through the maintenance of *pardah*

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or seclusion. For this class, the most important agency in the transfer of knowledge, culture and tradition was not formal institutions of instruction, but the family. Through socialization with many tiers of relations within the extended family, the female child learned attitudes, patterns of behavior, norms, manners and morals in preparation of her destined vocation as wife and mother of a large household. But as the winds of change came to Bengal along with most parts of the world in the nineteenth century, the secluded domestic space also felt the stirrings of physical and psychic mobility. This paper explores how much of the efforts of the transition from traditionalism to modernity were initiated by private enterprise as opposed to the colonial government's rhetorical stance in favor of progress. A large body of literature has developed in recent years on the dynamic interplay of physical, social and psychic mobility that occurred in Bengal in the nineteenth century, a phenomenon that is vital for the process of emancipation of any kind to begin. But social historians have mostly produced Kolkata-centric studies, neglecting the rich and varied history of eastern Bengal as it was considered the agrarian hinterland. The focus of this paper, thus, is on the process of development in the eastern part of Bengal which is now Bangladesh.

Gerder Lerner's Theory of Trained Ignorance

In 1993, Gerder Lerner published the second volume of her two-volume magnum opus *Women and History* which offers an elaborate theoretical discussion on the dynamics of gender imbalance in all social, political and economic relations.¹ Lerner's investigation reveals that education is a major area of domination; and the systematic exclusion of girls from educational institutions has perpetuated the subordination of women within the patriarchal structure. Women have been deprived from academia in every known society throughout history. Lerner terms this phenomenon as the condition of "trained ignorance."² As women neither had any function in the public arena of military, religious or political service, nor was there any promise of direct economic

1 Gerder Lerner, *Women and History*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). The first volume is titled *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) and deals with the historical process of women's subordination in society. The second volume is titled *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-seventy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) and discusses the growth of women's awareness of deprivation within the structure of patriarchal hegemony.

2 Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness* (New York, 1993), p. 10.

benefit, there was a lack of purpose for educating them. On the other hand, women of the aristocracy were carefully tutored, albeit at home, in case they were called upon to perform services to the State. That was a legitimate purpose. Lerner's thesis, although formulated in the context of European societies, is quite relevant to the process of women's entry in social and educational institutions in Bengal in the nineteenth century.

At the height of the social movement of Bengal, widely known as the 'Bengal Renaissance', the Women's Question became an integral part of social reorganization as all economic and political relations were being renegotiated and reshaped in the colonial environment. The demand for institutionally trained educated women was generated by the changes occurring in the family structure of the newly arising professional class who were employed in the colonial service. The joint family structure was breaking up as wives began to accompany their husbands to wherever their husbands would be stationed, far away from home, and would thus be required to raise a family and run a household without the guiding hands of a host of female relatives of various generations who were readily available in the traditional joint family system. But more important was the creation of the generation of Western-educated males whose changing ideas regarding what an ideal family should be, demanded the companionship of an educated wife. The lack of a purpose for formal education for girls slowly began to erode in the nineteenth century when the perception of the wife as companion rather than the vehicle for procreation and reproduction began to take form. When social reformers came to believe that having an educated wife at home would mean that the home would, to express in Gail Minault's compelling words, "... become a haven (or better still, an oasis), so that men would not be tempted to find their companionship elsewhere – with courtesans for instance"³, the social barriers against the spread of female education began to loosen up. The reformers further hoped that, "if middle-class women were literate and cultivated – traditionally a role reserved for courtesans – men would be saved from the dissolute life, and the expense that went along with it."⁴ It might be relevant here to mention that, in a nineteenth century instruction manual for use in girls' schools, one of the instructions in the 'Housewifery' section on 'Guiding Principles to Ensure

3 Cited in Sonia Nishat Amin, *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal, 1876-1939* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), p. 48.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

Health and Happiness', instructs girls to "Provide recreations and amusements in the home so that the members of the family may be made happy and kept from seeking their pleasures in *questionable places* (emphasis added)."⁵ Thus, social reformers in both nineteenth century England and India considered having an educated wife in the home to be a prerequisite to curtailing debauchery, if that what "pleasures in questionable places" indicates.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw determined indigenous efforts towards pushing forward the cause of female education not only in and around Kolkata, but also in eastern Bengal. The spurt of Christian missionary activity of the first half of the nineteenth century somewhat waned in the second half as reformers challenged and questioned the true intentions of the Christian missionaries.⁶ A phenomenon to take note of is the agency of women themselves in the amelioration of their lot. In the following section we shall take a look at how the indigenous private enterprise actually created the path for the emancipation of Bengali women.

Indigenous Private Enterprise

The western-educated elite and the newly emergent Bengali middle class had taken seriously James Mill's scathing criticism of how the Hindus treated their women in his 1817 treatise *The History of British India*.⁷ Mill notes: "The condition of women is one of the most remarkable circumstances in the manners of nations...A state of dependence more strict and humiliating than that which is ordained for the weaker sex among the Hindus cannot be easily conceived."⁸ Bengal's answer to such insinuations made by the British colonists and their missionary corroborators was reflected in an unprecedented push to 'break the seclusion of their women and thus pave the way towards women's

5 Deidre Beddoe, *Discovering women's history: A practical manual* (London: Pandora Press, 1983), p. 101.

6 A detailed discussion on this issue can be found in Nayeem, Asha Islam, 'Breaking the Myth of the 'White Woman's Burden': Female Missionaries in Bengal and the Institutionalization of Zenana Education', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh* (Humanities), Vol. 59, No. 1, June 2014, pp. 1-30.

7 James Mill, *The History of British India*, Vol. I, edited by H.H. Wilson, (London, 1840).

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 309-10, cited in Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for "Indian" Pasts?' in Ranjit Guha (ed.), *A Subaltern Studies Reader, 1986-1995*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, Oxford India paperbacks second impression, 2003), p. 276.

emancipation', as Ghulam Murshid has put it.⁹ While the intelligentsia provided the moral and ideological support for women's education, the local *zamindars* and philanthropists sponsored the founding of schools, supported the local initiatives for providing *zenana* education (the traditional system of providing education at home), and patronized the numerous associations that were formed to initiate and implement reforms. The waves of the social reform movement initiated in Kolkata did not take long to hit the shores of eastern Bengal where educational institutions for girls sprang up not just in the main cities of Dhaka and Chittagong but also in the *mofussil* towns like Barisal, Noakhali, Comilla, Jessore, Tangail and Mymensingh, to name a few. Meredith Borthwick observes, in her pioneering study on the women of Bengal that, "Enthusiasm for female education was especially apparent in the *mofussil*, where girls' schools sprang up for the daughters of the resident *bhadralok*. They were rarely set up by government initiative."¹⁰

The zamindars of Mymensingh, the district which, during colonial rule, included Tangail, Kishoreganj, Jamalpur and Netrokona, have been well-known for their altruism and patronage towards the spread of female education. The Magistrate of Mymensingh, in 1865, reports that there was one school in Mymensingh Sadar Station where eight girls were studying, and two more schools in the interior where there were twenty-nine girls. The Magistrate also observes: "...the natives of the district appear exceedingly ready to secure educational advantages for their children."¹¹ Even in present day Bangladesh, the Bindubashini Girls' School of Tangail and the Bidyamayee Girls' High School of Mymensingh are famous as well-functioning schools that have the honor of having been founded in the nineteenth century. The Bindubashini Girls' School was established in 1882, two years after the Bindubashini Boys' School, by Monmoth Roy, the zamindar of Santosh, Tangail. The famous Roy family maintained the schools entirely from their own funds. The financial reports compiled by the Female Education Committee in 1911 show that there was a Head Pundit for the school on a monthly pay of twenty rupees, a Second

9 Ghulam Murshid, *Reluctante Debutante: Response of Bengali Women to Modernization, 1849-1905* (Rajshahi: Sahitya Samsad, Rajshahi University, 1983), p. 71.

10 Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, 1849-1905* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 84.

11 Report of the Commissioner of the Dacca Division, GoB, Edu. Branch, February Proceedings, 1867.

Pundit and an Assistant Mistress on a monthly pay of ten rupees each and a maid servant on a monthly pay of three rupees and eight annas and that the school was supported entirely by the zamindars Babu P.N. Roy Chowdhuri and Babu M.N. Roy.¹²

The zamindars of Muktagachha and their extended family were the social leaders of Mymensingh for seven generations till they left their ancestral home for Kolkata after the abolition of the zamindari system in 1950.¹³ The area known as Binodbari was renamed Muktagachha by Ramram, the elder of four sons of Sri Krishna Acharya who came to live here from Bagura with three of his brothers and founded the zamindari. Their descendents built canals, roads, charitable dispensaries, libraries, boys' schools and schools for girls. Maharaja Surya Kanta Acharya, an adopted son of the descendents of the fourth and youngest son of Sri Krishna Acharya became an extremely prominent zamindar of Mymensingh who played host to Lord Curzon during the latter's visit to Mymensingh in 1904. Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi and Subhash Chandra Bose also stayed with the zamindars of Muktagachha when they came to Mymensingh. Maharaja Surya Kanta Acharya donated property that would yield an annual income of Rs. 2,000 to the National College of Jadavpur, which has now become the Jadavpur University of Kolkata. The most abiding legacy of this family that is relevant to this paper, however, is the establishment of the Bidyamayee Girls' High School that is still considered one of the best schools for girls in Mymensingh. In 1873, Rambabu, another illustrious member of the Muktagachha zamindar family established in his house which stood on 3.5231 acres of land, a school to educate the girls of the family. At some point of time, the school was named Alexander Girls' School. Whether the Alexander Girls' School was named after the Czar of Russia in anticipation of his visit or not, we cannot be sure until historical documents to that effect have been found, but it is most unlikely that it was named after the famous missionary Alexander Duff as

12 *Op. cit.*

13 The autobiography of Sri Jibendrakishore Acharyachowdhury, the last descendent of Sri Krishna Acharya (the founder of the Muktagachha zamindari) to have lived in Muktagachha, gives in detail the family tree and the life and times of the zamindars in, *Ami, Prothom Khondo: Puratan Katha, Ditiyo Khondo: Amar Kotha* [Myself, Part I: Story of the Past, Part II: My Story] (Kolkata: Pioneer Publishers, Part I, 1979 and Part II, 1983). See also, Muhammed Abdus Sattar, *Mymensingh Anchaler Jamidarder Itihash* [History of the Zaminders of Mymensingh] (Dhaka: Katharup Library, 2006).

some researchers have claimed.¹⁴ Not only did the missionary Alexander Duff never visit Mymensingh, or any part of eastern Bengal, for that matter, the patrons of the school were orthodox Hindu zamindars, and had no logical reason to name their school after a Christian missionary. This school became the famous Bidyamayee School through the generous funding of zamindar Jagat Kishore Acharya, yet another philanthropist of the family of the Muktagachha zamindars. He donated fifty thousand rupees to honor the memory of his mother Bidyamayee Devi. To honor the wishes of the generous donor, the name of the school was changed from Alexander Girls' School to Bidyamoyee School. Later, the zamindars of Gauripur and Krishnanagar, both extended family members of the Muktagachha zamindars, donated nineteen thousand rupees and six thousand rupees respectively to build a boarding house where there would be provision of separate accommodation for Hindus, Muhammadans, Brahmos and Christians and separate kitchen and dining arrangements for each community so that boarders would not have to fear losing caste or face other problems regarding socio-religious customs. The school was able to create a positive response from the leading Muslim families of Mymensingh.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Bidyamayee Girls' School had a student population of 150 of whom 70 were beyond the Lower Primary Stage. The Head Mistress, Miss Bhaktishudha Ghosh, trained at Isabella Thoburn College in Lughnow, was able to maintain a most amiable environment in the school. It was observed about the school that "Teachers and children appear more friendly, English is spoken more freely, and drill and games have been introduced daily throughout the school."¹⁵ Probably because of her superior qualifications or probably because Bidyamayee School was so well-endowed, Miss Ghosh was the highest paid Head Mistress among her contemporaries. She received a pay of Rs. 150 per month, whereas Head Mistresses of girls' schools of other district headquarters were hardly paid half that amount. For example, the Head Mistress of Barisal Middle English Girls' School, the Head Mistress of Pabna Girls' School and that of Faridpur Middle Vernacular School received

14 Mir Zaheda Nazneen, *Bangladeshe Nari Unnayaner Dhara, 1947-1995* [The Process of Women's Development in Bangladesh, 1947-1995], unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Department of History, Jahangirnagar University, 2009, p. 72.

15 Proceedings of the Female Education Committee, 9th June, 1911, Education (A) Proceedings, Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, Assam Secretariat Sylhet Proceedings, the month of January, 1912, File No. E-25-E, Nos. 53-56, NA,B.

Rs. 30 per month; the Head Mistress of Bogra Middle Vernacular Girls' School received Rs. 40 per month while that of Noakhali Girls' School received Rs. 50.¹⁶ The Head Mistress of Faizunnessa Girls' School, Comilla, another well-endowed school, received Rs. 75 per month. Even the Head Master of Dr. Khastagir's Girls' School in Chittagong was paid Rs. 125 per month.¹⁷ In comparison, Miss Ghosh was highly paid indeed. The ten other teachers who were employed there during the first quarter of the twentieth century, and a matron who looked after the hostel, were also paid more than the average standard salary of that time. Except for three, all the teachers of the school were female.

The patronization of girls' education was a tradition the zamindars of Muktagachha continued in the area. In 1907 zamindar Nagendra Narayan Acharya Chowdhury, another descendent of Sri Krishna Acharya, founder of the Muktagachha zamindari, established a school in one of the houses he owned for the education of the girls of his family. According to the autobiography of Sri Jibendrakishore, however, the school was established by Nagendra Narayan Acharya Chowdhury's wife Mrinalini Devi in memory of her husband. The school was initially established only for the girls of their family. By the 1930s, daughters of the zamindar's employees began to be allowed admission and gradually the Muslim girls of the area were allowed to join also. This school, called the Nagendra Narayan Pilot Girls' High School, is now an institution with over a thousand female students.¹⁸ These schools that have made a considerable impact on the socio-cultural development of Mymensingh stand proud today as reminders of the social reform movement that stirred all of Bengal in the nineteenth century.

Like Mymensingh, Jessore, a southwestern district of eastern Bengal presently in the Khulna Division (Jessore was first in the Nadia Division, and then in the Presidency Division during colonial times), was quite advanced economically and culturally. The Magistrate of Jessore, in his annual general report for the year 1865-66 observes that there are fifteen schools for girls in the vicinity of

16 Financial Statement of Zillah Girls' Schools, Proceedings of the Female Education Committee, 9th June, 1911, Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam.

17 *Ibid.*

18 Aminul Islam, *Nagendra Narayan Pilot Girls' School: 101*, Star Insight: Know Bangladesh Better, A Fortnightly Supplement of *The Daily Star*, June 21, 2008, Vol. 2, Issue 25.

the district headquarters, of which 5 are aided by Government, and there are also three schools for adult females. Because it is so interesting, the observations of R.B. Chapman, the Officiating Commissioner of Nadia in 1865 about Jessore is presented here in its entirety:

A subject of much interest is the state of the Female School in the district. The average attendance at these schools is from eight to ten or 12 girls. They are generally established by some enlightened resident in the village, who gives up a room in his house for a school, sends some of his female relations to be taught, and appoints his brother or cousin or some near relation to teach them. The girls learn to read and write Bengalee; they have not yet advanced to the point of receiving English instruction. Two of these schools I have inspected, and was very much astonished at the progress which the girls had made, and at the eagerness which they displayed in wishing to learn. The answer which they gave to questions put to them, shewed an evident understanding of what they had read; their replies shewed, I think, greater quickness than was observable in girls of the same age. To make the advantage derivable from the schools, however permanent, the establishment of adult female schools is indispensable. The customs of the country require that the girls should be married at an early age...There is, undoubtedly, a desire amongst the more intelligent of the community to have their female relations educated, and a beginning has been made in Jessore, which is highly satisfactory.¹⁹

The Commissioner regretted that because of the custom of early marriage, the education which little girls receive in the short period that they stay in school is soon forgotten. That is why he sees the necessity of adult female schools. He reiterated the necessity of female teachers and lamented the lack of them. The Commissioner also insisted in his report on the desirability and of the introduction of sewing and needlework in the curriculum.

Kushtia, which is presently in Bangladesh, was a district of the Nadia Division in colonial times. As early as 1854, in Kumarkhali of Kushtia, Kanganal Harinath Majumder established a vernacular school adjacent to the local temple, where the Hindu girls of the area presumably studied with the boys.²⁰ Nothing else is known about the school. The Kumarkhali area truly pioneered girls' education in Kushtia. In 1873 the local landlord Babu Ramlal established a girls' school which has remained till today as a legacy of the philanthropy of the local

19 Extract from the Jessore Magistrate's Annual General Report for the year 1865-66, From R.B. Chapman, Officiating Commissioner of the Nuddea Division, GoB, Education (A) Proceedings for February, 1867.

20 Shawkat Ali, *Kushtiar Itihas* [History of Kushtia] (Kushtia, 1978), cited in Mir Zaheda Nazneed, 'Bangladeshe Nari Ummayaner Dhara', p. 73.

zamindars. It is a government high school today and is called Charulata Government High School.²¹

The *Bamabodhini Patrika* (Journal for the Enlightenment of Women)²² also reported in its October issue of 1865, citing *Dacca Prakash*²³ that girls' schools were established in Durgapur, Dhanputa, Mangalpaut, Azmatpur, Mathurapur, Agrail, Khajura, Majjali, Goherpur and Nebutala of Jessore district, and that each school had an average of ten to fifteen students. Sixteen ladies were said to be studying in the adult female schools.²⁴ The *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, an influential daily newspaper published from Kolkata since 1871, had begun its journey from Jessore in February, 1868.²⁵ From its very first issue it strongly advocated for girls' education and *zenana* education as the only available solution short of raising the age for marriage. The paper praises the financial assistance given by Babu Raj Krishna Mitra, a clerk at the Faujdari Court, for establishing the Jessore Hindu Girls' School in the town of Jessore in January, 1867.²⁶ The land for establishing the school was provided by Babu Madan Mohan Majumdar. It started with six girls, but within a year, had twenty girls on its roll, studying at the Lower Primary level. The students did not pay any fees; the expenses of the school were completely managed through the patronage of the local merchants and rich landowners whose daughters and relatives attended the school. The Inspector of Schools C.B. Clarke and the Collector J. Monroe visited the school and expressed satisfaction with the performance of the students and gave them prize money of five rupees.²⁷

21 *Ibid.*

22 The most popular monthly journal for women published from Calcutta. Edited by Umeshchandra Dutt, it was in circulation from 1863 to 1922, the most long-lived of all journals that began publication in the nineteenth century.

23 *Dacca Prakash* was the first weekly newspaper published in Bangla which began publication in 1861.

24 *Bamabodhini Patrika*, October, 1865, cited in Swapan Basu, *Sambad-Samayikpatre Unish Shataker Bangalisamaj: vol. II* [Bengali Society of the Nineteenth Century as Depicted in Newspapers and Journals] (A Selection of news and articles from 19th Century Journals compiled and edited by Swapan Basu), (Calcutta: West Bengal Bangla Academy, 2003), p. 293.

25 The paper was edited by the brothers Sisir Ghosh and Moti Lal Ghosh, whose mother's name was Amrita. Their father, Hari Narayan Ghosh, who funded the paper, was a rich merchant of Jessore.

26 *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, March 26, 1868, cited in Swapan Basu, *Sambad-Samayikpatre Unish Shataker Bangalisamaj*, pp. 296-297.

27 *Op. cit.*, p. 297.

In Rajshahi, in 1868 Raja Promoth Nath Roy of the wealthy Dighapattia zamindari provided an endowment of Rupees 4,500 so that the Rajshahi Aided Girls' School could survive.²⁸ It was to be a permanent endowment, paid in Government Promissory Notes, yielding an annual profit of Rupees 180 which would meet the entire amount of private or local contributions and keep the school running. In honor of this contribution, the school was renamed after the Raja. By 1911 the school was housed in a good building and there were eighty-five girls on the roll, three of whom were beyond the Lower Primary stage. There were several British ladies residing with their husbands in the Rajshahi district headquarters and they were willing to serve on the school committee. The school today is called Government Promoth Nath Girls' High School.

Like the Roys of Dighapattia, Rajshahi, in Pabna we find mention of Babu Harishchandra Sharma in the November, 1862 circulation of *Somprakash*.²⁹ He set up a girls' school in his own house, at his own expense in that year. Harishchandra Sharma's wife Bamashundari helped her husband by teaching the girls. Within a year of the establishment of the school, there were twenty-five girls studying there, all daughters of the Hindu landowners and wealthy merchants of the town. The Pabna Girls' School, as it was called, received a government grant of thirty-five rupees per month. Babu Prannath Saha was the Secretary of the school and his sister (her name is not found in any record) was a teacher there. Srimati Bamashundari, wife of Harishchandra Sharma, was the Head Mistress and drew a salary of twenty rupees per month.³⁰ By 1911, the pay of the Head Mistress had increased to thirty rupees. There was a Head Pundit for the school on a pay of twenty-five rupees per month. Female Education Committee (FEC) reports mentioned the contribution of District Board and Municipality as twenty-two rupees and eight rupees respectively. Private sources contributed twenty-five rupees to the monthly income of the school.³¹ There were seventy-six children on the roll as of 1911, of whom 12

28 Memorandum from W.S. Atkinson, Esq., Director of Public Instruction, No. 1686, dated Fort William, the 7th April, 1868, GOB, Branch Edu., (A) Proceedings Nos. 83-84, NA, B.

29 *Somprakash* was a weekly newspaper started in November, 1858, by Dwarakanath Vidyabhusan (1819-886), a professor of Sanskrit College. The newspaper used to be published from his home at Changripota village, near Sonarpur, southeast of Kolkata.

30 *Dacca Prakash*, 31 December, 1863, cited in Swapan Basu, 2003.

31 Financial Statements of Zillah Girls' Schools, Proceedings of the Female Education Committee, 9th June, 1911, Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam.

were beyond the Lower Primary stage. The government sanctioned Rs. 12,000 to acquire land for the school and to construct a new building with mistresses' quarters. Female Education Committee reports say this school is one of the best in the Rajshahi Division.

Of the other schools of the Rajshahi Division, the Rangpur Aided Girls' School owed the entire cost of construction of its building to the generosity of Babu Ananda Mohan Roy Choudhuri, zamindar of Tapa. As of 1911, the school had sixty children on the roll, of who six were beyond the Lower Primary stage. Babu Ananda Mohon Roy Choudhuri had promised to pay another sum of Rs. 2,287 to carry out improvements to the school. Another zamindar, Raja Surat Chandra Roy Choudhury of Malda, promised Rs. 5,000 in 1911 to acquire a new building for the Barlow Aided Girls' School, Malda. There were nearly 100 children on the roll. The Head Pundit, a second pundit and the Head Pundit's wife made up the teaching staff. There were two European ladies in the Malda station, of whom one was a doctor and both of them were on the managing committee of the school. The Aided Girls' School in Jalpaiguri was another school where the Head Mistress enjoyed a salary of forty-five rupees per month and a there was a second mistress on a salary of twenty rupees. The school had fifty-four students on its roll. The wife of the Commissioner, Mrs. Monahan sat on the school Committee. The FEC found fifty-four girls in the Dinajpur Aided Girls' School of the Division of whom two were beyond the Lower Primary stage and sixty girls in the Bogra Aided Girls' School seven of whom were beyond the Lower Primary stage, but there were no secondary schools for girls in the Division yet.

Till now we have seen that the Hindu landowners and merchants and other professionals have come forward with their will, their money and their labour to better the lot of the women of this region. In Sirajganj of the then Rajshahi Division, we find a Muslim philanthropist who made a name for himself not only as an author³² but also as a founder of many boys' schools in Pabna, Dhaka, Faridpur and Mymensingh, the places that his work took him. Munshi Mohammed Meherullah Shirajganji was a Municipality Commissioner and also Member of the District Board and local Union Board. In 1895 he founded a

32 Munshi Mohammed Mehrullah Sirajganji wrote didactic tracts aimed at social reform and moral education. A few of them are: *Islami Bakritamala* [Lectures on Islam] (1897?); *Balya Bibaheer Bishmoy Phol* [The Poisonous Results of Child Marriage] (1909); *Upadeshmala* [String of Advises] (1909), *Manabjiboner Kartobyo* [Duties of Mankind] and other books.

girls' school in his own village Hossainpur in Sirajganj, now a full-fledged district, and there worked Khairunnessa Khatun (c.1876-1910), whom researchers identify as the first Muslim professional woman of eastern Bengal.³³ From the inception of the school in 1895 till her death in 1910, Khairunnessa Khatun spent the last fifteen years of her life working for the school in Sirajganj while her husband Asiruddin, with a transferable job as Sub-Registrar, moved from one district to another. As the founder of the school did not have the means to provide a large endowment, Khairunnessa Khatun took it upon herself to contribute to the school funds from her own income and appealed to the men and women of the village to help bear the expenses of the school. The story goes that she implored the womenfolk to set aside everyday, a little bit of rice before cooking, so that she could collect them, sell the rice, and buy provisions for the school as it did not charge fees from the students and they had to be provided with books, paper and pencils.³⁴

Her failure to induce the wealthy people of the surrounding areas led her to write a scathing criticism of such people in an essay in the monthly journal *Nabanur*,³⁵ which was published in 1904 under the title '*Amader Sikshar Antaray*', which, translated into English, means, 'the obstacles to our education'.³⁶ She wrote with anguish how the Hossainpur Balika Bidyalay of Sirajganj established by Munshi Mohammed Meherullah and supported entirely by him, was languishing for lack of funds; the school needed desks and chairs and teaching material; repeated appeals to the Rajahs, Nawabs, zamindars and wealthy people of the country did not yield any financial help for the school; if such was the case, then how would a worthy cause like women's education flourish?³⁷ She compared a life without education to a world without the sun. An uneducated person was like an animal, she said. If learning increases a man's quality, wouldn't it do the same for a woman, she asked. An educated woman can increase the quality of family life manifold, she said. Finally, she

33 See, Syed Abul Maksud, *Pothikrit Naribadi Khairunnessa Khatun* [Khairunnessa Khatun, the Pioneer Feminist] (Dhaka: Shahitya Prakash, 1992), p. 54.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

35 The monthly *Nabanur* started to be published from Calcutta (now Kolkata) in 1903. Syed Emdad Ali was the editor. It was the first journal edited by a Bengali Muslim which carried write-ups by Hindu and Muslim ladies in every issue. Azizunnessa Khatun and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein wrote regularly for *Nabanur*.

36 Khairunnessa, Khatun, '*Amader Shikshar Antaray*' [The Obstacles to our Education], in *Nabanur*, Year 2, No. 8, Agrahayan, 1311 (BS), (1904 according to the Gregorian Calendar).

37 *Op. cit.*, p. 21.

invoked Islamic and Hindu scriptures to show how religion does not have any conflict with educating women.³⁸ The Hossainpur Girls' School did, finally receive a negligible amount of aid from the government and a little aid from the District Board. In answer to a question placed in the Bengal Legislative Assembly of August, 1914, by the Hon'ble Maulvi Mazharul Anwar Chaudhuri as to the number, location and amount of aid given to girls' schools exclusively for Muslims, Miss Broch, the Inspectress of Schools, provided a complete list of all schools for Muslim girls and there it was mentioned that Hossainpur Girls' School received Rs. 3 as government grant-in-aid and Rs. 5 from the District Board as aid.³⁹

Khairunnessa Khatun was not only active in spreading the light of education among women in a backward village of eastern Bengal; she was also among the earliest Muslim women to actively participate in politics. She was an activist of the Congress Party and published another essay in *Nabanur* (1905) in support of the Swadeshi Movement, urging women to boycott foreign goods. She published anti-British political articles under the pseudonym Khoyer Kha Munshi. Some of the articles are: 'Rajnitik Andolon O Musalman' (Political Movements and the Muslims); 'Swadeshi Mangal' (Swadeshi Welfare), 'Swadeshanurag' (Patriotism) and 'Amir Ali Shaheber Probondho' (The Essay of Mr. Ameer Ali). She also wrote a didactic manual called *Satir Pati Bhakti* (The Devotion of a Chaste Wife) which was first published in 1908. The second edition of the 61-page booklet was published by her husband Mr. Asiruddin in 1911 after her death. Later, two more editions came out, proving the popularity of the manual. It contained advice about conjugal relationship, child-rearing and the importance of a woman's place in the family. Khairunnessa Khatun combined the qualities of political and social activism with idealism which, as a Muslim lady living in a remote village removed far from the socio-economic and political hub of Dhaka or metropolitan Kolkata, was a rare phenomenon at

38 Two essays by Khairunnessa Khatun, '*Amader Shikshar Antaray*' and '*Swadeshanurag*' has been reprinted in full in Akhtar, Shaheen and Bhowmik, Moushumi (eds.), *Bangali Musalman Lekhikader Nirbachita Rachana, 1904-1938* [an anthology of selected writings of Bengali Muslim women, 1904-1938], (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 1998), pp. 39-46.

39 Answer given by the Hon'ble H.F. Samman to the question asked by the Hon'ble Maulvi Mazharul Anwar Chaudhuri at the meeting of the Bengal Legislative Council held on the 5th August, 1914, GOB, General Department Education Branch (A) Proceedings, November, 1914, File No. 11-C/66, Nos. 91-93, NAB, List 18, Bundle 42, Oct-March, 1914-1915.

that time and age. The school she loved so much has been devoured by the mighty Jamuna River, but her legacy remains as the pioneer feminist and educationist of eastern Bengal.

Another brilliant legacy left by a woman who was also a zamindar is that of Nawab Faizunnessa of Comilla in the Chittagong Division. The impression of the Magistrate of Comilla in 1863 was: "About nine-tenths of the inhabitants are Mahomedans, and these, as a class, evince not only to the scheme of Government Education, but are positively hostile to it." Within a decade of the submission of that report, Nawab Faizunnessa was moving mountains to gain support for female education among that "hostile" community. In 1873, Faizunnessa Chaudhurani, established at Kandirpar in Comilla town, a primary school for girls which still today proudly stands as the lasting legacy of a great patron of learning and is called the Nawab Faizunnessa Girls' High School, Comilla. By 1911, when the Female Education Committee was taking stock of the girls' schools of eastern Bengal, it was found that the school consisted of two branches, a Middle English branch and a Lower Primary branch. In the Middle English branch there were five teachers, all of them female, and all were doing "remarkably well."⁴⁰ One of the teachers was trained at the Eden High School which had begun the teachers' training program in 1907. The Lower Primary branch was taught by three pundits. Nawab Faizunnessa's claim to fame is not just as a Muslim lady who administered her own zamindari (albeit from behind strict *purdah*), nor is it only because she was a philanthropist, establishing schools and madrassahs and hospitals, but in addition to all her achievements, she still remains the first published female author known to us. Faizunnessa's only extant literary work *Rupjalal* was published in 1876 in Dhaka. The other book she wrote was titled *Sangeet Lahari* (Waves of Music) but is not available anymore. *Rupjalal* is a love story written as a long poem interspersed by passages written in prose. The protagonists of *Rupjalal* are Prince Jalal and Princess Rupbano and the story revolves around their yearning for each other. It is said to be partially autobiographical.⁴¹

Where Tangail could boast of a school such as Bindubashini School, Mymensingh had its Bidyamayee School, and Comilla the Faizunnessa Girls'

40 *Ibid.*

41 Sonia Nishat Amin, *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal, 1876-1939* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), p. 216.

School, Chittagong too was at the forefront of local initiative and philanthropy in the person of Dr. Annadacharan Khastagir, the leader of the Chittagong Brahmo Samaj. In 1878, Dr. Khastagir established a Middle Vernacular School for girls in his native Chittagong town.⁴² True to the spirit of Brahmoism regarding the enlightenment of women, he educated all his four daughters in English. His fourth daughter, Kumudini, became an illustrious lady in her own right. She passed the Entrance examination from Bethune School and got her B.A. degree from Bethune College in Kolkata in 1887. Thereby she became the first female graduate of Chittagong. In 1890 Kumudini Khastagir joined the Bethune School as a teacher, and then moved to the Bethune College to become a lecturer there. In 1902 she became the Principal of the college and served till her retirement in 1913. After that, she came to Dhaka and worked as Assistant Inspectress of Schools of the Dhaka Division. She created quite a buzz in the conservative society of eastern Bengal by refusing to marry the person her father chose for her and marrying for love when she was thirty-two. Another one of Dr. Khastagir's daughters was Mohini. The *Brahmo Public Opinion*, the mouthpiece of the Brahmos in Kolkata, published in its edition of 25/7/1878 that Mohini Khastagir, Dr. Khastagir's second daughter, was educated in the Native Ladies' Female Normal School founded by the Indian Reform Association was appointed as Governess to Her Highness the Moharani of Kuch Behar (Keshab Chandra Sen's daughter) on a salary of Rs. 50 per month.⁴³ Later she got married to the son of the Brahmo leader Keshab Chandra Sen. Dr. Khastagir's third daughter Binodini was married to the lawyer Jatra Mohan Sengupta in 1876. Jatra Mohan Sengupta was an advocate and later became a member of the Bengal Legislative Council. Binodini and Jatra Mohan Sengupta's son Jatindra Mohan Sengupta became a barrister, married an English lady⁴⁴ and became an active Congress politician from 1911, becoming President of the Bengal Swaraj Party in 1925. He was also elected to the Bengal

42 S.N.H. Rizvi, (ed.), *East Pakistan District Gazetteers*, Government of East Pakistan, Services and General Administration Department, 1970, p. 315.

43 Cited in Swapan Basu (ed.), *Sambad-Samayikpatre Unish Shataker Banglaisesamaj: Vol. II* [A Selection of news and articles from 19th Century Journals], published by West Bengal Bangla Academy, 2003, p. 520.

44 After Jatindra Mohan's death in 1933, his wife Nellie actively participated in the nationalist struggle. She was elected to the Bengal Legislative Assembly in 1940 and again in 1946. In 1954 she was elected to the East Pakistan legislature. Nellie died in Kolkata in 1973. The Department of Posts, India, brought out a commemorative stamp of Jatindra Mohan Sengupta and his wife Nellie Sengupta on 22/07/1985.

Legislative Council. His mother Binodini died a premature death in 1906. The bereaved Jatra Mohan Sengupta donated a large piece of land and a house for his father-in-law's school to honor the memory of his wife. Situated on Jamal Khan Road, Dr. Khastagir's Government High School, as it is known today, is still the premier institution for girls' education in Chittagong. The government took over management of the school and made it a high school in 1907.

According to the information gathered by the Female Education Committee of 1908, by 1911 Dr. Khastagir's school had on its roll 110 girls, of whom 30 were above the Lower Primary Stage.⁴⁵ The authorities of Dr. Khastagir's Government High School felt that it was ready to send up girls for the Matriculation Examination, and, as such, the school should be provided with a staff similar to that in Mymensingh, and a hostel, "as the hostels both in Dacca and Mymensingh are now overcrowded."⁴⁶ The large number of girls enrolling in the school made a newer, bigger school building necessary in place of its double-storied brick building.

The branching out of the Brahma Samaj into all the major districts of eastern Bengal including Mymensingh, Faridpur, Bogra, Barisal, Dinajpore, Jamalpur, Rangpur, Kushtia, Kishoreganj, Sylhet, Comilla, and Dhaka made a large contribution to the spread of female education in the region in general and Dhaka in particular. The proliferation of the Brahma Samaj and its impact on spreading the "Bengal Renaissance" from urbanized Kolkata to the essentially rural eastern Bengal was observed by David Kopf thus:

Wherever a Brahma Samaj was established, there followed an institutional complex dedicated to social and religious reform. Whether in Mymensingh, Barisal, Chittagong, Comilla, or Sylhet, there was invariably the mandir or community prayer hall and meeting place, a girls' school and boys' school on various levels, possibly a college, a Sangat Sabha or discussion society for the youth, a charitable hospital, a library, a printing press for newspapers and tracts, a night school for workers and peasants, and a ladies' society.⁴⁷

Dhaka, as the most important city of eastern Bengal, naturally was looked upon to lead in terms of development. The city was made provincial capital twice, once in 1905 and again in 1947, and later was made the capital of independent Bangladesh in 1971. The oldest records to mention a girls' school in Dhaka is

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ David Kopf, *The Brahma Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 226.

provided by the earliest English weekly in Dhaka, the *Dacca News*, edited by Alexander Forbes. It began publication in 1856 and in its first issue mentioned the establishment by indigenous efforts of a girls' school in 1856.⁴⁸

Government records of 1872 mention the Bangla Bazar Girls' School as "one of the best girls' schools" in eastern Bengal, with forty-one girls studying there.⁴⁹ The Secretary of the school was the Christian missionary W.B. Livingstone, but the school was conducted without any missionary objectives. The Bangla Bazar School enjoyed a government grant-in-aid of thirty rupees and eight annas. The report of 1872 also corroborates the existence of the Lalbagh school but mentions it as a branch of Bangla Bazar School, "... at the north end of the town, in Lalbagh so that girls of that area could attend school."⁵⁰ Usually it was not normal for a girl to traverse a long distance to attend school. The Lalbagh Girls' School, as it was called, did not, however, enjoy any grant-in-aid. It had twenty-five girls on the rolls.

The Brahma Samaj of Dhaka, before they established the soon-to-be famous Eden School named after Lieutenant-Governor Ashley Eden, established a girls' school at Dail Bazar. About fifteen girls attended that school.⁵¹ Other than exclusive girls' schools, infant girls used to attend the town *Patshalas*. In 1873 the Dhaka Brahmans established a school for adult females called the Dacca Adult Female School. In 1878 the *Brahmo Public Opinion* published with great gusto the news of the appointment of the famous Brahmica Manorama Majumdar, wife of Babu Girish Chandra, minister of the Barisal Brahma Samaj and a teacher in the Barisal Government School as its second mistress.⁵² Manorama Majumdar was the first lady in eastern Bengal to conduct Divine Service and deliver sermons in public before a congregation of men. She was ordained a missionary of the Brahma Samaj in May 1881. In the same year as this remarkable lady Manorama Majumdar joined the Adult Female School in Dhaka in 1878, it was turned into a regular girls' school and renamed Eden Female School in honour of the then Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. The

48 Mentioned in Sharif uddin Ahmed, *Dhaka: A Study in Urban History and Development, 1840-1921* (2nd edition, Dhaka: Academic Press and Publishers Limited, 2003), p. 73 (first published by Curzon Press, London, 1986).

49 Education (A) Proceedings for March, 1872, General Department, Education Branch, May 1872, Proceedings Nos. 93 to 102, West Bengal State Archives, India.

50 *Ibid.*

51 *Ibid.*

52 Swapan Basu, *Sambad-Samayikpatre Unish Shataker Bangalisamaj: Vol. II*, [A Selection of news and articles from 19th Century Journals], p. 520.

history of the genesis of this most famous school of eastern Bengal which, with Bethune School of Kolkata, was the only High English (it was recognized as a high school in 1887-88) school managed by the government well into the twentieth century was painstakingly unearthed by Sonia Nishat Amin in her seminal work *The World of Muslim Women*. The origins of the school lay in the endeavour of the Dhaka Brahmos led by Nabakanta and Brajasundar Mitra.⁵³ The other Brahmos were Dinnath Sen, Abhay Dutt and Kali Prashanna Ghosh. The establishment of the Adult Female School (1873) mentioned above came under the auspices of the *Shubho Sadhini Sabha* (Philanthropic Society) which the Brahmos had established in 1870 with the aims of curbing alcohol consumption, spreading female education and spreading knowledge through distributing news journals at affordable prices.⁵⁴ The Society brought out a monthly news journal *Shubho Shadhini* to spread their ideas of reform. Although the Society ceased to exist after 1876, it had put in motion a noble deed that ultimately culminated in the creation of an institution like the Eden Female School. In 1921 the school opened a college section that opened the doors for the spread of tertiary education among the women of eastern Bengal. It is the college section that later retained the name of Eden. The school section was merged with Kamrunnessa School in 1948.⁵⁵ The Kamrunnessa School retained its name after the merger, while the name of Eden Female School was lost forever. The name, however, in another form, lives on as the Intermediate section of the Kamrunnessa School was merged with the Eden College at the same time. It is today's Eden Government Girls' College.

Government Agency

British attitude in India regarding female education was one of studied indifference. The Macauleyan system of education, in which women did not exist, continued to operate until the Wood's Education Despatch (1854).⁵⁶ The

53 See, Sonia Nishat Amin, *The World of Muslim Women*, pp. 151-152.

54 See, Swapan Basu, *Sambad-Samayikpatre Unish Shataker Bangalisamaj*: Vol. II, p. 690.

55 Mentioned by Ayesha Khatun in *Satabdir Sondhikhhone Eden College* [Eden College at the Juncture of Two Centuries] (Dhaka: Eden Mahila College, 1999), p. 42.

56 The debate has been extensively dealt with in David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), A.R. Mallick, *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal 1757-1856*, (Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1961); Zillur Rahman Siddiqui, 'Education' in *Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh*, (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003).

Despatch provided a guideline for native education from the primary to the highest levels. It was a glaring example of the British government's policy of caution and ambivalence with respect to the issue of female education. The Government did its part by extending the grant-in-aid net to both formal and informal schools for girls. The Government also left it to the locals to establish educational institutions while the newly formed departments of education ensured full supervision over the use of government aid.⁵⁷

It was no coincidence that a milestone in the educational history of India was achieved in 1882 during Lord Ripon's term as Viceroy (1880-1884). Education was an area of special interest to him and he was committed to promote the extension of elementary education among the marginal classes.⁵⁸ Lord Ripon appointed the first education commission in the history of modern India to look into the anomalies produced by the Despatch of 1854. Popularly known as the Hunter Commission, the Indian Education Commission was established in 1882 with the Bengal Civilian Sir William Wilson Hunter of *The Imperial Gazetteer of India* (1881) fame as its Chairman, and B.L. Rice, the Mysore Director of Public Instruction as its Secretary. In the twenty-member body, Indians were represented by Ananda Mohan Bose, social reformer and founder of Sadharan Brahma Samaj, Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, educationist, writer and journalist, Maharaja Jatindra Mohan Tagore, Kashinath Trimbak Teelang and Sayed Ahmed Khan who later withdrew in favor of his son Sayed Mahmud. The Director of Public Instruction for Bengal, A.W. Croft was also a member of the Commission. The missionaries were represented by Rev. Dr. Miller of Madras. Because of the Hunter Commission's entire focus on elementary education, female education could fit in prominently because, apart from a handful of exceptional women who had ventured into higher education and made some cracks in the glass ceiling, the education of girls was predominantly in the elementary stage even at the very end of the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the 20th century, a negligible number of girls were found above the Middle School stage.

⁵⁷ For details of the Education Despatch of 1854, see J. Richey, *Selections from Educational Records, 1840-59*, Part-II, Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1922.

⁵⁸ Suresh Chandra Ghosh, *The History of Education in Modern India, 1757-1998*, (Hyderabad: Orient Longman Limited, 1995, revised and updated edition, 2000.), p. 93.

The Hunter Commission recommended more liberal terms for grants-in-aid to girls' schools than boys' schools in order to encourage local philanthropists to establish schools for girls. It recommended scholarships for girls to provide financial incentive for attending schools. Provisions for girls' hostels were also to be made to induce girls from distant places to take advantage of education. The Commission recommended a separate curriculum for girls where practical subjects for girls such as hygiene, domestic science, cooking, nursing, etc. would feature prominently, which was, in fact, recognition of the latent function of the education of girls. The Hunter Commission exempted the central government of all responsibility regarding taking action to spread female education by recommending that mass primary education be the responsibility of the local government. The District and Municipal Boards created under Lord Ripon's Local Self-Government Act (1882) were given the responsibility for the management and expansion of primary education, while girls' secondary education was to be "judiciously extended" where private efforts had proved to be successful.⁵⁹ Local, municipal and provincial funds were to be earmarked in an equitable proportion for the support of boys as well as girls' schools. The Commission even exempted the government from management of the schools, but stressed the need for strengthening the numbers of female inspecting staff. Local bodies were to have real and effective authority over schools maintained by them. Subject to the conditions laid down by the Education Department for the appointment of teachers, local bodies were to appoint teachers of their choice. Female teachers were to gradually replace male teachers in girls' schools. Securing the co-operation of ladies in the management of girls' schools was also a primary target. However, it would be quite relevant to mention here that although on paper it looked good to have more women in management and teaching positions, the personnel with practical field experience thought otherwise. On the basis of long experience, Miss M.E.A. Garret, Inspectress of Schools, Eastern Bengal and Assam, commented that girls' schools need almost daily supervision and that "The infinite number of detail connected with a staff of women far exceeds that connected with a staff of men, and from a distance it is impossible to give them that attention which they need."⁶⁰

59 *Progress of Education in Bengal, 1902-03 to 1906-07: Third Quinquennial Review*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1907, West Bengal State Archives.

60 *Notes on the Management and Finance of Urban Schools by the Inspectress*, M.E.A. Garret, Inspectress of Schools, Eastern Bengal and Assam, Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, Education (A) Proceedings for the month of January 1912, File No. E/25-E, Assam Secretariat, Sylhet Proceedings, National Archives, Bangladesh.

The Government had accepted the recommendations of the Hunter Commission in its entirety. However, even public servants in the central government felt that the Commission had not done any service to the cause of female education in India by not making the central government responsible for the expansion of female education in India; and instead leaving this branch of education to the charge of local bodies, voluntary organizations, religious associations and philanthropists. The then Officiating Director of Public Instruction C.B. Clarke commented that:

... I regret that Government has made such small attempts to introduce the education of girls in Bengal. There is indeed the Bethune school and the Eden school at Dacca; but, as Mrs. Wheeler (Inspectress of Schools) justly observes, when Government commenced the encouragement of boys' education, it commenced on a very different scale. At present the whole Government contribution to national girls' education in every shape cannot exceed Rs. 20,000 a year. I most fully concur in Mrs. Wheeler's opinion that 10 per cent of the net Government expenditure would hardly be an adequate portion to devote to girls' education. The official reply to this is, where are the girls on whom we are to expend the money, which is like sending a chowkidar to count the bullock-carts before sanctioning a railway which will create its own traffic.⁶¹

The types of girls' schools that were established in the post-Hunter Commission years in eastern Bengal ranged from model primary schools for girls to urban girls' schools of an improved type. A total of twenty two model primary schools were established. The urban girls schools enjoyed a recurring grant of forty rupees per month from the Education Department which were mostly situated at sub-divisional headquarters and other important centers.⁶² The *Panchayeti* union girls' schools operating in different districts of eastern Bengal were quite unique and they had no corollary in West Bengal. These schools were managed by District Boards while necessary capital and recurring funds were provided by the Education Department.⁶³ The Education Department also set up Peasant Girls' Schools in remote places on an experimental basis. They taught up to the lower primary standard and received a grant of thirteen rupees per month.⁶⁴

61 Government of Bengal, General Department, Education Branch, January 1885, File 13, Proceedings 5-6, paragraph 8, Memo by DPI C.B. Clarke forwarded to Secretary to the Government of Bengal. West Bengal State Archives.

62 *Report on Public Instruction in Bengal for 1917-18* (Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1919), p. 14.

63 *Ibid.*

64 *Ibid.*

The effectiveness of any recommending body is entirely dependent on the sincerity and commitment of the implementing body. If an assessment is to be made of the impact of the Indian Education Commission of 1882 (popularly known as the Hunter Commission) on the spread of female education in Bengal, we can say in all fairness that it addressed the problems in that area and recognized the necessity for affirmative action. But the painful fact remained that the actual and desired expenditure for implementing the recommendations of the Hunter Commission remained disproportionate to the funds made available for that purpose. The colonial education philosophy was born out of negative virtue, as the purpose for education expenditure was only to produce a pool of clerks for the ever-growing bureaucratic machine. The overriding concern was how to devise a method that would be cheap but efficient. In the quest for cheapness, the colonial government continued to search for ways for the local community to pay for the education of its children.

A Statistical Picture of Girls' Education in Various Divisions

According to government reports, in the academic year 1881-1882, the Eden Female School passed eight candidates at the primary, and four candidates at the lower vernacular scholarship examination.⁶⁵ In other schools of the Dhaka district, eighty candidates appeared at the Primary scholarship examination, of whom sixty-nine passed by the lower vernacular standard.⁶⁶ Among other districts, in Faridpur, five girls passed by the primary standard. In Mymensingh one girl passed by the lower standard while four more passed by the primary standard.⁶⁷

A Division-wise statistical account of the state of female education in 1880-81 in Eastern Bengal published by The *Bamabodhini Patrika* (*Baishakh*, 1290 B.S.) shows that the Dhaka Division had one hundred and thirty-two primary schools in 1880-1881 in which 2,441 girls attended. In the academic year 1881-1882, the number of schools increased to two hundred and thirteen and the number of pupils also increased to 3,418. Unfortunately, only four of them passed the Upper Primary and eighty-five of them passed the Lower Primary level. In the Rajshahi Division, in 1880-1881 there were thirty-one schools with a total of 548 registered students. The next year, in 1881-1882 the number of

⁶⁵ Government of Bengal, General Department, Education Branch A Proceedings, November, 1882, NA,B.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

schools in Rajshahi rose to thirty-four and the number of students increased to 749. Yet, none of them passed the Upper Primary level and only one girl passed the Lower Primary examination. In the Chittagong Division the situation is closer to that of Dacca. One hundred and thirty schools in the Chittagong Division had on their rolls 1,558 students in 1880-1881. The following academic year, the number rose to 2,161 students studying in a total of one hundred and eighty three schools. The pioneer in girls' education in the Chittagong Division was the Faizunnessa Girls' School in Comilla. The school received in grant-in-aid forty rupees per month. As the school requested an additional government grant of 25 rupees per month for the pay of a mistress in 1901, the District Board of Tipperah (now Comilla) was obliged to supply the attendance of students for the previous five years. The attendance was 58 in the academic year 1896-97, 69 in 1897-98, 63 in 1898-99, 73 in 1899-1900 and 77 in the academic year 1900-1901.⁶⁸ As the Partition of Bengal was repealed in 1911 and the government was taking stock of the condition of schools in Eastern Bengal, the Faizunnessa School was reported to have on its roll 104 girls combined in the Middle English and Lower Primary branches. The Lower Primary branch contained 70 girls and the rest were in the Middle English branch.⁶⁹ In Comilla, which was previously known as Tripura and spelled Tipperah in colonial records, one girl passed the middle vernacular examination. Nine girls passed the primary scholarship examination, one of whom secured a scholarship. In Noakhali, five students passed by the primary standard. In Chittagong, seven girls passed the primary standard, while three of them gained scholarship. It is worth mentioning here that in the public examinations, girls competed on equal terms with the boys. It is to be noted that a very small number of registered students were passing in the examinations.

Female education of the secondary level and higher tertiary levels did not pick up before the second decade of the twentieth century in eastern Bengal with the inclusion of a college section at the Eden High School in 1921 and the establishment of the University of Dhaka in the same year which opened its doors to women from the very beginning. The state of girls' secondary education in eastern Bengal was in a poor state compared to that of West

68 Bengal Education (A) Proceedings for the month of July 1901, File 2-G/2, 1-2, Nos. 49, NAB.

69 Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, Education (A) Proceedings for the month of January 1912, File no. E/25-E, Nos. 53-56, NAB, Assam Secretariat Sylhet Proceedings, Serial No. 75, Bundle No. 3, List No. 4.

Bengal. In Dhaka, the newly created capital, there were only two facilities for girls' secondary education: the Eden Female School, which was the only Government High School, and the Baptist Middle Vernacular School. In Mymensingh, there were two secondary schools. Chittagong had the distinction of having a Government High School, apart from Dhaka.

Awareness about the disparity between socio-economic advancement among Hindus and Muslims had grown manifold during the Partition of Bengal in 1905 and the communal tension surrounding its annulment in 1911. Questions began to be asked what the government has done and can further do for the betterment of the demographically powerful but financially weak Muslims of eastern Bengal. The gradual rise of a Muslim middle class after the partition of India in 1947 translated into the rise of the number of Muslim girls at the primary and high school level. The University of Dhaka, from its very inception in 1921, had opened the door for tertiary education for the girls of eastern Bengal, thus further consolidating the path to women's emancipation.

Conclusion

This paper shows that it was not government initiative that spread female education in Bengal. Instead, it was the private initiative of local philanthropists which made a huge contribution to the promotion of girls' education in eastern Bengal. However, the teleology of social reforms concerning women in the nineteenth century did not include establishing her economic worth through gainful employment other than teaching primary school. To break through the restrictions imposed by a controlled reform agenda, eastern Bengal needed the power and wealth of a Nawab Faizunnessa (1847-1905), the strength of character of a Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein (1880-1932), the passionate perseverance of a Rashshundari Debi (ca. 1809 - ca.1900), or a combination of all those characteristics to make significant cracks in the thick glass ceiling. Apart from these well-known pioneers, progress for women depended on the nameless, countless others who broke all conventions at a time when gender roles were rigidly defined and female sexuality was strictly controlled, to bring about change from within.

LAND REVENUE AND LAND TENURE SYSTEM OF CHITTAGONG: ORIGIN, ODDITY AND OUTCOME*

Alamgir Muhammad Serajuddin **

Abstract

The land revenue system of Chittagong has been an interesting phenomenon among Bengal administrators for peculiarity and intricacy. Several factors can explain this peculiarity. The system has been influenced by the Arakanese domination over Chittagong and the lateness of the district's incorporation into the Mughal system. Its frontier position, the survey and measurement of only the cultivated lands of the district in 1764-67, and the degree to which even in the early twentieth century internal colonization of waste lands was still proceeding had also made it an intricate system. Above all, the small size of the zamindaries and their dispersal in many distant and detached blocks, and the only partial imposition of the Permanent Settlement of 1793 all help to explain why the land revenue system in Chittagong was interesting for Bengal administrators. This article seeks to state and explain these eccentricities in some detail and their consequences.

I. The Mughal Administration

Before the Mughal conquest of 1665-66 Chittagong had been alternately in the hands of the Muslim *sultans* of Bengal, the Hindu *rajās* of Tipperah and the Buddhist kings of Arakans.¹ The district was perpetually in a state of war; life and property were insecure; and population was thin. Of the dynasties which preceded the Mughals, only the Arakanese, generally known as Maghs, are known to have left their mark on the revenue history of Chittagong. The unit of land measurement in Chittagong even to this day is the *Maghi kani* and not the *Shahi kani* as in the adjoining district of Noakhali or the *bigha* as in most other

* This essay largely draws on my London University Ph.D. dissertation (1964), *The Revenue Administration of the East India Company in Chittagong 1761-1785* (published by the University of Chittagong in 1971). The essay is dedicated to J.B. Harrison, retired Professor of South Asian History, School of Oriental and African Studies, who supervised the dissertation.

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1. For a brief account of the political condition of Chittagong prior to Mughal conquest see H. Blochmann, "Contributions to the Geography and History of Bengal – Part 1", *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XLII, 1873, pp. 233-34

parts of Bengal. Until recently the use of the *Maghi* era was common in the revenue and land transactions. The Arakanese influence is also evident in the local dialect of Chittagong and some place names. Nothing is, however, known of the revenue administration of Chittagong under the Arakanese rule.

Chittagong was well known to early Mughals. Abul Fazl describes the port-city of Chittagong thus: "Chittagong is a large city situated by the sea and belted by woods. It is considered an excellent port and is the resort of Christian and other merchants."² Though Chittagong was at that time under the possession of the Arakanese rulers, for revenue purposes Abul Fazl treats it as an integral part of the Mughal Empire and shows it in the *Ain-i-Akbari* as one of the twenty-four *sarkars* of the Bengal *Subah*.³ The Mughals conquered Chittagong in 1665-66 and for a long while after the conquest no rent being collected from Chittagong, the defence of the district was a heavy burden to the Mughal Government. The expenses of the troops maintained for its defence against the Arakanese and the Portuguese pirates were borne by the Dhaka treasury.⁴ As the inhabitants increased and the lands were improved and cultivated, the revenues arising from them were assigned to the officers commanding the troops at Chittagong for its defence. The lands under their management continuing to prosper so as to yield a sum considerably above the real charges for the defence of the region, in 1713 the Government assessed an *asal jama* or 'crown rent' of Rs. 68,422 on the lands. The total revenue of Chittagong collected under the heads of land revenue and various duties and customs amounted to Rs. 443,918 in 1760 when the district passed under the administration of the East India Company.⁵

II. The Land Revenue Administration of Chittagong under the East India Company

Under article 5 of the treaty concluded between Mir Qasim and the East India Company on 27 September 1760, Mir Qasim assigned to the Company the

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2. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, translated by H.S. Jarrett, corrected and further annotated by J. N. Sarkar, (Bibliotheca Indica Series, Calcutta, 1949), p. 137
 3. A.M. Serajuddin, "The Revenue Accounts of Chittagong in the *Ain-i-Akbari*", *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*, Vol. VII, No. 2 April 1970, p. 22
 4. *Proceedings of the Committee of New Lands*, 24 June 1761. (The unpublished records referred to in this article are those preserved in the India Office Library).
 5. *Bengal District Records, Chittagong, Vol.1, 1760-1773*, (Calcutta, 1923), p. 176. The revenue accounts of Chittagong were maintained in *Dasmasha* Rupees, 100 *Dasmasha* Rupees being equal to 110 *Current* Rupees.

revenues of the three districts of Chittagong, Burdwan and Midnapore known collectively henceforth as the 'Ceded Districts'. Ostensibly these revenues were to meet the expenses of the army that the Company agreed to keep for the support of the Nawabs. In reality, it was the price that the new Nawab paid for his elevation to the throne. At that time the revenues of the three districts were estimated at about one-third of the net revenue of Bengal. In 1765 the Mughal emperor conferred upon the Company the Diwani of Bengal, i.e., power of collecting revenue and administering civil justice. Of the administrative tasks facing the Company after it had become a great country power in Bengal, two were essential: the creation and organization of an army capable of retaining what had been won at Plassey and Buxar, and the establishment of a sound revenue system to support that army. For a moment after victory, plunder could supply the Company's needs, but that moment quickly passed while the needs grew all the time. It was of the utmost importance, therefore, that servants of the Company should ascertain the full revenue-paying capacity of Bengal and then exploit its revenue resources to the full. Hence the many experiments in land revenue management in different parts of Bengal, which preceded the Permanent Settlement of 1793.

One of the earliest and most instructive of these experiments was carried out at Chittagong immediately after the introduction of the Company's rule there in 1761. The servants of the Company decided upon a detailed survey and measurement of the lands of Chittagong as the best method of acquiring a true knowledge of their value.⁶ But they underestimated or miscalculated the hazards and difficulties of such an undertaking. They were dismayed by the great expenditure involved in so elaborate an investigation, and by the slowness of the survey. Chittagong, much intersected by hills and mounds, creeks and rivulets, and only partially reclaimed from jungle and waste, was exceptionally difficult to survey. It was impossible to maintain an adequate check upon the surveyors and, as was to be expected, the land-holders in many cases were non-cooperative and obstructive. Added to these difficulties was the hostile and distrustful disposition of the people who had much to lose and little to gain from the measurement.⁷ Given the Chittagong experience, this particular mode

6. *Proceedings of the Committee of New Lands*, 3 February 1762

7. A. M. Serajuddin, *The Revenue Administration of the East India Company in Chittagong 1761-1785* (hereafter *The Revenue Administration*), (Chittagong, 1971), p. 26

of ascertaining the revenue resources of Bengal was not repeated in other parts of Bengal.

The survey and measurement procedures were both interesting and peculiar. Charles Allen has described them as follows:

He [the surveyor] commenced from a starting point, locally known as the *adhibanda*, which was usually some recognizable landmark, e.g., a tank or house. After recording the dimensions of this starting point, i.e., its length, breadth, and area, the description of land, the estate to which it belonged, and the name of the tenant, he proceeded to measure another plot adjacent to the starting point, describing it as “to the north, or south etc.”, of the starting point, and giving the same particulars as noted above regarding it, including two more boundaries. His next plot would be a plot adjacent to the second, the direction being specified, and similar particulars recorded.⁸

The only measurement instrument was a *nal* or bamboo pole, eight cubits or usually $12\frac{2}{3}$ feet in length. The unit of measurement was the Maghi *kani*, which was two-fifths of an acre. Twelve *nals* by ten *nals* made a *kani*. The Amini Commission of 1776-78 describes the component parts of the *kani* as follows: four *cawras* made one *ganda*; twenty *gandas* one *kani*; and sixteen *kanis* one *done*.⁹

The survey, begun in 1764 and concluded in 1767, yielded a total measured area of 57,759 *dones*, consisting of the following varieties of land: (i) revenue-payable cultivated lands 24, 510 *dones*; (ii) land called *khila* such as tanks and village roads 7, 843 *dones*; (iii) lands called *nij-jot*, *khanabari* and *pattahdari* 10,016 *dones*; and (iv) *lakhiraj* or revenue-free lands 15, 389 *dones*.¹⁰ Only those lands which were found occupied and cultivated or used for other purposes at the time of the survey were measured. The survey being conducted with the sole purpose of ascertaining the area of the estates liable to revenue, the waste lands, hills and jungles were not included. The total area measured in 1764-67 was 390, 282 acres, whereas the entire area of the district was 1, 594, 816 acres, which shows that less than one-fourth of the area of the district was measured.

Four categories of records were prepared during the survey.¹¹ The *chitta* or the field-book showed the length, breadth and area of each plot and by whom and

8. C.G.H. Allen, *Final Report of the Survey and Settlement of the District of Chittagong, 1888 to 1898*, (Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1900), p.55

9. *British Museum Additional Manuscripts*, No. 29088, p. 57

10. *Proceedings of the Committee of Circuit*, 18 November 1772

11. *Correspondence on the Settlement of the Noabad Lands in the District of Chittagong*, (Calcutta, Bengal Secretariat Press, 1889), p. 89

under what tenure it was held. Each *chitta* contained the record of one day's work of the measuring *amin*. The second record, the *khatiyān* assembled all the *chittas* relating to one zamindari in one village and measured by one *amin*. The *nal-terij*, also called *terij*, contained the aggregate of the *khatiyāns* of the same *amin* for one zamindari in several villages. And lastly, *ekwals* recorded the total measured land comprised in each zamindari. In all these paper there is no mention of assessment but merely details of the lands comprised in the zamindaries. The assessment was to be found in another set of records, called *jamabandies* which were prepared after the conclusion of the survey. The *jamabandi* papers showed both the amount of land and the *sadar jama*, i.e., the Government demand on each zamindari.

The survey of 1764 was of great importance, both to the history of land survey and to the revenue history of Chittagong. The measurement of 1764 defined for all time the quantity of lands belonging to each estate and precluded the zamindars from claiming at any future time any lands which were not recorded as belonging to the estate in 1764.¹² It is this feature which distinguishes Chittagong from the other Bengal districts. Elsewhere in Bengal, zamindars held their lands under specification by metes and bounds, with only estimated areas. There had been no measurement prior to the year 1793 when these estates comprising whole villages or aliquot and compact parts of villages, were permanently settled and the Government abandoned the right to tax culturable wastes included in the estates. It was estimated that at least one-third of the total lands was surrendered by this action. At Chittagong the Permanent Settlement was applied only to those estates which had been measured in 1764-67. Lands of whatever description, waste or culturable, not included in one or other of the estates in 1764-67 came to be known as *noabad* or new cultivation; and was considered as belonging to Government in absolute proprietary interest. Thus the *noabad* problem of Chittagong is inseparably connected with the survey proceedings of 1764-67. Again, due to the corruption of the officials employed in the survey, some lands were excluded from measurement and some under-measured. The lands omitted or under-measured in 1764-67, or subsequently reclaimed, paid no revenue and were known in official correspondence as 'secreted lands' and in local dialect as *gunjaish* — over-plus lands. From 1772 onwards one theme of Chittagong's revenue history was the hunting out and

12. C. G. H. Allen, *Op. cit.*, p. 56

assessment of these lands. It is the above factors operating together which have built up that complex structure which has made Chittagong a by-word among the districts of Bengal.

The survey and measurement proceedings were followed by an assessment of revenue in 1767. Here no new principles of assessment were introduced; the established Mughal rate of assessment, or *pargana* rate as it used to be called, was rigidly adhered to. Thus for every *done* of land the Government demand on the zamindars was fixed at Rs.11/8/0/2. The zamindars were allowed to collect a further Rs. 2/4/12 as expenses of collection, so that the authorized collection of the zamindars from the ryots for a *done* of land amounted to Rs. 13/12/12/2.¹³ The total revenue of Chittagong was fixed at Rs. 478,419, land revenue being Rs. 435,573 and *sair*¹⁴ revenue Rs. 42,846. The land survey and the subsequent revenue assessment of Chittagong did not live up to the expectations of the Company officials. The Mughal demand on the district being Rs. 443,918, the surplus that the survey produced was only Rs. 34, 501, which incidentally negated their often-repeated claim that there was large-scale evasion of revenue for lands under cultivation. As in other parts of Bengal, between 1771 and 1787 various attempts were made by the Company to increase the revenue yield of Chittagong. Finally, the Decennial Settlement was concluded in 1790 and Company's Rs.498, 912 fixed as revenue of Chittagong.¹⁵ In 1793 the Permanent Settlement of Lord Cornwallis confirmed this settlement in perpetuity.

III. *Lakhiraj* Lands

One admirable feature of the Mughal land management policy was the existence of a large number of *lakhiraj* or revenue-free lands the incomes of which were used for various welfare services. The servants of the East India Company, ignorant and distrustful of many indigenous customs and institutions, readily believed that most of the revenue-free grants were fraudulent. While the general measurement of the lands was in progress from 1764, they took the opportunity to measure the quantity of the *lakhiraj lands*, then in existence. The total

13. *Bengal Board of Revenue Proceedings*, 6 May 1788

14. *Sair* or other sources of revenue in Chittagong included customs, transit duties, duties levied on market places and ferries, betel-leaf, tobacco, salt, fisheries and spontaneous forest products and a tax collected from the hill tribes.

15. H.J.S. Cotton, *Memorandum on the Revenue History of Chittagong*, (Calcutta, Bengal Secretariat Press, 1880), p.74

number of these holdings was found to be 24, 843 and the total quantity of lands 15, 389 *dones*. The reasons for this large number of *lakhiraj* grants are to be found in the developments of the preceding decades.¹⁶ Faujdar Maha Singh had made a very liberal distribution of *lakhiraj* grants to increase his influence with people who mattered. Secondly, the zamindars had taken the opportunity of the troubled and disordered state of the Mughal administration to make rent-free grants to their relatives and favourites. Thirdly, early in the colonization of the district, the Mughal rulers had encouraged people of credit and good character to come and settle at Chittagong by offering them rent-free land grants. Finally, in the early eighteenth century the Bengal Nawabs had adopted a policy of reserving the better central lands to Government and making grants of *jagirs* in the more hilly and inaccessible regions of the country. Many grants, often made to people serving outside the district, were thus made in the border lands of Chittagong.¹⁷

Whatever may be the reason, the revenue-free lands were certainly very considerable in Chittagong – they were equal to five-eighths of its assessed lands. Therefore, they were definitely a great drain on the Company's territorial revenue of Chittagong. The revenue-free lands may also have lessened the value of the existing revenue-paying lands, as the former could have been rented to the cultivators on relatively easier terms than the latter. But, as an analysis of the nature of the revenue-free grants will show,¹⁸ at a time when the Government functions were confined merely to the collection of revenue and defence of the country against internal rebellion or external attack, they provided certain very useful welfare services to the rural communities. Thus, *khairat* was land given in charity for the maintenance of mosques, holy shrines, similar Muslim religious institutions, schools and colleges and also for the support of families of noble birth, saints and other pious and learned people. *Brahmottara* was land assigned for the maintenance of priests of Hindu zamindars and helpless Brahmins; *devottara* for defraying the expenses of

16. See A. M. Serajuddin, *The Revenue Administration*, pp. 42-43

17. For one such grant made to one Syed Khan who lived in Dhaka, see *Bengal Public Consultations*, 12 June 1770

18. The grants included *khairat* 8,538 *dones*, *brahmottara* 4,561 *dones*, *devottara* 1,315 *dones*, *kanyadan* 117 *dones*, *mahatran* 79 *dones*, *maharana* 14 *dones*, *zimmadaran* 265 *dones*, *hats*, *ghats* and *sarais* 75 *dones* and a few other heads. See *Proceedings of the Committee of Revenue*, 19 August 1982; also *British Museum Additional Manuscripts*. No. 29088, p. 57

temples and idols; and *mahatran* for the support of respectable Hindu families of limited means. *Hats*, *ghats* and *sarais* were grants for the maintenance of market places, ferries and inns for travelers. It is interesting to note that the Company's servants followed the precedents of the Mughal governors and made *lakhiraj* grants of 3,324 *dones* of land between 1764 and 1788.¹⁹ One such example was a *khairat* grant of seventeen *Shahi dones* of land made in 1766 to Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah of Andermanik in Nizampore *chakla* for the maintenance of a mosque and the support of his family.²⁰ The Company's servants also continued the old practice of distributing cash each month to a number of deserving people. The total payment under this head amounted to Rs. 4,678 in 1771-72.²¹

The *lakhiraj* lands had drawn the attention of the Company servants stationed in Chittagong as early as 1761. As these lands were considerable, they concluded that most of the grants were fraudulent and fictitious and should be resumed. Abortive attempts were made in 1761, 1771, 1783 and 1788 to resume the lands. Finally in the forties of the nineteenth century steps were taken to ascertain and define all rent-free holdings, valid and invalid, and to resume the latter and assess and settle them with the occupants under the resumption regulations in force. As a result, all *lakhiraj* tenures not exceeding ten *bighas* in extent were relinquished; 259 *dones* appropriated for support of religious institutions; 447 tenures containing 1404 *dones* of land confirmed as valid *lakhiraj*; and 4957 tenures comprising 15,305 *dones* resumed and settled with the occupants at six Rupees per *done*.²² The rate of assessment compared favourably with that fixed at Rs. 12/0/4 per *done* for the *noabad* lands.

IV. Noabad Lands

The most interesting oddity of the land revenue administration of Chittagong was the *noabad* tenures. *Noabad* literally signifies new cultivation. In the Mughal records it is defined as 'the amount of revenues for lands newly cleared'.²³ Under the Mughal administration the waste lands were open to

19. H. J. S. Cotton, *Op. cit.*, p.132

20. *Proceedings of the Committee of Revenue*, 2 September 1782.

21. *Proceedings of the Controlling Committee of Revenue*, 25 June 1771 contains the names of the beneficiaries and the amount of money each received.

22. H.J.S. Cotton, *Op. cit.*, p.134

23. *Proceedings of the Committee of New Lands*, 24 June 1761; *Bengal District Records*, Chittagong, Vol. I, 1760-1773, p. 174

anyone to settle and clear; the only condition being sanction in the shape of a *pattah* from the Nawab or his agent, the *faujdar*. A *pattah* granted to one Mannah Ashek by the Nawab's Government in 1758 for clearing and cultivating the jungle lands situated in *mauza* Silok in *chakla* Rangunia throws interesting light on the terms of reclamation and the privileges attached to it.²⁴ The *pattahdar* was to bring the lands into cultivation "by inviting settlers who have no fixed abode for themselves." No revenue at all was payable in the first year; while in the second, third and fourth years the *pattahdar* was to pay a moderate revenue on progressive rate. The lands reclaimed were subject to the usual *pargana* rate from the fifth year onwards. All the cultivated lands of Chittagong were measured and their position and extent recorded in 1764-67; revenue was assessed on them in 1767; and they were permanently settled in 1793. The term *noabad* ought, therefore, to have been applied only to land brought under the plough after 1767. But all wastes, jungles and even unculturable hills, i.e., more than three-fourths of the area of the district, were labelled *noabad* by the Company officials and held to be at the absolute disposal of Government.

A steady expansion of the area under cultivation is a dominant feature of the land system of Chittagong. The process had started with the Mughal conquest of the district and continued down to the last century. The extensive wastes and jungles of Chittagong early attracted the notice of the Company servants. Here was a great opportunity to develop the resources of the district and improve the revenues of the Company. They issued a proclamation inviting people from all quarters to take up the wastes and bring them under cultivation and offering zamindari interest in the lands reclaimed.²⁵ Subsequently, however, on the basis of a *sanad*²⁶ supposedly granted by Harry Verelst, the Chief of the Chittagong Council, to Joynarayan Ghosal who was a nephew of Gokul Chandra Ghosal, the *diwan* of Chittagong, the Ghosal family put forward an exclusive claim to all the waste lands of Chittagong and this claim was acknowledged and respected by Government. The estate thus established was known as Joynagar

24. *Correspondence on the Resettlement of the Noabad Lands in the District of Chittagong*, Vol. IV, (Calcutta, Bengal Secretariat Press, 1886), p. 36

25. See the *Proceedings of the Chittagong Council*, dated 12 May 1761 in the *Bengal Revenue Consultations*, 22 April 1796; also B. H. Baden-Powell, *The Land Systems of British India*, Vol. 1, (Oxford, 1892), p. 558, footnote.

26. See the copy of the *sanad* in *Bengal Revenue Consultations*, 11 September 1778

zamindari. The *sanad* recognized the zamindari interests of the Joynagar zamindar in all the new lands brought under the plough. As zamindar of the *noabad* lands he was entitled to the same rights and privileges over these lands as were enjoyed by other zamindars over their lands. Out of every sixteen Rupees of the *noabad* revenue assets the zamindari interests of the Joynagar zamindar amounted to Rs. 4/13/2; the remainder being payable to Government.²⁷ Under the operation of the *sanad* any person willing to reclaim waste lands had to obtain a *pattah* from Joynagar zamindar for the quantity of land he desired to reclaim. The holders of the *pattah* were called *talugdars*. They had to account to him for the quantity of lands they cultivated and pay the revenues of the lands to him. While the revenue that the *talugdars* were liable to pay was fixed at the *pargana* rate current in Chittagong, the amount payable by the *noabad* ryots was not defined. In other words, the *talugdars* were left to make their arrangements with the ryots. But this does not imply that the ryots were at their mercy; for the law of demand and supply operated to the advantage of the *noabad* ryots. Land was available for the mere asking but population was thin. It was the *talugdars* who sought for ryots and not the ryots who clamoured for land. This appears to have enabled the ryots to hold the lands at fluctuating but favourable rates; for if the demand was raised by the *talugdar* above what a ryot was willing to pay, he could migrate to the lands of neighbouring *talugdars* where he would be welcome. The status of *noabad* ryots appears to have been similar to that of the *paikasht* or non-resident ryots in the other sparsely cultivated regions of Bengal.²⁸

During the general survey of 1764-67 the Joynagar zamindari was found to contain 692 *done*s of land under actual cultivation and after another measurement in 1788, 1566 *done*s, paying annual revenue of Rs. 16, 207.²⁹ This presents a poor contrast to the reclamation of the Mughal period. The Joynagar zamindar had held the monopoly of all waste lands but seriously neglected to improve them. Neither *takavi* loans nor protection against wild animals and vagaries of nature had been extended to the reclaimers. In the eighties of the eighteenth century, the Ghosals were accustomed to mortgage and farm it

27. *Correspondence on the Settlement of the Noabad Lands in the District of Chittagong*, p. 49

28. A. M. Serajuddin, *The Revenue Administration*, p.145

29. *Correspondence on the Settlement of the Noabad Lands in the District of Chittagong*, p. 49

frequently to bidders who having only an annual or biennial interest in the zamindari, ruthlessly exploited its resources.³⁰ The negligence of the Ghosal family was, to a certain extent, due to the fact that they had Bengal-wide trade and land interests to look after and used to manage their affairs in Chittagong with the help of *naibs* who were notorious for gross mismanagement and questionable practices. Though the genuineness of the Joynagar *sanad* had never been doubted, the Collectors of Chittagong had questioned the propriety of making such an extraordinary grant from time to time. In 1798 a thorough investigation conducted by the Collector of Chittagong revealed that the *sanad* was a forgery.³¹ The Ghosals were dispossessed and the entire property was attached to Government. The Ghosals brought a suit against Government to set aside the attachment. After long-drawn litigation, finally in 1815 the Sadar Diwani Adalat pronounced the *sanad* to be a forgery. The court ordered restitution of such lands as had been recorded in the survey of 1764-67 as belonging to the Joynagar zamindari. All other lands were to remain the property of the Government. In Sir Henry Ricketts' *noabad* land settlements the *noabad* land possessed by each individual in each village was made a separate *taluk* and the 32, 258 *taluks* thus created were separately assessed and settled with them for a period of fifty years.³² These *taluks* comprised 66,525 *done*s of land with a gross revenue of Rs. 200,825, the average assessment being Rs.12/0/4 per *done*.³³

V. Zamindaries of Chittagong

One peculiarity of the land management of Chittagong was the large number and small size of the zamindaries. In 1776-77 the number of zamindaries in Chittagong was 1673 of which 135 paid less than Rs.10 as revenue of the lands; 930 between Rs. 10 and 100; 423 between Rs. 100 and 500; 87 between Rs. 500 and 1,000; 76 between Rs. 1,000 and 5,000; and 22 more than Rs. 5,000.³⁴ Contrast this with the Rajshahi zamindari which covered nearly thirteen

30. *Bengal Board of Revenue Proceedings*, 14 May 1790

31. *Bengal Revenue Consultations*, 30 March 1798

32. H. J. S. Cotton, *Op. cit.*, pp.122-23

33. *Ibid.*, p. 123

34. A. M. Serajuddin, *The Revenue Administration*, Appendix E, p. 220. For the names of the 1673 zamindars see *British Museum Additional Manuscripts*, No. 29088, pp. 27-54

thousand square miles and yielded Rs. 25,87,172 in land revenue in 1776-77,³⁵ or with the smaller but still richer Burdwan zamindari which on some five thousand square miles paid Rs. 41,49,471 in 1767-68;³⁶ and the insignificance in area and revenues of the Chittagong zamindaries at once becomes apparent. Even more striking than the petty extent of the zamindaries was the way in which they were scattered in small parcels, both within individual villages and between villages, and even between *thanas*. Only a handful of the more insignificant zamindaries were confined to one spot; the vast majority was dispersed in many distant and detached blocks. For instance, the zamindari of Baidyanath Qanungo, which contained an area of 3,435 acres, was scattered in 241 villages, situated in nine *thanas* and Zabardast Khan's 3,194 acre zamindari was dispersed among 71 villages in six *thanas* — 406 acres being found in eleven villages, themselves in five *thanas*.³⁷

The reason for the extraordinary distribution of the zamindaries may probably be found in the gradual process of the colonization of Chittagong and in the peculiar way in which the zamindaries appear to have taken origin during this process. The immigrants finding extensive tracts of waste before them appear to have settled down pretty much at random, and set to work to clear the jungles. They probably chose their own leader or *tarafdār* — the word *taraf* which means 'on the part of the partisan' is also suggestive — through whom they paid their revenue to Government. Otherwise, the *tarafs* would not be found scattered piecemeal over the district. Had the *tarafdars* obtained the land and then settled people, it is certain that such a fragmentary division and distribution of the *tarafs* would have been avoided, as it was opposed to all facility for collection of revenue. The intermingling and scattering of the lands of the zamindaries as well as their petty extent may be presumed to have had some significant effects. Some zamindaries, obviously, were too small to be anything but family farms of the usual peasant pattern, yielding subsistence but no very large surplus. But even those of a larger size, of from one hundred to five hundred acres, or above, must have been much less productive and profitable than the zamindaries, comparable in acreage but more compact, to be found in some other districts. The cost of management must have been high; and efficient control over so

35. *British Museum Additional Manuscripts* No. 29087, p.131

36. Harry Verelst, *A View of the Rise, Progress and Present State of the English Government in Bengal*, (London, 1772), p. 72

37. C. G. H. Allen, *Op. cit.*, p. 83

many widely scattered blocks almost impossible to maintain. Few Chittagong zamindars can have made large profits, or been able to lead any very luxurious life as absentee landlords in the towns and cities. There was certainly much truth in the assertion of the zamindars of Chittagong that 'we are very poor and indigent, and not to be compared even with the ryots of other provinces'.³⁸

Again, just because efficient land management was almost impossible, and because only someone well acquainted with the villages of the district could know and value the scattered fragments of any particular zamindari, land speculators from outside the district must have been deterred from purchasing lands in Chittagong. These factors are probably largely responsible for the absence of absentee landlordism in Chittagong in this period and also in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But though the zamindars lived within their district rather than in the great cities of the province, they could not be residents on their estates in the same way as other landed proprietors. A zamindar whose lands lay in 241 villages and nine *thanas* could be a presence and an influence over his ryots only in one small corner of his estate. The minor zamindars were in any case no more than peasants in the size of their holdings, but even the greatest could not easily give a social lead, provide financial assistance in difficult years or assume a political role when their tenants lived so distant and dispersed. The self-willed peasant of Chittagong was a marked contrast to his meek counterpart in Rajshahi and Burdwan.

If the involved and complicated nature of the zamindari estates of Chittagong saved them from the attention of the speculators, it laid them wide open to false dealings, dispute and litigation. The litigious habit of the people of Chittagong may, to a great extent, be ascribed to it. As early as 1775 Collector Bateman complained to the Council of Revenue at Calcutta of the 'natural extraordinary litigious disposition of the people' and the 'numberless disputes' relating to the landed property at the *diwani adalat*.³⁹ Sir Henry Ricketts, Commissioner of Chittagong, thus wrote of the people in 1848:

It is not only that they will litigate to the last for a rightful advantage: they will litigate though any ultimate advantage is impossible; and, more than that, they will litigate incurring certain loss in order to disturb and injure a neighbour.⁴⁰

38. See the memorial of the Chittagong zamindars in *Bengal Board of Revenue Proceedings*, 14 May 1790

39. *Bengal Revenue Consultations*, 7 July 1775

40. Quoted in W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, Vol. VI, (London, 1876), p.155

This survey of the zamindaries of Chittagong would remain incomplete without a few words on the zamindars themselves. The principal land-holding families of Chittagong were descendants of two main professional classes – the military and the clerical. The three most prominent of the military class of zamindars were Niamat Khan, Tej Singh and Mangat Ram Hazari.⁴¹ Niamat Khan's ancestor was a military officer of the Mughal army that invaded Chittagong under the command of Buzurg Umed Khan, son of Nawab Shayista Khan, in 1665-66. He built a fort upon the Sangu River to protect the southern frontier of Chittagong against the incursions of the Arakanese and the wild tribes from the hills. Tej Singh was the grandson of Ramu Singh, another military officer of the invading Mughal army of 1665-66. The Hazaries were also officers of the invading army and appointed to defend the passage of the Sangu river against the inroads of the hill tribes and the Arakanese. The ancestors of many of the Hindu zamindars of the clerical class were immigrants from other parts of Bengal.⁴² They came into the district as revenue agents and clerks in the service of the Muslim rulers. A few of them had also been in the service of the Arakanese rulers of Chittagong prior to the invasion of the Mughals. The ancestor of Bhowani Prasad Qanungo and Santiram Qanungo of the famous Qanungo family of Paraikora is said to have immigrated to Chittagong from near Gaur about the year 1575.⁴³ Kali Charan Roy, the founder of Taraf Prabhatabi, was the descendant of one Sadananda who immigrated to Chittagong from West Bengal in the middle of the sixteenth century.⁴⁴ Rajaram Chowdhury of Kuipara was fifteenth in descent from one Chandra Roy, a native of Burdwan, who came to Chittagong about the year 1571.⁴⁵ The number of Muslim zamindars of the clerical class was negligible, compared to the numerous Hindus of this category. This is easily accounted for by the traditional apathy of the Muslims towards revenue work. Though Chittagong came under the direct control of the servants of the East India Company twelve years earlier than the Diwani lands, the mercantile and banyan class of zamindars, rather surprisingly, was insignificant in Chittagong. As everywhere in Bengal, Muslims and Hindus provided the great bulk of the zamindars of Chittagong; there was also a sprinkling of European zamindars in Chittagong. Already

41. A. M. Serajuddin, *The Revenue Administration*, pp. 190-91

42. *Ibid.*, p. 193.

43. C. G. H. Allen, *Op. cit.*, p. 24

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*

before the commencement of the Company's administration several Portuguese families had become owners of zamindaries in Chittagong. They were most probably descendants of the Portuguese adventurers and mercenaries who had played such a destructive role in the history of Chittagong in conjunction with the Arakanese in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and who at the time of the Mughal invasion of 1665-66 had conveniently transferred their allegiance to the new conquerors. The Company's Government assigned the whole of the island of Kutubdia to one Captain Herbert Sutherland as *khairat madad-i-ma'ash* or subsistence grant in 1763⁴⁶ and Moiscal to Robert Worledge as a zamindari in 1779.⁴⁷ Land grants were also made to Europeans for specific purposes like plantation of coffee, pepper and indigo.

VI. Concluding Observations

Until the Permanent Settlement of 1793, The East India Company's revenue administration in Chittagong was a continuation of that of the Mughals. The servants of the Company disturbed as little as possible the Mughal system of land management and revenue collection. Every year the *band-o-bast* or settlement of revenue was renewed with the zamindars – their tenure was, as a rule, hereditary – at a ceremony called *punya* which was usually held in the month of July or August. At this ceremony the zamindars would either appear in person or depute agents to settle the account of the past year and renew their engagement for the current year. The revenue was received by the *tahsildars* at the district head-quarters directly from the zamindars themselves in stipulated instalments. If a zamindar failed to meet his obligations the Government appointed an officer called *sazawal* to manage the zamindari and supervise the revenue collections.⁴⁸ The practice of letting out the lands to revenue farmers in supersession of zamindars was rare in Chittagong, though common in other parts of Bengal. From the acquisition of Chittagong by the East India Company in 1760, Chittagong secured the benefits of a continuity of administration, unknown elsewhere in Bengal; and the alarming excesses that followed the acquisition of the Diwani by the Company in 1765 and the administrative relapse occasioned by the many administrative and revenue experiments in the Diwani lands passed Chittagong by. The assumed success of the land survey of

46. H. J. S. Cotton, *Op. cit.*, p, 231

47. *Bengal Revenue Consultations*, 7 September 1779

48. A. M. Serajuddin, *The Revenue Administration*, p. 46

1764-67 and the unattractiveness to revenue farmers of the fragmented estates of Chittagong meant that the putting up to auction of the revenues which dealt a devastating blow to the rural economy in many other places was avoided in Chittagong and the zamindars of Chittagong were maintained in their stations. In this respect they were more fortunate than the fellow-zamindars of other parts of Bengal where a short-sighted policy of letting the lands by public auction to the highest bidders led to the ousting of zamindars from their traditional function of land management and in their place the installation of a band of adventurers.

If the improvement of the figures of collection is any criterion of a successful revenue administration – in the eighteenth century this appears to have been the only criterion – the Company's revenue administration of Chittagong must be regarded as an unqualified success. The average annual collection of revenue in the last years of Mughal rule had been about Rupees two lakhs;⁴⁹ it was more than Rupees four lakhs and a half under the Company's rule. The primary object of the revenue policy was thus achieved, though whether in the long run the Company was wise to base their demands on the maximum revenue-paying capacity of the ryots is less certain. The Company in pressing its demands upon the zamindars always professed the wish to prevent the latter from oppressing the ryots. The two objects were, of course, incompatible. Being forced by the Government to collect the desired tolls, the zamindars eventually coerced the ryots. In 1767-68 the authorized collection of the zamindars from the ryots was Rs. 13/12/12/2 per *dona* of land. In the eighties it amounted to Rs. 17/10/11/3 or, as stated by a Collector, 'one moiety of the produce of the soil'⁵⁰ -- an exorbitant demand indeed! Protection of the ryots against the arbitrary exactions of the zamindars and the rapacity of the farmers was much talked about during the period under review and granting *pattahs* to the ryots showing the quantity of lands held by them and rates of these lands was regarded by the Company as the best safeguard to them. But they miserably failed to introduce *pattahs* or extend protection to the ryots in any other way and left them at the mercy of the zamindars who as a class were not known to be kind and generous. There was little compensation for the Company's pressure for more revenue in other measures to increase the prosperity of Chittagong. Our inquiry into the *noabad*

49. Harry Verelst, *Op. cit.*, p.74, footnote

50. A. M. Serajuddin, *The Revenue Administration*, p. 212

lands has shown that reclamation of waste lands under the Company's rule came almost to a standstill, with only fifteen hundred *does* brought into cultivation between 1761 and 1788. This was insignificant in comparison either with Mughal achievements or the vast quantity of cultivable waste available. Nor did an increased trade promote prosperity during this period. An analysis of the *sair* revenue figures⁵¹ has shown that trade and commerce made no significant advance in Chittagong in the second half of the eighteenth century.

51. *Ibid.*

WORSHIP OF BALARAMA IN COOCHBEHAR: A HISTORICAL STUDY

Bijoy Kumar Sarkar*

Abstract

The worship of Balarama, the elder of Krishna was very popular in the Kamata-Koch Kingdom; he is still worshipped independently or along with Krishna in a number of temples in Coochbehar. However, he still remains utterly untouched historically and independently as he should have been. An attempt has been made here to study the background, nature and extent of Balarama's worship in the Coochbehar State along with exploring out the causes of its immense popularity. The question of Balarama's worship as one of the *Vyuhās* and/or of the *Avatāras* or something else has also been addressed. Keeping in view the simultaneous worship of Balarama and Manasa on special occasions, their relationship in popular concept has also been investigated. We have consulted the original source materials complementing with relevant secondary sources and undertaken field trips to explore the issue. It is found that Balaram's identity as a patron of agriculture and a deity of fertility - *Hala* (ploughshare) being his most distinctive weapon and *Halayudha* as his nomenclature – contributed considerably to his popularity among the pre-dominantly agricultural people of the Kamata-Koch Kingdom.

The history of Vishnu-worship may be traced in Kamarupa from early times in light of erection of a cave temple for Balabhadrasvamin in the 5th century A.D. In Kamarupa and Kamata-Koch Kingdom, the *Bhakti* movement, known as Neo-Vaishnavism, was launched by Sankaradeva. Earlier, there was profound influence of Saktism and Tantrism, which ritually approved wine drinking, human sacrifice, flesh curry, etc. Sankaradeva's teaching formed qualified monism of absolute surrender to *paramabrahma*, the all pervasive Supreme Being in the form of Vishnu (Krisna) and no distinction were made of caste, creed, sex and religion. Cooked rice that became the *prasada* of Jagannath was distributed among the people. The erudition and noble qualities of Sankaradeva impressed Maharaja Naranarayana, who extended all facilities to him in order to propagate Neo-Vaishnavism. It appears that the Kamata-Koch rulers following Maharaja Naranarayana embraced Vaishnavism, though they had inclination

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towards Saivism. The Vaishnava movement in the Kamata-Koch Kingdom practically continued in full swing for three generations of rulers. Subsequently Vaisnavism remained confined in the initiation of the Maharajas due to the more popular cult of Siva as well as the opposition of the priestly class and the Brahmas.

Balarama was perhaps older than Krishna and lived in Gokula along with Him. According to the Pancharatras, Sankarsana along with Vasudeva, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha formed together what is known as *vyuha*. Sankarsana-Balarama is not only a primary *Vyuha*, but also a *Vibhava (avatara)*, the same name or form denoting either of the two aspects of the cult-god Vishnu. Balarama is also recognized as the eighth *avatara (vibhava)* of Vishnu by some as the eighth *avatara* of Vishnu; by others as an incarnation of the cosmic serpent *Sesa/Ananta*. Balarama was a patron of agriculture. His special weapons are a club, ploughshare and pestle (*musala*) and he is called *Halayudha*, *Halabhrita*, *Langali*, *Sankarsana* and *Musali*. It is to be noted that *hala* (ploughshare) is his most distinctive *ayudha*. In independent images of Balarama, found in other parts of India, the god is seen to have a canopy of snake hood over his head. This iconographic trait is a reflection of a tradition that describes him as an incarnation of the mythical, cosmic serpent *Sesa/Ananta*. He was of great strength and was much addicted to wine (*Madhu-priya*). He had one wife, Revati; and he was faithful to her.

The worship of Balarama (and also of Bishahari) was very popular in the Kamata-Koch kingdom. Almost every substantial farmer would get *mandaps* or huts in his house where *puja* would be offered to them.¹ Special occasions, such as the marriage of children, tonsure (*churakaran*), adaption in the family and first-rice (*annaprasana*), would invariably include the worship and propitiation of gods Balarama as well as Bishahari.

Balarama is worshipped in iconic form in the Balarama temple at Tufanganj; the ceremony connected with the worship is conducted by a Brahmana from Kamarupa.² The temple is situated in the village of Bhuchungmari at Natabari in the Tufanganj sub-division. It stands about a mile west of the river Kaljani. After

1 H. N. Choudhury, *The Cooch Behar State and its Land Revenue Settlements*, First published in 1903, ed. by N. N. Pal (Siliguri 2010), p.140.

2 Pabitra Kumar Debnath, *Religion and Religious Establishments of Kamata-Koch Kingdom*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, (University of North Bengal 1993), p. 202.

the name of the presiding deity of the temple, the place has come to be known as Balaramapur.³ According to *Rajopakhyana*, Nazirdeo Santanarayana established Balaramapur and gave it the name. However, there is no reference to installing the image of Balarama in this place.⁴ H. Beveridge also reported that the temple had been built by a Najir Deo. The old temple is now in ruins the traces of which can be noticed in the premises of the present temple. The present temple is square in shape, having four shades of corrugated iron and faces east. Anyway, daily and periodical worship of Balarama in the temple under discussion is still performed. Special *puja* is, however, held on the annual festive occasions like *Rathayatra*, *Dolyatra*, *Janmastami*, etc.,⁵ which are attended by a large number of devotees with handful of *naivedya*.

Another temple of Balarama could be found on the right bank of the river Gadadhar about two miles west of the Tufanganj town. The place is generally known as Daria Balai Dham.⁶ The image of Balarama is seen lying flat on the ground inside the temple with the head placed towards the east. The image is said to have been established by Maharaja Narendranarayana.⁷ Provision was made for meeting the expenses of daily worship of the deity. Endowment of land had also been made by him. It is said that there was no trace of old temple and the place was almost hidden in jungle. Possibly, there was a temple made of perishable materials like bamboo and thatch, which had been replaced by a rectangular temple of four shades of corrugated iron. The walls are made of bamboo, while the floor is *kachcha*, that is, made of clay. Interestingly, this temple faces the west.⁸ The west-ward direction of the present temple may be explained on the canonical instruction that if the Sun (i.e. Vishnu)-temple cannot be made to face east, it should face the west. Daily worship of Balarama is performed even today, while special *puja* is offered on the *Astami Tithi* during the *Basanti Puja*. A fair is held on this occasion, to be attended by a large number of people intending to do 'darshan' of the deity with offerings. A Kamarupi Brahmana priest is also there for conducting the rituals of the deity. The temple, however once maintained directly by the state, is now maintained by private individuals.

3 Choudhury, *Op. cit.*, p. 241

4 Munshi Joynath Ghosh, *Rajopakhyana*, ed. by B. Das, (Calcutta 1985), p. 37

5 Dilip Dey, *Tufanganj Mahakuma Satabarsha Smarakgrantha*, (Tufanganj 1992), p. 93

6 Dey, *Op. cit.*, p. 99

7 cf. Choudhury, *Op. cit.*, p. 703

8 Debnath, *Op. cit.*, p. 202

The god Balarama is also worshipped in Madan Mohan temple at Mathabhanga. Situated near the S.D.O.'s office of Mathabhanga Sub-division, the temple is adorned with a dome at the top. Images of Krishna and Balaram are installed in the temple. Every year celebrated here are the *Ratha Yatra*, *Raas Yatra*, *Janmastami* and *Dol Yatra*.

About 8 kilometers from Cooch Behar town is situated the village of Baikunthapur, a prosperous locality of the past. It is said that the Maharaj Lakshminarayana, king of Cooch Behar, established an idol of Baikunthanath (Vishnu) in this village for which the village came to be known as Baikunthapur.⁹ Mythologically, the paradise of Vishnu is known as *Vaikuntha*, sometimes designated as Mount Meru, and at others as in the Northern Ocean. Vishnu himself is sometimes designated by this term.¹⁰ *Vaikuntha* is higher even than the *Brahmaloka*. Whenever the devotee, by constant adoration of the god renouncing *karmaphala*, reaches the stature of *Bhagavana* from *guna* point of view, he is entitled to live in the *Vaikuntha*, the *adhipati* of which is *Vaikunthanatha*.¹¹ The *Vaikunthanatha* temple is, however, quite interesting. The floor as well as the altar is made of clay, while the wall is made half with tin and the rest with bamboo. There is no definite information about the founder of this temple, which is constructed in *charchala* made of tin. Inside the shrine are two idols on the throne – one of Krishna and the other of Balarama. The height of both the octo-alloy images is about 31 cm. (1 ft). The major festivals celebrated here include *Rathayatra*, *Rasa* and *Dolyatra*. Every year a fair is held at the nearby village of Khapaidanga on the occasion of Moari festival on *Dol-Purnima*, which is visited by a large number of people. The death anniversary of Damodardeva, the disciple of the Assamese Vaishnava guru Sankaradeva, is also another occasion for some small festival.¹²

Madanmohan or Balarama Thakur Temple at Dinhat¹³ temple is situated in Dinhat sub-divisional town on the east side of the Cooch Behar on Dinhat Road. Originally, there was a temple of corrugated iron shed before 1889 A.D.

9 Biswanath Das, *Koch Biharer Purakirti*, (Calcutta 1985), pp. 44-45

10 John Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology & Religion*, Fourteenth Impression (New Delhi 2004), p. 331

11 S.N. Kundu, *Prachin Vange Pauranic Dharma o Devabhavana*, (Burdwan University 1996), p. 136

12 Das, *Op. cit.*, pp. 44-45

13 Debnath, *Op. cit.*, 283-84; Das, *Koch Biharer Purakirti*, *Op. cit.*, p. 51

with Krishna, Balarama and Subhadra being the presiding deities.¹⁴ The images were worshipped at Balarampur under the auspices of one Nazir Deo, an inhabitant of Balarampur. In 1889, the images were replaced in the temple at Dinhat.¹⁵ It may be noted that according to Biswanath Das,¹⁶ inside the temple, octo-alloy images of Krisna and Balarama are installed, which are as high as 21 cm (8 inches). However, he has not said anything about the Subhadra figure. It appears from an inscription of the temple that the present shrine was erected in 1314 B.C. under the patronage of Dhairyanath Sarkar and Baidyanath Sarkar, inhabitants of Mirer Kuthi, in loving memory of their father.¹⁷ It is a brick-built temple facing the south. The *veranda* in front is flat-roofed and enclosed with beautiful railings. There is a dome above the facade having two pillars on either side of the dome. The top of the facade is decorated with the images in lime and sand of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesvara (i.e. *Hari-Hara-Pitamaha*), which represents the Puranic concept of Hindu Trinity, syncretism that is said to be the outcome of the end of sectarian conflict. In addition to daily worship,¹⁸ *Rathayatra*, *Janmastami*, *Rasayatra* and *Dolyatra* are celebrated in the temple with special worship. Naivedya is generally offered and consists of fruits and sweets, etc. Kanauji Brahmana is engaged there as priest. In front of the temple are found *Natamandapa*¹⁹ and *Dolamandapa*.²⁰

An analytical study of some interesting aspects of the rituals described above is presented below. The first of the things that demands our attention is why Balarama had received so popular a worship and continues to do so even to this day. As is known, *Hala* (ploughshare) is the most distinctive weapon (*ayudha*) of Balarama. He is regarded as a patron of agriculture as well as the deity of fertility.

14 During the reign of Dhairyanarayana, there was a quarrel between the Raja and Nazir Deo, which came to an end in 1788 with the intervention of Mercer and Chouvet. Later on, all the properties of the Nazir Deo was taken in absence of suitable heir. The images were also replaced in the temple of Dinhat – Sre Sandhani, ‘Deva Parichay’, Koch Behar Samachar, Asvina, 1383

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*, p. 51

17 P. K. Bhattacharyya, *Madhuparni*, Cooch Behar Zilla Sankhya, (Coochbehar 1396), B.S., p. 82

18 Interview: Ramkripan Ojha, present priest, Madanmohan temple, Dinhat as quoted by Debnath, fn 194

19 Dancing Pavillion/Hall or theatre-hall.

20 A cradle arch for the Lords to swing in the Dola festival during the last five days of Phalgua.

All these factors most probably have had tremendous bearing on his worship by the agricultural people in Kamata-Koch Kingdom. Roughly speaking, the people of Cooch Behar State had only one occupation – agriculture.²¹ The most predominating section in the population is the Rajvansis, who comprise about 60 percent of the entire, and 87 percent of the Hindu population of the state.²²

It has been put on record that “the weapon of the former (Balarama), namely the plough, has some bearing on his worship.....but it is not clear why the worship of Bishaharai, the goddess of snake, is so popular in a country where the poisonous are but rare, and instances of death from snake-bite are not very common.”²³ It could be explained, as we feel, by exploring out a relationship in popular conception between Balarama and Manasa. As is known, Balarama is also regarded, according to Brahmanic faith, as an incarnation of the mythical, cosmic serpent *Sesa*, also known as *Ananta* and in independent images, the god is very frequently represented with a canopy of snake hood over his head. On the other hand, Manasa is identified with Jaratkaru, the sister of the *naga*-king Vasuki in the *Mahabharata*.²⁴ She also appears as the goddess of snakes in the *Brahmavaivartta* and the *Devi-Bhagavata*²⁵ and is always represented in images with the head covered by a canopy of snake-hoods. Snakes are a universal symbol of fertility and procreation.²⁶ Most archaeologists and art historians identified the "Snake Goddess" as a "fertility deity" associated with the Mother Goddess. In the association of both the deities with snake, snake hood canopy and fertility, the agricultural people have most probably found out some relationship between them – something like Manasa being the *sakti* of Balarama, the supposed phenomenon, which may have popularized their worship.

India's medieval period is regarded as the golden age of Tantrism, particularly for Sakta and Buddhists. The territories of Kamarupa and also of Kamata-Koch were also under the widespread influence of Saktism and Tantrism. Employment of

21 Choudhury, *Op. cit.*, p.154

22 *Ibid*, p.123

23 *Ibid*, p.140

24 Chapters 13-16, 38-40 & 46-48

25 *Brahmavaivartta-Purana: Prakriti-khanda*, Ch. 45-46; *Devi-Bhagavata Purana: Ninth Chapter*, Adhs. 47, 38ff; 48; 1-145

26 The ability of snakes to be flaccid, erect and to curl in a circular manner made them a symbol of the male and at times of the female organ. Besides, snakes can give birth at a time to a large number of snakes - <http://www.bookmanlit.com/siwodanbala.html>

Pancha-makaras - *madya* (wine), *maithuna* (sex), *mudra* (ritual gestures), *matsya* (consumption of fish) and *mamsa* (consumption of flesh) in the tantric rituals were popular. As we know, the 'wine-loving' Balarama was much addicted to wine (*Madhu-priya* or *Priya-madhu*)²⁷ so much so that drunkenness came to be an essential part of his character. It demands our attention to look into whether Balarama's essential feature of drunkenness was somewhat responsible for endearing him to the Sakta-Tantrik section of the society at large.

The next question we need to address is whether Balarama received worship as one of the *Vyuhās* and/or of the *Avataras* or something else? Wherever we come to notice the images of Balarama in the Kamata-Kingdom or Cooch Behar, he appears independently or along with Krishna. Krishna-Vasudeva and Sankarsana, the first two deities of the *Vyuha*, is, of course, taken into account by the Gopala-Krishna sub-sect of the Vaishnavas. However, the object of worship with this sect is the child-god Krishna, who grew up in the house of Nanda in company with his brother Balarama.²⁸ But Krishna, who is found accompanied by Balarama in the Kamata-Koch Kingdom, is popularly known as Madan Mohana. Therefore, the role of the Gopala-Krishna subsect in the popularity of Balarama-worship in the Kamata-Koch Kingdom seems to be out of question. On the other hand, the Pancharatra sub-sect worshipped Vasudeva, Sankarsana, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha, who formed together what is known as *Vyuha*. In view of this, it is reasonable to think that Balarama, the object of worship in Kamata-Kingdom, is one of the representations of the close associates of Lord Jagannath at Puri. This is testified to the celebration with special worship of *Rathayatra* in the temples of Balarama or Krishna-Balarama situated in Cooch Behar. Needless to say that *Ratha Yatra* is a huge festival associated with Lord Jagannath held at Puri in the state of Orissa during the months of June or July. The absence of the image of Subhadra in the Krishna-Balarama temple is because of the fact that the Vaishnavism prevalent in Kamata-Koch Kingdom was considerably founded upon the Mahapurushiya Dharma of Sankaradeva, in which no concept of the god's *sakti* is recognized. In contradiction of the popular concept, Subhadra worshipped in the temple of Puri is just a name only; in reality, she is Lakshmi, the spouse sakti of Visnu.²⁹ The impact of Neo-Vaishnavism from Assam can be noticed in the employment of Kamarupi Brahmanas as the priests in many

27 Dowson, *Op. cit.*, p. 41

28 Sudhakar Chattopadhyay, *Evolution of Hindu Sects up to the time of Samkaracarya*, First published in 1970, 2nd revised edition, (New Delhi 2000), p. 58

29 Amal Kumar Bandopadhyay, *Pauranika* (Encyclopedia Hinduism in Bengali), 2 volumes, (Calcutta 1985), p. 745

temples of Balarama or Krishna-Balarama in Cooch Behar. The priest belonging to Kanaujiya Brahmana is found in the Madanmohan or Balarama Thakur Temple at Dinhata, which is due to the constant contact of the Koch kings with North India for religious as well as educational purpose. Visva Simha, who converted to Hinduism in 1527, is said to have imported numerous Brahmanas from Kanauj, Benaras and other centre of Hindu learning.³⁰ King Visva Singh was so enlightened in Hinduism that he wanted to make his two sons staunch Hindus by educating them in Banaras in Sanskrit and accordingly, he sent his two elder sons to study Sanskrit in Banaras.

The people of the Cooch Behar State in the first decade of the twentieth century were generally composed of two elements - Hindus and Musalmans (Muslims)- in addition to a small number of some animistic tribes. The Hindus outnumbered the Muslims in every part of the state. Their share among the total population in different sub-divisions was as follows: Mathabhanga: about 76%; Sudder: 75%; Tufanganj: 72%; Dinhata: 66% and Mekligunj: 58%. The Muslims on the other hand, were the largest in Mekligunj, forming about 41% of the entire population, followed by Dinhata with 33%, Tufanganj 26%, the Sudder 24% and Mathabhanga only 23%. Mathabhanga had thus got the largest proportion of Hindus and the smallest proportion of Muslims while Mekligunj was inhabited by the largest proportion of Muslims and the smallest proportion of Hindus in the whole state. Tufanganj occupied a position intermediate between these two, none of the two elements in it being either too many or too few.³¹

We have already seen that the god Balarama³² was, and is still worshipped independently in the temple in two places in the Tufanganj sub-division, while he has received worship along with Krishna in the Madanmohan temple situated both in the Sudder, Mathabhanga and Dinhata. Evidently, we find no reference to any image or shrine of Balarama in Mekhligunj, the sub-division which had got the largest proportion of Muslims in the entire state. In view of the fact, it is to be seen whether the demographic majority had anything to do with the popularity of the god Balarama, as it is said that the position of the rich traders and men of position, the mainstay of the Neo-Vaisnavism, became jeopardized with the large influx of the Muslim peasantry. Mahadeva is said to have appeared to the rich traders and men of position to support his *bhaktas* and himself with food and money. They were considered to be the mainstay of the Neo-Vaishnavism whose

30 Col. Ved Prakash, Encyclopaedia of North-East India, Vol. 2, p. 937

31 Choudhury, *Op. cit.*, pp.118-119

32 Debnath, *op. cit.*, pp. 192-3

position became jeopardized with the large influx of the Muslim peasantry and outsiders like the Armenians and the Bhutiyas in the bigger business transactions of the country. The Balarama temple at Bhuchungmari (Tufanganj) faces the east, while the same at Daria Balai Dham faces west. According to the *Bhavisya Purana*, the entrance of a Sun-temple should face the east;³³ if not possible, it should face the west. As is known, Vishnu is originally an aspect of the Sun in the Vedic literature, popularly known as the *Aditya-Vishnu*. And needless to say again that Balarama is no one but Vishnu in both his *Vyuha* and *Avatara* aspects. Thus, the east/ west ward face of the Balarama Temple in question might be a pointer to the forgotten relationship between Surya and Vishnu. On the contrary, Madanmohan or Balarama Thakur Temple at Dinhat faces the south. Convenience or compulsion has prevailed in this case over the canonical prescription of temples facing preferably east or compromisingly west.



Image of Balarama in Balarama temple at Bhuchungmari (Balarampur) in Tufanganj sub-division.

33 D. N. Shukla, *Hindu Science of Architecture*, Vol. 1, (New Delhi 1958), p. 183



Image of Balarama in Daria Balai Dham near Tufanganj town.



Image of Balarama in Daria Balai Dham near Tufanganj town.



Madan Mohan temple at Mathabhanga (Cooch Behar) enshrining images of *Krishna* and *Balaram*



Madanmohan or Balarama Thakur Temple at Dinjata, Cooch Behar



Octo-alloy image of Balarama Thakur in Madanmohan or Balarama Thakur Temple at Dinhata



Octo-alloy image of Balarama Thakur (in the middle above) in Madanmohan or Balarama Thakur Temple at Dinhata, Cooch Behar

RATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION IN THE NATURE OF SCIENTIFIC TRUTH

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Abstract

Conventional wisdom suggests that scientific knowledge is objective and a proven truth. This paper challenges the conventional wisdom and argues that scientific knowledge offers only partial or relative truth. If we analyze some scientific phenomena such as theory-change and the unobservable entities assumed in science, we will find a different picture about the nature of scientific truth. Philosophers of science view these phenomena and seek to rationalize what is achieved by scientific discoveries: truth or something else. Looking at some such views we finally find that achievement of scientific enterprise is not absolute truth, but it is human truth - the truth which is relative to human conditions, be it intellectual or psychological.

Introduction

What kind of truth science obtains by its theoretical investigations? The question becomes more significant when we find that scientific theories assume some entities which are not observable -- neither in experience nor in instrument. Scientific entities such as aether, electron, gene, field and many other entities assumed by different theories are not observable. In describing these entities, are our theories true --- where there is no scope to compare between the assumed entities and the reality as such?

Answer to this kind of questions depends on what we think about the nature of scientific enterprise. Our theories may or may not be true, but first of all, there must be the world external to our thinking. This view is called metaphysical realism which holds that there are truths about the actual structure of the real world that do not depend on cognitive capacities of human investigators. According to this view, there is exactly one true and complete description of the way the world is. So, metaphysical realism is not a thesis now known, it is a thesis about some possible theory. However, it is not sufficient for the truth to be there, but it is necessary for science to be able to get that truth. This view about the ability of science is called epistemological realism. According to this view,

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the real structure of the world is cognitively accessible to scientific investigations. It holds that certain forms of evidence or empirical supports are so epistemologically probative which any theory that exhibits them can legitimately be presumed to be true, or nearly so. Metaphysical realism and epistemological realism together claim that the world of our experience is real and we have the capacity to understand that reality. Secondly scientific realism asserts that the unobservable entities that the theoretical terms indicate do exist. By supposing their existence we can give good explanation of the behavior or characteristics of observable entities; otherwise the world remains completely inexplicable. Theoretical entities explaining the observable phenomena --- observable not merely by their existence, but by their being the way --- are assumed by theory. It is assumption, for we do not have any scope to compare between our theories and assumed entities. So, sometimes the face value of the theory decides about the truth of the unobservable.

Alfred Tarski¹ re-established a theory of absolute truth which shows that we are free to use the intuitive ideas of truth as correspondence with the facts. But what is 'correspondence with the facts'? There are two formulations each of which states very simply under what conditions a certain assertion corresponds to the fact. One, the statement or the assertion, 'Snow is white' corresponds to the facts if and only if snow is indeed white. Two, The statement or the assertion, 'Grass is not red' corresponds to the facts if and only if grass is indeed not red. For Tarski, a theory may be true even though nobody believes it, and even though we have no reason to accept it or for believing that it is true. According to correspondence theory, even if we hit upon the true theory, we shall as a rule be merely guessing, and it may well be impossible for us to know that it is true. On the other hand, a theory may be false although we have comparatively good reason for accepting it.²

William James³ suggests that truth is a property of certain of our ideas. It means their 'agreement', as falsity means their 'disagreement' with reality.

1 Alfred Tarski (1901–1983) was a Polish logician, mathematician and philosopher. He worked on the foundation of modern logic, formal notion of truth and analytic philosophy. His theory of truth is known as correspondence theory of truth. According to this view a statement is true if it corresponds to the reality.

2 Alfred Tarski, *The Semantic Concept of Truth: and the Foundation of Semantics*, In *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 4, No. 3, (International Phenomenological Society, 1944), p. 343.

3 William James (1842–1910) was an American philosopher and psychologist. James was one of the leading thinkers of the late nineteenth century and is believed by many to be one of the most influential philosophers the United States has ever produced. He is considered to be one of the major figures associated with the philosophical school known as pragmatism.

Pragmatists⁴ and intellectualists⁵ both accept this definition as a matter of course. They begin to quarrel only after the question is raised as to what may precisely be meant by the term 'agreement' and what by the term 'reality' which ideas to agree with. The popular notion is that a true idea must copy its reality. It is widely believed that our true ideas of sensible things do indeed copy them. James says, shut your eyes and think of yonder clock on the wall, and you get just as true picture or copy of its dial. But your ideas of its 'works' (unless you are a clock maker) is much less of a copy; yet it passes muster, because it in no way clashes with the reality. Even though it should shrink to the mere word 'works', that would still serve you truly; and when you speak of the 'time-keeping function' of the clock, or of its spring's 'elasticity', it is hard to exactly what your ideas can copy.⁶

In this situation a pragmatist asks 'what concrete difference will its being true make in any one's actual life? How will the truth be realized? What experience will be different from those which would be obtained if belief were false? What is the truth's cash-value in experimental terms? The answer would be: true ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we cannot. So, the meaning of the truth is all that is known-as truth.⁷

Now the question is what kind of truth science achieves. Is it possible to achieve the absolute truth in the course of theory-change? There are different views in this regards, that is, one thing is viewed from different rational reconstruction. Every rational reconstruction seeks to explain the truth within the activities of science. In rational reconstruction one explains the various kinds of activities of science with one single general rationale, which at the same time explains the nature of truth. In this regards, Popper, Kuhn, Lakatos, Lauda and Toulmin⁸ are among

4 Pragmatism is a philosophical view that began in the United States around 1870. Pragmatism is a rejection of the idea that the function of thought is to describe or mirror the reality. According to this view, assertions that predicate truth of a statement attribute the property of useful-to-believe to such a statement.

5 Intellectualism, in other words realism, stands opposite to pragmatism. It holds that function of thinking is to seek for truth of the world. It also holds that truth is the correspondence to the reality.

6 William James, *Essays in Pragmatism*, (New York, 1966), pp. 159-160

7 *Ibid*, pp. 160-161

8 Karl R. Popper, Thomas S. Kuhn, Imre Lakatos, Larry Laudan and Stephen Toulmin are the most influential figures in philosophy of science in contemporary period. They all have independent views about scientific change and the nature of scientific truth within change.

the philosophers who did this work. In this course we find scientific truth in different nature:

- (1) Science inquires objective truth but achieves ‘truth-likeness’ (Popper)
- (2) Science is theory-based, so its achievement is relative truth (Kuhn)
- (3) Science aims at discovering facts, but facts do not necessarily correspond to the reality (Lakatos)
- (4) Meaning of truth is problem-solving-effectiveness, empirical or conceptual problem (Laudan)
- (5) Essence of truth is intellectual satisfactoriness (Toulmin)

Truth-likeness

Scientific truth is viewed as truth-likeness in Popper’s⁹ philosophy of science. For him, science aims at truth in Tarski’s terms, that is, objective truth or correspondence truth¹⁰ (Correspondence theory of truth holds that a proposition can be true if and only if it corresponds to reality). He holds that scientific method is a method of falsification. In this method, science cannot verify the truth, but it eliminates the falsity from our ideas. So, reduction of falsity entails the nearness of truth – the more nearness the more truth-likeness. This is all that science does with regards to truth.

In science, Popper argues that we seek for highly informative theory, while the highly informative theory has low probability to be true. From this point of view, we do obviously not obtain the truth or approach to the truth.¹¹ Theory of falsification allows us to know that we carry on search for truth, though we may not know when to have found it. This may be compared to that of mountain peak which is permanently or almost permanently wrapped in clouds. The climber may not know when he gets there, for, he may be unable to distinguish in the clouds between the main summit and some subsidiary peaks. Yet this does not affect the objective existence of the summit. The very idea of falsification implies the idea of an objective truth which we may fail to reach. Though it may be impossible for

9 Popper’s philosophy of science tells that not verification but falsification of theories is the aim of scientific tests. No amount of verification, how big it may be, can establish an inductive conclusion; whereas one-single counter instance can refute the same.

10 Alfred Tarski, The Semantic Concept of Truth: and the Foundation of Semantics, In *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 4, No. 3, (International Phenomenological Society, 1944), p. 343.

11 Karl Popper, *Objective Knowledge*, (Oxford, 1979), p. 107

the climber ever to make sure that he has reached the summit, it will often be easy for him to recognize that he has not yet reach it. Similarly even a demonstrably consistent system may be false in fact – inconsistency does establish falsity.¹² So, we are seeking for truth in terms of reducing falsity-content.

Popper argues that science is search for true theories. Since our search starts from the expectation for some solution of some relevant and interesting problems, our search is thus for relevant and interesting truth. Interesting truth is what has a high degree of explanatory power. Mere truth is not enough; when the judge tells a witness that he should speak ‘the truth’, ‘the whole truth’ and nothing but truth; then what he looks for is as much of the relevant truth as the witness may be able or willing to offer. A witness who likes to wonder off into the irrelevancies is unsatisfactory, even though these irrelevancies may be truism and thus part of the whole truth. So, in method of falsification there is first step to make bold conjecture that produces the interested and relevant truth and its second step is some other conjecture that will try hard to falsify the earlier conjecture; at the same time later conjecture becomes subject to further falsification, which thus makes a continuous process.

If an earlier theory is T1 and a later theory is T2, there is no doubt that a theory T2 corresponds better to facts than other theory T1. Popper mentions the following list of six types of cases in which we should be inclined to speak of better correspondence.

- (1) T₂ makes more precise assertions than T₁, and these more precise assertions stand up to more precise tests.
- (2) T₂ takes account of, and explains, more facts than T₁.
- (3) T₂ describes, or, explains, the facts in more detail than T₁.
- (4) T₂ has passed test which T₁ has fail to pass.
- (5) T₂ has suggested new experimental tests, not considered before T₂ was designed and T₂ has passed these tests.
- (6) T₂ has unified or connected various hitherto unrelated problems.

If we reflect upon this list we can see that the content of the theories T1 and T2 plays an important role in conceiving the better correspondence to facts. So, we have combined here ‘the idea of truth’ and ‘the idea of content’ into one. It is very difficult to say of a theory true or false, but independently of truth value, the

12 Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, (New York, 1965), p. 226

theory has some degree of ‘truth-likeness’, which is defined in terms of truth and falsity content. The content of a statement, ‘*a*’, is the class of all logical consequences of ‘*a*’. If ‘*a*’ is true then this class can consist only of true statements; for, truth is always transmitted from a premise to all its conclusions. But if ‘*a*’ is false, then its content will always consist of both true and false conclusions. For example, ‘it always rains on Sunday’ is false, but its conclusion that ‘it rained last Sunday’ can happen to be true. Popper calls this class of the true logical consequences of ‘*a*’ the ‘truth-content’ of ‘*a*’; and the class of the false consequences of ‘*a*’ the ‘falsity-content’ of ‘*a*’. Assuming that the truth content and falsity content of two theories T1 and T2 are comparable, we can say that T2 is more closely similar to the truth than T1 if and only if either

- (a) The truth content but not falsity content of T2 exceeds that of T1; or
- (b) The falsity content but not truth content of T1 exceeds that of T2.

So, this is the approximation to truth or verisimilitude, not the absolute truth as such. However, even after T2 has been falsified in its turn, we can still say that it is better than T1 for more truth-likeness of T2. By every falsification, we do achieve more truth-likeness, not truth as such. Truth-likeness or verisimilitude is not the same as probability. For, progress in science means progress towards more interesting and therefore less probable theories. The statement ‘electron exists’ is more interesting and less probable than the statement ‘the Sun will set at 6.00pm’. Moreover, probable statements are not falsifiable.¹³

Therefore, verisimilitude is neither ‘truth’ nor ‘probability’; it is a kind of truth at the level of our interest. Our gradual achievement of verisimilitude at its highest reach will still remain the verisimilitude, for it is essentially verisimilitude, not truth. We always find a falsifying hypothesis; so, no hypothesis has the authority not to undergo criticism. This issue of empirical science in this way appears fully agnostic.¹⁴ And if every previous theory is false according to that method of falsification, then the meta-induction allows us to say that every future theory, when it is past by other theory, will also be false. In this point the method suggests that scientific community ought to be, and to a considerable degree

13 Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, (London, 1959), p. 197

14 M. Bunge, *The Critical Approach to Science and Philosophy*, (London, 1964), p.35. Agnosticism holds that it is doubtful that man can obtain the truth. Man is fallible whereas the world is extremely complex.

actually is, an open society in which no theory, however dominant and successful, is ever sacred.¹⁵

Relative Truth

Most famous of the proponents of the concept of relative truth are Thomas Kuhn and Feyerabend.¹⁶ They hold that every scientific community look at the world through their fundamental theory which Kuhn calls paradigm. So, same thing may be viewed as different things due to their differing paradigms. No one can reach reality; rather he can reach that point up to which his paradigm suggests. Which of the theory is true in describing the world? There is no rationality on which we can decide upon this question. For, there is no such rationality beyond the paradigms, rather paradigm designs rationality which can work within paradigm. Paradigms are incommensurable to each other; so there is no common rationality between them on which we may decide upon. So, any statement may be considered as true to one paradigm and may be false to other. In this condition, victory of new paradigm over the old cannot establish the real victory; for, rejection of old paradigm and acceptance of new one is decided not by rationality but by some psychological influence. So, this victory cannot indicate truth.

Feyerabend argues that new theory is less competent, as a child before an adult; so if it is to succeed, the only way is to resort to means other than arguments. It will have to be brought by irrational means such as propaganda, emotion and appeal prejudice of all kinds. This irrational means is necessary to uphold a blind faith until the newly designed arguments turn the faith into sound knowledge.¹⁷ No discovery comes with full-fledged adequacy at the start; only when the future research opens up the possibilities, theory gets maturity. Before Galileo's dynamics, Copernicus' counter induction as opposed to Ptolemy's was acted simply on faith. So, there is no reason to reject Ptolemy's system and accept Copernicus' one; but it happened. Therefore, transfer of allegiance from paradigm to paradigm is a conversion experience, says Kuhn. Scientists work on new immature theory with belief that the new will solve all the problems in the future.

In the history of science, there are some situations when our most liberal judgments and our most liberal rules had eliminated an idea which we today

15 I. Hacking, *Scientific Revolution*, (Oxford, 1981), p. 26

16 Paul Feyerabend is a giant figure in philosophy of science. He claims that science does not or should not have a universal method. So, methodological anarchism is desired for scientific innovation.

17 P. K. Feyerabend, *Against Method*, (London, 1975), p. 154

regard as essential for science. The idea survived, but they cannot be said to be in agreement with reason. They survived because prejudices, passion conceit, errors, sheer pigheadedness as opposed to reason were permitted to have their way. Copernicanism and other irrational views exist today only because reason was overruled at some time in the past.¹⁸ So, scientists decide between two competing theories through persuasion on their fellows. Moreover, Kuhn says, there is no single argument that can persuade them all. Rather than a single group conversion, what occurs is an increasing shift in the distribution of professional allegiance.¹⁹ Thus the scientific activities particularly in the choice between competing theories indicate that scientific truth is relative to theory which a scientific community is committed to.

If we consider the other side of the nature of paradigm, it will reveal that paradigmatic understanding of the world is but human understanding. Kuhn says that what is discovered with the emergence of paradigm is not the part of the world as it is, but it is an interpretation of the observations. So, we find that Priestly and Lavoisier saw oxygen but they interpret their observation differently. Aristotle and Galileo both saw pendulum, but they differed in their interpretation of what they both have seen. This discovery is neither wrong nor mere mistakes; this is a shift of scientists' mind about the fundamental matter. So the scientist who embraces a new paradigm is like the man wearing inverting lenses. He confronts the same constellation of facts, he nevertheless finds them transformed through and through in many of their details.²⁰

The history of science does not consist just of facts and conclusions drawn from facts. It also contains ideas, interpretations of facts, problems created from conflicting interpretations, mistakes and so on. On closer analysis we find that science knows no 'bare facts' at all, but facts which enter our knowledge are already viewed in certain way and are therefore essentially ideational.²¹ So, Boltzman writes, 'we cannot utter a single statement that would be pure fact of experience'.

It can be argued that a paradigm can touch the actual world if there is within its framework increase of predictive accuracy, scope and fertility of theories which

18 *Ibid*, pp. 154-155

19 T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, (Chicago, 1970), p. 158

20 T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, (Chicago, 1970), pp. 121-122

21 P. K. Feyerabend, *Against Method*, (London, 1975), p. 19

ensure progress. But this is not justified. This argument is quite similar to the argument: theory touches the reality because it survives. Nevertheless this 'survival value' will not attest to truth or approach to the truth of hypothesis. For, a false theory may well have the 'survival value'. Comparing Copernicus' theory, Ptolemy's is still used for many successful predictions in navigation. Even defeat or success of a theory is not a necessary sign of falsehood or truth. For, we find that ideas are often rejected before they can show their strength. Even in a fair competition, an ideology, partly through accident and partly because greater attention is devoted to it, may assemble success and overtake its rival. The philosophy of atomism is excellent example. It was introduced in antiquity with purpose of saving micro phenomena such as motion. It was overtaken by the dynamically more sophisticated philosophy of the Aristotelians, returned with the scientific revolution and was pushed back with the development of the continuity theory and returned again late in the nineteenth century, was again restricted by theory complementarity.²² So, paradigm may be wrong, but there is no way to correct it. For, comparison is limited to the features among our theories, certainly not between theories and objective reality.

Moreover, scientific activities of all kinds are determined by paradigm. Not only are experimental procedures value-laden, but also standards, rules, values and commitments – all are value laden in the sense that they are determined by paradigm. Paradigm determines what the relevant data are, what questions we should ask, what experiment we to perform, how to handle the new data, what occurs as evidence for or against a supposition, what occurs as a good or bad experimental result and so on. So, different paradigms make different understanding about the same world. It entails that what we achieve by our theory is not 'thing-in-itself'. Rather we see the things as paradigm represent them.

Fact versus Truth

Imre Lakatos views truth yet more differently than Popper and Kuhn do. Popper's 'falsification' has become 'sophisticated falsification' in Lakatos' philosophy. According to 'sophisticated falsification', falsification of a theory does not mean that the theory is really false and corroboration of a theory does not mean that the hypothesis is really true. According to research program view, scientific theory is not an isolated idea but a set of related ideas which he calls research program. His

22 P. K. Feyerabend, *Realism, Rationalism and Scientific Method*, (Cambridge, 1981), p. 139

research program view does not provide us with any proven knowledge. Proof is a conclusive decision about theory choice, whereas research program does not give us any such conclusive decision – neither failure nor success is final in this approach. Unlike Popper, a rejected theory may well again be a champion, and the champion theory may be defeated in the constant competition of different research programs. Since research program is a set of related theories, no research program becomes false or true in its entirety. Unlike Kuhn, Lakatos holds that decision about theory is not made just by scientific community, but by consideration of facts the theories explain. A research program which does not discover any novel facts is a degenerating research program. On the other hand, research program that continues to discover novel facts is a progressive research program. Among this type of programs the progressive one is considered as better. Discovering new facts of the nature and explaining the old facts does mean victory of a program over its competitor; but facts do not guarantee truth. Since scientific hypothesis is human device, man invents scientific system and examines whether or not it accords with the observed facts.

It is generally believed that nature attests the theory constructed by human mind whether it is true or false. But facts do not deserve such a status, for facts have such status only in the mono-theoretic model. But in reality we find a pluralistic method where there are two types of theories: interpretative theories and explanatory theories. The first provide the hard facts and the second explain them. So, here facts have no such independent status. Interpretative theories produce facts and the explanatory theories solve the problems on the basis of those facts. So, the solution of the problems does not ensure the truth.²³ Moreover, the testing of the basic statement has no natural end; we always come to a point when there is no further disagreement. So, theory may clash or conform to factual statement, but it does not necessitate the falsity or truth.

Regarding facts Lakatos says that a new research program which has just entered the competition may start by explaining old facts in a novel way but may take a very long time before it is seen to produce genuine novel facts. He mentions that the kinetic theory of heat seemed to lag behind the result of the phenomenological theory for decades before it finally overtook it with the Einstein-Smoluchowski theory of Brownian motion in 1905. After this, what had previously seemed a

23 I. Lakatos, *The Methodology of Scientific Research Programme*, (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 43-44

speculative reinterpretation of old facts, turned out to be a discovery of novel facts.²⁴ This reveals that discovering facts is dependent on human preparation to think or understand it as a fact. The fall of an apple has been a fact only some theory suggests it in Newton's mind.

Moreover, Lakatos says that the experimental results are not reliable, or that discrepancies which are asserted to exist between the experimental results and the theories are only apparent and that they will disappear with advance of our understanding. Scientists do continue to use theories in face of evidence that seems to refute them. Newtonian mechanics is the case in point. Scientists in the nineteenth century recognized that the anomalous motion of mercury counted against the theory. Nevertheless they continued with it. They were not acting irrationally in so doing; because refutation and rejection are not the same; refutation is not and should not be followed invariably by rejection. Theories should be allowed to flourish even within an ocean of anomalies.²⁵ Lakatos observes that scientists may claim that his experiment defeated a program and part of the scientific community may even rashly accept the claim. But if a scientist in the defeated camp puts forward, a few years later, a scientific explanation of allegedly 'crucial experiment' within (or consistent with) the allegedly defeated program, the honorific title may be withdrawn and the crucial experiment may be the cause of victory rather than defeat for the program. There are many experiments in the eighteenth century, which were, as historico-sociological fact, widely accepted as crucial evidence against Galileo's law of free fall, and Newton's theory of gravitation. In the nineteenth century there are several experiments based on measurement of velocity of light which disproved the corpuscular theory and which turned out later to be erroneous in the light of relativity theory. These experiments were later deleted from the justificationist's text books as manifestation of shameful short sightedness or even of envy.²⁶ Such a position tells us that facts are not entitled to ensure us truth.

Truth is Problem-solving-effectiveness

Thus far we are missing truth either in falsification or in paradigm-shift or in fact-oriented truth in a research program. In all these views about the status of

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 70

²⁵ J. Losse, *A Historical Introduction of Philosophy of Science*, (Oxford, 1980), p. 228

²⁶ I. Lakatos, *The Methodology of Scientific Research Programme*, (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 86-87

scientific knowledge, we could not achieve truth from scientific activities, because we conceive of truth as correspondence to reality. But there is no way to see whether a theory corresponds to the reality. We may conduct an experiment for testing a theory; we also may find that theory has lasted the experiment; but how can we guarantee that to win the experiment is to correspond to the reality? Since the victory of a theory is decided by experimental effect, the problem-solving effectiveness is the indication of truth. But it is just a human faith – there is no necessary relation between effectiveness and truth. All that we can say about truth is that problem-solving-effectiveness cannot be the indication of truth; having no other way to conceive of truth we may change our view of truth and say that truth is nothing more than problem-solving-effectiveness. This kind of truth is viewed by Larry Laudan in his ‘research tradition’ concept of science. For him scientific knowledge is not free of, but includes, the conceptual elements. So, human mind cannot reach the bare facts; we have just one thing to say of truth and that is that only effectiveness can accredit truth to theory. Truth is nothing more than the problem-solving- effectiveness of a theory.

Laudan says that scientific research starts when scientist encounters a problem and it ends when he find a solution of that problem. But how does a scientist feel himself in a problem and how and when does he feel that problem is solved? There are two kinds of problems: empirical and conceptual problems. The empirical problem is the object of solving and the conceptual problem is the way of solving. Both are interconnected – empirical problem is oriented by a conceptual framework, and the conceptual framework is designed with a view to solve the empirical problem. An empirical problem is solved when scientists believe they understand why the situation in question is the way it is. Laudan says, when we ask whether a problem is solved, we are actually asking whether it stands in certain relationship to some theory or other.²⁷ So, it is nothing but theory which solves the problems. The theory’s ability of such kind is called problem-solving-effectiveness.

There are two types of theories: one, the term ‘theory’ denotes a specific set of related doctrines which can be used for making experimental predictions and explanation of natural phenomena. Einstein’s theory of photoelectric effect is of this kind. By contrast the term ‘theory’ also denotes much more general, much less easily testable sets of doctrines or assumptions. For instance, kinetic theory

27 L. Laudan, *Progress and its Problems*, (New Delhi, 1978), p.22

of gas, evolutionary theory; we are not referring to a single theory, but to a whole spectrum of individual theories that historically or conceptually related. It is a grand theory which embodies huge conceptual divergence.²⁸ So, the second type of theories is different not in generality, but also in mode of appraisal and evaluation. This kind of theories is the primary tools for understanding. Laudan calls this type of theories 'scientific research tradition'. One of the essential character of research tradition is it cannot claim to be an eternal and universal problem-solver. For, it includes the conceptual scheme of the day; in other words, reason is related to milieu. This is why both Aristotle in the fourth century B.C. and Einstein in the twentieth century are rational in their ages. Thus, problem-solving-effectiveness accredited truth to their theories in their time.

There are three types of empirical problems: (1) Unsolved problems – problems that have not yet been adequately solved by any theory. These are also called potential problems. (2) Solved problems – problems that have been solved by our theory. (3) Anomalous problems – problems that particular theory has not solved but that one or more of its competitors have.²⁹ A situation or event is felt as problem for scientific research only when theory or research tradition suggests them to be. Apple-fall is felt as a problem to Newton, because his theory suggested so that time. Similarly, a research result is recognized as solution only when the theory suggests. Moreover, Laudan says that research tradition should not be judged in terms of truth or falsity; for, research traditions are historical creatures. Since they are created for solving the problems they have merits and demerits with regard to that purpose – not truth. Research traditions are articulated in particular intellectual milieu, and like all other historical institutions they wax and wane, borne and thrive; so they die and cease to be regarded as instruments for furthering the progress of science.³⁰

In the final analysis, to suppose truth to be a goal of science is to portray activity of science as irrational. For, truth can never be recognizably negotiated by a scientist. Rational behavior demands we have recognizable goal. The achievement of that goal should be publicly worthy of celebration. The failure to attain the goal should also be in principle confirmable. So, problem-solving rather than truth-finding can be deemed to be such a recognizable goal of science.³¹

28 L. Laudan, *Progress and its Problems*, (New Delhi, 1978), p. 72

29 I. Hacking, *Scientific Revolution*, (Oxford, 1981), p. 146

30 L. Laudan, p. 96

31 J. Leplin, *Scientific Revolution*, (Los Angeles, 1984), p.196

Truth is Intellectual Satisfactoriness

In this view Stephen Toulmin focuses on the aspect of science which suggest that scientific theory is not a consistent interconnected whole, rather every concept and idea live on itself in a common environment. Toulmin calls it ‘population of ideas’.³² In every milieu there is a gap between existing knowledge and intellectual ambition. For the population of ideas, milieu makes the common environment for ideas and intellectual ambition creates dissatisfaction in human understanding in this environment. The idea which satisfies this intellectual thrust will survive and the idea which fails to do so will be rejected from the population. If truth is to be conceived at all, it is survival value which satisfies our intellectual thrust.

According to Toulmin, the problem of human understanding is two-fold; ‘man knows’ and ‘he is conscious that he knows’. It means that knowledge and the knower both are the objects of knowledge. Knowledge grows, and by reflection upon knower, it deepens as well. Looking outside ourselves we extend our knowledge, looking inward we deepen our knowledge. Change of one results in the change of other.³³ For this reason the same type of object will fall within the domain of several different sciences, depending on what questions are raised about it. What makes problem ‘problematic’ is the point of view of specific descriptions. Thus the nature of an intellectual discipline always involves both its concepts and also the men who conceive them.³⁴

So we should, Toulmin suggests, come to terms with the phenomenon of inevitable interaction between human ideas and Natural world – neither of them is an invariant. Instead of a fixed mind gaining command over fixed Nature by applying fixed principles, we should expect to find variable epistemic relationship between a variable man and a variable Nature from one period of intellectual history to other. (Toulmin, p. 12) So, this is an evolutionary way of developing human understanding, and continuity and change of understanding can be explained in terms of a dual process of ‘variation and selective perpetuation’. If the variants are disadvantageous, they are not naturally selected and if advantageous they are selected by nature. There must be suitable ‘forum of competition’ within which intellectual novelties can survive for long to show

32 S. Toulmin, *Human Understanding*, (Oxford, 1972), 121

33 *Ibid*, p. 2

34 F. Suppe, *The Structure of Scientific Theories*, (Urbana, 1977), p. 676

their conquests or defeats. Within such a forum, in other words, natural environment they are criticized and wedded out or they survived and perpetuated. The selection process picks out those novelties which best meet the specific 'demands' of the local intellectual environment – intellectual environment means the forum of the competent scientists. So, the concept of truth is the adaptation in the minds of scientists.

For Toulmin, the selection of one particular conceptual innovation is justified by showing that it best succeeded in resolving an outstanding conceptual problem of science and led to an appropriate increase in 'explanatory power'. Thus, the selection criteria have to be understood in relation to their specific explanatory aims and ideas.³⁵ For him, scientific problem and its solution both are characterized by this aims and ideas. Problems are recognized by locating and specifying the gap between our current capacities and the explanatory ambitions defined by the scientific community's current ideas of natural order. In short,

Scientific problems = Explanatory ideals – Current capacities.

So, solution means the satisfaction of explanatory ideals which comes out from the mind of scientists and this solution is not any absolute, unchanging and universal one. It is true that at any stage scientists' intellectual ambition exceeds their grasp in some fundamental respect. Ideas of 'completeness' or 'perfection' is thus unrealizable. Throughout a period, the general conception of a 'complete explanation' imposes a unity upon the disciplines. So, solution is dependent on time.

Now the question is what it is that is sought by intellectual ideals over time. Piaget says, in this regards, 'reason not only evolves but reason does not change without reason'. So, there is some directional tendency in evolutionary change, which he calls orthogenesis. This orthogenesis is like a 'press', towards an ideal equilibrium between organism and environment, and between epistemic subject and epistemic object.³⁶ Our prior expectations and our general world picture yield algorithms or heuristics that guide us in explaining given data or in solving given problems.

35 S. Toulmin, *Human Understanding*, (Oxford, 1972), p. 225

36 R. F. Kitchener, Genetic Epistemology, Equilibration and the Rationality of Scientific Change, in *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, (Ed.) Nicholas Jardine, (Oxford, Vol. 18, 1987), p. 345

Our intellectual selection from the different variants always seeks to make equilibrium between the intellectual ideals and current capacities by minimizing the distance between them. But the epistemic change can never provide us with the complete equilibrium. Because there will always remain a gap between intellectual ideals and current capacities. For this constant gap science becomes perpetually open and we will never have the final theory -- there is only an increase of equilibrium instead of a complete equilibrium.³⁷ A cognitive system of selection does not allow appropriating all aspects of the apparently unlimited diversity and complexity of universe. If the equilibrium has been the aim of science, then evolutionary development is the development that occurs not on the world but on the organism, in other words, epistemic subject. So, development of knowledge depends on an epistemic subject's capacity or disposition. Our knowledge is, thus, about the subject that lives in the intellectual environment, not about the world as it is.³⁸ So, theories are ways of looking at phenomena which work or do not work, which are or are not fruitful.

Conclusion

We were satisfied that science provides the objective and correspondence truth established by experiments. But it becomes untenable when we find theory to assume such entity which is not observable – we cannot compare our theory with reality. This is one process: we have theory to assume the unobservable; but we do not have the unobservable in our hand to testing our theory. In this situation, Popper seems right to say that we obtain only truth-likeness rather than absolute truth. Since this result is established through severe criticism, our truth-likeness is objective. But Kuhn seems right to point out that criticism and corroboration, all are theory-dependent. So, our achievement is not objective, but relative to paradigm; that is, science provides relative truth. But Lakatos does not agree with Kuhn that scientists are such irrational in their decision. He finds, therefore, 'factual-truth' in science, though fact cannot ensure the absolute truth because fact is designed in accordance with research program. But factual out-sidedness ensures rational choice. Laudan goes one step ahead about scientists and says that as a human being, scientist's thinking is not just confined within some program or algorithm; they have some scope for some conceptual or ideological choice. So, we achieve in the name of truth problem-solving-effectiveness: be it empirical or

37 S. Toulmin, *Human Understanding*, (Oxford, 1972), p. 348

38 Karl Popper, *Objective Knowledge*, (Oxford, 1979), p. 73

conceptual problem. He finds scientist not confined in the program, but in research tradition with their ideological openness. Toulmin finds wider scope for scientists as human beings. For him, human concepts and ideas constitute a conceptual population rather than any holistic system. In conceptual population every idea struggles for survival; the idea which satisfies man's intellectual need can survive. This condition of scientific achievements amounts that truth is survival value. In this way scientific truth is now viewed as human truth - the truth which is relative to human conditions, be it intellectual or psychological. This perspective of scientific truth indicates its subjective nature also - though gross sense of subjectivism is not relevant here. Thus, the various reconstructions in the nature of scientific truth bring us, in the final, to the idea that scientific truth is human truth.

RETAIL MIX, SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY IN THE FOOD RETAIL CHAIN SUB-SECTOR OF DHAKA CITY

Partha Prasad Chowdhury*

Abstract

The study investigates the importance of different retail mix elements and the effect of retail mix and service quality on customer satisfaction in the food retail chain sub-sector of Dhaka city. The study is based upon the empirical findings of a quantitative research where primary data is collected by surveying a structured questionnaire. Most elements of the retail mix play a significant role in the shoppers' buying decision process to select a retail outlet. The study indicates that strength of the relationship between retail mix and customer satisfaction is moderate. There is, however, strong and positive association between service quality and customer satisfaction in the food retail chain sub-sector of Dhaka city. The study provides directions for further research and suggests managers in retail industry of Bangladesh to focus on formulating retail mix elements properly as these play significant role in shoppers' buying behaviour and develops customer satisfaction.

Introduction and Background

Retailing is an integral part of our economic structure. It shapes, and is also shaped by our way of life.¹ Global retail industry consists of six segments (Table-1) that sell their product offerings to the end customers only. The compound annual growth rate of the global retail industry was 4.8% from 2009 to 2013 and this rate is expected to grow at 6.5% from 2013 to 2018 with industry revenue of \$7,215.1bn by the end of 2018. In 2011, the contribution of food and grocery segment was 61% (\$ 6,678.9 billion) out of global retail industry's sales of \$ 10,949.2 billion.²

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1 D. Gilbert, *Retail Marketing Management*, 2nd ed., New Delhi: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2003, p.2

2 <http://www.marketline.com/marketLine Industry profile/Global Retailing>, accessed July 20, 2014.

Table-1: Different Retail Segments²

Retail Segments	Merchandises/Products offerings
Apparel, accessories, and luxury goods	Men's wear, women's wear, children's wear, footwear, watches and jewelry
Food & grocery	Food, beverages, tobacco, household care, and personal care
Electrical & electronics	Audio-visual equipment, fixed and mobile telecommunications equipment, computers and peripherals, domestic appliances, photographic equipment and games consoles.
House & garden	Carpets and floor coverings, domestic furniture, garden products and home improvement products.
Media products	Books, newspaper, stationery, and recorded music and video
Sports & leisure	Sports and fitness equipment, and traditional toys and games

The economy of Bangladesh is growing. This is evident in 6.12% GDP growth rate. During the same year the contribution of wholesale and retail sector to GDP was 14.08 percent and the growth rate of the sector was 6.57 percent.³ During the last decade some structured food retail chains were established in Dhaka city. The retail sector of the country was not properly structured in the past but the number of structured retail chains are growing now, mainly in Dhaka city. The growth of food retail chains is driven by several factors including increasing affluence level, the rise of a middle class, and a growing number of women into the workforce. Other factors focus on consumers' willingness to buy easy to prepare foods, the growth in the use of refrigerators, and changing life-style etc. Retail chain or corporate retail chain consists of two or more outlets that share a common ownership.⁴ Hence as per this definition the major food retail chains of the country are shown in Table 2.

3 http://www.bbs.gov.bd/WebTestApplication/userfiles/Image/National%20Reports/GDP_2013-14.pdf, accessed August 12, 2014.

4 S. Pradhan, *Retailing Management: Text and Cases*, New Delhi: Tata-McGraw-Hill, 2004, p. 32.

Table-2: Different Food Retail Chains of Bangladesh⁵

Retail Chain	Year of Establishment	Number of Outlet	Merchandise categories
Nandan	2005	02	Bakery, dairy, frozen food, fruits and vegetables, grocery, health-beauty, home care, meat-fish, stationery.
Meena Bazar	2002	18	Apparel, bakery, dairy, frozen food, fruits and vegetables, grocery, health-beauty, household items, meat-fish, stationery, toys.
Agora	2001	09	Fish, meat, vegetables, fruits, bakery, dairy, personal care, and other consumer goods and household utensils.
SHWAPNO	2008	59	Baby care, baby food, beverage, commodities, dairy, gifts & toys, home care, kitchen additives, packaged food, perishable, personal care, stationeries.
Prince Bazar	2005	02	Fruits, vegetables, fish-meat, groceries, chocolates, toys, clothing, beverage, food items.

Rationale and Objectives of the Study

Due to frequent interaction of service executives with the shoppers, the role of service attributes, service quality and customer satisfaction are very important in the retail industry. Some research studies have been done in the recent past in order to find out the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction and it is recognised that providing good service quality is a prerequisite for customer satisfaction and a number of other desirable behavioural outcomes.⁶ But

5 Websites of different organizations and information collected from different retail chains during period of survey for this study.

6 D. M. Mayer, M. G. Ehrhart and B. Schneider, "Service attribute boundary conditions of the service climate–customer satisfaction link", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol.52, No.5, 2009, pp.1034-50; B. Sindhav, J. Holland, A.R. Rodie, P.T. Addidam and L.G. Pol, "The impact of perceived fairness on satisfaction: are airport security

customers' needs vary depending on industry and their interpretation regarding service quality is different.⁷ Most of the studies were conducted mainly in the Western context. As discussed the economy of Bangladesh is growing and the retail sector is expanding. Despite this no study has been made to verify the role of retail mix strategy and service attributes on developing customer satisfaction in the context of Bangladesh market. Hence the purpose of this study is to address this gap in the literature by identifying the consumer behavior and the role of retail mix strategy and service attributes on developing customer satisfaction in the retail chain sub-sector of Bangladesh. The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

- To study the due weightage given to each of the retail mix elements in the selection of a retail chain;
- To examine whether gender, age, marital status, occupation have any impact on the importance of retail mix elements;
- To verify that retail mix strategy has impact on developing customer satisfaction; and
- To verify that service attributes and service quality have impact on developing customer satisfaction.

We have two hypotheses:

H1: There is a positive relationship between retail mix and customer satisfaction in the food retail chains of Dhaka city.

measures fair? Does it matter?" *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, Vol.14, No.4, 2006, pp. 323-335; S. Mithas, M. S. Krishnan and C. Fornell, "Why Do Customer Relationship Management Applications Affect Customer Satisfaction?" *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 69 (Oct), 2005, pp. 201-209; C. Liang and W. Wang, "Attributes, benefits, customer satisfaction and behavioral loyalty- An integrative research of financial services industry in Taiwan", *Journal of Services Research*, Vol.1, 2004, pp.58-89; R. L. Oliver, *Satisfaction: A behavioural perspective on the consumer*, New York: Irwin/McGraw- Hill, 1997; S. W. Anderson, L.S. Baggett and S.K. Widener, "The Impact of Service Operations Failures on Customer Satisfaction: Evidence on How Failures and Their Source Affect What Matters to Customers", *Manufacturing & Service Operations Management*, Vol.11, No.1, 2009, pp. 52-69; C. Fornell, M.D. Johnson, E.W. Anderson, J. Cha, J. and B.E. Bryant, "American customer satisfaction index: nature, purpose, and findings", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 60, No.4, 1996, pp. 7-18.

7 E. Soltani, P. Lai, R. Van Der Meer and T.M. Williams, "Managerial approaches towards service quality: the case of three service organizations", *The Service Industries Journal*, Vol. 8, No.10, 2008, pp.1399-1414.

H2: There is a positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in the food retail chains of Dhaka city.

Literature Review

Retail industry is the largest private industry followed by the financial service industry. It is unique due to its proximity to the customer, rise of consumerism, and introduction of private label brands. The change of technology has transformed the retail industry⁸ and the pace of development within the retail industry is accelerating due to its more visible economic importance, diverse activities, organizations growing on an international scale, size of operations allowing for supply chain control, blurring of areas of retail to include wider area of business activity.⁹ In this present scenario retailers should know the ever changing needs and expectations of the consumers, competition, change of technology and socio economic climate of the nation that retailer is operating.¹⁰

Consumer perceptions are different and it varies market-wise and industry-wise and they put different weightage whenever they buy goods or services or even to select an outlet. Some studies have suggested that retail mix strategy has impact on developing customer satisfaction.¹¹ Primary focus of marketing is the exchange relationship,¹² but discussions on consumer-organisational relationship are not clear in the literature.¹³

Retailing: The word retail came from the French word “retailier” which means to break bulking.¹⁴ Retailing is part of an integrated supply chain system and retailer purchases merchandises from the vendors or the wholesalers in bulk quantity and

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- 8 S. Pradhan, *Retailing Management: Text and Cases*, New Delhi: Tata-McGraw-Hill, 2004, pp. 4,7,8.
 - 9 D. Gilbert, *Retail Marketing Management*, 2nd ed., New Delhi: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2003, pp.1,5
 - 10 S. Pradhan, *Retailing Management: Text and Cases*, New Delhi: Tata-McGraw-Hill, 2004, p. 5.
 - 11 P. Kotler, *Marketing Management: Analysis, Planning, Implementation, and Control*, 8th ed., New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India Private Limited, 1996, p.186, 195; P. Kotler, K.L. Keller, Y.A. Agnihotri and E. Haque, *Principles of Marketing: A South Asian Perspective*, 13th ed., New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd. 2011, pp.127-132,316-329.
 - 12 V. Jham and K. M. Khan, “Customer Satisfaction in the Indian Banking Sector: A Study”, *IIMB Management Review*, March, 2008, pp.84-93.
 - 13 L. O’Malley and C. Tynan, “The Utility of the Relationship Metaphor in Consumer Markets: A Critical Evaluation”, *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol.15, 1999, pp.587-602.
 - 14 S. Pradhan, *Retailing Management: Text and Cases*, New Delhi: Tata-McGraw-Hill, 2004, p.3.

then sells in smaller quantities to the shoppers for a profit and with high frequency.¹⁵ Retailing is defined as the set of business activities that add value to the products and services sold to the consumers for their personal or family use, i.e., non business use,¹⁶ consists of all activities involved in the marketing of goods and services directly to the consumers, for their personal, family and household use¹⁷ and as the business that directs its marketing efforts towards satisfying the final consumer based upon the firm of selling goods and services as a means of distribution.¹⁸ Retailing includes every sale to the final consumer-ranging from cars to apparel to meals at restaurants to movie tickets. Retailing is the last stage in the distribution process.¹⁹

Retail Mix: Retail mix consists of three related sub-mixes: i) goods and services mix (variables are variety and assortment, parking, sales service, credit, price lines, guarantees and exchanges, alterations and adjustments, delivery); ii) communication mix (variables are personal selling, advertising, window display, interior display, public relations, store layout, catalogs, telephone sales); and iii) physical distribution mix (variables are Store location, distribution centers, inventory control, transportation, handling goods).²⁰ A retail mix has six elements. These are location, merchandise assortment, pricing, communication, store design and display, and customer service.²¹

Location: Location plays an important role in shaping consumer decision on where to shop. By developing outlet in the best possible location retailers can develop

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- 15 P. Kotler, K.L. Keller, Y.A. Agnihotri and E. Haque, *Principles of Marketing: A South Asian Perspective*, 13th ed., New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd. 2011, p.316.
- 16 B. Berman, J.R. Evans and M. Mathur, *Retail Management-A Strategic Approach*, 11th ed., New Delhi: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2011, p.4; P. Kotler, K.L. Keller, Y.A. Agnihotri and E. Haque, *Principles of Marketing: A South Asian Perspective*, 13th ed., New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd. 2011, p.316.; M. Levy and B. A. Weitz, *Retail Management*, 5th ed., Singapore: McGraw-Hill, 2004, p.6; P. Kotler, *Marketing Management: Analysis, Planning, Implementation, and Control*, 8th ed., New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India Private Limited, 1996, p.558.
- 17 S. Pradhan, *Retailing Management: Text and Cases*, New Delhi: Tata-McGraw-Hill, 2004, p.3.
- 18 D. Gilbert, *Retail Marketing Management*, 2nd ed., New Delhi: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2003, p.6.
- 19 See, P. Kotler, 1996, p. 4.
- 20 Cited in, B. Rosenbloom, "The Trade area Mix and retailing Mix: A Retail Strategy Matrix", *Journal of Marketing*, 1976 (Oct), pp.58-65.
- 21 M. Levy and B. A. Weitz, *Retail Management*, 5th ed., Singapore: McGraw-Hill, 2004, p.23

sustainable competitive advantage²² because if a site is selected it cannot be occupied by another store. The retailers can change their merchandise assortments, pricing, service within a short period but once a facility is built, purchased or leased and a store comes into existence, the ability to change the location becomes difficult for a number of years and if a retailer needs to move store from one location to another then some loyal customers and employees may be lost; new location may not have equal traits and generally stores fixtures cannot be transferred to the new location.²³ Location is one of the most significant strategic decisions as poor location is a liability that even for a superior retailer it is difficult to overcome and hence a good number of criteria for example population size and traits, competition, transportation access, parking availability, the nature of nearby stores, property costs, length of the agreement, legal restrictions etc are required to be considered for taking decisions regarding location.²⁴ Hence location is the most important element of retail mix.

Pricing: Decisions regarding pricing is critical as business needs adequate margin to survive in the long run.²⁵ It is suggested that target market, store policies, merchandise assortment, competition and the customer considerations are required to be considered to take pricing decisions.²⁶ Price is an integral part of the retail marketing mix²⁷ and an important variable in decision making in the current marketplace where customers are very much price sensitive and hence price is a major strategic weapon for many retailers.²⁸ Growing concern of today's shoppers for buying good value merchandises and services has significant impact on the

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- 22 D. Gilbert, *Retail Marketing Management*, 2nd ed., New Delhi: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2003, p.276.
 - 23 M. Levy and B. A. Weitz, *Retail Management*, 5th ed., Singapore: McGraw-Hill, 2004, p.217; R. Hasty and J. Reardon, *Retail Management*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997, p.204; S. Pradhan, *Retailing Management: Text and Cases*, New Delhi: Tata-McGraw-Hill, 2004, p.80; B. Berman, J.R. Evans and M. Mathur, *Retail Management-A Strategic Approach*, 11th ed., New Delhi: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2011, pp.260-61.
 - 24 See, Berman, J.R. Evans and M. Mathur, 2011, pp. 260-61.
 - 25 D. Gilbert, *Retail Marketing Management*, 2nd ed., New Delhi: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2003, p.157.
 - 26 S. Pradhan, *Retailing Management: Text and Cases*, New Delhi: Tata-McGraw-Hill, 2004, p.133.
 - 27 See, S. Pradhan, 2004, p.133; P. Kotler, K.L. Keller, Y.A. Agnihotri and E. Haque, *Principles of Marketing: A South Asian Perspective*, 13th ed., New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd. 2011, p.326.
 - 28 R. Hasty and J. Reardon, *Retail Management*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997, p.457

importance of pricing decisions.²⁹ Every customer whether buying an expensive or inexpensive merchandise item, wants to feel that the purchase represents a good value and retailers should price their merchandise items in a way that both profitability of the retailers can be achieved and customers can be satisfied.³⁰

Communication: Communication is important in retailing to develop appealing brand images, attract customers to store outlets and internet sites and encourage them to buy.³¹ In addition to informing the customers about the retailers, merchandises and the services communication helps to build their store image.³² Communication is important in retailing as shoppers want to know store hours, special offerings, product features, styles in fashion and so many other things from the retailers.³³ The most common communication tools in retailing are advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, publicity and direct marketing.³⁴ The main objective of retail promotion is to influence perception, attitudes and behavior of the shoppers to increase store loyalty, store visits and product purchase.³⁵

Store design and display: The store design and layout is the architectural character or decorative style and consists of external design elements like architectural style, signage, windows,, entrance, materials, color, lighting and internal design elements like layout, fixtures, displays, floors, color, light, ceilings that communicates the customers what the store is all about.³⁶ As the store design and layout helps to

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- 29 M. Levy and B. A. Weitz, *Retail Management*, 5th ed., Singapore: McGraw-Hill, 2004, p.477
- 30 B. Berman, J.R. Evans and M. Mathur, *Retail Management-A Strategic Approach*, 11th ed., New Delhi: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2011, p.478.
- 31 M. Levy and B. A. Weitz, *Retail Management*, 5th ed., McGraw-Hill, 2004, p.513.
- 32 S. Pradhan, *Retailing Management*, p. 196; Levy and Weitz, *Retail Management*, 5th ed., Singapore: McGraw-Hill, 2004, p.533.
- 33 R. Hasty and J. Reardon, *Retail Management*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997, p.497-500.
- 34 R. Hasty and J. Reardon, *Retail Management*, 1997; S. Pradhan, *Retailing Management: Text and Cases*, New Delhi: Tata-McGraw-Hill, 2004, p.196; D. Gilbert, *Retail Marketing Management*, 2nd ed., New Delhi: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2003, p.176; Levy and Weitz, *Retail Management*, p.520; B. Berman *et al.*, *Retail Management-A Strategic Approach*, 11th ed., New Delhi: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2011, p.544; P. Kotler *et al.*, *Principles of Marketing: A South Asian Perspective*, 13th ed., New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd. 2011, p.326.
- 35 D. Gilbert, *Retail Marketing Management*, 2nd ed., New Delhi: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2003, p.175.
- 36 S. Pradhan, *Retailing Management: Text and Cases*, New Delhi: Tata-McGraw-Hill, 2004, p.224; R. Hasty and J. Reardon, *Retail Management*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997, p.256.

develop the image of a retail store, the retailers should consider all other retail mix strategies during designing a store so that it carries consistent image.^{37,38,39} There are two functions of store design. The design serves the functional purpose of protecting, enclosing, and displaying merchandise at convenient time at convenient location. It also serves the symbolic needs of shoppers which includes the social aspects of shopping or owning a product from a specific store.⁴⁰

Customer Service: Retail customer service is defined as the set of activities undertaken by retailers to make the shopping experience more rewarding for the shoppers.⁴¹ Customer service consists of the factors like store hours, parking, shopper friendliness of the store layout, credit acceptance, salespeople, rest rooms, employee politeness, delivery policies, the time shoppers spend in checkout lines and customer follow-up etc and hence has strong impact on total retail experience.⁴² Level of service which includes both the quality of the services provided by the salesperson and the quality of associated services such as gift, wrapping and mailing depending on the type of merchandise being sold and the shoppers being targeted. These act as positive differentiator⁴³ and a superior service is a valuable strategic asset and source of sustainable competitive advantage as these service activities add value that the shoppers receive from the merchandises they purchase.⁴⁴

Merchandise Assortments: Merchandise assortment is the selection of merchandises a retailer carries⁴⁵ and the main purpose of creating an assortment plan is to create a balanced assortment of merchandise in terms of colour, size, brand, materials, quantities.⁴⁶ Merchandise assortment also works as a differentiator

37 R. Hasty and J. Reardon, *Retail Management: Text and Cases*, 2004

38 R. Hasty and J. Reardon, *Retail Management: Text and Cases*, 2004, p. 224

39 M. Levy and B. A. Weitz, *Retail Management*, 5th ed., McGraw-Hill, 2004, p.587.

40 R. Hasty and J. Reardon, *Retail Management*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997, p.258-259.

41 M. Levy and B. A. Weitz, *Retail Management*, 5th ed., McGraw-Hill, 2004, p.619.

42 B. Berman, J.R. Evans and M. Mathur, *Retail Management-A Strategic Approach*, 11th ed., New Delhi: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2011, p.16.

43 R. Hasty & J. Reardon, *Retail Management*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997, pp.55-56.

44 M. Levy and B. A. Weitz, *Retail Management*, 5th ed., Singapore: McGraw-Hill, 2004, pp.157,621,682

45 B. Berman, J.R. Evans and M. Mathur, *Retail Management-A Strategic Approach*, 11th ed., New Delhi: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2011, p.410.

46 S. Pradhan, *Retailing Management: Text and Cases*, New Delhi: Tata-McGraw-Hill, 2004, p.112; M. Levy and B. A. Weitz, *Retail Management*, 5th ed., Singapore: McGraw-Hill, 2004, p.365; R. Hasty and J. Reardon, *Retail Management*, New York:

as the overall choice of merchandise conveys a clear message to the shoppers about the type of organization they are purchasing from.⁴⁷ Retailers need to take various factors into consideration while taking decisions regarding planning of merchandise assortments. Research findings show that “wide variety” or “popular styles and brands” are key factors to be considered for differentiation⁴⁸ and to differentiate, merchandise assortment should be planned in a way that it can match target shoppers’ expectation and it carries exclusive items.⁴⁹

Consumer Buying Behaviour: Consumers buy any product to receive some benefits and see each product as bundle of attributes with varying capabilities of desired benefits satisfying the needs.⁵⁰ All product attributes are not equally important for all consumers and importance varies within the same individual over time.⁵¹ Consumers’ behaviour is influenced by four major types of factors. These are cultural (culture, sub-culture and social class); social (reference groups, family roles and status); personal (age, life style, occupation, economic circumstances, personality, self concept); and psychological (motivation, perception, learning, beliefs and attitudes). In addition gender, age, occupation and marital status are considered to be key factors that influence consumer’s buying behavior.⁵²

Customer Service, Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction: Customer service is defined as a task other than proactive selling that involves customers’ interactions in face-to-face, e-mail, telecommunication or by any other automated

McGraw-Hill, 1997, p.412; D. Gilbert, *Retail Marketing Management*, 2nd ed., New Delhi: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2003, p.135.

47 See, D. Gilbert, 2003.

48 B. Berman, J.R. Evans and M. Mathur, *Retail Management-A Strategic Approach*, 11th ed., New Delhi: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2011, p.411-412.

49 P. Kotler, K.L. Keller, Y.A. Agnihotri and E. Haque, *Principles of Marketing: A South Asian Perspective*, 13th ed., New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd. 2011, p.325.

50 P. Kotler, *Marketing Management: Analysis, Planning, Implementation, and Control*, 8th ed., New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India Private Limited, 1996, p.195-196.

51 P. Kotler, 1996; D. I. Hawkins and D. L. Mothersbaugh, *Consumer Behavior: Building Marketing Strategy*, 4th ed., Boston: BPL-Irwin, 2010, p.563.

52 P. Kotler and K. L. Keller, *Marketing Management*, 13th ed., New Jersey: Pearson Prentice-Hall, 2009, p.151; Kotler, P., K.L. Keller, A. Koshy and M. Jha, *Marketing Management: A South Asian Perspective*, 13th ed., New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd. 2009, p.144; P. Kotler, K.L. Keller, Y.A. Agnihotri and E. Haque, *Principles of Marketing: A South Asian Perspective*, 13th ed., New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd. 2011, p.325; P. Kotler, and K. L. Keller, *Marketing Management*, 14th global ed., New Jersey: Pearson Prentice- Hall, 2012, p.173.

processes^{53,54} which are designed, performed and communicated in order to achieve operational productivity and customer satisfaction.⁵⁵ These activities add more value for the shoppers for the merchandises they buy.⁵⁶ Customer service depends on type of merchandise sold and the type of outlet itself. Due to severe competition, each retailer whether it is big or small, has to focus on developing store image by providing store services that satisfy the customers.⁵⁷

Service quality is defined as the degree and direction of discrepancy between customers' perceptions of the organizations providing the service and their expectations about the service organizations should offer.⁵⁸ Service comprises of a complex bundle of explicit and implicit attributes.⁵⁹ Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) introduced five dimensions tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.⁶⁰ Several innovative IT-based services such as electronic retailing are no more a new concept in the retail industry. Hence in addition to above five dimensions another dimension, information technology is used to measure service quality.⁶¹ Hence for this study six service dimensions like tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and information technology are taken into consideration.

In marketing literature, customer satisfaction has been defined and measured in different ways.⁶² Customer satisfaction is defined as the sum of the customers'

53 D. Gilbert, *Retail Marketing Management*, 2nd ed., Pearson Prentice Hall, 2003, p.87.

54 S. Pradhan, *Retailing Management: Text and Cases*, Tata-McGraw-Hill, 2004, p. 208.

55 S. Pradhan, *Retailing Management: Text and Cases*, 2004

56 M. Levy and B. A. Weitz, *Retail Management*, 5th ed., Singapore: McGraw-Hill, 2004, p.619.

57 S. Pradhan, *Retailing Management: Text and Cases*, New Delhi: Tata-McGraw-Hill, 2004, p.208.

58 A. Parasuraman, V.A. Zeithaml and L. L. Berry, "A Conceptual Model of Service Quality and Its Implications for Future Research", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 61(fall), 1985, pp.41-50.

59 L.L. Berry, V.A. Zeithaml and A. Parasuraman, "Five imperatives for improving service Quality", *Sloan Management Review*, Vol. 31, No.4, 1990, pp.29-38.

60 A. Parasuraman, V.A. Zeithaml and L. L. Berry, "SERVQUAL: A Multiple-Item Scale for Measuring Consumer Perceptions of Service Quality", *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 64, No. 1, 1985, pp.12-40.

61 S. Chen, "Establishment of a performance-evaluation model for service quality in the banking Industry", *The Service Industries Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2009, pp.235-247.

62 R. L. Oliver, *Satisfaction: A behavioural perspective on the consumer*, New York: Irwin/McGraw— Hill, 1997; R. L. Oliver, "Whence Consumer loyalty", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 63 (Special), 1999, pp.33-44.

expressions of the service quality.⁶³ Customer satisfaction which is the primary responsibility of each member of a retail organization can be created by correctly matching the needs of the shoppers with the merchandises they offer.⁶⁴ Customer satisfaction is the feeling or attitude of a customer towards a product or service after its consumption or use and is generally defined as the full meeting of one's prior expectations.⁶⁵

Relationship between Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction: Quality is defined as 'conformance to requirements'.⁶⁶ Service quality is the outcome of the comparison between customer expectations and customer perceptions. Services are processes that often involve customers as co-producers.⁶⁷ Satisfaction is defined as overall assessment of the customer's experience with a product or service.⁶⁸ Thus Customer satisfaction is the feeling or attitude of a customer towards a product or service after it has been used and is generally described as the full meeting of one's expectations.⁶⁹ Consequences of superior service quality are customer satisfaction and loyalty, greater willingness to recommend others, reductions in customer complaints and improved customer retention rates.⁷⁰ Customer satisfaction is very

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- 63 S.Prabhakaran and S.Satya, "An Insight into Service Attributes in Banking Sector", *Journal of Service Research*, Vol.3, No.1, 2003, pp.157-169.
- 64 R. Hasty and J. Reardon, *Retail Management*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997, p.121; P. Kotler, K.L. Keller, Y.A. Agnihotri and E. Haque, *Principles of Marketing: A South Asian Perspective*, 13th ed., New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd. 2011, p.325.
- 65 R.L. Oliver, "A cognitive model of the antecedents and consequence of satisfaction decisions", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 1980, pp. 460-469.
- 66 L. Crosby and J. R. Taylor, "Psychological commitment and its effects on post-decision evaluation and preference stability among voters", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 9, 1983, pp.413-431.
- 67 C. Gronroos, "Relationship Approach to marketing in Service Contexts: The Marketing and organisational behavioural Interphase", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1990, pp. 3-11; Cited in, B. Edvardsson and J. Mattsson, "An Experienced-Based Measure of Service Quality", *The Service Industries Journal*, Vol.13, No. 4, 1993, pp.289-306.
- 68 B. Sindhav, J. Holland, A.R. Rodie, P.T. Addidam and L.G. Pol, "The impact of perceived fairness on satisfaction: are airport security measures fair? Does it matter?" *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, Vo.14, No.4, 2006, pp.323-335.
- 69 R.L. Oliver, "A cognitive model of the antecedents and consequence of satisfaction decisions", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 1980, pp. 460-469.
- 70 M. J. Bitner, "Evaluating Service Encounters: The Effect of Physical Surrounding and Employee Responses", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 54(April), 1990, pp.69-82; V.A. Zeithaml, L. L. Berry and A. Parasuraman, 'The behavioural consequences of service quality', *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 60, No.2, 1996, p.31-46.

important to be successful in the highly competitive marketplace.⁷¹ and is increasingly becoming a corporate goal as more and more companies strive for quality in their products and services.⁷²

Methodology and Structure of the Study

Nature of the Study: A quantitative research is carried out as the study is empirical in nature where research approach is deductive. The research style is descriptive and the objective is to find out how shoppers give emphasis to each of the retail mix elements in the selection of a retail chain and to verify the role of retail mix and service attributes on customer satisfaction.

Sampling structure, Sampling technique and Sample size: Target population of this study was all shoppers of all the outlets of all structured retail chains of Dhaka city. The sampling unit includes individual shoppers in the retail chain sub-sector of Dhaka city. One set of structured questionnaire was used to obtain opinion of the respondents which was pretested before the field work. To collect responses the survey was conducted in Dhaka city only. Convenience type non-probability sampling technique was used in selecting the respondents from the sampling frame as this technique is considered to approach the most accessible members of the population of interest and relatively inexpensive and less time consuming.^{73,74} The reason behind selecting this type of sampling was to obtain relatively large amount of responses quickly from a cooperative group of respondents. Hence the selected sampling units were accessible, convenient, easy to measure, cooperative, articulate, inexpensive and less time consuming. For this type of study appropriate sample size would be between 30-500. To analyse data by SPSS, sample size should be at least ten times the number of variables.⁷⁵ However, for conclusive

71 A. Parasuraman, V.A. Zeithaml and L. L. Berry, "A Conceptual Model of Service Quality and Its Implications for Future Research", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 61(fall), 1985, pp.41-50; F. Reichheld and W.E.J. Sasser, "Zero defections: Quality comes to services", *Harvard Business Review*, Vol.68, No.3, 1990, pp.2-9.

72 M.J. Bitner and A.R. Hubbert, (1994) "Encounter Satisfaction versus Overall Satisfaction versus Quality" in Rust, R.T. and Oliver R L., *Service Quality: New directions in Theory and practice*, Sage, London, 1994.p p. 70-94

73 A. Wilson, *Marketing Research: An Integrated Approach*, 3rd ed., London: FT-Prentice Hall, 2011, p.205.

74 N.K. Malhotra and S. Dash, *Marketing Research: An Applied Orientation*. 6th ed., New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd., 2011, p.335

75 Cited in, L. Lin and C. Chen, "The influence of the country-of-origin image, product knowledge and product involvement on consumer purchase decision: an empirical study of insurance and catering services in Taiwan", *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol. 23, No.5, 2006, pp. 248-265.

research such as descriptive surveys and to use sophisticated data analysis larger samples are necessary.⁷⁶ Taking the above factors into consideration a sample size of more than 200 was considered for this study. Primary data were collected from 203 respondents and hence the sample size of this study was 203.

Questionnaire Design and Measures: Based on the objective of this study the questionnaire was structured into three main sections as follows:

- 1) To know the demographic profile of the shoppers.
- 2) To know the importance of the elements of retail mix.
- 3) To verify the role of retail mix strategy and service attributes on customer satisfaction.

Questionnaire was designed with simple structure in order to make it understandable to the respondents and to enhance the response rate. Measures of all constructs were developed based on the review of literature. To find out how shoppers give emphasis to each of the retail mix elements in the selection of a retail chain, five-points Likert-style rating scale anchored by 'Most unimportant' (i.e., value 1) and 'Most important' (i.e., value 5) were used. Again to verify the role of retail mix and service attributes on customer satisfaction five-point Likert scale anchored by 'Strongly disagree' (i.e., value 1) and 'Strongly agree' (i.e., value 5) were used. Based on the literature review six retail mix elements (e.g. merchandise assortments, location, pricing, communication, store design and display, customer service) have been considered to know the importance of the elements of retail mix and six service attributes (e.g. tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and information technology) were considered to verify the role of service attributes on customer satisfaction in the food retail chains of Dhaka city.

Questionnaire Administering Method and Data Analysis: Primary data was collected by using survey method with the help of a self-completion questionnaire. Personal interview technique was applied while administering the questionnaire on respondents in order to collect necessary information. Respondents were given necessary explanation during the course of interview and encouraged them to answer accurately to increase validity of the information. Data was analysed by using SPSS to measure the importance of retail mix elements and to test the hypotheses as per the research objective.

76 N.K. Malhotra and S. Dash, *Marketing Research: An Applied Orientation*. 6th ed., New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd., 2011, p.332.

Results and Discussions

To determine the degree of importance of different retail mix elements and the degree of importance of different retail mix elements by gender, age, marital status, occupation categories in the selection of a food retail chain, the mean values were considered.

Overall Degree of Importance of Different Retail Mix Elements: The mean values of different retail mix elements shoppers use to select a food retail chain are presented below (*Table-3*). The study indicates that degree of importance of all retail mix elements is high. It also shows that merchandise categories (mean 4.94); prices of the merchandises (mean 4.86) and location (mean 4.81) are the three most important retail mix elements that the shoppers use to select a food retail chain.

Table-3: Mean Values of Different Attributes
Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Merchandise Categories	203	4	5	4.94	.245
Customer Service	203	3	5	4.78	.462
Location	203	4	5	4.81	.395
Prices of Merchandises	203	3	5	4.86	.373
Store Design & Display	203	1	5	4.16	.801
Communication	203	2	5	4.31	.709
Valid N (listwise)	203				

Gender-Wise Degree of Importance of Different Retail Mix Elements: Gender-wise mean values of different retail mix elements (*Table-4*) indicates that female shoppers are more concerned than males about all retail mix elements. Least importance is given to store design and display by both males and females (mean for male 4.07; for female 4.30).

Age-Wise Degree of Importance of Different Retail Mix Elements: Age-wise mean values for retail mix elements (*Table-5*) reveals that shoppers belonging to the middle- aged /mature (40--60) put comparatively more importance on the retail mix elements and they are comparatively more price sensitive. Location of the store is also comparatively more important factor for them to select a retail outlet than other age groups. Young adult shoppers put comparatively less importance on retail location and customer service than other age groups. Least importance is given to store design & display by all age groups (mean for young adult 4.01; for adult 4.18; for middle-aged 4.28).

Table-4: Gender-wise Mean Values of Retail Mix Elements

Gender		Merchandise Categories	Customer Service	Location	Prices of Merchandises	Store Design and Display	Communication
Males	Mean	4.92	4.80	4.74	4.83	4.07	4.22
	N	120	120	120	120	120	120
	Std. Deviation	.278	.460	.440	.423	.807	.761
Females	Mean	4.96	4.75	4.90	4.92	4.30	4.43
	N	83	83	83	83	83	83
	Std. Deviation	.188	.464	.297	.280	.777	.609
Total	Mean	4.94	4.78	4.81	4.86	4.16	4.31
	N	203	203	203	203	203	203
	Std. Deviation	.245	.462	.395	.373	.801	.709

Table-5: Age-wise Mean Values of Retail Mix Elements

Age		Merchandise Categories	Customer Service	Location	Prices of Merchandises	Store Design and Display	Communication
young Adult (19-25)	Mean	4.93	4.67	4.69	4.82	4.01	4.28
	N	67	67	67	67	67	67
	Std. Deviation	.265	.473	.467	.424	.826	.692
Adult (26-39)	Mean	4.94	4.85	4.80	4.81	4.18	4.24
	N	79	79	79	79	79	79
	Std. Deviation	.245	.426	.404	.426	.781	.702
Middle Aged (40-60)	Mean	4.94	4.80	4.96	5.00	4.28	4.43
	N	54	54	54	54	54	54
	Std. Deviation	.231	.491	.191	.000	.787	.742
Aged (Above 60)	Mean	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.67	5.00	4.67
	N	3	3	3	3	3	3
	Std. Deviation	.000	.000	.000	.577	.000	.577
Total	Mean	4.94	4.78	4.81	4.86	4.16	4.31
	N	203	203	203	203	203	203
	Std. Deviation	.245	.462	.395	.373	.801	.709

Marital Status-Wise Degree of Importance of Different Retail Mix Elements:

The degree of importance given to the various elements of retail mix by shoppers belonging to different marital-status categories (*Table-6*) shows that merchandise categories (mean for married 4.93; for unmarried 4.94), prices of merchandises (mean for married 4.88; for unmarried 4.85) are two key components of retail mix for both married and unmarried shoppers. The study indicates that unmarried shoppers put comparatively less importance than married shoppers on some attributes like customer service (mean for married 4.82; for unmarried 4.72), location (mean for married 4.86; for unmarried 4.74). Both married and unmarried shoppers put less importance on store design & display and communication than other retail mix components.

Table-6: Marital Status-wise Mean Values of Retail Mix Elements

Marital Status		Merchandise Categories	Customer Service	Location	Prices of Merchandises	Store Design and Display	Communication
Unmarried	Mean	4.94	4.72	4.74	4.85	4.08	4.34
	N	85	85	85	85	85	85
	Std. Deviation	.237	.478	.441	.394	.848	.682
Married	Mean	4.93	4.82	4.86	4.88	4.23	4.29
	N	113	113	113	113	113	113
	Std. Deviation	.258	.448	.350	.320	.744	.740
Single (divorced/widowed)	Mean	5.00	4.80	4.80	4.60	4.00	4.20
	N	5	5	5	5	5	5
	Std. Deviation	.000	.447	.447	.894	1.225	.447
Total	Mean	4.94	4.78	4.81	4.86	4.16	4.31
	N	203	203	203	203	203	203
	Std. Deviation	.245	.462	.395	.373	.801	.709

Occupation-Wise Degree of Importance of Different Retail Mix Elements: The mean values of different retail mix elements according to occupation (*Table-7*) indicates that merchandise category is the most important retail mix element to select a food retail chain by all occupation groups and housewives are more concerned about the importance of retail mix elements. Business persons put comparatively more importance on customer service and location than other occupation groups. Shoppers of all occupation groups put less importance on store design & display and communication than other retail mix components. Students and service holders show comparatively less importance on these two retail mix elements than other two occupation groups.

Table-7: Occupation-wise Mean Values of Retail Mix Elements

Occupation		Merchandise Categories	Customer Service	Location	Prices of Merchandises	Store Design and Display	Communication
Student	Mean	4.92	4.66	4.78	4.82	4.06	4.26
	N	65	65	65	65	65	65
	Std. Deviation	.269	.477	.414	.429	.846	.691
Service holder	Mean	4.92	4.79	4.73	4.87	4.05	4.19
	N	85	85	85	85	85	85
	Std. Deviation	.277	.465	.447	.338	.800	.732
Business person	Mean	4.96	4.92	4.96	4.83	4.37	4.58
	N	24	24	24	24	24	24
	Std. Deviation	.204	.408	.204	.482	.711	.654
Housewife	Mean	5.00	4.89	4.96	4.96	4.57	4.57
	N	28	28	28	28	28	28
	Std. Deviation	.000	.416	.189	.189	.634	.634
Total	Mean	4.94	4.78	4.81	4.86	4.16	4.31
	N	202	202	202	202	202	202
	Std. Deviation	.246	.462	.396	.374	.803	.710

Descriptive Statistics of Variables Used in Bivariate Correlation: Descriptive statistics (Table 8) pointed out the standard deviations for the 8 scales range from 0.656 to 0.977 indicating a substantial amount of variance in the responses for most of the scales used in this research study. The skewness values indicated that the scores do not fall in a nice, normally distributed curve where most scales are negatively skewed which indicated the clustering of scores at the high end. The kurtosis values of most of the scales are positive hence distribution of scales is clustered in the centre with long thin tails. Mean values of scales suggested that retailers are providing acceptable retail mix and there are reasonably high levels of service attributes, service quality and customer satisfaction in the food retail sub-sector of Dhaka city.

Table-8: Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Retail Mix	202	2	5	4.33	.671	-.694	.171	.253	.341
Service Quality (Tangibles)	202	2	5	4.51	.656	-1.231	.171	1.238	.341
Service Quality (Reliability)	201	1	5	4.42	.752	-1.231	.172	1.478	.341
Service Quality (Responsiveness)	200	2	5	4.32	.781	-1.077	.172	.826	.342
Service Quality (Assurance)	202	1	5	4.10	.878	-.829	.171	.284	.341
Service Quality (Empathy)	201	1	5	4.21	.909	-1.193	.172	1.141	.341
Service Quality (IT)	202	1	5	3.99	.977	-1.111	.171	1.156	.341
Customer Satisfaction	201	2	5	4.35	.691	-.678	.172	-.311	.341
Valid N (list-wise)	196								

Relationship between Retail Mix and Customer Satisfaction: The direction of the relationships between the retail mix and customer satisfaction and between overall service quality and customer satisfaction have been tested with the help of bivariate correlation method, where the values of Pearson's r were calculated to assess the strength of the relationship between service attributes and shoppers satisfaction.

Significance level (sig value) was taken into consideration to measure the level of statistical significance level and interpret the relationship. Significance is small if $r = 0.10$ to 0.29 ; significance is medium if $r = 0.30$ to 0.49 and significance is large if $r = 0.50$ to 1.0 .⁷⁷

From the Correlation matrix (*Table 9*), the correlation between retail mix and customer satisfaction was $r = .463$. The significance levels for all cases were Sig. = .000. with a large sample size ($N=203$). Hence it can be concluded that the above mentioned correlation is statistically significant (medium significance), based on the evidence of Z-distribution.

Table-9: Correlation between Retail Mix & Customer Satisfaction

Correlations			
		Retail Mix	Customer Satisfaction
Retail Mix	Pearson Correlation	1	.463**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	202	201
Customer Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.463**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	201	201

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Checking the Reliability of the Scales (Service Quality Dimensions) and Computing New Variable: As discussed in the literature review for measuring service quality, 6 dimensions each with one item were used. In order to check whether all were measuring the same construct or not we checked the reliability of the scale. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used as an indicator of internal consistency. Ideally the value of Cronbach's alpha coefficient should be greater than 0.7 to be acceptable. The Cronbach's alpha value of 0.772 (*Table 10*) suggested the strong internal consistency in the scales and hence we reported the mean inter-item correlation for the items. Based on the findings from the above (i.e. checking the reliability of the scales) new variables were inserted to represent overall measure of service quality with the help of transforming variables technique used in SPSS.

⁷⁷ Cohen, 1988 cited in, J. Pallant, *SPSS Survival Manual: A Step by Step Guide to Data Analysis using SPSS for Windows*, 3rd ed., Berkshire: McGraw Hill, 2007, p.132

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Table-10: Reliability (Scales on Service Quality)

Case Processing Summary				Reliability Statistics	
		N	%	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Cases	Valid	198	97.5	.772	6
	Excluded ^a	5	2.5		
	Total	203	100.0		

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Relationship between Overall Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction:

Standard deviations for the measure of all variables- overall service quality and customer satisfaction ranged from .576 to .691 (*Table 11*) indicating a substantial amount of variance in the responses for the scales used in the bivariate correlation whereas the mean values suggested that there existed reasonably high levels of overall service quality and customer satisfaction in the food retail sub-sector of Dhaka city.

Table-11: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Overall Service Quality	198	4.2593	.57058
Customer Satisfaction	201	4.35	.691
Valid N (listwise)	197		

Table-12: Correlation between Overall Service Quality & Customer Satisfaction

Correlations			
		Overall Service Quality	Customer Satisfaction
Overall Service Quality	Pearson Correlation	1	.785**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	198	197
Customer Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.785**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	197	201

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation between overall service quality and customer satisfaction was $r = .785$ (Table 12). The significance levels reported above for all cases were Sig. = .000. Sample size was large (N=203). Hence it can be asserted that the above mentioned correlation is statistically significant (significance is high), based on the evidence of Z-distribution.

Other Findings: The study results indicated that all service attributes have direct and positive relationship with customer satisfaction. The positive relationships between assurance, empathy and IT dimensions of service quality and customer satisfaction are strongly significant and hence more important factors for customer satisfaction in the food retail sub-sector of Dhaka city. The association of tangibles, reliability and responsiveness dimensions of service quality with customer satisfaction is medium (Table 13).

Conclusions, Managerial Implications and Further Research

Conclusions: The primary purpose of this study was to identify the key elements of retail mix that influence the shoppers' decision to select a retail outlet. The study also attempted to examine whether gender, age, marital status, occupation have any impact on the importance of retail mix elements or not, and to verify that retail mix and overall service quality have impact on developing shoppers' satisfaction. Based on the findings the following conclusions are drawn:

- The study indicates that the degree of importance of all retail mix elements is high. It also shows that retail mix elements, e.g. merchandise categories (mean 4.94), prices of the merchandises (mean 4.86) and location (mean 4.81) play most important role to select a retail outlet. Least importance is given to store design and display.

- The study indicates that female shoppers and shoppers belonging to the middle- age/mature category (40-60 years) are more concerned about most of the retail mix elements. The mature people give comparatively more emphasis on prices of merchandises and location of the outlets than other age groups. Married shoppers and business persons put more importance on customer service and location of store than unmarried shoppers.
- The findings of the study indicate that the strength of the relationship between retail mix and customer satisfaction is medium (Pearson's $r = 0.463$) and significant at the $p < 0.01$ level.
- The study indicates that the strength of the relationship of overall service quality with customer satisfaction is high (Pearson's $r = 0.785$) and significant at the $p < 0.01$ level.
- Assurance, empathy and IT dimensions of service quality have more positive significant association with customer satisfaction and hence need to be considered carefully for developing customer satisfaction.

Shoppers are in general satisfied with overall service quality of the food retail chain sub-sector in Dhaka city. This study reveals that the combination of right retail mix elements is important to provide customer satisfaction and consistent with the previous studies⁷⁸ conducted in the context of Western market.

78 V. A. Zeithaml, L. L. Berry and A. Parasuraman, 'The behavioural consequences of service quality', *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 60, No.2, 1996, pp.31-46; D. M. Mayer, M. G. Ehrhart and B. Schneider, "Service attribute boundary conditions of the service climate–customer satisfaction link", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 5, 2009, pp.1034-1050; S. Mithas, M. S. Krishnan and C. Fornell, "Why Do Customer Relationship Management Applications Affect Customer Satisfaction?" *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 69 (Oct), 2005, pp.201-209; C. Liang and W. Wang, "Attributes, benefits, customer satisfaction and behavioral loyalty- An integrative research of financial services industry in Taiwan", *Journal of Services Research*, Vol.1, 2004, pp.58-89; S. W. Anderson, L. S. Baggett and S. K. Widener, "The Impact of Service Operations Failures on Customer Satisfaction: Evidence on How Failures and Their Source Affect What Matters to Customers", *Manufacturing and Service Operations Management*, Vol.11, No.1, 2009, pp. 52-69; C. Fornell, M.D. Johnson, E.W. Anderson, J. Cha, J. and B.E. Bryant, "American customer satisfaction index: nature, purpose, and findings", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 60, No. 4, 1996, pp.7-18.

Table-13: Correlation between Service Attributes & Customer Satisfaction

		Correlations						
		Service Quality (Tangibles)	Service Quality (Reliability)	Service Quality (Responsiveness)	Service Quality (Assurance)	Service Quality (Empathy)	Service Quality (IT)	Customer Satisfaction
Service Quality (Tangibles)	Pearson Correlation	1	.288**	.189**	.330**	.354**	.249**	.440**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.007	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	202	201	200	202	201	202	201
Service Quality (Reliability)	Pearson Correlation	.288**	1	.455**	.248**	.391**	.291**	.426**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	201	201	199	201	200	201	200
Service Quality (Responsiveness)	Pearson Correlation	.189**	.455**	1	.249**	.388**	.466**	.465**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.007	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	200	199	200	200	199	200	199
Service Quality (Assurance)	Pearson Correlation	.330**	.248**	.249**	1	.524**	.448**	.531**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	202	201	200	202	201	202	201
Service Quality (Empathy)	Pearson Correlation	.354**	.391**	.388**	.524**	1	.457**	.655**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	201	200	199	201	201	201	200
Service Quality (IT)	Pearson Correlation	.249**	.291**	.466**	.448**	.457**	1	.602**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	202	201	200	202	201	202	201
Customer Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.440**	.426**	.465**	.531**	.655**	.602**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	201	200	199	201	200	201	201

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Managerial implications: A key implication of this study is that marketers in the retail industry of Bangladesh may drive competitive advantage from others by formulating right retail mix. There is a strong evidence to suggest that retail mix has a strong positive and direct influence on shoppers/consumer satisfaction. Marketers could use this as a guideline for developing marketing strategies and focus on developing all key service attributes to develop shoppers' satisfaction. Marketers need to identify the relative preferences of shoppers towards different retail mix elements and by offering right marketing mix with superior service attributes that fulfill a need or solve a problem marketers can create more value for the customers. In this age of intensive competition a retail firm should create a superior store image by right combination of retail mix elements with a view to create a competitive advantage over others. To be successful a retail store should offer a variety of prices because someone who can afford the highest level of pricing doesn't always want to spend that much.⁷⁹ Moreover what might be considered a luxury item in Mirpur could be viewed as a mid-priced staple in Gulshan.

Further research: The context of the study is one main limitation of this study. The respondents were selected from the shoppers of branches of different food retail chains of Dhaka city only. Therefore, findings of this study might not be directly generalised to other institutional environments of Bangladesh beyond food retail chain sub-sector and also in places outside Dhaka city. At present, there are no studies investigating the importance of retail mix elements, role of retail mix and service quality on developing customer satisfaction in the retail industry of Bangladesh as a whole. Therefore more research is required in other settings with different retail categories, and sample populations in order to verify and generalise the findings of this study and to determine other factors if any. In conclusion, this study could lead to further research in the context of retail industry of Bangladesh or any developing economy.

79 L. L. Schroeder, "Successful Retailing-The Magic Price Point; inventory management Tips", *Business Forum*, August, 2009, pp. 18-19.

**Shariful Islam, *New Light on the History of Ancient South-East Bengal*, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2014;
pages: 1-270; price: Tk. 750.00**

In early times Southeastern Bengal initially embraced the kingdoms of Samatāta and Harikela. With the rise of the Chandras as a regional power in the early tenth century, Vanga was included within its orbit resulting in the shift of capital from Devaparvata in Samatāta to Vanga (the area around Dhaka). Thus the region of early Southeastern Bengal encapsulates the present day Comilla-Noakhali, parts of Tripura (in India), Chattagram and its surroundings and of course the Dhaka – Vikrampur area. With this one must also add Śrihaṭṭa which was within the Chandra domain. The importance of this region, Samatāta and Harikela in particular, was highlighted by B. M. Morrison in two books—*Political Centers and Cultural Regions in Early Bengal* (1970), and *Lalmāi, a Cultural Center of Early Bengal* (1974). That South-East Bengal, which demanded a separate full length study, was already recognized and Harunur Rashid took up the challenge of working on this region for his doctoral thesis entitled ‘The South-East Bengal in the Light of Recent Archaeological Material’. This thesis was submitted to the Cambridge University way back in 1968. We had to wait for a long time till the thesis was finally published in book form in 2008 with the same title. In between new data on the region kept on unraveling and scholars had incessantly worked on the various aspects of the region, focusing on the site of Mainamati and its environs or gleaning data from its art historical/ epigraphic /numismatic findings but a full length study on the region is still wanting.

The book under review is a welcome attempt to write the dynastic history of this region, incorporating all the recent epigraphic and numismatic material that has come to light. The author, Shariful Islam, with his knowledge of epigraphy could actually read new inscriptions which added to our learning about the period.

Apart from the introduction and the conclusion, the overall plan of the work comprises twelve chapters– dynastically arranged, from the Guptas to the later Devas; with the last two chapters dealing with the neighbouring areas and early urban administrative and trade centers. Among other notable features are a table of chronology, images of the coins reproduced, photographs of new inscriptions and an extensive, very useful, bibliography. What is missing is a good map and I must admit that this is a disappointment. In a study on dynastic history a map outlining the geo-political territory of each dynasty is a must.

The introduction unveils the geographical features, particularly the rivers of the region. The author correctly notes that “rivers with their branches are the most distinctive characteristic feature of the physical geography of South-East Bengal”.

Truly, the three great rivers, the Padma, the Yamuna (Brahmaputra), and the Meghna form the lifeline of the region. The author also gives us a brief overview of the scholarly contributions on history of Bengal in general, while pointing out that these works did not give primacy to the dynastic history of the region.

The first chapter discusses the identification of Vainyagupta on the basis of his own reading of the Kotalipada Copper-plate of Dvādaśāditya and rightfully places Dvādaśāditya in the line of rulers like Dharmāditya. But his identification of Vainyagupta as a member of the Gupta family cannot be accepted as a historical reality. In fact, there are many instances of independent rulers during the Gupta era, a case in point could be the Valkhā rulers of western Central India. Thus the mere use of Gupta era or having a Gupta name ending does not qualify Vainyagupta to be a part of the Gupta ruling house.

The second chapter focuses on South-East Bengal in the Post-Gupta period. Here the author discusses in details the inscriptions found from Kotalipada in the Vanga subregion and also dwells upon the numismatic evidence. Of particular interest is the copper-plate of Dvādaśāditya published by the author himself. This Dvādaśāditya has been identified with Śrī Dvādaśāditya referred to in some gold coins. The author also brings to our notice two Samatāṭa type gold coins of Gopachandra lying in the Bangladesh National Museum. On the basis of this, Islam argues that Samatāṭa was perhaps included within the kingdom of Gopachandra. We need to look for further evidence. Recently Sayantani Pal, on the basis of the pattern of their landgrants has argued that Gopachandra of Jayrampur, Kotalipada and Mallasarul are not one and the same person. On the basis of numismatic evidence, in this chapter, the author also, like other scholars, refers to Śaśanka's conquest of Samatāṭa though he admits that there is no evidence to confirm it by other sources.

The next three chapters deal with the history of the Rātas, the Nāthas and the Khaḍga rulers, who held sway over Samatāṭa. Their history is discussed at length from their inscriptions and coins. Here a significant contribution is the reading of the Uḍiśvar copper-plate of Śrīdhāraṇa Rāta. Like the other Rāta records, this copper-plate also refers to Devaparvata as their seat of power. Thus this is the fifth inscription which describes Devaparvata. In course of the discussion of the political might of the Rātas and Nāthas and their allegiance to an overlord, the author feels that the Varmans of Kāmarūpa might have been their overlord for a brief period but later on Jivadhāraṇa Rāta and Śrīdhāraṇa Rāta were independent rulers. As for the Nāthas, we have the Tippera Copper-plate of Samanta Lokanātha. In this copperplate the great grandfather of Lokanātha was designated as adhimahārāja and his grandfather was a mahāsāmanta. Lokanātha is referred to as a nṛpa (king) with a prefix Śrī added to his first name. That he was not an independent ruler is clear from the fact that the inscription talks of a Parameśvara of Lokanātha, who gave

him the Śrīpatta and induced him to subdue Śrī Jivadhāranarāta who was the local ruler of Samatata. The question of identifying their overlord has been kept open by the author although to my mind it could be the ruler of Kāmarūpa. The dynastic history of the Khadgas has been well covered by the author. What is noteworthy is that he has brought into the question the religious affiliation of the Khadga rulers. He argues in favour of the Khadgas being followers of Siva on the basis of the fact that the Khadgas attached the bull symbol to their charters as a royal seal. Moreover none of the rulers are referred to as *Paramasaugata*. However, his statement that the “Khadgas ... were Śaiva or Brahmins” is baffling. A religious category and a caste category cannot be brought in together.

Early Devas of Samatata forms the basis of the next chapter where dynastic successions of the rulers are discussed with the help of inscriptions and coins. The author also discusses how the Devas came to power by supplanting the Khadga dynasty.

The Chandras were the most important regime in Southeastern Bengal. It is under them that a large area was politically integrated. Therefore, their history deserves larger attention. The author has minutely studied all the Chandra records and gave us a succinct history of this dynasty. Each of the rulers is discussed in details and all the worthwhile epigraphic information has been noted. He has negated the idea that the last two Chandra rulers Laḍachandra and Govindachandra were followers of Brahmanical religion. According to him, “Hindu mythological references in the inscriptions or installation of Brahmanical images by Buddhist king or visit to Varanasi on pilgrimage, perhaps do not suggest conversion to Hinduism” (page 114). He believes that the scribes or the composers could introduce auspicious symbol of their own faith.

The eighth chapter discusses the history of the Varmans and Senas in South-East Bengal. It mentions all that has already been discussed regarding the Varman dynasty and raises certain queries. The author deserves to be credited for his meticulous study of all the kings in the region. Hence, a ruler like Harivarman gets greater visibility. The Varmans were supplanted by the Senas, who captured their capital Vikramapura. The Senas were the only power who held sway over all the sub-regions of Bengal. The author correctly observes that the later copper-plates of Lakshmaṇsena and his successors were not issued from Vikramapura but from other jayaskandhāvāras like Dhāryagrāma and Phaspagrāma. Is it of any significance that these plates were not issued from Vikramapura?

The next chapter focuses on the history of Harikela. Harikela’s history can be constructed from the epigraphic and numismatic sources. Of special significance are the two metal vase inscriptions, one of Devatideva and the other of Attākaradeva, recording land transfer. Recording land grant in vases is something unique to the region. Though the inscriptions have been studied meticulously, it is surprising that the coins from Harikela are hardly discussed.

The last chapter dealing with dynastic history relates to the later Devas. It goes to the credit of the author that he could cull information from the inscriptions to construct the history of both the Devas of Samatāta and Śrihaṭṭa. These pages are rich in details which are hardly available in a general history of Bengal.

A region cannot be studied in isolation and so it is heartening that this book has a chapter on Southeast Bengal and the neighbouring areas. To understand the history of the region, the network of interactions of Samatāta and Harikela should be underlined. In various sub-sections, the author discusses the relations of the region with Gauḍa, Kāmarūpa and Arakan. One has to remember that in Samatāta fluvial networks were very important. The name Samatāta itself signifies a flat coastal area and this is also corroborated by Xuan Zang (629-645 CE, travels in India). While the Bay of Bengal formed its southern boundary, its northern boundary was flanked by the river Meghna, and even to the west the Meghna is joined by the river Padma. Meghna and the Brahmaputra are again linked with each other. The navigability of these rivers offered excellent riverine networks between the regions through which they flowed and connected the interior to the sea.

The last chapter on early urban administration and trading patterns gives us a useful description of certain administrative and commercial entres of South-East Bengal. Thus we have information about Wari-Bateswar, Kotalipada, Sabhar, Devaparvata and Vikramapura. The richness of the data in the description of these places is indisputable. The importance of Sabhar and Devaparvata has been rightfully highlighted. Sabhar perhaps had a continuous history of being an important trading centre right from around sixth century CE till tenth century CE. On the other hand Devaparvata flourished as the capital and a riverine trading centre in the pre-Chandra phase and as riverine trading centre in the time of the Chandras. A section of this chapter also deals with the connected history of the region with the outside world. Considering the kind of archaeological and art historical data that are available, this section could have been further enriched. The conclusion gives us a synoptic view of what has been said in the earlier pages.

New Light on the History of Ancient South-East Bengal by Shariful Islam is indeed a must read for scholars interested in the History of Early Bengal. The book is extremely rich with empirical evidence. Having said this, the reviewer feels that while introducing the region, there should have been some discussion on the concept of a region. Use of an expression like 'paramount power' for any ruler of the region is not appropriate in our present understanding of political history. Some of the data used in the text relating to trade and urbanization could have been more critically used. This book, as the author notes, is an attempt to write a dynastic history of South-East Bengal. The attempt is definitely a successful one. I only wish that he had gone beyond the dynastic history to write a political history of the region. Asiatic Society of Bangladesh deserves appreciation for publishing this book.

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