

DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

MASTER OF ARTS – HISTORY

SEMESTER -IV

HISTORY OF MEDIEVAL BENGAL

(1206 A.D.-1757 A.D.)

ELECTIVE 404

BLOCK-2

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

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FOREWORD

The Self Learning Material (SLM) is written with the aim of providing simple and organized study content to all the learners. The SLMs are prepared on the framework of being mutually cohesive, internally consistent and structured as per the university's syllabi. It is a humble attempt to give glimpses of the various approaches and dimensions to the topic of study and to kindle the learner's interest to the subject

We have tried to put together information from various sources into this book that has been written in an engaging style with interesting and relevant examples. It introduces you to the insights of subject concepts and theories and presents them in a way that is easy to understand and comprehend.

We always believe in continuous improvement and would periodically update the content in the very interest of the learners. It may be added that despite enormous efforts and coordination, there is every possibility for some omission or inadequacy in few areas or topics, which would definitely be rectified in future.

We hope you enjoy learning from this book and the experience truly enrich your learning and help you to advance in your career and future endeavours.

HISTORY OF MEDIEVAL BENGAL (1206 A.D.-1757 A.D.)

BLOCK-1

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Unit 2: Control over land and relations of production,

Unit 3: Resource base and pattern of resource use in agrarian production

Unit 4: Nature and magnitude of taxation and agrarian relations

Unit 5: Industries, production technologies, Trade, Commerce and Monetary System

Unit 6 : Inland and maritime trade, role of Arab and European traders,

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BLOCK-2 HISTORY OF MEDIEVAL BENGAL (1206 A.D.-1757 A.D.)

Introduction to block

Unit 8 focuses on the urbanization of Bengal from early days till 15th century.

Unit 9 focuses on the urbanization of Bengal from 15th century to pre colonial times.

Unit 10 focuses on the Islamic architecture of Bengal from 13th century to 18th century.

Unit 11 concentrates on the temple architecture of Bengal from 13th to 18th century.

Unit 12 concentrates on the development of Bengali language till pre colonial times.

Unit 13 concentrates on Bengali literature till 15th century

Unit 14 concentrates on Bengali literature till pre colonial times and its evolution.

UNIT – 8 PROCESS OF URBANISATION – NATURE AND CLASSIFICATION

STRUCTURE

- 8.0 Objective
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Nature and Classification
- 8.3 Lets Sum Up
- 8.4 Keywords
- 8.5 questions for Review
- 8.6 Suggested Readings
- 8.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

8.0 OBJECTIVE

To learn about the growth of cities and towns

To learn about the factors, nature that led to the growth

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In the modern days, the enhanced study on the process and importance of urbanisation has become a special area of research among the historians. Detailed investigation and collecting information on the birth and growth of urban centres, structural pattern of cities, features of urban centres and their decline and decay has led to the study of urbanization. This special area of study is multidisciplinary on the one hand and interdisciplinary on the other. Urban lifestyle depends on the geographical, political, economic, social and religious condition of the common people. The historical background of a part of or the

whole nation also influences the process of urbanisation. One should have a clear idea about urban origin, urban forms, urban system, urban organization, urban demography, urbanism and urbanization. So to throw a good deal of light on the entire process of urbanisation, the contribution of historians, geographers, economists, sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, archaeologists, architects, etc., are utmost essential.

8.2 NATURE AND CLASSIFICATION

In writing the history of Urbanization, a study of its geography is indispensable for more than one reason. First it was in this period that a broad and distinct geo-political entity of Bengal emerged. Secondly, it was under the Sultans of Bengal that the geo-regional and geo-political units of Bengal evolved out of numerous fragmented but corresponding territories of linguistic homogeneity, which ultimately gave birth to the rise of the idea of individualism. Thirdly, the natural features of this region, which were and even now are peculiar to it left distinctive marks on the socio-cultural institutions, mental outlook, way of life, food, dress, manners and customs. Geographically, Bengal has the most remarkable feature of its landscape the network of rivers formed by the Ganges, the Brahmaputra, the Meghna and its numerous tributaries. In fact the alluvial of these rivers brought the surrounding land surface into existence. Many primary and modern sources, provide the geographical description of Bengal. This description of the territories of Lakhnauti and parts of Bihar, a distinct Muslim principality emerged under the leadership of Muhammed Balhnyar Khalji in the early 13th century (1203 A.D.). Since the foundation of Muslim earliest reference to this distinct unit in the eastern most corner of India is found in Tahaqat-i-Nasiri. The successors of Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji. W\ Mardan Khalji. Iwaz khalji and Nasiruddin Mahmud, all maintained their independent rule in Bengal.

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The Ilyas Shahi and Husain Shahi were the two very powerful dynasties known for their contribution in the establishment of a powerful self-sufficient economy with prosperous urban centers. Ali Mardan issued silver coins and extended the Sultanate conquering the areas around Lakhnauti. Minhaj-us-Siraj says that Ali Mardan Khalji sent his armies in different directions, and brought the surrounding areas of Lakhnauti under his sway. Besides, Bihar continued to be part of his kingdom and formed a part of the territory controlled by his successor Iwaz Khalji. Iwaz Khalji also issued coins and organized the army, he was bestowed the investiture from the Caliph.

In 1342 A.D., Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah, the foster brother of Ali Mubarak Shah succeeded his brother and founded the Ilyas Shahi dynasty. Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah grandson of Ilyas Shah was the greatest and most famous of the Ilyas Shahi Sultans of Bengal. He devoted himself more to the task of consolidation, conquest and annexation. He ruled over a vast territory of Bengal which is evident from the name of mint towns namely Firuzabad and Jannatabad in the west. Muazzamabad in the east, Satgaon in southwest and rule, Bengal got the status of a separate geo-political entity in history. The Chittagong (Chatgaon) in southeast. Jalal-ud-din Muhammad Shah the son of Raja Ganesh ruled over Bengal from A.D. 1415-1432. The author of Riyaz-us-Salatin calls Jalalud-Din Muhammad as an able ruler because he consolidated and extended the Sultanate of Bengal. His coins are known from the mints of Firuzabad, Sonargaon. Satgaon. Chittagong (Chatgaon) and Fatahabad. (modern Faridpur district in Bangladesh.)

The accession of Alauddin Husain Shah marked the beginning of a new dynasty of rulers. They are referred to as the Husaini or Husain Shahi dynasty. The period of Husain Shahi dynasty was marked by peace, prosperity and all around development. It turned out to be self-reliant not only through the efforts made by the ruling elites, but also by the active as well as sincere participation and co-operation of the people of Bengal. Sultanate rule thus

gradually penetrated in all directions and laid its control over fertile hinterlands as well as arteries of trade. After the establishment of independent Sultanate, the Sultans introduced a highly centralized bureaucratic administration in Bengal, which considerably weakened the feudal system. The induction of local people in administration helped in creating a secular society with cosmopolitan character. The absence of Jizya and other extra taxes such as, pilgrim-tax, taxes on grazing fields and levies on the other small scale industries run by the rural people, the participation of the local people in the state services, particularly in the military and revenue department, are the direct as well as shining examples of the changed nature of the polity established in the 13th century.

The rise and growth of Muslim society, no doubt, was the result of the combined efforts of the rulers, migrants and the Sufi saints. The social fabric of the Sultanate was of highest order where people belonging to different faiths and religions lived together in harmonized friendly relations. The society was knitted in such a manner that it was almost impossible to distinguish between people of different faiths. All sorts of interactions took place between people of different faiths, which resulted in common practices, and customs. One of the great sources of convergence was the veneration of tombs and Dargahs. This led to the intermingling of cultures, which got further ascendancy due to the direct stimulation visibly given by the Muslim scholars and Sufis.

The Sufis established their Khanqah and Madrasa, i.e. educational institutions in different places, which were surrounded by well-qualified people, and as such a very dense population surfaced around these Khanqah and Madrasa. This in turn gave rise to well-planned Bazaars (market) within the domain of these Khanqah and Madrasas. The center of Sufi order was one of the important factors that led to the rise of some urban centers like Lakhnauti, Sonargaon, Pandua (Firuzabad), Satgaon and Chittagong (Chatgaon). The initial phase of urbanization can be attributed to the emergence of new towns and cities and the re-emergence of the

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older ones. To start with, the Sultans invited learned men: traders and landholders in to the city from certain towns in their territory and made them reside there.

One very significant aspect of this period is that wherever the Muslims settled down their settlement? ultimately changed into urban settlement from the point of social, political and economic view point. The urban ethos of the Muslims seems to have been the prime reason for this transformation.

The second most important factor that contributed to the process of urbanization was the foundation of mint houses. The establishment of mint houses resulted in the circulation of coin money that made business and trading activities very smooth. In this regard the contemporary sources reveal that all kinds of transactions buying and selling were done by coined money. The foundation of mint houses led to influx of people to these places, Gradually the population around these mint houses grew in numbers and this resulted in the formation of new mint towns having all the necessary requirements. These mint towns were Muhammadabad, Syedabad, Husainabad and Fatahabad etc.

Bengal flourished economically and its commercial relations with China, Indonesia and Malaya peninsula and other parts of the country remained uninterrupted even during the period of military engagements. The coin-hoards unearthed from Bengal and Bihar contain along with the coins of Bengal rulers, the coins of Delhi, Bahmani and Jaunpur Sultans. These coins established the fact that commercial ties through merchants and traders remained uninterrupted and unbroken.

The process of urbanization picked up at a very fast pace with the foundation of the Sultanate of Bengal under the Khalji's. Gaur, the capital city of Pala's, now assumed a new face-lift as Lakhnauti. The urban ethos of Muslims combined with other factors of socio-economic necessity of the time led to the emergence of a large number of urban centres in Bengal. The settlements of the ruling elite as well as of the immigrant

Muslims grew up in different places of the Sultanate dominion. Some of these settlement sites turned into flourishing urban centres of metropolitan character like Lakhnauti, Devikot, Sonargaon and Panduah (Firuzabad), while the rest, emerged into small townships during the subsequent dynasties. For convenience and easy functioning of the administration, the territory of the Sultanate was divided into a number of units or provinces, under the charge of a Wali or Muqta, which generally corresponded to its main geographical division. Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji divided his newly established dominion into three main regions, placing them under the charge of his three principle lieutenants.

These were the southwestern region comprising mainly the district of modern Murshidabad, Nadia, Birbhum and Burdwan, to the south west of river Ganges the northwestern region, on the north of the river embracing mainly the district of Malda, and parts of eastern Bihar and the northeastern region, to the north of the river Ganges comprised mainly the districts of Rajshahi, Bogra, Dinajpur and Rangpur. From the time of Sultan Shamsuddin Firoz Shah (A.D. 1310-1322), the Sultanate dominion was extended in the east up to Sylhet and the intervening part of central and southern Bengal embracing at the districts of Faridpur and Jessore. From 1203 to 1538 A.D. the territory of the Bengal Sultanate included practically the whole of Bengal, as it was known together with the major parts of Bihar in the west and part of Assam and also Tripura in the east.

During the Sultanate period cultural centres of Bengal emerged as centres of urbanization. This led to the transformation of the rural places into the urban centres. Seeing better avenues in the eastern corner of India, Muslims Scholars and Sufis migrated from Central Asia to Bengal. They established their Khanqahs (hospice place); which was a common meeting place for the Hindus and Muslims that led to the intermingling of both the communities. Hindus continued to build their temples and worshiping their goddess, without any fear or restrictions. Numerous literary and epigraphic sources, like *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, of Minhaj-us- Siraj,

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The Rehla of Ibn-i-Battuta, the Portuguese and the Chinese sources provide the evidences of the cultural centres flourishing during the reign of the Sultans of Bengal.

The emergence of a large number of towns and cities, the formulation of a sound fiscal policy and introduction of new technology and crafts lead to an increased volume of agricultural and industrial production. The demand of products that grew more with the rapid growth of urban population needed the establishment of Karkhanas. These Karkhanas were involved in the production of substantial amounts of commodities. Goods produced by these Karkhanas were sold in the market and as such these goods fulfilled the needs of the people. The artisans and professional classes involved in the production process were very much skilled in their profession. The industries as well as commercial activities not only transformed the localized rural economy of the time but also created a vast avenue of jobs of diverse nature.

The arrival of foreign merchants and merchandise ships, more particularly from Ispahan, China and Malacca indicate the flourishing trade relations of Bengal with the southeast and Middle East Asian countries. The development in the field of crafts and industry' contributed to the flourishing trade. The collection of custom duties from the towns and port cities supported the state exchequer unloading its dependency on land revenues, derived from the cultivators. The revival of Bengal Maritime commerce and the establishment of her connection with different parts of the world based on money economy during the Sultanate period was an achievement in the field of commerce which favoured Bengal in earning surplus amounts. All these factors were equally responsible for the urbanization of Bengal.

The thrust areas, by scholars who worked on Bengal have been Gaur and Pandua. Whereas other urban centres of this period still remain unexplored. An attempt has been made to explore the achievements of Bengal Sultans in their endeavour to urbanize

Bengal so as to keep themselves abreast with the Delhi Sultans. The areas, which have been explored, are Chittagong, Salimabad (Burdwan) Sonargaon, Deokot, Midnapur etc. These were political, cultural and commercial centres of Bengal. Rise of new settlements, mint towns; trade centres etc. were the hallmark of the sultanate of Bengal. They maintained their identity as a separate state and even went further to get recognition of the Abbasid Caliph to legitimize their rule. Bengal had remained a land of refuge to the emigrants who fled eastwards on account of Mongol invasion, or dynastic change in Delhi, forcing preceding ruling class and their followers to seek shelter in Bengal. The foreign Muslims who had come in the wake of Muslim conquest, settled down here, and the local converts had hardly any sociological reasons to spring suddenly into a stable group of enlightened people. These emigrants contributed towards the prosperity of Bengal in cultural, social and economic fields. The settlements of new areas were primarily due to such emigration and the Bengal Sultans provided proper incentives to those new settlements. Sultanate's rule represents a significant contrast with the preceding Sena rule in respect of economic condition of Bengal. It is significant to note that Minhaj observed circulation of Conch shells as a dominant trend and it also manifests the absence of metallic currency in mid-thirteenth century. In the initial period of Muslim rule, coins were circulated not only as a symbol of the ruler's sovereignty but also as a medium of exchange. With the foundation of independent sultanate, important ports like Satgaon and Chittgong (Chatgaon) came into existence. These coupled with the foundation of a considerable number of mint towns. Muhammadabad, Syedabad, Husainabad, Fatahabad etc. led to the revival of Bengal maritime commerce and the establishment of her connection with the different parts of the world. Based on the introduction of money economy the sultanate rule was responsible for the urbanization of Bengal. Socio-cultural trends in the life of Bengal from the earlier part of the Sultanate's rule continued till the Husain Shahi period 1494-1538. which, also

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witnessed the culmination of some of the historical processes long at work. The Vaisnava movement, the growth of Navya Nyaya, the final codification of Hindu socio-religious laws by Raghunanda, the formation of the local cults of Dharma, Manasa and Satyapir and composition of Panchali poems, which took place in the said period; Husain Shahi's rule showed also the signs of Secular thought which influence not only the life of Bengal but also that of the Indian sub-continent.

Of the new forces at work, the coming of Portuguese was a matter of considerable importance. Bengal had a long tradition of flourishing trade. Its commerce, closeness to the sea, existence of good number of navigable rivers, good harbour and cheapness of commodities added to the flair. The Chinese and Portuguese travellers, who visited Bengal, have all testified to the flourishing trade and commercial transaction of Bengal. Besides the town and cities, Bengal had several Ports and Port towns, which greatly contributed to her sea borne trade and commerce. In this connection, towns like Satgaon, Chittagong, Sonargaon and Hugh need special reference. These were most flourishing trade centres of Bengal in those days." Modern historians have devoted their entire attention to the rulers and their military exploits, and as such no work is available on urbanization except that of Anirudh Ray and Ratna Bali Chatterjee which is on the urbanization of Gaur and Pandua. The present theme covers the whole of Bengal Sultanate i.e from Bakhtyar Khalji to the Hussain Shahi dynasty. The fruitful work of Dhaka University, the History of Bengal vol 1 and Nihar Ranjan Ray's Bangali Itihas, which provide a picture of the society and people of ancient and early medieval times deserve to be highly commended

But no work, including the History of Bengal, Vol II, produced by the said University, contains socio-economic history of the sultanate period till the advent of K M Ashraf 'Life and condition of the people of Hindustan' and Abdul Karim's Social History of the Muslims in Bengal (down to 1538)." Both these work give fresh ground for historical studies and set a pattern for dimensions to

research. The work of Muhammad Abdur Rahim's Social and Cultural History of Bengal¹ M.R. Tarafdar's Husain Shahi Bengal (1494-1538). A socio political study and Richard M. Eaton's Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier (1204-1760 A.D.)² are worth mentioning. The work of Upendra Thakur's History of Mithila (from the earliest times to 1556 A.D.), of Bihar through the ages³ and the Comprehensive history of Bihar⁴ deserve to be cited. The works of Abdul Karim and Muhammad Abdur Rahim are much more important in the sphere that they are absolutely devoted to the study of socio-cultural history of Bengal, which not only covers the period chosen but also the greater part of our space.

A. Karim clearly identifies his central problem as the origin and development of the Muslim society in Bengal. He writes that he has gathered together all the relevant materials, which help in tracing the origin and gradual building up of the Muslim Society in Bengal from the earliest time down to 1538 A.D. In M.A. Rahim's book there is no preliminary discussion of the scope and conceptual framework appropriate to such a study. The reader is just left to piece together all the relevant materials.

Of the gradual building up of the Muslim Society in Bengal from the earliest time that is from 1201 to 1576 A.D. It was the time of the development of Muslim Society and it further suggests that at least Rahim shares Karim's view of Muslim society as an appropriate social unit for study. The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier (1204 - 1768) of Richard M. Eaton are dedicated to the study of economy, society and culture of Bengal during the Sultanate period. It is not only the most recent but appears to be the most ambitious work. In dealing with the Sultanate phase (i.e. pp 1-134) the scholar has devoted to the revival of the traditional debates on the arrival and settlements of early Sufis,⁵ and the nature of mass conversions to Islam.⁶ But as far as society, economy and culture are concerned the learned scholar observes that. Islamic devotionism became a force in its own right in Bengal Delta.

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The sources of the Study There are no official records available on Bengal Sultans, however this deficiency is amply compensated by the records available on Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire. Moreover, the establishment of Muslim rule in Bengal was rather an extension of the same process of development in northern India, the history written at Delhi and elsewhere in northern India have a special relevance to the early phase of Muslim expansion in Bengal.

The earliest of the sources is Hasan Nizami's 'Tajul Maasir' which contains Ghorid as well as early Turkish History of the period from 1192 to 1217 A.D. Barani mentions that Khwaja Sadr Nizami, the author of Taj-id-Maasir was a trust worthy writer and scholar of distinction. Hasan Nizami came to India soon after the conquest of Delhi and commenced his work early in the reign of Aibak to whom the first part of the work was dedicated. Except one in the India office, all the existing manuscripts of the work are defective, and none of them contains the last portion covering the years A.H. 614 to 626/1217-1228 A.D., which Elliot quoted, in his extracts, from a copy in the possession of Nawab Ziauddin of Laharu. The author, who was a learned man of repute in the court of Ghazni and later of Delhi, wrote another history of the Ghorides in verse, which, though mentioned by Minhaj-i-Siraj, unfortunately does not appear to be extant. Manuscripts of another work by him entitled Adabiil Harh Vas Shujaat and dedicated to Iltutmish, are however, preserved in several collections. This contains useful details about the government and military organization of the newly established kingdom of Delhi and Bengal. It describes in numerous places, festival and amusements and about civil administration. One of its brief passages records the arrival of Bakhtiyar Khalji at Badaun to meet Qutub-ud-din Aibak. after the former's conquest of Bihar. For a connected contemporary account of the period, however we are mainly dependent on the Tabaqat-i-Nasiri of Minhaj-ud-din Abu Umar bin Sirajud-din al Juzjani. It is a general history of the world of Islam beginning with the Patriarchs, but its main value consists in its first hand account of

the Shansabani conquest in India and the subsequent history of the new kingdom in which the author held high ecclesiastical and judicial offices. He was not only a contemporary, but also an actual participator in some of the events narrated in the work, which consequently, suffers from personal prejudice. He is biased towards the Ghorides and the dynasty of Iltutmish and in many places conceals facts unfavourable to his Patron Ulugh Khan and the Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud. It was the author's association with Sultan Nasir al Din Mahmud (1246-1266) that prompted him to name his work *Tahaqat-i-Nasiri*.

The author himself visited Bengal in 1242-44 during the governorship of Malik Izz-al-Din Tughral Tughan Khan. He accompanied him in his campaign against Orissa and also acted as a mediator between him and his adversary, Malik Tamar Khan Qiran, governor of Oudh. From the internal evidence it is also clear that Minhaj took special care to collect materials for the history of the Muslims in Bengal, particularly receiving information from the surviving companions, of Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji. The *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* is planned as a general history of Islam, with special emphasis on the author's own period, particularly on the rulers of Delhi. He devotes, however, a special section on the Khalji Malik of Bengal. His devoted attention mainly to political and military events of the time, on the whole it is the earliest and best available source for an account of the establishment of Muslim rule in Bengal.

For the rest of the period, consequently, we are exclusively dependent on Ziauddin Barani, the author of *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*, completed in 1359 and dedicated to Firoz Shah Tughlaq. Shams-i-Shiraj Afif's *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shah* was written separately during the reign of Firoz Shah Tughlaq (1315-1388). Barani claims to have resumed the history of the Delhi sultanate from the point where Minhaj-us-Siraj left it. Having held office in the government, possibly in the agrarian affairs, though his remarks are often ambiguous and rather scrappy in his work named *Fatwa-i-Jahandari* (instructions on state craft) written about the middle of the 14th

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century. The author did not visit Bengal, but was involved in a rather long-drawn conflict with the first two Ilyas Shahi rulers of Bengal. Causa!, but sometimes extremely illuminating references to political and social life are found in a series of contemporary writings, which are professedly non-historical. Among them the poetical works of Amir Khusrau, a contemporarx' of Barani contains interesting sidelight on contemporary events and personages. Some of his qasidahs addressed to the leading men of the court are usually helpful. He was a favourite courtier of Prince Muhammad, the eldest son of Balban, after whose death he took service in the court of Kaiqubad. At the latter's request he composed the poem entitled Qiran-us-Sa'adai (of two fortunes) describing Kaiqubad's meeting with his father. In his preface to the poem entitled 'Ashiqa" he gives brief resume' of the historx of the Sultans of Delhi upto Ala-ud-din Khalji and the Sultans of Bengal. Valuable information regarding the working of the governmental machinery and also about some of the expeditions are found in his Ijca-i-Khusravi, which, though admittedly written to exhibit his literary skill and ingenuity, yet embodies the substance of some actual letters and farmans. The poet visited Bengal twice, once in 1280 A.D. in connection with the expedition sent against Bengal by Sultan Balban under the command of Prince Nasir-al-Din Muhammad Bughra Khan and for second time in 1325 A.D. in the reign of Sultan Ghiyas-al-Din Tughlaq. In between the two dates Amir Khusrau accompanied the Delhi Sultan Muiz-al-Din Kaiqubad in his march in 1289 to meet his father Bughra Khan the Sultan of Bengal.~ Though essentially a poetical work, it is the best contemporary record of that important event and it throws much sidelight on country life and ceremonies of that time. It describes the trade and transaction of business in the Bengal Sultanate. In a way it supplies the link between the period covered by Tabaqat-i-Nasin on the one hand and the Tarikh-i-firoz Shahi on the other.

Two other notable works the Futuh-us-Salatin by Isami and the Tankh-i-Mubarak Shahi by Yahya bin Abdullah Al-sarhindi/"

refer to its affairs in connection with their description of the Delhi rulers. Among histories written in the 14th and 15th century, the verified history, entitled *Futuh-us-Salatin* by an author having the pen name of Isami, and compiled in 1348, supplies a great deal of interesting though unconfirmed details.' The *Tarikh-i-Mubarak Shahi* of Yahya bin Ahmad bin Abdullah Sirhindi, completed in 1434, although mainly based on the contemporary works mentioned above, gives some additional information for which however no authority is cited. The *Gidshan-i-Ibrahimi*, commonly known as the *Tankh-i-Fuishta*, by Muhammad Qasim bin Hindu Khan, dedicated to Ibrahim Adil Shah of Bijapur *Firishta* utilized the sources. He has given information of the Bengal Sultanates administration.

A large number of gold and silver coins of the Bengal Sultans have been discovered. These are now preserved mainly in the British Museum (London), the Dacca Museum and the Indian Museum, Calcutta. The most important information supplied by the coins is the specific dates of the rulers, which help in determining the chronology and even the order of succession mentioned in Delhi chronicles. The coins also contain various titles and legends, all in Arabic, which throw a good deal of light on the nature and spirit of the administration. The variety and metrology of the coins together with the mention of a number of mint-towns from which coins were simultaneously minted during single reigns are an eloquent testimony to the financial strength and economic prosperity of the Bengal Sultanate throughout the period. More than hundred inscriptions have so far been discovered. " These Inscriptions were discovered at Dinajpur, Rangpur districts, Chittagong (Chalgaon), Sonargaon, Gaud and Pandua. The Inscriptions are in Arabic and Persian and inscribed on black basalt stone tablets varying in sizes according to the length of the texts. These are related to the construction of mosques, bridges, canals, forts, gateways, katras, madrasas, minarets, tanks etc The literary works in Bengal It can be divided into two groups *Maktubat* i.e. letters written by the contemporar) prominent Shaikhs of the time like Maulana Muzaffar Shams

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Balklii, a contemporary of Sultan Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah (792-813A H./ 1390-1410), Shaikh Nur Qutb al Alam, Mir Sav^id Ashraf Jahangir Simnani and Shaikh Sharf-al-Din Yahya Maneri, all contemporaries of Raja Kans and Jalal-al-Din Muhammad (first of the 15th century A-D.)

The second group of work is literary production of the time in Bengal in Arabic, Persian and Bengali. These works contain biographies on the Shaikhs and the Sufis referred as "Hagiological literature". They form a supplementary source of information during this period under the liberal patronage of the Sultans of Bengal.

The foreign traveller's account: Chinese and European.

The Chinese records are mainly six in number. i) Ying Slieng Ian, which is general account of the county without any reference to its king or court, compiled by Ma Huan between 1425 and 1432. He came to Bengal as interpreter with the two Chinese missions early in the fifteenth century.

ii) Taoyi die leo, compiled by Wang Ta-Yuan most probably in Bengal in the winter of 1349-50.

iii) Sing Ch'a sheng Ian, compiled by Fei-Sin in 1436. It is an account of Hou-hien's visit to Bengal in 1415.

iv) Si Yang Ch'ao Kiing tien lu. compiled in 1520 by Huang Smg-Tseng. It refers to the various emissaries sent by the Bengal ruler to China till 1438.

v) Shu chou tseu lu, compiled in 1574 by Yen Ts'ong Kien "This is the most complete of all accounts", based "not only on the previous accounts but also on other sources not known to us at present.

vi) Ming-she, an official compilation completed in 1739 but based on old materials.

These accounts throw a good deal of light on the socio-economic condition of Bengal. It appears from these records that diplomatic missions were sent to China in 1405, 1408, 1409, 1412,

1414 and 1438-39 and these were reciprocated by the Chinese emperor at least three times in 1409, 1413 and 1415. The European travellers visited Bengal from 16th century onwards. It may be recalled that when Sultan Hussain Shah with the help of his Arab and other supporters was consolidating his position on newly acquired throne of Bengal, the Portuguese navigator Vasco Da Gama, with the help of an Arab guide landed at Calicut on the west coast of India in 1498. In the early year of the following century and during the reign of Hussain Shah (1494-1519 A D) Nicolo Di Conti, Varthema and Barbosa visited Bengal. Each of these travellers has left an account of their travels. In the second half of the century came the Venetian merchants Caesar Frederick (1563) and the English traveller Ralph Fitch (1585-86). Their accounts refer to the economic condition and trade of Bengal particularly.

Tom Pires (1512-1515 A.D.) though never visited Bengal or Bihar, but the first volume of his work the *Suma Oriental* contains, the socio-economic information about Andhra, Orissa, Peru, Ceylon, Tripura, Bengal etc. was written at Malacca on the basis of the reports made available by the merchants, who carried on business with south Asian maritime nations. Its importance for our purpose lies in getting supplementary evidence for the assessment of the nature of the balance of foreign trade, likewise, the portions related to the sultanate of Bengal and other south east Asian states contained in the *Book of Duarte Barbosa 1516-1580* give us much more supplementary insights into the economic history especially trade and maritime trade of the region. As a matter of fact these are not contemporary sources, but they relate to such topics as industrial and agricultural production trade, prices of commodities, social practices etc. which are not adequately covered by other sources. It is not unexpected to make mention of some other latter sources which have been consulted in preparing this work. These include the *Babur Nama* of Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur (1526-1530 A.D.) the *Tarikh-i-Sher Shahi* of Abbas Khan Sherwani, the *Waqiat-i-Miishtaqi* of Shaikh Rizqullah Mustaqi, the

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Akbar Nama and Ain-i-Akbari of Abul Fazl. the Tabaqat-i-Akhari of Nizamuddin Ahmad, the Miintakhab-ut-Tawarikh of Abdul Qader Badaoni, A more general history of the Indian mystics based on careful study o'i the existing literature is the well-known Akhbar-iil-Akhyar by Abdul Haqq Dehlavi, completed in the reign of Jahangir. Contemporary with this work is another very valuable account named Gulzar-i-Abrar, by Muhammad Ghous This work details a number of otherwise unknown Sufis whose life and activit) supply interesting details of the socio-political trends of the sultanate period.

Moreover the study involves an extensive reading and consultation of relevant modern works and the research articles published in different journals, which appears in the footnotes of every chapter and in the selected bibliography attached at the end of the thesis. However, its evident from the outline given above that we have a large scattered mass of source materials for reconstructing the political, social and economic history of Bengal in the light of urbanization which took place during the Sultans period. Much of these sources are contemporaneous and hence dependable. Also it is variegated, being of different type and in different languages, which enables a greater degree of cross checking a matter of great advantage to those interested in the subject. It is not impertinent to mention here that a study of the map of this region has helped in understanding the gradual expansion of Sultan's rule, the rise and growth of urban centres and more particularly in framing the idea about urbanization during the period under review. For this, we have appended the maps covering the period of study from 1203 to 1538 A.D. highlighting the urban centres, and mint towns.

GEOGRAPHICAL INFLUENCE IN GROWTH

Firstly it was in this period that a broad distinct geo-political entity of Bengal emerged in the history of the subcontinent. Secondly it was under the Sultans of Bengal that the regional geo-political units of Bengal evolved out of numerous fragmented but

corresponding territories of linguistic homogeneity/, which ultimately gave birth to the rise of the idea of individualism, in course of time. Thirdly, the natural features of this region, which were and even now are peculiar to itself left distinctive marks on its socio-cultural institutions, mental outlook, way of life, food, dress manners and customs.' During the Sultanate of Bengal since the time of Sultan Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah (1339-1358) this change in geographical phases of influence had wider application to the name of Bengal. It has the most remarkable feature of its landscape the network of rivers formed by the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna and their numerous distributaries. Infact the alluvia of these rivers have brought the surrounding land surface into existence. The Ganges and the Brahamaputra, both originating in the Himalayas, flow through Bengal from the northwest and from the northeast respectively. While the Meghna originating in the Assam Hills, enters from the East. All the three rivers join their streams in East Bengal before falling into the sea. At present however, the main Brahmaputra channel runs along the western borders of Mymensingh and Dhaka district and meets Ganges near Goalando (Faridpur district) except for this no other remarkable changes in the courses of the great rivers in Bengal appear to be on record. At any rate the main Ganges channel has ever flowed east south after entering Bengal near, Rajmahal, falling into the sea at present with the district of Noakhali and Chittagong on its eastern side and the district of Barisal on its western side.

The main channel of the Ganges as well as its combined stream with the Brahmaputra and the Meghna. however, give off numerous distributaries and channels that inter into south Bengal and empty themselves into the sea. These distributaries and streams, together with the main rivers, form one of the most remarkable networks of rivers in the world. The rivers and rains together with the alluvial nature of the soil and tropical climate accounted for the proverbial fertility of the land and its rich vegetation. The coastline in the south is fairly broken by numerous islands and delta formed at

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the mouth of the rivers, but it is generally tidal and remains submerged in water for most part of the year. Moreover it is rendered inaccessible by dense forest, which covered a wide tract across the whole southern parts of the three districts of 24 pargana, Khulna and Barisal. Almost the whole of Bengal is a vast alluvial plain with the exception of the foothills of the Himalayas in the north, the marginal hills in the east and southeast and the Raj Mahal Hills in the west below the point where the Ganges enters the land. It is divided by the river system into four well-marked sections, which in ancient times bore distinct names.

The eastern part is marked off by the main channel of the Ganges in the south-east. Most of its southeasterly part was known as Banga. The section lying to the west of the Hugli-Bhagirathi bears the name of Radha.[^] These identifications are of course only general. It appears that their limits particularly those of Samatata. Banga and Radha overlapped one another in the border areas. As with the other places, the geography of Bengal had important influences on the courses of its history. The rivers and rains have through ages facilitated irrigation and agriculture but unlike the Indus Valley in the western pan of the subcontinent, the Ganges-Brahmaputra valley has not been the seat of any ancient civilization. The reason obviously is that the area was, at that period, subject to inundation and was full of forest cover. The settlements activities started in this deltaic zone at a comparatively much later period. When Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji selected northern Bengal as the centre of his activities and sought expansion in the north rather than towards the east, the same geographical factors were at work. The rivers dictated the necessities to buildup strong river flotillas with the help of which the conquerors advanced towards east and south Bengal. Finally, the fertility and abundance of land attracted many immigrants from different countries to come and settle in Bengal.

D.C. Sircar says that though the name of Gaur (Gauda) was used as a general name for the Bengal states, but it can be conclusively said that country of Gaur, comprising the territory of Mithila,

Barendra, Rarh and northwestern portion of Bagdi had its capital at Nadia.[^] In the early 13th century Minhaj-us-Siraj observes the territorial units of Barind (Barendra) and Rarh, on either side of the Ganga. He writes, the territory of Lakhnauti has two wings on either side of the river Ganga. The Western side they call Ral (Rarh-Radha) and the eastern side they call Barinda, the city Deokot is on that side."* Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji conquered this territory of Gaur in 1204-1205 A.D. and made Lakhnauti his capital and since then, the principality began to be known as Bild Lakhnauti. In the 13th century A.D. the modern states of Bengal (Bangladesh and West Bengal) was split up into a number of divisions and Vanga or Vangala denoted southeast Bengal, which included Sonargaon, Vikrampur, Sylhet and Chittagong regions. The most important point to be noted here is that the term 'Bangalah' used by the Muslim chronicler in writing the political events of Lakhnauti upto mid 13th century A.D. did not mean Bangalah or Bengal, the Europeans, denoting the whole of Bengal. In fact, it was Sultan Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah (1342-1357 A. D.) who united the territories of Lakhnauti, Satgaon (South-West Bengal) and Sonargaon (South-East Bengal) under his sole authority and laid the foundation of an independent Sultanate of Bengal. He gave the united territories the name of Bangalah" and the people thus integrated the name of Bangalee. He assumed the title of Shah-i-Bangalah. or Sultan-i-Bangalah and Shah-i-Bangaliyan.

The Chinese account of early 15th century thus mentions the whole country as Pang-Ko-la (Bangala) " In his memories, Babur calls Aluddin Husain Shah (1493-1519 A.D) and Sultan Nasiruddin Nusrat Shah (1519-1531 A.D.) as rulers of Bangalah and their peoples as "Bangalis' and their custom as Bangali custom.[^] It is the Bangalah or Subah Bengal of Abul Fazl, which he defines as situated in the second clinic. Its length from Chittagong to Garhi (Teligarhi) is four hundred kos. It is bounded on the east and north by the mountains, on the south by the sea, and on the west by the Subah of Bihar. Bordering on this country are Kamrup and Assam. Its breadth is two hundred kos.

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Under these circumstances, the the on. of Majumadar that, at the time of Pala Kings, Bangalah (Vangala) came to denote the whole of Bengal and that of Ganguh that, in the first half of the 16th century Lakhnauti or Gaur, which had so long been outside the limit of Vangala, was included in it, looks unsupportable. It is difficult to accept that by the end of this century Vangala comprised the whole of the country now known as Bengal. Though, It may undoubtedly be summarized that the Bangalah of Sultan Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah mentioned by Shams Siraj Afif, became Suhah Banglah of Akbar by Abul Fazl, which was corrupted into Bangala or Bengal of the Europeans. So far the topography of Bengal is concerned, it may roughly be divided into two main physical divisions. (a) The vast plain and (b) the marginal hills and forests: Murang hills. Bhutan range, Kamrup hills, Garo hills etc. in the north, Birbhum-Rajmahal hills in the west and the Khasia, Jaintia, Sylhet (Kamrup), Chittagong hills in the east." An overwhelming proportion of the surface of Bengal is a vast fiat even alluvial plain. It is a dominant feature of Bengal's topograph). The plain can be broadly divided into three classes (a) the older deltaic and flood plain on north of the Padma-Meghna axis (b) the younger deltaic and flood axis and (c) the erosional and flood lying plain west of the Bhagirathi-Hugli river. The plains of Bengal may fairly be called the agrarian or agricultural zone. Contemporary sources refer to the mountain and forest tracts and marshy lands of this region.

Minhaj writes: from the territory of Kamrud to that of Tirhut are thirty five mountain passes, by which Tangan horses are brought to the territory of Lakhnauti." Dharmasvamin (1234-1236 A.D.) makes mention of the big mountain tracts at Vaisali and Rajgir and in the border region of Bihar with Nepal, which he calls Rishisirsha Parvata, meaning summit or Big Head. He further informs that wild men and dacoits inhabited these regions. Ibn Battuta refers to the mountain region of Mymesingh-Sylhet (Kamru). He writes: The Kamaru mountains are a vast expanse ranging from China to Tibet and the musk producing gazelles are found

there. The inhabitants of these mountams resemble the Turks. The low-lying muddy and marshy lands of Bengal are regarded by contemporary writers like Minhaj, Barani, and Afif etc. They record that in the rainy season the whole of the tracts on either bank of the Ganges (about 200 miles around Lakhnauti) would become inundated and the route would fill with mud and morass." In relation to the territory of Bihar, Bengal lands are more low-lying and marshy. Barani refers to the land of Bengal as low as liable to deep inundation. " Afif records the remarks made by Firuz Shah Tughlaq thaBengal is a land of swamps and the nobles of the country passed their lives in their islands ' Among the contemporary sources the Chinese account of Mahuan (HIS A.D.) informs us that the climate of Bengal is consistently hot in summer.^ Abul Fazl in 16th century writes that, in 'Bengal' the summer heats are temperate but the cold season is short.

Barani and Afif refer to the heavy rainfall in Bengal. Barani while describing the march of Sultan Balban against Tughril in 1297 A.D. writes, Balban while crossing Sarju river faced heavy rains; the passage through the low-lying country was difficult and the army was delayed by ten or twelve days, toiling through water and mud and the pouring rain ^^ The latter in his account of Firuz Tughlaq's siege laid to the fort of Ekdala, writes, Ilyas fortified himself in the island of Ekdala with the belief that when the rams will come and the country will become inundated the Sultan Balban would be obliged to retreat.

Whatever features of the land and people have been discussed will remain incomplete if we do not agree with Chinese records of the mid 14th century and early 16th century, that have sketched a brief but complete picture of the natural resources of the land, the profession of the majority, of the people and the integrity} of their character. Wang Ta-Yuan a Chinese explorer of 14th century (1349-1351 A.D.) records these people of Bengal owe all their tranquility and prosperity to themselves, for its source lie in their devotion to agriculture, whereby a land originally covered with Jungles has been reclaimed by their unremitting toil in tilling

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and planting. The seasons of heaven have scattered the wealth of the earth over this kingdom, the riches and integrity of its people surpass perhaps those of Chue Chiang (Palembarg) and equal those of Chao-wa (Java).

Check your progress –

1. Write about nature of the growth of cities during Sutanate period.

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2. Elaborate about role of geography in urbanisation

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8.3 LETS SUM UP

The major among them revolves around west centric evolutionism. According to this, one uses the western methods even to explain the process of oriental society and culture. The base-superstructure problem is very complex where it becomes necessary to know on which basis urbanisation had taken place economic, political, religious or what else? It is impossible to separate the urban centres from the other features of lifestyle. To have a clear idea about the urban centres and other related affairs, one should consider the core-periphery problem. Some other problems in the area of study have also appeared.

The causes of the growth of a town, its structure, development, urbanization process should always be judged in the background of society and culture of a particular place or country. Here culture implies lifestyle of different socio-religious groups, their ideals of life, moral values, overall experience about livelihood, etc. Therefore, the contemporary researchers are trying to give a final shape to this area of study by finding out the comparative

relationship among the process of production, the surplus production, trade and commerce and its impact, basis and characteristics of the administrative system, religious groups, customs and traditions, varieties of establishments, etc.

8.4 KEYWORDS

Sheher, Mulk, Village, Gaon

8.5 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. Write about urbanisation in 15th century.
2. Briefly write about the types of settlements.

8.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

History of Bengal, Vol 2 by R C Majumdar

The History of Bengal, Vol 2 by Sir Jadunath Sarkar

8.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Hint – 8.2
2. Hint – 8.2

UNIT 9 – URBANISATION FROM 16TH CENTURY IN BENGAL

STRUCTURE

9.0 Objective

9.1 Introduction

9.2 Urbanisation In Bengal In 16th Century

9.3 Lets Sum Up

9.4 Keywords

9.5 Questions For Review

9.6 Suggested Readings

9.7 Answers To Check Your Progress

9.0 OBJECTIVE

To learn about the growth of cities and town from 17th century in Bengal

To learn about the growth of Murshidabad

9.1 INTRODUCTION

In the modern days, the enhanced study on the process and importance of urbanisation has become a special area of research among the historians. Detailed investigation and collecting information on the birth and growth of urban centres, structural pattern of cities, features of urban centres and their decline and decay has led to the study of urbanization. This special area of study is multidisciplinary on the one hand and interdisciplinary on the other. Urban lifestyle depends on the geographical, political, economic, social and religious condition of the common people. The historical background of a part of or the whole nation also influences the process of urbanisation. One should have a clear idea

about urban origin, urban forms, urban system, urban organization, urban demography, urbanism and urbanization

9.2 URBANISATION IN BENGAL IN 16TH CENTURY

Briefly speaking, urbanisation envisages a state of development where among other things, „a compact conglomeration of or mass of miscellaneous governing organism and industries as productive unit exist“. This is, in fact, in contradiction to the rural society that implies a dispersed population over a relatively larger area, a rather loose administrative set up and cultivation as the principal productive activity. In a recent paper, B.D. Chattopadhyay [1992] provides a set of prescriptions for the definition of urban settlement. He writes that, „the archaeologists working on urban sites have so far graded them hierarchically on the basis of size.“ He offers an alternative to this mode of assessment and asks instead to look at the structure of the settlement site. He further says that a settlement site should be containing certain specific features to qualify as an urban centre i.e., in addition to residential buildings, it should also have artisan areas, roads, drains, religious shrines and community spaces. Any site possessing any one dominant feature cannot be considered as an urban settlement. However, our special area of research is related to the process of urbanisation of Murshidabad which was the capital of the Bengal Nawabs for a considerable length of time. It is generally noticed that the old ruined urban settlements of the Hindu-Buddhist period got ready expansion under the Bengal Sultans and the Mughal Subahdars.

As Murshidabad belongs to this category of an urban centre, it would be logical to have a look on the process of urbanisation in the Nawabi period. Prior to the 13th century all the leading urban centres, which had originated in ancient period, decayed or declined in early medieval times. Some of the remaining existing settlements could not be called urban centres in the proper sense of the term „urban“, they were small townships of the fragmented political authorities and

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their Brahmana supporters, in which a small section of the population was brought under the culture of urbanisation. “Pre-Muslim urban centres”, in the language of a modern scholar, “were all examples of Non-Commercial Township surviving under the aegis of a political authority. They were essentially centres of conspicuous feudal and religious consumptions and hardly served any positive economic interest of contemporary society.”

Let us now have a look at the process of urbanisation in general as the process is applicable to that of Murshidabad also to a large extent. Muhammad Habib is pioneer in this respect. He formulates the theory of „urban revolution“ of which the chief feature is the growth and multiplication, almost to a dangerous extent, of the urban working class. While evaluating the Muslim contribution to urbanisation, K.M.Ashraf notes the addition of some infrastructure activities, namely the construction of palace, mosques, tanks etc., to the Hindu town.⁶⁰ But with the advent of Islam and Muslims not only were additions made in the earlier cities, but also in the planning of the cities new dimensions were added. So this phase may be termed as the process of urbanisation in the sense that new factors emerged in urban life at this time.

Some factors were definitely responsible for the growth of urban centres. Muslim settlements initiated by political, economic or religious considerations emerged with the passage of time into urban settlements. The urban ethos of Muslims seems to have been the prime reason for this transformation. The Muslim conquerors were highly urbanised people and immediately after their advent in Bengal, either they founded new urban centres or renovated or rebuilt the old sites. The urban ethos of Muslims combined with other socio-economic factors led to the emergence of a large number of urban centres in Bengal and Murshidabad was once more enlivened under the rule of the Bengal Nawabs from 1704-1757. Rulers made capital cities, established administrative headquarters, posted police-camps or thanas and constructed garrison-camps or forts in different parts of Eastern India. With the advent of the conquering Muslims many learned immigrants, Ulema, poets, scientists and Sufi saints from different

parts of the Muslim countries followed them. The Sufis established their Khanqahs in suburbs of towns, or beside the old Hindu-Buddhists sites of religio-cultural importance. In a word, in many ways, settlements of the ruling elite as well as the immigrant-Muslims grew up in different places of the Muslim dominion.

Some of these settlement sites turned, in course of time, into flourishing urban centres of metropolitan character, while the rest developed, at least, into Small Township. The chief metropolitan cities like Murshidabad had royal palaces, residential zones, streets, bazaars and markets, rest houses, places of common utility, educational institutions and flourishing trade and commerce of international repute. In the urban centres all administrative arrangements as well as construction of various institutions such as Khanqah, mosque, madrasah, etc., were made. Cities of this category appeared as political headquarters, some of them even flourished so much that a few of them attained the status of big metropolitan cities. Some urban centres emerged out of the construction of garrison-camps or forts. For the purpose of guarding border territories and maintaining law and order, Muslim rulers established a number of garrison-camps or forts in different areas of their kingdom. These fort-settlements of the Muslims in course of time gave birth to large populous towns. The establishment of thanas or administrative-cum-police posts in different territories might have given rise to some townships. No doubt, these settlements which had government offices, mosques, madrasah, Khanqah, etc., certainly, turned into small townships or pargana headquarters. Sufi-saints' settlement was one of the important factors that led to the rise of some urban centres. Saints generally used to settle at the sites of old places of religio-cultural importance. They established their Khanqahs in those places. Centering around Khanqah, mosques and educational institutions developed and the spots assumed an urban character in the due course of time.

Normally, whenever the Muslim rulers conquered any region they issued commemorative coins and sometimes established a new mint in that place. It appears that these centres of mint resulted in the

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development of towns, known as mint towns or Shahr-i-Takshal. Murshidabad was an important mint town during the period under review.⁶⁴ In addition to these there were some other factors that quickened the process of urbanisation. The introduction of coins and the establishment of Karkhanai.e. workshop were the two most important factors that hastened the rise and growth of urbanisation, especially in Murshidabad.

The mint not only produced coined money but the very existence of its office enlivened the town from official and administrative points of view. The establishment of Karkhana as well as craftsmen's shops in Murshidabad furthered the process of urbanisation significantly. In the Bengali texts like the Vaishnav literature and Mangalkavya of the 15th-17th century emphasis of urban life falls mainly on craft production. In fact, Karkhana was one of the important institutions of foreign origin, which brought artists and craftsmen in urban settlements. In the towns of India there were artisans such as makers of swords, bows and spears and different kinds of weapons, coat of nails, goldsmiths, embroiderers, saddlers and masters of every craft who used to make special things for men and women and masters of swords and pen and the common people. As a matter of fact, settlements wherein coined money prevailed as a medium of exchange and Karkhana drew the working class of people from different areas, soon assumed the characteristics of an urban complex. Accordingly, the karkhanas used to cater to the needs of the ruling class and their family in Murshidabad and they produced huge varieties of luxury goods suitable to the lifestyle of the Bengal Nawabs.

While founding cities, rulers used to consider its topographical position first. They were situated usually on a higher level of land than the surrounding areas. This very nature of location served the purpose of easy communication, defence and security, drainage facility, water supplying and trade and commerce links. Cities developed along the banks of the rivers and showed a straight water frontage. They were backed by some parallel line of communications such as roads that usually made a town of perfect rectangular form. A modern scholar

writes that among the contributions of Muslims towards Indian town planning may be noted in their beautiful and spacious mosques, their gateways, probably the use of fountains, domes, a new arch and an improved style of walls around a city with watch-towers and other military equipment of more efficient pattern. He adds that their buildings, their mausoleums, their roofed tanks and baths and their beautiful gardens all went to enrich an Indian city.

In fact, the process of urbanisation initiated by Muslim rulers was marked mainly by adorning cities and towns with beautiful buildings, gardens, mosques, khanqahs, madrasahs, palaces, streets, karkhanas, bimaristans, tanks and wells and so on. A close look at the condition of Murshidabad under the Bengal Nawabs would establish the point more firmly as they did their best to make their capital the most beautiful city.

It is evident that Muslim rulers and philanthropists constructed a large number of residential as well as administrative buildings in their cities. Anyway, around the important sarais, wells and mosques were constructed where bazaars might have been established for the sale and purchase of articles. Thus the khanqahor sarai spot itself developed into a small township. It is of course noteworthy that as free foods were supplied from the langar or free kitchen attached to the khanqah, and of which gates were kept open for all irrespective of religious identity, the institution of khanqah had a positive impact on the life and culture of the people. The educational institutions made towns centres of learning and culture. They could have drawn scholars and students from places of far and wide distances, causing social as well as demographic mobility. Works of public utility such as streets, public bath, wells or tanks, etc., were several prerequisites for an important city which were fulfilled very well in Murshidabad. Wells and tanks were constructed in towns as a mark of the process of a planned settlement. From morphological point of view, it seems that a city was divided into several residential zones.

There is no direct information focusing on the division of the city zones based on religious affiliation of the people in most of the urban

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centres. It, however, seems that different professional groups had different residential zones. References to the quarters of paper-manufacturers or kagaziya khana and that of the musicians or ahl-al-tarab known as tarababad, tantipara i.e., the weavers' quarters, the prostitute or vaysaya mahallah, etc., may fairly indicate that different occupational groups had separate as well as distinct residential sections in the city. These quarters were made as complete and self-sufficient as could be possible. In every colony there were separate mosques, minarets for calling people to prayer, bazaars, public bath, ovens for baking flours or baking house, leather manufacturers and artisans skilled in different crafts such as goldsmiths, dyers, etc., according to the needs of the people, so that the people of one colony might not depend upon another for selling and buying and exchanging things. Like residential zones, bazaars or markets were also arranged in a disciplined order in Murshidabad. It appears that Muslims kept the provision of specialised type of wholesale market in their city planning.

Thus, there were slave markets or nakkhas which were located outside the wall of the city, garments market, fruits and vegetables market, chattel markets, books market and markets of all kinds of household furniture, food grain markets, jewellery markets, weapon markets, etc. It is important to note here that every market was provided with all amenities essential for sellers and buyers. In making urban complex big and expanded the new rulers adopted specific policy in their urban planning. The provisions of large suburban areas were kept for the further possible extension of a city. Another most important aspect of the Muslim town planning was the making of cities cosmopolitan in character, the best example of which could be seen in Murshidabad. In fact, Muslims kept the gates of the new cities open for workers, artisans and chandalas or people belonging to lower classes. All types of people—both high and low—could then build houses within the fold of the town walls. Professional classes such as geomancers, dancing girls, singers, musician parties, physicians, diviners, astrologers and all kinds of artisans, skillful in hundreds of crafts, gathered in the markets of cities and held different shops there. It

then becomes evident that cities and towns became cosmopolitan in character. As a matter of fact, even in the earlier period, Muslim rulers did not deny Hindus permission to settle in the newly founded cities, because they were earnestly needed for rendering special services as shopkeepers, artisans and bankers or moneylenders.

In this context, attention may be given to the contribution of urbanisation in Bengal in general and Murshidabad in particular. The most noteworthy among the contributions was the increase in urban population. Urban centres brought a large number of people in the fold of their settlements. As already mentioned, during the period under review the Nawabs of Bengal kept the gates of Murshidabad open for workers, artisans, labourers, etc. So all types of people, high and low, rich and poor could build their residential houses in Murshidabad without any social stigma attached to anyone. In Murshidabad, artisans and masters of every craft as well as the common people were many.

Another important impact of urbanisation was noticed in making the people socio-politically conscious. With the arrival of the new ruling class, urban centres became the centres of all sorts of socio-political activities. If we consider the case of Murshidabad here, people from all walks of life moved their eyes towards the city as it was the capital of Bengal where exchanges of political views could take place among ruling elites. No doubt, such enlivened political activities of the new rulers centered in towns and cities drew the attention of the people, which eventually made them conscious about their rights and privileges. The political consciousness of the people made them to become socially responsible as well.

Demographic mobility in India during the medieval times was clearly linked up with the process of urbanisation. The expansion of old towns and the construction of new metropolitan centres first in Delhi and then in capital cities of the newly founded regional kingdoms like Bengal led artisans, artists, craftsmen, merchants and scholars to move there in the hope of better prospects as well as to get many other socio-political objectives realized. The application of modern

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push and pull factors may not altogether be denied here. Either stricken by poverty or driven back by the Mongol invaders, many Central Asian people came to the various parts of India and Bengal in the 13th-14th century. On the other hand, opportunities of livelihood and prospects of better quality of life drew people of different strata from rural areas to get them settled in cities and towns. People from different regions flocked to the urban centres of Eastern India and eventually caused cultural as well as demographic mobility in the region to significant extent.

Thus, metropolitan cities like Murshidabad also became the repositories of the best of Islamic culture that had developed in Persia, Khurasan and Central Asia over the past centuries. Thus, it can be firmly said that the urban centres that became melting pots of different cultures might have moulded the life and culture of the people especially of the indigenous urban citizens. The most significant contribution of the process of urbanisation, especially in Bengal was its economic impact on the society and life and conditions of the people. It seems that with the rise and growth of urban centres, an urban economy aided by coined-money developed in the country. Towns and cities, especially, the capital cities of different regional kingdoms became centres of all sorts of economic activities based on trade and commerce and industries.

The capital cities were working as nerve of all economic functioning, which resulted in the growth of urban economy. The net result of the process of urbanisation was the birth of a large number of urban centres that profoundly influenced the life and conditions of people by contributing largely to the socio-economic mobility in Bengal. After a prolonged discussion on the factors behind the process of urbanisation it can now be well ascertained that judging from all sides Murshidabad was one of the best examples of the urban centres in the period under review.

The establishment of the Sultanate rule and the socio-economic changes that it brought about ran parallel with the older socio-economic structure that was still in existence in many urban centres of India including

Murshidabad. This was due to the facts-1] The control over older city centres by the new ruling class.2] The growth of an urban group like merchants, artisans, political officials, administrators and even religious groups like the Sufis and 3] Military security and need to be in a well-protected place also led many people to take shelter in the towns. According to Prof. Irfan Habib, urbanisation in any place can be assessed only by ascertaining three factors-1] The growth in number and geographical space of the towns.2] The development in artisanal crafts and commercial activities, increasing prosperity among the citizens and 3] The existence of a developed mercantile economy.

Murshidabad had, no doubt, well satisfied all the above mentioned prerequisites to be classified as an urban centre. A brief study of the physical structure of towns of medieval Bengal becoming prosperous shows that they were due to their commodity production and growth of trade and commerce. The process shows integration between agriculture and industry which was equally applicable in case of Murshidabad. In spite of the agricultural nature of the Mughal Empire, cities and towns had played crucial roles politically, socially and culturally. Cities and towns in pre-modern India, to quote K.N. Chaudhury, "represented the final point of convergence between settled people and nomads, between the rulers and the ruled, between agriculture and industry, between foreigners and domestic merchants, and the literate and illiterate."

It is a very common feature in India that a town rising rapidly to prominence as an administrative centre was declining suddenly with the withdrawal of power. While studying about urbanisation the accounts of European travellers, contemporary Bengali poems and some inscriptions and coins may be used as sources. The problems of the accounts of the European travellers are many. Some of them contradict each other and are often without dates. Also these travellers evaluated urban centres by their physical appearances and functions such as small towns, big towns, walled towns, market towns, walled cities, unwalled cities, etc. and often gave their value judgments such as „helpful town“, „civilised town“, etc. without

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specifying their categories. Almost always they are comparing the Indian cities with the European cities in the regularity of streets influenced by the concept of urbanisation in Europe.

One major problem is that the accounts of the travellers generally show a static picture of the towns, as if using an idealized image where people almost mechanically follow their assigned duties. There is very little evidence of the movement within the town that would have revealed the structure of such towns. Each urban settlement has an economic force backed by the social structure of the town. This force interacts with the world outside influencing the social structure within the town. Murshidabad was not an exception. The contradictions within the social structure often due to group interests and rarely of communal or racial interests create problems for the primary function of such towns. In case of bigger urban centres, in the capital cities like Murshidabad, the increasing numbers of economic forces help to create a complex social structure with diverse contradictions. On the other hand, the initial settlement creates the social structure that operates the economic force thus helping to turn it into an urban settlement. Thus, economic forces and social structure go hand in hand to make an urban centre well developed. The morphology of the towns and cities of medieval Bengal was a natural development depending on ecological and economic forces operating in their integration of agriculture, manufacture and commerce. Murshidabad, under the Bengal Nawabs was a good example of this type of town. These towns could not generally be classified as parasitical since these towns developed with increasing investment creating opportunities for increasing employment in the neighbouring villages.

It is difficult to speculate on the nature of urbanisation of Bengal immediately preceding the period of the coming of the Turks. Karnasuvarna used to lie west of the Bhagirathi River and seems to be the only site to continue till the 13th century. This was the very site where Murshidabad developed as the capital of Bengal in the later ages. It was a node of settlement locality, with widespread linkages with South Bengal, North Bengal and Upper Ganga Basin. A connected

history of urbanisation of medieval Bengal can be framed with the help of contemporary writing and archaeological findings. Generally, for the sake of better understanding, Bengal has been divided into three regions by scholars which are as follows-1] Upper Ganga called Varindri.

2] Middle Ganga and other rivers like Ajay, etc., occupying Murshidabad, Burdwan, Rajshahi and generally called Radha. This is further subdivided into two-the upper part or Uttara Radha and the lower part or Dakshin Radha.3] Lower Delta along the coast, particularly the eastern region called Samatata and a portion of the upper part of that area called Vanga. From the early 13th century, urbanisation in Bengal has proceeded in the one or the other of these areas and in certain times, in more than two areas simultaneously. Even then the nature and the type of such urbanisation differ from area to area depending on their settlement pattern and linkages. Comparative parallels can rather be found in other regions of India during the period. From a long time now, scholars have known Bengal with its numerous names and divisions. From the earliest period, Bengal was divided into various janapadas.

The Jain text Bhagabati Sutra depicts that Radha and Vanga countries were once part of great sixteen Mahajanapadas. On the other hand, various literatures like the Vedas, Epics, Sutra and epigraphical records opine in favour of the different geopolitical divisions of Bengal. These are Pundravardhana, Vanga, Samatata, Harikela, Gauda, Radha, Tamralipti and Davaka. Among these divisions if we turn our attention particularly to the area of our research, Murshidabad district is a district of West Bengal in Eastern India. Situated on the left bank of the river Ganga, the district is very fertile. The Murshidabad city, which lends its name to the district, was the seat of power of the Nawabs of Bengal.

The district of Murshidabad, at present, borders West Bengal's Malda district to the north, Jharkhand's Sahebganj district and Pakur district to the north-west, Birbhum district to the west and Nadia district due south. The international border with Bangladesh's

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Rajshahi division is on the east. The district comprises two distinct regions separated by the Bhagirathi River. To the west lies the Radha, a high undulating continuation of the Chota Nagpur plateau. The eastern portion, the Bagri, is a fertile, low-lying alluvial tract, part of the Ganga Delta. The district is drained by the Bhagirathi and Jalangi rivers and their tributaries. Bhagirathi is a branch of the Ganga and flows southwards through the district and divides it into more or less equal halves. Going back to the historical age, the capital city of Shashanka, the great king of Gauda in the 7th century A.D. and that of Mahipala, one of the later Palakings of Bengal, were in this district.

Actually the ancient history of Murshidabad can be recorded from the period when Shashanka, the king of Gauda established Murshidabad as his capital city. It should be mentioned in this context that Gauda region is a historical country in ancient India, which included Gauda in Bengal. The history of Murshidabad is known from the archaeological excavations and the destroyed remnants of the earliest monuments found there. The Mauryas conquered and incorporated the Radha region with the territory of Murshidabad.

Radha region is mentioned in the Jain scripture Acharanga Sutra in the 6th century B.C. which clearly proved that Murshidabad existed even in the 6th century B.C. King Bimbisara conquered Anga which was the previous name of West Bengal. Later the Nandas defeated the Mauryas and established their supremacy over large parts of Bengal including Murshidabad. Finally the famous Maurya king Chandragupta Maurya defeated the Nandas and reestablished the Maurya supremacy in Murshidabad.

Ancient history provides witness that the Mauryas ruled Murshidabad for ages and the Ashokan stupas at Karnasuvarna, the capital of Shashanka, indicates Murshidabad to be a part of the Mauryan Empire for a long time. The post-Mauryan history of Murshidabad was composed under the rule of the Shungas and the Kushanas. Though there is no available record of the Shunga rule in Murshidabad, the Kushana coins excavated in the Rajbari Danga

region of Murshidabad indicate the existence of Kushana rule in Murshidabad. The coins prove that the Kushana kings carried on business transactions throughout the Middle East and the south-east countries with Murshidabad as the core centre. A Chinese traveler I-tsing opined that the Gupta king Sri Gupta granted some villages to a temple Mrigashikhavana which was an area adjacent to the city of Murshidabad. The writings of the famous Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsang are an important source of information about the history of Murshidabad. Hiuen Tsang mentioned in his travelogues about Lo-to-mi-chi [Raktamrittika which means "Red Soil"] Mahavihara, an important centre of learning of Vajrayani Buddhists. Lo-to-mi-chi monastery has been identified with the excavated monastery at Rajbari Danga in village Jadupur near Chiruti railway station in the Sadar subdivision of Murshidabad district. So Karnasuvarna can now be located with exactitude in the neighbourhood of the excavated site.

The Gupta kings drove out the Kushanas from Murshidabad and ruled over the area till 6th century. Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese traveler wrote about the cultural prosperity of Murshidabad under the Gupta kings. Very recent excavations at a place between Gankar and Umarpur in Murshidabad have brought to light almost 150 coins bearing similarities with those of the Gupta period. Experts have opined that those coins belonged to the 4th-5th century when Bengal was under the rule of the Guptas. The Gupta period constituted a glorious chapter in the history of Murshidabad. But towards the end of the 6th century, the Vanga kingdom became independent and the Gauda Kings rose with their capital at Karnasuvarna. King Ishanavarmana invaded the entire area of Murshidabad and defeated the Guptas. Finally Mahasenagupta of the Gupta dynasty installed his own supremacy over the extensive area of Murshidabad. Shashanka was a vassal chief under him. Sometimes before 606 Shashanka declared his independence, unified the smaller principalities of Bengal and fought for regional power with King Harshavardhana in northern India. The earliest history of Murshidabad is codified in a written form only from the period of Shashanka. King Shashanka made Karnasuvarna his capital.

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To mark the foundation of his capital, he introduced a new Bengali calendar, now known as „Bangla Borsha“ which is a solar calendar. After becoming the King, Shashanka extended his kingdom even to the distant west, for which the boundary of Murshidabad also experienced changes. The Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsang called Karnasuvarna Kie-lo-na-su-fa-la-na that comprised of Birbhum, Murshidabad and northern part of Burdwan of present West Bengal and the Jessore area of present Bangladesh.

According to him, the area was densely populated, the land was low and moist, had a temperate climate, developed agriculture, the inhabitants were wealthy and honest, patronized education and the area had ten viharas. Just beside the capital, there was the Raktamrittika or Lo-to-mi-chi Mahavihara. The Vihara had many storeys and the rooms were spacious. The Mauryan Emperor Ashoka built a stupa in that place. There were also fifty temples and most of the inhabitants were Hindus. After the death of Shashanka in 637, there was a period of political turmoil, disunity and foreign invasion which continued for many years.

Finally in 750, Gopala, a feudal lord of Pundra or Pundravardhana was elected the king of Gauda who established the Pala rule in Bengal with Pundranagara as the capital. The Palas ruled over Murshidabad for about 400 years. The remnants of the kingdom of the Pala king Mahipala at Balanagar, Sagardighi indicate that the king had his capital at Murshidabad.⁹³ When the Sena dynasty was established in the extensive land of Bengal, the major parts of Murshidabad came under the sway of the Senas and they continued to be the last sovereign Hindu rulers before the Muslim rule started in Bengal. Murshidabad, as an urban centre occupied an important place even in the Pathan and Mughal age, the remnants of which can still be found in and around Murshidabad. In the north-western direction from Azimganj railway station in Murshidabad district, there is a small village called Gaysabad on the western bank of Bhagirathi. The historians and archaeologists consider it to be the ruins of an ancient city. It is said that Gaysabad has been named after Sultan Gaysuddin of Gauda. There were two kings of Gauda by the name Gaysuddin. In the

first half of the 13th century, during the rule of Gaysuddin-i-Gaysabad was established. The famous Parganah Fateh Singh on the western bank of river Bhagirathi was the residential area of many aristocratic Muslims. They were well-known in the Pathan rule.

The greatly enlightened king of Gauda, Hussain Shah had close relation with Murshidabad. In the north-eastern direction from Sagardighi railway station, a village called Ek Ani Chandpara is situated. Sayyid Ashraf, the father of Hussain Shah first settled in Chandpara after coming from Tirmiznagar. Hussain Shah married the daughter of the Qazi of Chandpara. Just near Chandpara, Hussain Shah dug a big lake, presently known as Sheikherdigi, the ruins of which can be seen even today. With the end of the Pathan rule in Gauda, the region came under the sway of the Mughals. In place of the independent Pathan rulers, Gauda started to be ruled by the Mughal Subahdars.

When Man Singh arrived at Bengal as the Subahdar, the Pathans united themselves under their leader, Osman. The Mughal army being defeated by Osman's troops fled away through Orissa. When Man Singh arrived at Murshidabad, Osman met him at a place called Sherpur Atai which was near Khargram in the Kandi subdivision of Murshidabad. During the Mughal age, Murshidabad continued to occupy a vital place as an urban centre. Murshidabad became an attractive centre of trade and commerce due to which the European companies flocked at this place in large numbers. The Dutch arrived first of all and in the 17th century they established their factory at Kalikapur, a place adjacent to Kashimbazar, an important centre of trade and commerce. After the Dutch, the English East India Company settled at Kashimbazar, the records of which are available from 1668.

Afterwards the Armenians and the French set up their factories at Saidabad, another notable place of importance near Murshidabad. The Armenian factory was exactly at a place called Sheta Khaner Bazar. Similarly the French factory was at Farashdanga. Murshidabad had historical significance even in the great revolution that took place in Bengal at the end of the 17th century. The revolt was conducted by the zamindar of Burdwan, Shobha Singha who joined hands with

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the Pathan leader Rahim Khan. When Shobha Singha was murdered by the Princess of Burdwan, Rahim Khan acquired the leadership and entered Murshidabad. The owners of the European factories at Kashimbazar had to pay huge amount of money to Rahim Khan to keep him satisfied. Afterwards Prince Azim-us-shan, the grandson of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb became the Subahdar of Bengal and he crushed the revolt. It is very much essential to trace the growth and development of the city of Murshidabad and to judge its significance as the capital of Bengal particularly in the 18th century as during this time the city reached its height of glory. The pre-modern cities of Bengal were characterized by their instability. As mentioned earlier, the towns mostly flourished on the river banks and due to frequent changes in the river courses few towns could take permanent roots. Moreover due to the non-availability of lime and stone in the region and lesser durability of mud and brick structures.

The temporary nature of the towns and cities of Bengal can be ascertained from the frequent changes of capital. In the early 13th century, Nadia was the chief administrative centre, the Muslim rulers later moved it to Gauda. In the middle of the 14th century, the capital was transferred to Pandua, about a century later Pandua was abandoned in favour of Gauda. The Mughals established their capital at Tanda. Towards the end of the 16th century the capital was decided to be shifted to Rajmahal. In 1608, however, the capital was shifted to Jahangirnagar, presently known as Dacca. Finally in 1704, Murshid Quli Jafar Khan, the Diwan of Bengal removed the centre of Diwani from Dacca to Makhsudabad, which was later renamed as Murshidabad after his own name. So it is evident that in the time span of about five hundred years from 1202 onwards the capital of Bengal was changed several times. Murshidabad remained the capital for about seventy years, but these years were also not undisturbed for the progress of the city. If we consider the geographical position of Murshidabad in the 17th century, we will find that at that time the modern Murshidabad district lay within the Sarkar of Satgaon, Tandia and Sharifabad, three of the nineteen Sarkars into which the whole of Mughal Bengal was divided. Satgaon was anciently known as

Saptagram and was situated near the junction of the three rivers-Ganga, Saraswati and Yamuna, about twenty miles north of Calcutta. It was known by the poetic name of Triveni. Tandi means highland, it was situated 15 miles south-east of Malda, just at the place where the Ganga was separated into two branches in those days. Sharifabad included the south-eastern portion of Birbhum and a large portion of Burdwan. In 1722, Murshid Quli Khan redistributed the Subah of Bengal into thirteen large territorial divisions called Chaklas. The Chakla of Murshidabad comprised the whole of the present district of Rajshahi, Bogra, Pabna and Murshidabad together with parts of Birbhum, Malda and Nadia. During the late 18th century, the Chaklas came to be superseded by smaller units, the districts whose names still survive, though the areas to which they apply have been subject to much rearrangement in the later period. One of these districts was Murshidabad. As Murshidabad was the seat of government of the Mughal Nawabs, its administrative control was extended over a wider area than that of any other district.

The history of Murshidabad entered a new phase at the beginning of the 18th century when Murshid Quli Jafar Khan removed the Diwani office from Dacca to Murshidabad. But nothing definite is known about its origin as different views are presented by experts at different times. It is a known fact in history that when Murshid Quli Jafar Khan, the Diwan of Bengal, removed the provincial revenue headquarters from Dacca to Murshidabad in 1704, it came to be called after him, Murshidabad, instead of its former name Mukhsusabad, or the Select City. Sir Jadunath Sarkar mentioned to have heard a very old man, a relic of the bygone Muslim administration, calling it Maqsudabad or the Desirable City.

But neither of these names has been found in any Persian document or European traveller's report before 1680. Sir Jadunath Sarkar conjectured that the city got this name when Shaista Khan settled the administration of Bengal during his second long Viceroyalty of Bengal.

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Its earliest name was Masumabazar or the market town founded by some noble's wife, the word "Masuma" meaning a Chaste Lady. It is first mentioned in the Travels of the Sebastian Manrique, 1629-'43. He writes, "The city of Masumabazar stands on the banks of the Swift Ganges, which separates it from the city of Balighata..... I noticed the abundance of everything in these marts, especially of eatables and house-hold necessities ... besides many kinds of cotton goods, drugs, tobacco, opium....."

This word, Masumabazar, has been distorted in Tavernier's Travels as Made Sou Bazarki, by dropping the nasal sound m in the middle. In 1659 Mir Jumla in the pursuit of Prince Shah Shuja, encamped on a high ground here, which his Persian historian distinctly names as Masuma Bazar and he defeated Shuja in the great battle of Belaghata in its neighbourhood. Ghulam Hussain, the author of Riyaz-us-Salatin opined that a merchant called Makhsus Khan first improved the present site of Murshidabad.

Ain-i-Akbari mentioned about a Makhsus Khan who, as a nobleman, had served in Bengal and Bihar during the last decades of the 16th century. He built a rest house, surrounded it with shops and the place got its name Makhsusabad or Makhsudabad after him. During the 17th century, Murshidabad became well-known for silk and silk textiles. It continued to grow in importance during the second half of the 17th century and afterwards became a Mughal administrative centre. During the 1660s Murshidabad had become a Pargana headquarter and its officers had jurisdiction over the European factories at Kashimbazar. Murshidabad was at the centre of important places of the Subah and on the main line of communication between the Upper Ganga Valley and the Bay of Bengal. It also commanded the settlements of the European companies along the banks of the Bhagirathi and Hughli rivers. We shall consider the history of Murshidabad under Nawab Murshid Quli Khan as the real development of the city as an administrative centre was noticed from that time onwards. Murshid Quli Khan had a personal reason to shift his capital from Dacca to Murshidabad. The Governor of Bengal, Prince Azim-us-shah had made an unsuccessful

attempt to kill Murshid Quli Khan. But there were some administrative, political and commercial reasons also. Dacca had lost its strategic importance as a base of operations against the Maghs and the Portuguese and the military activities of the European traders also influenced Murshid Quli Khan's decision. He moved from Dacca with all his revenue officials and wealthy merchants and bankers. After coming to Makhshudabad he improved the town, raised public offices and other Government establishments and changed its name to Murshidabad after his own name. The city flourished during his time, and became the centre of political, economic and cultural life under the Nawabs of Bengal for more than half a century. Nawab Murshid Quli Khan achieved the posts of Subahdar and Dewan from the Mughal Emperor Muhammad Shah and devoted himself to the task of arranging the land revenue system.¹⁰⁸ He realized the necessity of further dividing the Sarkar in Bengal and accordingly divided Bengal into thirteen provinces or Chaklas. This division was actually the introduction of his zamindari system.

Murshidabad was one of those thirteen Chaklas. It covered large parts of Sarkar Odambar, Jannatabad, Barbaqabad, Sharifabad, etc., some parganas of Satgaon and Chunakhali. It also comprised of some areas of the zamindari of Rajshahi, the fertile land of Kashimbazar, the zamindaris of Birbhum, Nadia, etc., and the famous parganas of Fatehsingh, Asadnagar, etc. The Chakla of Murshidabad, as a whole consisted of 118 Parganas. Nawab Murshid Quli Khan used all his energy to decorate his capital Murshidabad. It gradually developed into a cosmopolitan city having many beautiful buildings owned by the Amirs and wealthy people, large number of temples and mosques, etc. Many zamindars of Bengal constructed their temporary rest-houses in Murshidabad. The family of the Jagat Seths, the famous merchant princes of Murshidabad had their palatial buildings at Mahimapur which added to the beauty of Murshidabad. But above all, the most attractive architectural specimen among the palaces of Murshidabad was the "Palace of Forty Pillars" built by the Nawab himself.¹⁰⁹ In its vicinity was the Chowk or the main market place of Murshidabad. Wealthy merchants and traders added to

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the glory of the city. The Nawab constructed beautiful specimens of architecture in Murshidabad like the Katra masjid

After Murshid Quli Khan, his son-in-law, Shuja-ud-din Muhammad Khan ascended the throne. He made some new constructions in Murshidabad like Nahabatkhana, Tripolia Gate, rest-houses, stables, etc. Then he ordered to make decorative pieces of work for beautifying his palace like jewel-studded carpets, etc. No other Nawab of Bengal spent so much on the pieces of art. The Nawab built a very beautiful garden in Murshidabad on the western bank of the Bhagirathi River. Large number of trees and decorative fountains beautified the garden called Farhabag. Infact, peace and prosperity prevailed in Bengal as the result of his wise and beneficial measures. Shuja-ud-din was fond of pomp and splendour. To add to his architectural contributions he considered the buildings erected in the time of his predecessor unsatisfactory for state-offices. He demolished the old buildings and erected some magnificent edifices at Murshidabad such as a Palace, an Arsenal, a high gateway, Revenue-Court [diwan-khana], a public Audience-Hall, a Private Chamber [Khilawat-Khana], a Farman-Bari and a Court of Exchequer [Khalsa-Kachhari]. Actually, Shuja-ud-din's regime was marked by peace and prosperity. It was the only part of the whole period from Murshid Quli Khan to Mir Qasim with the exception of the last years of Alivardi Khan in which the conduct of the government was in any respect calculated for the improvement of the country. But it is very much unfortunate that the data available about his regime is very scanty. After the death of Nawab Shuja-ud-din on 13th March, 1739, his son Sarfaraz Khan ascended the throne of Bengal. Actually, he did not possess the essential qualities needed for the ruler of a state. The administration of the province fell into confusion and disorder. Accordingly, nothing remarkable was achieved further in the field of urbanisation in Sarfaraz Khan's regime.

After defeating and killing Nawab Sarfaraz Khan in the Battle of Giria in 1740, Alivardi Khan ascended the throne of Bengal. But during the first eleven years of his rule, Alivardi Khan could not devote much attention towards any productive work like extending the area

of his kingdom or capital Murshidabad due to the constant fights against the Marathas. The Marathas ravaged large areas of his kingdom and during his absence dashed on Murshidabad, the capital. The Maratha army reached Dahapara, a suburb of Murshidabad on 6th May, 1742, burnt the bazaar and then crossing over to Murshidabad plundered it for one day, taking three lakhs of rupees. Nawab Alivardi Khan immediately reached Murshidabad on 7th May and drove out the Marathas. But after the Treaty of 1751 with the Marathas, he heaved a sigh of relief and paid some attention towards the process of urbanisation. He then turned his attention towards repairing the towns and villages, which had suffered from the ravages of the Marathas. In spite of that Alivardi Khan could not save his province altogether from the influence of some disruptive forces like the Afghan rebellions and the incursions of the Maghs that disturbed the peace and order of Bengal. The young Prince Siraj-ud-daulah ascended the throne of Bengal in April, 1757 after the demise of his grandfather, Alivardi Khan. He devoted huge amount of time and energy to the urbanisation of Murshidabad by building up magnificent edifices, palaces and ponds. It was very unfortunate that within a short span of time, Nawab Siraj-ud-daulah faced a tragic end at the Battle of Plassey against the English East India Company.

But before being the Nawab, during his grandfather's reign, Siraj built the very beautiful palace of Hirajheel. In this context, it may be said that Siraj was often compared to the great Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan who had a fine taste of architecture. There was a mixture of luxury and architectural style in Siraj's character. Some of the fairs and festivals held in Murshidabad during the rule of Nawab Siraj-ud-daulah also act as witness of the prosperity of Murshidabad as an urban centre. Thousands of people used to assemble at Murshidabad from far and distant places on these occasions. The native people and even the foreigners dressed themselves in royal style and enjoyed the festivities.

Some such special festivals were „Bera“ that was held every year on the last Thursday of the Bengali month of Bhadra and „Nawara“, another important festival. Murshidabad, as an urban centre, especially as

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the capital of Bengal under Nawab Siraj-ud-daulah reached such a high degree of excellence that had no equal among the other contemporary urban centres. In spite of being the administrative headquarter of Bengal, Murshidabad still retained its commercial importance. Actually, the town of Murshidabad began to grow commercially during the second half of the 17th century along with Kashimbazar, six miles distant. So while dealing with the process of urbanisation of Murshidabad, one should have a clear idea about that of Kashimbazar. In fact, Kashimbazar grew earlier than Murshidabad which became its administrative centre while the former remained a manufacturing town mostly catering to cotton and silk production. In March 1668, Francois Bernier in a Memoir to the French Directors Caron and de Faye asked them to establish a factory at Kashimbazar.

Bernier⁴⁹ stated that Kashimbazar is the meeting place of all textiles in Bengal and manufactures all kinds of silk textiles. A legend says that Qasem Khan, after driving out the Portuguese from Hughli in 1632 came to stay at Masumbazar and renamed it Kashimbazar. It was the Jaigir of Mir Jumla during his Subahdarship of Bengal and during the struggle with Shah Shuja this was the military post of both parties. Tavernier came to Kashimbazar in February 1662 and stayed at the Dutch factory. He categorized Kashimbazar as a village for the absence of any inn to stay. He considered this place as the biggest manufacturer of silk in India exporting mostly to Ahmedabad and Surat. In 1676, Streysham Master came to Kashimbazar. He found that Faujdar Balchand Rai was residing at Makhsudabad. Thomas Bowrey narrated that the mint was set up around 1675 at Murshidabad. One of the coins of this mint was dated 6th October 1679.¹²³ Officially Kashimbazar was under Makhsudabad which became the principal town for official transactions. Goods used to go to the port of Hughli for shipment. One could visualize Makhsudabad as the centre of a big complex to which Bhagwangola supplied provisions while Kashimbazar was the manufacturer of raw silk to be carried to Hughli. Makhsudabad controlled the complex.

The European companies including the French used to buy from Kashimbazar and send these down to Hughli. Around Kashimbazar-Makhsudabad complex various types of market-towns called Ganjbegan to grow like Jiaganj, Azimganj, etc. According to the accounts of the Dutch traveler Nicholas de Graff around 1669, Makhsudabad had become an important administrative and financial town around 1670 long before the arrival of MurshidQuli Khan in Bengal in 1700. He praised it as a beautiful city full of merchants and sarafs and a good place for commerce. The town was famous for filigree work. Actually a Diwani office was located at Makhsudabad from the 1680s. Bertrand, a French merchant bought goods at Kashimbazar in 1682 and paid the tax there. The custom office at Kashimbazar was given ijara and the Europeans were asked to pay custom there which they refused in order to avoid duplication. Both the Nawab Ibrahim Khan and Dewan Kafayet Khan stayed at Makhsudabad.

Check your progress –

1. Who was Alivardi Khan?

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2. Where was Kashim Bazar?

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9.3 LETS SUM UP

There were many reasons behind the decline of Murshidabad. After the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and even after the acquisition of Diwani in 1765, the East India Company applied administrative pressures in support of its commercial activities. So the normal pattern of trade was disturbed by political power. The gradual process of decay of the Karkhanas in India was another cause of the decline of

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Murshidabad during the period under review. Another important cause of decline of Murshidabad was the great famine of 1769-70.

9.4 KEYWORDS

Karkhana, Cossimbazar, Battle of Plassey

9.5 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. Write about the urbanization of Murshidabad.
2. Write about decline of Murshidabad

9.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

History of Bengal Vol 2 by R C Majumdar

A History of Bengal by Sir Jadunath Sarkar

9.7 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Hint – 9.2
2. Hint – 9.2

UNIT 10 – ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE

STRUCTURE

10.0 Objective

10.1 Introduction

10.2 Islamic Architecture

10.3 Lets Sum Up

10.4 Keywords

10.5 Questions For Review

10.6 Suggested Readings

10.7 Answers to check your progress

10.0 OBJECTIVE

To learn about the Islamic architecture in medieval Bengal

To learn about the different types of Islamic architecture in Bengal

10.1 INTRODUCTION

United Bengal of deltaic formation. Monsoon climate and fertile land has made this delta a prime habitable land. The history of the settlement in Bengal region is probably more than 3000 years old. This region was ruled by the Buddhist and Hindu rulers till 11th century B.C. The rich civilization and the cities of Gaur

10.2 ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE

The Muslim rule was introduced by the invasion of Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khilji at around 1204 A.D (<http://www.historyfiles.co.uk/KingListsFarEast/IndiaBengal>). In the later years lots of Muslim rulers and saints came in this continent and

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contributed in the construction of Masjid, Madrasa, and Mausoleums. The early Muslim rulers were originated from Turkish or Afghan and they brought the technology and spatial character of the West; specially the Persian style. But through the course of time this style merged with local architectural style and formed a unique style called “Indo-Islamic” style. During the Sultanate period (1342-1576 A.D.) the use of unique building materials, climatic considerations, social and contextual impact on spatial quality has given such prominence in these building forms that it has become identical as “Bengal Style” among the other styles practiced in Indian sub-continent and outside of India in other Muslim countries during 12th-16th century (Husain, 2007). There are some key contextual issues behind the practice of “Bengal Style” in Mosque Architecture during Sultanate period. The term “contextual issues” not only covers the climatic and geographical context but also political and socio-cultural aspects. The objective of this paper is to determine the effect of contextual issues which enforced the design evolution in the architecture of mosques during sultanate period.

Political Background of Bengal in Medieval Period

The timeline of sultanate period in Bengal

(Figure 1) can be counted from 1204 to 1576 A.D. Following the invasion of Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khilji this region was ruled by the governors of Delhi Sultans from 1204-1339 A.D. But most of the time this governors ruled freely without having any direct controls from their sultans. The rivers and marsh land made this region invincible to the foreign invaders. The local governors took the opportunity of the landscape and often declared them as an independent ruler. But due to the minimum duration of the ruling period, most of the governors had very few chances to contribute in architecture and building construction. Among them, Sultan Shamsuddin Firuz Shah ruled for 21 years (1301-1322 A.D.) and it was the longest duration for a single ruler. Firuz Shah was the founder of “Pandua Nagar” and few other buildings (Figure 2). It is assumed that many other buildings were founded by the “Gazi’s, who were the saint come warriors and worked as a joint force with the governors to expand the glory of Islam. Most of the

“Gazi” came from Persian-Turkish region and Syria. They brought the construction technique and design approach with them which actually founded the design ideology of “Bengal Style” in later phases (Husain, 2007).

After the governors, this region came under the rule of Ilias Shahi family at around 1342 A.D. Their ruling period was divided in two phases e.g. Early Ilias Shahi (1342-1412 A.D.) and later Ilias Shahi (1436-1487 A.D.) Ilias Shah was the first ruler of the Ilias Shahi family and he was the first independent ruler without the control from Delhi Sultanate. The mosque architecture during this time had a prominent impact of Persian style in the spatial organization and building scale. The largest mosque of Bengal phases of Ilias Shahi regime there was another ruler called king Ganasha, who came in power at the death of Alauddin Firuz Shah (the successor of Ilias Shahi family) at 1414 A.D. At the death of king Ganasha, his son Jodu came in throne of Sultanate at 1418 A.D. Within a few days he converted himself from Hindu to Muslim by taking Islam as his religion and was titled as Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah. His contribution in the “Bengal Style” was the innovation of “Eklakhi Style” which was the outcome of single dome prototype structure considering low-cost construction with minimalist design attitude. Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah was in the power of sultanate from 1418-1436 A.D.

Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah was one of the successors of Ilias Shahi family and he took the power of Bengal sultanate at 1436 A.D. He and his successors were in power till the murder of Fateh Shah at around 1486 A.D. these 50 years were counted as one of the golden era in the field of architecture, literature and economical development (Husain, 2007). Apart from the rulers, there were some saintwarriors who contributed in the spread of Islam and construction of some mosques. Among them Khan-e-Jahan was most famous for his contribution in the development and practice of Bengal style in his works. He had good relationship with both the ruler and the general mass. Most notable Khan-E-Jahan works are Sixty Dome Mosque and his own Mausoleum at Bagerhat, Khulna. The Sixty dome mosque was completed before his death at 1459 A.D. After the murder of Fateh Shah at around 1486 A.D., this continent was ruled by the Abyssinian Rulers from 1487-1493 A.D.

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These six years were counted as one the darkest era of this region having political clash and corruption. At the death of Shamsuddin Mozaffar Shah at 1493 A.D. this region again came under the rule of Sultanate and the ruler was Sayed Hossain. The regime of his Family (1493-1538 A.D.) is known as Hossain Shahi Era. The Hossain Shah himself and his successors carried out the Bengal Style in Mosque construction by following the design elements and fenestration of Khan-e-Jahan style. Giyasah Uddin Mahmood was last ruler of Hossain Shahi Family and he completely failed to continue his ancestor's glorious past. He lost his throne to the Sher shah and thus the Era of sultanate end at around 1576 A.D. (Husain, 2007). More than 200 years of Sultanate period (1342-1576 A.D.) was comparatively stable and free from outsider's invasion. Due to this stability, some of the rulers successfully contributed their effort and resources to the mosque construction and developed the unique "Bengal Style".

Local Context and Building Materials

It has been discussed earlier that the Islamic rule had been introduced in this continent through the 'Nodia' invasion of Ikhtiyar Uddin Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khilji at around 1204 A.D. for the next hundred years the governors of Delhi sultanate and some 'Gazi's' were in the control of power. These rulers first introduced the mosque architecture in Bengal region having the spatial concept and façade articulation of Persian and Byzantine architecture. Before the introduction of Islam, the Bengal region was ruled by the Buddhist and Hindu kings. They built lots of temples and other structures. The Muslim rulers found long practiced building construction technique by the local masons and they were also introduced by the use of brick and terracotta work. Though most of the buildings were demolished which were constructed in governor's regime due to the using of nondurable materials, one mosque can be noted specially for its partial existence till today. That is Zafar Khan Gazi mosque, which was built by bricks but later had a stone cladding over it for the durability and aesthetic properties (Hasan, 1989). This mosque shows the existence of interior column, multi-dome roof, use of arches for structural load distribution and the use of 'squinch' to distribute the load of domes. Local masons

were used to build temples, which were solidly built and had very little interior space inside. Thick walls of temples could take the load of 'shikhara', which could reach up to 15-21m high.

Unfortunately in a mosque, the interior space had to be free of obstruction and it requires a large pavilion like space for prayer in multiple rows. That is why the Muslim builders faced a great challenge while working with the local masons. First they had to choose brick instead of stone as the main building material. But main structural elements like base and column were entirely made of stones though it was rare in the Bengal region. Stone slab or beam had a problem while taking load in large span. Therefore, the entrance and hallways were made of brick arches and the arches were topped by dome on them. The size of the dome was depended on the width of the arches. This system is called the pendentive system and it was imported from Persian and Byzantine construction technique. The introduction of arch and dome was evolved from structural solution rather than Islamic symbolism and early mosques in Bengal region had direct influence of the mosque architecture practiced in Delhi that time (Husain, 2007).

In the regime of Sikandar Shah (Son of Ilias Shah) the largest mosque was built named 'Adina Mosque' at 1373 A.D (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adina_Mosque) (Figure 3). It was in the urban area of his administrative center at Pandua (Husain, 2007). The enormous size of the mosque represents the political power and dignity of the ruler and could accommodate huge number of peoples during prayer (Husain, 2007). Adina mosque is the only mosque in Bengal, which had direct influence of Arab mosques in spatial organization (Figure 4). Even it had great similarity in plan with Qwat-ul-Islam mosque at Delhi, which was founded by Qutub Uddin Aibek almost hundred years earlier. Both of the mosques had a central courtyard surrounded by a pillared hall. This complex module of spatial arrangement was commonly seen in the Arabian and Persian region. The central nave which leads to 'Mihrab' was covered by huge vaults due to the wider span than the other areas. The pillared hallway was covered by the domes supported by the pendentives and columns (Figure 5). Though the main building material was brick, but lower part of the walls were covered by stones. Adina

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mosque is not the true example of 'Bengal Style' due its direct influence of western world, but this mosque clearly represented the power and dedication of the builder through its scale, structural innovation and the majestic appearance. Both the innovations and the failures in Adina mosque were the inspiration for the mosque builders of later phases. This huge Mosque is considered as a prominent example of Early Ilias Shahi style (Husain, 2007).

When the Muslim builders started to build small mosques, they had taken the inspiration from the form of rural homestead or 'Hut' (Figure 6). Apart from the temples, it was the only built form type from which they could be inspired to respect the climatic context and achieve the acceptance from the local mass. The first outcome of respecting the local context, building material and inspired by the origin can be seen in the tomb of Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah, which was a single dome structure with thick walls and known as 'Eklakhi Tomb' (Figure 7 & 8) (Hasan, 2007). The innovation in the Eklakhi style was the representation of rural hut having curved cornice for rainwater drainage and symbolized the pitched roof (Husain, 2007). The corner minarets with circular bands represented the bamboo support in rural huts. The dome in this structure was revolutionary because of its size. The Eklakhi style was minimalist in design approach and it was cost efficient. It also generated the concept of independent model of the mosque for a small community (Hasan, 1989). In later phases lots of mosques were built having single dome over the main prayer area. The curved cornice and minarets with bands at each corner became the symbol of 'Bengal Ilias shahi family came in power for the second time through Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah. He and his successors ruled this continent peacefully and had great contribution in mosque architecture. The Bengal style in mosque architecture got prominence and became profound in their regime. They had introduced mixed structural system in independent models and built a number of small mosques for local community. The notable Example of this phase is the Chamkatti Mosque (Figure 9) at Gaur, Maldah (<http://www.asikolkata.in/maldah.aspx>). It was founded by the Yousuf Shah at 1475 A.D. An additional approach verandah with the main prayer area is the unique feature of this mosque. Similar feature can also

be seen in the 'Lottan Mosque' (Figure 10), but Chamkatti Mosque was much older than it. Unlike the Eklakhi tomb, the wall in the Chamkatti Mosque was thinner; less than 1.5m wide. The Squinch at each corner takes the load of the central dome. The verandah was topped by the 'Chowchala Vault' at the central grid and one small vault at both sides (Husain, 2007).

The vault was made having the similarity with the "Chow-Chala roof" of rural hut (Hasan, 2007). By using the Vault over the central nave of the verandah represents both local heritage and structural symbolism. The vault over the central nave became so popular that many of the large mosques had this feature in later decades. Another feature that made Chamkatti mosque special was the using of stone at the base and beneath the arches to reduce decay and increase the structural strength. Using of the mixed material is also a part of innovation in this unique mosque which added additional features in 'Bengal style'.

Khan Jahan was a Saint-warrior who came in Bengal during the regime of Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah (1418-1432 A.D.) (Husain, 2007). He conquered the Khulna and Jessor region under the command of Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmood and became the governor of that area (http://www.banglapedia.org/HT/H_0136.HTM). After conquering, Khan Jahan formed a city and named it "Khalifatabad" (Zakaria, 2007). He ruled there for more than forty years and during that period he developed a unique architectural style in mosque architecture which is known as "Khan Jahan Style". He had developed an independent prototype composed of pendentive and dome. Repeating this single prototype in rows can generate the horizontal expansion of prayer space. This invention virtually opened the opportunity to build a large mosque under a single roof; though the roof was composed of multiple domes. Having this prototype, he built 'Sixty Dome Mosque' at Bagerhat, Khulna (Figure 11) at around 1459 A.D.

It was the second largest mosque in Bengal (after the Adina mosque) and was the most notable work of Khan Jahan. The size of the mosque was 48m x 32.45m and interior space was composed of eleven bays and six rows. The mosque was also used as the Madrassa and Darber hall in

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between prayer times. Though it was known as Sixty Dome Mosque, the number of dome is actually 70 (Zakaria, 2007). The Middle bay is rectangular and topped by seven “Chow-chala” Vaults and it is wider than the other grids which are square in shape. The structural system is pendentive system (Figure 12) having slender stone columns beneath the brick arches and a hemi-spherical dome over it. Khan Jahan showed the respect to the local heritage and climatic context by using curved cornice, “Chow-chala” vault, Corner Minarets with bands (which elements were used in previous mosques) and austere building aesthetics (Zakaria, 2007).

The Minarets are circular in plan where previous mosques had octagonal plan. The simplicity in façade treatment and pavilion like interior space made this mosque unique. The spatial and structural achievements of sixty dome mosque was followed in later phases, e.g. during Hossain Shahi regime. But those mosques had little contribution in the structural innovation and symbolic representation rather those were famous for their rich and detailed façade decoration (Husain, 2007)

Chronological Contextual Development of Bengal Style Mosques Architecture

In the light of structural innovation, respecting local context and climatic consideration, four most influential mosque of Bengal have been discussed. These mosques show a chronological development in the structural innovation and as well as symbolic representation of local built forms. These unique characters differentiated these mosques from the other mosques in other Muslim countries of medieval era.

It is clear that the ruler, who was in the throne for a long time had notable contribution in the mosque architecture in Bengal. Thus, the stability in political power became one of the key contextual issues in the evolution and development of “Bengal Style” in mosque architecture. Again, Socio-cultural aspect and location also determined the size and detailing of a mosque. Most of the mosques outside of the main administrative area were small and single domed, where the mosques in the main city were larger due to accommodate larger mass of population and spatial demand. The climatic force like monsoon had pushed the

builders to build the structures with better drainage properties. From this challenge the design of curved cornice has evolved by the idea and inspiration from the rural hut. The symbolic representation of hut in mosques also got the appreciation from local mass. Thus the climatic, political and socio-cultural aspects enforced the development of “Bengal Style” in mosque architecture.

Mosque Architecture (1205-1765) was introduced by the Muslims for the ritual needs of their religion, Islam after the establishment of Muslim rule in Bengal. Mosque architecture was different from those of the Buddhists and Hindus. Differences were due to the different nature of participation that was required. In temples, a Brahmin priest performed the rituals before the image of a deity; he alone entered the sanctum while the rest of the devotees waited outside.

The Muslims needed a large space for congregational prayer, especially on Fridays, when all men were required to perform the prayer collectively. There was no sanctum with a sacred image, and all worshipers had to stand in rows behind the imam who led the prayer. The only indispensable architectural feature was the mihrab, the niche in the qibla wall (western in South Asia) that directed the worshippers towards the Kaba in Mecca, their holiest shrine; the orientation prescribed for ritual prayer. During the Sultanate the Friday (jami) mosque became very important as an official building because the khutba (sermon delivered before the mandatory collective prayer) gave official recognition to the ruler, and also worked as a declaration of sovereignty. It expressed piety, and was a potent visual symbol of the power, ideology, and affiliation of the sponsor.

MosqueArchitecture.jpg

Numerous mosques were built during the five and a half centuries of Muslim rule before the British colonial period, but a few landmark monuments have been chosen to illustrate how mosque styles developed in Bengal (both the Indian state of West Bengal as well as Bangladesh). bakhtiyar khalji (1205-06), the founder of Muslim rule in Bengal, had constructed several mosques, madrasas and khanqas, all centred on the capital, lachnauti. But unfortunately, extant monuments are few from the

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13th and early 14th centuries, the only firmly dated mosque of the period being Zafar Khan Ghazi's Mosque (1298 AD), now in ruins, in Tribeni (Hughli district; West Bengal, India).

It is a large multi-domed rectangular, hypostyle building of brick with stone veneer (fig.1). Brick, easily manufactured from the abundantly available clay of the delta, has been the traditional building material of Bengal from ancient times, as seen in the ruined, but monumental mainamati and paharpur monasteries in Bangladesh (7th to 12th centuries).

Stone was not available locally, and during the early part of Muslim rule it was often quarried from pre-existing temples, as seen in Zafar Khan Ghazi's mosque. Stone columns divide the interior into two aisles, each with five square bays, covered by small domes. Each one of the five bays in front has an entrance, opposite which is a mihrab in the qibla wall. Such a line-up of multiple mihrabs is absent from mosques in the central Islamic lands as only one is sufficient to signify direction. The alternative interpretation, that the mihrab symbolized the place where the Prophet stood in the first mosque of Madina, also dictates a single mihrab. This convention of multiple mihrabs axially aligned to entrances seems to have local roots, and may be traced to temple architecture, where an image niche is opposite every entrance into the sanctuary. This mihrab-entrance organisation and the rectangular shape remained popular in Bengal mosques throughout the Sultanate period. The building appears squat because the front row of arches springs directly from huge piers. The ornamentation is both in stone and terracotta, and some in a 15th century style suggestive of remodeling in later times. The inscription tablet on the central mihrab refers to Zafar Khan as a warrior and to the building as a madrasa, indicating that the mosque served a dual purpose.

The adina mosque in hazrat pandua of Maldah district; west bengal, dated to 770 AH (1369 AD) is the only dated mosque of the 14th century which corresponds roughly to the rule of the independent Iliyas Shahi rulers (1338-1413). It is unique not only because it is the largest mosque in South Asia, but because it is the only one in Bengal with an enclosed courtyard (fig. 2), an important feature in the traditional mosque plan of

the central Islamic lands of West Asia. Built in the new capital by Sultan Sikandar Shah (1358-89) who had successfully repelled the attack of Sultan Firuz Shah Tughlaq of Delhi, it is clearly conceived as an expression of the glory and authority of the new dynasty.

Its main prayer chamber had a great vaulted central nave (fig. 3), now collapsed, that divided it into two wings and related it closely to the Great Mosque of Damascus, the earliest extant mosque in Islam built by the Umayyad caliph al-Walid in 87 AH (706 AD). The early mosques of Delhi and Ajmer have enclosed courtyards, but no naves. Perhaps Sikandar Shah, seeking additional sources of legitimacy, had both nave and courtyard to reinforce his affiliation to Islamic lands beyond India; accordingly, in the foundation inscription he declares himself to be 'the most liberal and the most perfect of the kings of Arabia and Persia'.

Mosques with huge enclosed courtyards were never built again, because they did not suit the soil, climate, and needs of the community; large, open courtyards were not very useful in a monsoonic region like Bengal. The nave, later used rarely, was built cautiously with adaptations, perhaps because local craftsmen were not experienced in executing vaults of such massive proportions.

Another unusual feature in the Adina, repeated again in a number of mosques sponsored by sultans or high officials, is the takht or raised platform in the northwestern corner, which functioned as a maqsura (royal enclosure). This was screened off from the rest of the mosque; had a separate entrance in the northwest approached by a ramp from the outside, and could be used by the king and his entourage.

Each wing of the prayer chamber was organised along the same principles as the mosque in Tribeni; columns form numerous square bays, each one covered by a dome, and the qibla wall has a mihrab opposite every entrance in front, so that there is a staggering number of three hundred and six domes and forty one mihrab niches. The stone veneer has been re-used with a much better understanding than the helter-skelter manner in which plundered material was used in earlier mosques; mihrab interiors with hanging lamp motifs were carved specifically for the mosque. The terracotta motifs of the mihrab

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tympanums are noteworthy for their excellent craftsmanship. The tradition of carving had pre-Islamic precedents; the Buddhist/Hindu sculptor who made religious images of imported stone had enjoyed a higher status than makers of terracotta. With the advent of Islam, which did not make use of stone images, mosques were lavishly decorated in terracotta. By supporting terracotta, the Muslim rulers elevated the status of the terracotta artist. Some traces of coloured tiles and painted plaster remain. In the nave, to the north of the central mihrab, is a carved stone mimbar (pulpit from where the imam delivers his Friday sermon) approached by a staircase.

A typical Bengal style of architecture with salient features derived from the rural hut evolved in the 15th century; the eklakhi mausoleum in Hazrat Pandua, Maldah district, West Bengal, (fig. 4) being most significant in this development. It is believed to be the tomb of Sultan jalaluddin muhammad shah, the converted son of raja ganesha, and his family.

The first Muslim sultan of Bengali origin, he favored a style with indigenous roots. The tomb re-established brick alone as the primary building material, and its form, a single-domed square building with curved cornice and roof, squat hemispherical drumless dome, engaged corner towers, and terracotta ornamentation, influenced all subsequent buildings, particularly mosques, the only building type that has survived in large numbers.

The hut was the model for a type of pre-Islamic Buddhist/Hindu temple (bhadra), examples of which are found in Myanmar. Antecedents of these must have existed in Bengal, because from here ideas of religion and religious buildings spread further east. References to temples in manuscript paintings and stone sculpture also prove that ancient Buddhist /Hindu temples were small square structures ultimately based on the village hut. They had straight cornices, and roofs crowned with xikhara or stupa, the signifiers of function and denominational affiliation.

The Eklakhi and subsequent buildings differed in elevation because they always had curved cornices and roofs crowned with domes. They did not replicate the entire thatched roof because domes had the symbolic

function to broadcast the presence of Islam in a largely non-Islamic environment. They imitate the curvature of thatched roofs of the rural chala huts of Bengal. These are generally single-roomed structures with a roof sloping down in two segments (do- chala) or four (chau- chala), away from the centre of the room. The top ridge where the segments meet, as well as the eaves on the lower edge, are curved because of the flexible nature of the bamboo frame that supports the thatch. The stocky, octagonal corner towers which emphasize the solidity of the Eklakhi may have been inspired by the corner posts of a hut, which bear its fabric but are usually hidden from view. Jalaluddin's seventeen-year reign heralded the beginning of an era when the sultanate firmly grounded itself in the culture of the land, and the style of the Eklakhi reflects the new outlook. Incorporation of hut forms into a brick medium became so popular that the style persisted even after the restoration of the old Iliyas Shahi house in 1435.

The Bengal style is well reflected in the architecture of the restored Iliyas Shahi (1433-1486) and husain shah (1494-1538) periods, much of which is located in Lakhnauti, later called gaur, the capital. The international border between India and Bangladesh runs through this ancient walled city, both parts are still known as Gaur. The buildings reflect the absence of any need for monumental symbols and fit in well with local culture, which even in pre-Islamic times lacked structures on a monumental scale, the Mainamati and Paharpur monasteries being rare exceptions. The sultans no longer had the air of foreign rulers whose buildings must symbolize political power or the majesty of religion. Mosques of modest size suggest that the Muslims had begun to feel accepted in Bengal.

Instead of trying to impress people with imposing architecture, they concentrated on their own ritual needs by building small, practical mosques that fitted in with the local building tradition. Numerous small, square, single-domed mosques inspired by the Eklakhi tomb, and some medium sized, rectangular, hypostyle mosques with multiple bays and domes are extant from this time onwards.

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A good example of the 15th century style is the mosque in Rampal (Munshiganj district, Bangladesh), dated 888 AH (1483). It is named after Baba Adam Shahid, traditionally known to be an early martyr of Islam, whose tomb is nearby. It is a medium-sized, rectangular, hypostyle mosque with three bays and two aisles covered by six domes (fig.5). Decoration during this century was subordinated to the building design, so that there is no excess of ornamentation. Large decorated panels stand out in high relief against plain walls, as in the Eklakhi Mausoleum. A thin layer of lime wash, once probably painted, is sometimes still visible on the surface of the terracotta plaques.

Sometimes a verandah would be added to the front, just as in a residential hut, with additional engaged towers in the exterior where the verandah joined the prayer chamber. Examples of small and large mosques with verandahs are the gopalganj mosque in Dinajpur dated 865 AH (1460), where the prayer chamber is only 4 metre square; and the darasbari mosque in Gaur dated 884 AH (1479) with a 30.32 metre ' 11.81 metre rectangular prayer chamber, both in Bangladesh (fig.6 and7). The verandahs used a variety of roofing devices: cross-vaults, as in the Gopalganj Mosque; or domes; or combinations, as in the Darasbari Mosque. Built by Sultan Yusuf Shah in 884 AH the latter once had a maqsura in the northwest corner approached by a flight of steps outside the north wall. The terracotta decoration that fills the tympana of the mihrabs in the interior is remarkable for its liveliness and deep relief.

Deviations within the style prove the dynamism of 15th century architecture. From the middle of this century there is a homogenous group of monuments in southern Bengal known after Khan Jahan. His title 'Ulugh Khan-I-Azam' suggests that he was an ethnic Turk and a high ranking officer in the Bengal Sultanate. He is popularly credited with Islamising and clearing forests in the area that now comprises the Bagerhat, Khulna, Jhenaidah, Jessore, and Patuakhali districts of Bangladesh. He is said to have founded Khalifatabad, with its administrative centre of Haveli Khalifatabad, presently identified with Bagerhat. The majority of the Khan Jahan style mosques are located in this area.

They range from very large to small in size, and include an unusual square, nine-domed type. Although rooted in the 15th century architectural tradition of Bengal, their stark, unadorned exteriors, circular engaged corner towers, and massive appearance show considerable influence from Tughluq architecture of Delhi. The most important example of this group is the shatgumbad mosque in Bagerhat, the largest mosque in Bangladesh (fig. 8). The mosque has eleven bays and seven aisles, with the largest bay in the centre. This central bay is divided into seven independent, rectangular bays that are covered by the chau'-challas; this being the earliest use of the form in Bengal. It connects the largest entrance in the east to the largest mihrab, and divides the mosque into northern and southern wings.

The interiors of the miniature chau-challas have thin, raised bands of brick that imitate the rafters and purlins of bamboo hut frames. The rest of the bays also terminate in mihrabs except the one immediately north of the central mihrab, which has an entrance doorway reserved for the imam so that he can enter directly from behind the mosque.

There are seven entrances each on the north and south sides. It seems that the stone pillars once had brick casings, because there are traces of brickwork around some of their bases. The bare exterior walls are articulated by recesses. The curved cornice comes to a point over the central arched doorway in the east, resulting in a triangular shaped pediment, which is probably derived from the gable ends of do-chala huts. The four circular tapering corner towers are domed, and the two in front have staircases inside, making these the only ascendable towers attached to a mosque in this period. The monumental gateway in the east indicates that there was probably once an enclosing wall around the mosque.

Besides the tomb in Bagerhat the only other dated monument in the Khan Jahan group is the masjidbari mosque of 876 AH (1471-72 AD) in Mirzaganj, Patuakhali district. This mosque not only indicates the extent of influence of the Khan Jahan Style, but also helps us map the southern limits of Sultan Barbak Shah's kingdom to whose reign it is dated. It is also the only extant mosque with a large chau- -chala vault covering the

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entire verandah. The interior of the vault shows how meticulously the terracotta decoration was used to simulate the patterns of woven bamboo strips

Three of the four nine-domed mosques in Bangladesh, the nine-domed mosque in Bagerhat, the masjidkur mosque in Khulna, and the qasba mosque in Barisal are in the Khan Jahan style; the satoir mosque in Faridpur, being of a slightly later date. Fairly large in size, in plan and elevation they are enlargements of the square, single-domed type of mosque. A typical one is the Masjidkur Mosque in Khulna where the interior is about 12.19 metres square and the walls are 2.20 metres thick (fig. 10).

Four pillars in the centre divide the interior into nine equal square bays, each one covered by a dome. There are three entrances on each of the east, north and south sides. According to convention, the three mihrabs in the west wall are on axis with the front entrances. The only earlier building of this plan is the chamber attached to the west wall of the Adina Mosque in Hazrat Pandua, popularly believed to be the tomb of Sultan Sikandar Shah, the patron of the Adina.

There are no pre-Islamic examples of nine-bayed buildings in Bengal, but such mosques are known, though not common, throughout the Islamic world; they are rare in other parts of India. In Bengal they were discontinued after the Sultanate period, but there are nine-bayed tombs in later Mughal times throughout the subcontinent. The building type, perhaps imported from the central Islamic lands, became popular because it was entirely covered, and thus met the need for sheltered space for assembly in Bengal. In usage it became thoroughly Bengalised, and gives the impression of a large square building where the single-domed square unit has been multiplied. A nine-domed building was the only solution if a symmetrical enlargement of the popular square, single-domed mosque was desired, while still retaining the emphasised central mihrab. Compared to the smallness of the single-domed mosques, these were large and most certainly built for the Friday congregation.

Sultanate architecture of the 16th century includes buildings of the Husain Shahi (1494-1538), Suri (1538-63) and Karrani periods (1563-

1575), before the takeover by the Mughals in 1576. The general peace and prosperity brought about by the Husain Shahi rulers resulted in a large number of buildings of a rather uniform style. Although the Bengal style spread as far as Bihar and Assam at this time, there was nothing outstanding or innovative in design. Craftsmen seemed to occupy themselves with refining decoration and details.

There are several mosques both in West Bengal and Bangladesh that represent this late Sultanate style. Tiles, which had appeared in a restrained manner in the 14th (Adina Mosque) and 15th (Khan Jahan's Tomb) centuries, are now in profusion as in the lattan mosque in Gaur, West Bengal. Stone is also sometimes used to encase brick, as in the Bara Sona and Chhota Sona mosques in Gaur, (West Bengal, and Bangladesh), Sura and the Kusumba mosques in Dinajpur and Raishahi, Bangladesh.

The Chhota Sona Mosque in Gaur (fig. 11) dates by inscription to the reign of Sultan Alauddin Husain Shah (1494-1519), and was built by one Wali Muhammad, a high official in the royal court. This rectangular mosque is completely faced with stone in the exterior, while inside there is stone up to the springing of the arches. Pillars, pilasters, and the maqsura platform in the northwest corner are of stone. Cunningham also reports seeing screens of trelliswork, now disappeared, which used to partition off the platform, entrance to which was from the exterior northwest side. In this five-bayed mosque the central bay is wider than the others and has chau-chala vaults instead of domes, as in the earlier Shatgumbad and Darasbari mosques.

There is abundant stone carving in low relief in the exterior, and ornamental niches within rectangular panels, rosette and kalasa (pot) motifs that are used repeatedly. There are similar motifs in the mihrabs inside, but the central mihrab is bare and the stone structure is now believed to be in the Royal Scottish Museum in Edinburgh.

The bagha mosque in Rajshahi (fig. 12) was built by Sultan Nusrat Shah (1519-32), son of Husain Shah in 930 AH (1523-24). This rectangular mosque is within an enclosed courtyard, to be entered by a gate. Four pillars in the north-south direction divide the interior space into two

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aisles and five bays, each of the resulting ten bays being covered by a dome. The presence of a mihrab on an upper level in the northwestern bay indicates there was a maqsura platform in that corner that must have been approached by a flight of stairs in the east, although no trace of platform or staircase exists.

It is also possible that a platform was planned but never built. The mosque is profusely decorated with terracotta, and the style is so distinctive that several monuments are dated stylistically to the early 16th century on the basis of similarity to the 'Bagha style'. Rectangular panels with cusped arches and hanging motifs are predominant in the decorative scheme (fig. 13).

The hanging ornament has lost its earlier vegetal quality and become highly ornamental, approximating jewelry design. The rectangular frames of the three large mihrabs in the interior have panels with niches holding flowering rose, fruiting pomegranate and mango trees.

The Mosque at Kusumba, Rajshahi, dated by inscription to 966 AH (1558-59), is a rectangular six-domed mosque of two aisles and three bays whose exterior is entirely faced with stone (fig. 14). It is one of the last major monuments of the Sultanate period, and recalls plans of the earlier mosque of Muazzampur of 1435-36 and Baba Adam's Mosque at Rampal of 1483 in Bangladesh. It also anticipates the single-aisled, three-bayed plans of the end of the 16th century.

The stone-faced interior and exterior, curved cornice, engaged corner turrets, and the maqsura platform in the northwest corner belong to the tradition of the Chhoto Sona Mosque.

The platforms of these two non-imperial mosques prove that they were used not only by the king, but others of high position to separate themselves from the masses during prayer. All the decoration is on carved stone, and on the exterior a prominent moulding divides the wall into upper and lower sections. The outside stone facing is coarse and the carving is in shallow relief. Inside, the mihrabs and the platform supports are very elaborately carved. There are bunches of grapes, serpentine vines, and kalasas; tendrils and rosettes are reduced to dots (fig. 15). Although akbar conquered Bengal in 1576, it was many decades before

the resistance of powerful local landlords could be crushed, and it was only in 1613 that the whole of Bengal was firmly integrated into the Mughal empire. Two mosques in Bangladesh built by the Qaqshals, one of the rebel Afghan clans, occupy key positions in the transformation of the Sultanate style to Mughal.

These are the chatmohar mosque, Pabna, dated 989 AH (1581-82), and the Kherua mosque in Sherpur (fig. 16) dated 989 AH (1582). These mosques used the single-aisled, three-bayed plan, which was to become the plan par excellence for Mughal mosques in Bengal from the 17th century onwards. In elevation the octagonal corner towers, the curved cornice, low drumless domes, brick surface and pointed arches link them to the Sultanate style.

In contrast to the buildings of the Sultanate period, which have a marked regional character, Mughal buildings are constructed within the imperial tradition of Delhi and Agra, but are more subdued than contemporary architecture elsewhere in the subcontinent. As in Sultanate times, Mughal mosques consist of only a prayer hall, which is now single-aisled with three or five bays. The exterior surfaces are plastered and paneled, the cornices are straight, and the buildings look less ponderous than Sultanate ones because of the higher domes.

A refined Mughal provincial style was developed in the capital city of Dhaka in the 17th century. The Lalbagh Fort Mosque in Dhaka dated 1059 AH (1649) and 1194 AH (1780) conforms to the typical Mughal mosque plan. Located inside the fort, closest to the river, it was probably the earliest building on the site (fig. 17).

Lateral arches in the interior divide the rectangular structure into three bays, the central one being the largest. The building is plastered, and the entire east facade is divided into small rectangular panels; the engaged tapering corner turrets have regularly spaced horizontal mouldings. The three doors in front are placed within recessed arches with half-domes ornamented with faceted stucco motifs. The straight cornice is embellished with a row of merlons; its height varies, the central section, which corresponds to the largest bay, being the highest. Inside, the north

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and south walls have panels like the exterior, and the stucco motifs of the entrances are repeated in the three mihrabs.

The 1780 date, now whitewashed, must refer to the restoration of the mosque when the domes were reconstructed, because fluted domes such as these, especially like the side ones which have a restricted shape, are more common in the late 18th century architecture of Murshidabad. The domes, placed over drums, are higher than their Sultanate counterparts.

The satgumbad mosque in Dhaka, also of the second half of the 17th century, has a unique character (fig. 18). Although the main prayer chamber has the regular three-bayed plan, enormous double-storied, domed corner pavilions replace the usual engaged turrets. The three domes of the prayer chamber together with the four corner ones add up to a total of seven, thus giving the mosque its name.

While mosques in Dhaka reflect the imperial style of Delhi, the Sultanate style lived on in several mosques that were built away from the capital. The atiya mosque in Tangail district in Bangladesh was built in 1018 AH (1609) by Sayyid Khan Panni. It is a single-domed, square mosque with a three-domed verandah in front, engaged octagonal corner towers and curved cornice.

Its weightiness, suggested by the relatively small entrance arches as well as the ornamental style of the exterior surface which is broken up into numerous small niches (fig. 19), recalls Sultanate monuments, eg the kadam rasul (1530) and jahaniyan mosque (1535) of Gaur, West Bengal.

But the drums of the domes, the lotus finials, and the merlon decoration are Mughal. Sadi mosque in Egarasindur, Bangladesh dated 1062 AH (1652) is another mosque that harks back to Sultanate times.

Two mosques in Dhaka dating from the early 18th century mark the termination of the high tradition of Mughal architecture which had begun a hundred years earlier.

These are kartalab khan's mosque in Begumbazar, which he reportedly built during his residence in Dhaka between 1700-1703, and Khan Muhammad Mridha's Mosque in Lalbagh dated by inscription to 1116 AH (1704-05). Both are built on raised terraces with vaulted rooms in the

plinth that were used for shops or for madrasa students. Both are single-aisled, and while Mridha's Mosque has three bays, Kartalab Khan's has five. An unusual feature of Kartalab Khan's Mosque is the room with a pitched do-chala roof with drooping eaves that is attached to the north side of the mosque (fig. 20)

By 1717 murshidabad became the last Mughal capital of Bengal. The earliest surviving and most significant of the monuments that were built to embellish this capital is the Jami Mosque, also known as the katra mosque, built 1137 AH \1724-25 (fig. 21). The name comes from the domed chambers that surround the mosque on all four sides, which are locally known to have served as a market but have been described also as a madrasa. In accordance to his wishes, murshid quli khan was buried under the entrance to this mosque.

The largest Mughal mosque in Bengal, the Katra Mosque is now ruined. This single-aisled, five-bayed mosque sits on a high plinth about 54 metres square. Although the plan is typically Mughal, its massiveness, and the ornamental style of its exterior surface, like the Atiya recalls the Jahaniyan Mosque of Gaur of Sultanate times, and contrasts with the elegant Mughal buildings in Dhaka. The rounded shape of the cusped arches may indicate an early European influence, and the harking back to the Sultanate style symbolizes the break with Delhi just as quarrels among the successors of aurangzeb was leading to the decline of Mughal power there.

Check your progress –

1. Where is Adina Mosque?

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2. Where is Boro Shona Mosjid?

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10.3 LETS SUM UP

The sultanate period was a glorious time for the development of “Bengal Style” in mosque architecture. The Bengal style was unique among the other styles practiced in Indian subcontinent and outside of India in other Muslim countries during 12th-15th century in terms of structural innovation and addressing contextual issues. Those mosques and design philosophy lasted for hundreds of years in our continent and considered as the inspirational works for the rulers and builders of later phases, like: Mughol (Imamudin et al., 1985) and colonial regime. Detail study of the “Bengal Style” can also provide us some design ideas which we can incorporate with the modern design and construction technique and glorify our past heritage.

10.4 KEYWORDS

Islamic architecture, Building materials, Climate, Context, Bengal style.

10.5 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. Elaborate about the mosques under Alivardi Khan.
2. Elaborate about the Islamic architecture under Sultans.

10.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

Alexander Cunningham, Report of a Tour in Bihar and Bengal in 1879-80,

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10.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR POGRESS

1. Hint – 10.2
2. Hint – 10.2

UNIT-11. TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE

STRUCTURE

11.0 Objective

11.1 introduction

11.2 Temple Architecture

11.3 Lets Sum Up

11.4 Keywords

11.5 Questions For Review

11.6 Suggested Readings

11.7 Answers To Check Your Progress

11.0 OBJECTIVE

To learn about the temple architecture of medieval Bengal

To learn about the different types of temple architecture

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Art of Bengal, which was mainly religious in nature, was expressed through the medium of temples. Brick temples of Bengal (built between 16th and 19th century) forms one of the most distinctive groups of sacred monuments in India. Due to multiple artistic influences acting upon the region during this period the Brick temples of Bengal show wide range of forms and techniques of construction. Hence the temples constitute a coherent series in their architecture and sculpture, characteristically expressed in brick and terracotta.

11.2 TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE

The chronological span also significant coinciding with the emergence of the new Bengali culture. “In fact, the Bengali temples may be viewed as one of the most important manifestations of this regions culture, closely associated with contemporary movements in religion, literature and the arts as well as with broader political, social and economic developments.”ⁱ Due to the political unification and consequent independence of Bengal; a unique Bengali style of monumental architecture was created which was also an expression of the local idioms. “Another important result of this change was the combination of Hindu and Muslim elements as intrinsic part of Bengali culture: thus, Muslim rulers and monumental Islamic architecture, but Hindu revivalism and religious poetry.”ⁱⁱ

The history of religious architecture in Bengal can be divided into three periods:

1. Early Hindu (up to the end of the twelfth century, later in western areas)
2. Sultanate (fourteenth to early sixteenth centuries)
3. Hindu revival (sixteen to nineteenth centuries) ⁱⁱⁱ

During early Hindu period, Bengali temples were based on Mayuryan and Pre-Mayuryan art of India. In this early stage, the terracottas consist of stray cult pieces of small sizes. In later stages terracotta plaques appeared with new designs which were different from the primitive illustration of the same theme. In the next stage terracottas appeared in larger sizes and related to architectural structures, as decorations of the facades of the temples. The temples were having elaborate representation of themes borrowed from the Puranas. Most of the decorations are typically Gupta in style.

When Muslims came to India in the beginning of 13th century, under Sikander Shah, Bengal became an independent entity for the first time and for the next two centuries distinctive Bengali culture developed which was evident in literature and architecture of Bengal. In combination with large domes and corner minarets, local characteristics of curved cornices taken from bent bamboo eaves of village huts and

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indigenous terracotta decoration was added. Structurally also there was a significant shift from the old Hindu corbelling system to Islamic vaults, dome and keystone arches.

Siddheshvari temple at Barakar Rekha Deul brick Temple at Sonatopal

Figure 1. Showing Siddheshvari temple at Barakar and Brick temple at Sonatopal By the end of the 16th century, a uniquely Bengali style of temples architecture and sculpture had established itself as the Hindu

artistic expression of the new social, religious and Cultural Revolution. “The wide range of temple styles embraced elements of both change and continuity, typical in the dynamic but traditionally based Bengali society.”^{iv} Furthermore, the temple decoration depicted the aspects of everyday life of the contemporary society, particularly the ambitions of the temple builders. Clearly temple building was the result of an intense concentration of economic and artistic resources, as well as public means of expressing power. Temples built in the later part of eighteenth century were smaller in size and also had less terracotta decoration mostly having it only on the front façade. This was due to the economic and social change that Bengal experienced, because of the increase in overseas trade.

Style of construction^v

Figure 2. Siddhesvara temple of Bahulara at

Bankura

There were four different styles of construction followed in Bengal.

- Traditional style
- Hut style
- Pinnacled style
- Flat roof style

Traditional style

The temples of pre-Muslim period have few remaining evidences from which it can be said that tall curvilinear rekha deul temples were predominantly built. The earliest temple still standing of this group is Siddheshvari temple at Barakar. (Figure 1) This type of temples went on developing up to the end of twelfth century, increasing in height and complexity. Examples of later complexity in Bengal are the dilapidated deul still standing at Satdeulia (Burdwan), Bahulara and Sonatapol (Bankura), or Deulghat (Purulia).vi (Figure 1 and 2)

Another Equally common group of temples found in Pre-Mughal Bengal are temples with tiered pyramidal tower known as pirha or bhadra deul. A combination of pirha deul surmounted by a rekha shikhara (Rekha deul) temple evolved later.

During the earlier and later Hindu period religious changes took place in Bengal which also brought some changes in temple architecture. Hence from the above designs rekha deul continues to be built in large numbers. In their places of the other temple styles appeared two entirely new styles – hut style and pinnacled style. Hut style which was based on imitation of common village house with thatched roof and pinnacled style was closest to the Islamic style. Both these styles incorporated Islamic construction features like domes, vaults, arches etc and also took over the local features that were current on the mosques: curved cornices and terracotta decoration in low relief with prominent moldings.

Hut style

Figure 3. Simple domestic hut form transformed into temple form

A simple form of domestic hut is been reproduced in case of hut style temples in Bengal. The struts supporting the gable ends and bamboo framing done for the walls are often reproduced as a decorative feature in brick temples. (Figure 3)‘Even the bamboo rafters on which the thatch rests in case of hut mat be reproduced on the inner vault and supporting poles on the inner vault. This design is referred to as ek-bangla or dochala. Two such huts, one as a porch in front of the other as shrine constitute as jor- bangla or char-chala design–Bengal’s most distinctive contribution to temple architecture.’vii (Figure 4)

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Figure4. Jor Bangla or Keshta-Raya temple at Bishnupur

Another reason behind the imitation of vernacular hut form for temple construction was the evolution of local cults that occurred during the same period. Most of the local deities in Bengal which were worshiped in huts, when transformed incorporating the services of Brahmins, were housed in brick temples copying its original form. “This progression from mud and thatch to brick was later continued in stucco and concrete construction.

Figure 5. Showing Siva temple at Amadpurviii and Raghavesvara temple at Diknagarix

If on the roof of a char-chala temple, a miniature temple is built then the temple is called as at-chala. This typical hut form when imitated in bricks or stone the result is more decorative than utilitarian. For construction of a char-chala roof, a square plan is covered internally by a dome on pendentives to give it a hut shaped roof. In case of at- chala temples on elongated base, the chamber roof extends lengthwise from a central dome on arches and narrow corbelled vaults. Do-chala design is also supported on similar type of large vault with curved ridges and lower edges construction. This type of construction was also used for porches of at-chala temples.

Figure 6. Rasamancha at Bishnupur showing repetitive use of eka-bangla roof

Figure 7. Different type of roof constructionx

Even though jor-bangla design was developed from ek-bangla, examples of latter very rarely exist. ‘During the Mughal period do-chala roof should have been taken up by

Muslims, and even exported to other parts of India, where it became a prominent feature of seventeenth century architecture of Delhi, Lahore, Gulburg, from where it passed in the eighteenth century on to the palace balconies and garden pavilions of Rajashtan.’xi In Bengal this form was majorly used for entrance gateways to temple enclosures, or for subsidiary buildings as in case of Madan-Mohana bhoga-mandapa or as it is used in repetitive way around huge Rasamancha built in sixteenth

century at Bishnupur.

Pinnacled style

Figure 8. Madan-Mohan temple and Shyamrai temple at Bishnupur

Pinnacled or ratna style design has the same lower structure as in case of chala – but the roof is more or less flat and is surrounded by one or more towers or pinnacles called ratna. The simplest form has a single central tower called eka-ratna, to which four more towers can be added at the corner which is called as panchratna. ‘By thus increasing the number of stories and corner turrets the number of ratnas can be multiplied through nine, thirteen, seventeen, and twenty-one up to maximum of twenty-five (panchavimshati-ratna)’.^{xii} Ratna style seems to emerge in sixteenth century and was a favorite style of a Malla king of Bishnupur.

Flat-roofed style

Apart from the above three types there existed one more minor category with lotus shaped domes or spires called flat roofed temples. In nineteenth century Bengal architecture came under European influence in which structures were domed internally but internally spanned by shallow vault and latterly flat ceilinged. Porch resting on two or more pilasters was replaced by clustered pilaster. The arches were cusped and facades were designed as those of chala and ratna designs with plastered terracotta decoration. Common example of flat roofed temple is the sixteenth century Durga dalan built for annual pujas.

Figure 9. Rupesvara Temple, Kalna.^{xiii}

Over a period of time these temples lost their traditional characteristics, becoming a brick built room similar to those of modern domestic architecture. Innumerable such temples have been built in late nineteenth and twentieth century.

The Temple builders

The plaques of terracotta give us a glimpse of the early culture of the people of Bengal which is not available in Bengal literature. This proves that this plastic art supports the literary art of Bengal. In Bengal only two

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caste forms can be traced – the Acharyas and Sutradharas. The role of the Acharyas and Sutradharas indicates an age old relationship of working together that existed in India.

These terracotta reliefs are noteworthy contribution of these artists. These artists derived their inspiration not only from the standard rules and regulations of the Shilpa Sashttras, but also from the keen observations of the daily lives of the people around. In course of time Sutradharas became capable of using materials like stone, ivory, metal etc. and became skilful artists. They accordingly developed into four different directions namely – Kashtra (wood), Mrttika (clay), Chitra (painting), Pasan (stone) and divided themselves into several regional groups. The Sutradharas worked as a group and each consisting of several families and having their hereditary knowledge used to live and work under Acharyas who were responsible for planning and supervision. These teams used to travel from one place to another. The heads of these groups had readymade master plans of temples of varied size and shapes and they use to carry these plans with them. Then according to donor's choice and even details regarding arrangements of terracotta bricks, according to the theme and pattern used to be completed and necessary instructions were issued by the leader before the commencement of the construction.

‘As the majority of Bengalis during this period were illiterate, terracotta artists had little opportunity to acquaint themselves with the Sanskrit Puranas, epics, and other source books of mythologies. For these artists’ knowledge of the epics and myths was mainly derived from the works of local Bengali poets particularly in the form of popular dramas and songs. These poets translated and retold the stories for the benefit of villagers and also introduced new episodes and their own interpretation in it without any hesitation. This brought atmosphere of contemporary society in their stories and poetry; bringing their works nearer to the hearts of Bengalis and profoundly influenced the artists who decorated the temples of the period.’ For example the influence of contemporary society is seen in Mangal Kavyas as well as in the portrayals of the marriage of Shiva and Parvati in temple art. In the depiction of this popular scene, temple artist didn't follow the standard iconographic texts but preferred to

represent Parvati as a small girl, and Shiva as a half naked old man. While describing the marriages between the poor and homeless Shiva and the beautiful Parvati, poet drew upon scenes of ordinary Bengali life in which girls of tender age were sometimes given in marriage to old men. In their descriptions of such scenes poets did not hesitate to emphasize the pain and regret of the young girl. And this was true in 18th and 19th century when marriage between old men and young girls was a common practice. Hence this way the different epics of Puranas were recited by storytellers at village gatherings and undoubtedly influenced terracotta artists of that time.

Materials and technique

The temples of Bengal form one of the most distinctive groups of sacred monuments in India, incorporating a wide range of forms and techniques that testify to the multiple artistic influences acting upon the region. Following four different building traditions influenced the temple architecture in Bengal:

1. Temple architecture of north India specifically of Orissa: Massive walled towers with hollow interiors constructed in corbelled layer of stonework. This kind of temples stone temples can be found in Burudwan.
2. Temple architecture associated with Buddhism: pointed arches, vaults were created using by laying voussoired bricks end to end.
3. Monumental architecture if Sultanate period: By using bricks which was a local building material in Bengal typical Islamic features such as domes, arches, vaults were created. Not only domes and vaults were created but local building forms were replicated to make these structures more permanent. Like hut shapes are recreated in brick vaulting along with curved cornices and terracotta façade decoration.
4. Mughal architecture: Mostly finished in plaster-decorated surfaces, interior spaces are roofed with variety of vaulted forms, particularly shallow pointed cross-vaults and flat ceiling with curved coves on square and octagonal plan.

Material

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Even though stone was mainly used for construction till this period, there are rarely any stone temples in this province due to scarcity of stone. In Bengal Stone temples are mostly found on southwestern periphery of Bengal as a coarse-grained laterite was plentiful in those regions. Region wise availability of Material in Bengal is described below:

- Coarse grained Laterite: Midnapore, Bankura and Purulia district
- Yellow Baraka sandstone: Northern Burdwan and adjacent Purulia.
- Local sandstone: Birbhum
- Fine grained crimson laterite: Bolpur-Suri-Rampurhatxvi

Due to abundant availability of good alluvial soil temples were rarely built with or faced with stone. The majority of the Bengal temples were built with well-fired bricks. These brick sizes vary not only from region to region and from century to century but also within the same building (Figure 7). For example at Kodla brick sizes range from 24 x 20 x 4 cm to 17 x 13 x 4 cm.^{xvii} Following drawing will help to understand how different sizes of bricks were used to get desired effect or to create pseudo effect of stone construction. Mortar used for laying brick was made from mixture of powdered brick and lime (lime was obtained by processing snails shells.) fine but very hard pankha plaster done on roofs, vaults and walls of plaster was made from snail lime mixed with river sand.

Bricks were generally laid as stretchers, with half bricks to fill the gaps and to avoid successive vertical joints. Surface brickwork when covered with terracotta sculptures organized into overall façade schemes, displays considerable skill of the craftsman. Different shapes of bricks are used such as long thin bricks laid edgewise as framing bands, triangular bricks as filling pieces and flat plaques coordinated in large scale sculptural compositions, these all carefully interlock.

The surface skin i.e terracotta tiles were carefully knitted into the core structure of the building i.e of brick. Various broken temples shows that, the core of structure generally consist of properly laid horizontal brick courses. Domes and vaults were also created using bricks laid as

stretchers. In arches bricks are cut often crudely to form tapering voussoirs. Curved layers of brickwork were used to create vaults as well as swelling contours of temple cornices and roofs. Bricks laid diagonally sometimes decorate supporting arches and pendentives. Regular shapes were used for temple plans like square, rectangular, octagonal etc. these spaces were vaulted or domed or sometimes arranged in complex composition. Sizes of these domed or vaulted spaces were also limited. Krishna- Chandra temple at Kalna consisting of dome of almost 4.5 m diameter is one of the largest extant examples. Wall thickness were also ranging from 75cm to 125cm. Very rarely massive brick work was done like one at Kodla which is almost 3m thick to imitate stone construction.

Figure 4. Varying brick sizes used to create a make believe effect at Rasmancha, Bishnupur

Non standardization in constructionxviii

Well fired brick is the basic building material for temple making in Bengal. Brick sizes vary, not only from region to region and from century to century but also within the same building. Following drawing will help to understand how different sizes of bricks were used to get required effect or to create pseudo effect of stone construction. (Figure 9, 10)

Bricks are generally laid as stretchers, with half bricks to fill the gaps and avoid successive vertical joints. (Figure 9) Surface brickwork when covered with terracotta sculptures organized into overall façade schemes, displays considerable skill of the craftsman. Different shapes of bricks are used such as long thin bricks laid edgewise as framing bands, triangular bricks as filling pieces and flat plaques coordinated in large scale sculptural compositions, these all carefully interlock.

Figure11. Different sizes of brick were used according to the requirement.

Figure12. In case of arch bricks are cut to form tapering voussoirs

Figure13. Different sizes and shapes of bricks used to get the desired effect

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Vaults and domes are also created with bricks laid as stretchers. In arches, bricks are cut to form tapering voussoirs. Curved layers of brickwork are employed to create vaults as well as swelling contours of temple cornices and roofs. Sometimes bricks are laid diagonally to decorate supporting arches and pendentives.

Articulation on the temples

Articulation on the facades of Bengali temples appears to be figurative as well as ornamental. Carvings appear in panels above arched entrances, as well as on surrounding walls, raised bands and pilasters, bases and cornices, columns and arches. There is more uniformity in the decoration of the facades, particularly in their sculptured details, than in the diverse temple types, which were evidently invented by architects with particular flair for improvisation and experimentation.

Figure 14. Scenes of hunting with variety of animals seen on temple façade

Figure 15. Mythological scenes and foreign women shown on temple facades

After the middle of the eighteenth century there was an emergence of neoclassical forms in temple articulation. The popularity for European styles in dress and education among the wealthy Bengalis also found an expression in architecture. Many neoclassical Italianate urban and country houses came up all over Bengal, and many neoclassical details of these houses were imitated in nearby temples, reinforcing the link between religious and domestic architectural traditions. A continuous frieze form one of the most common subjects in temple art of Bengal. Subjects like royal processions, boating, receptions; hunting with variety of animals can be found on temple facades.

There was more emphasis on war scenes, warriors with contemporary weapons, music, dancers and instrumentalists. Foreigners too were common subjects, easily recognizable by their dress and headgear, weapons they hold or ships they navigate. By depicting scenes from upper strata of the society on his temple, the patron connected himself

with this powerful, leisured class of the society. General scenes of village and urban life were showed in a mythological context.

Deterioration of temple art

In the second half of the nineteenth century, due to the increasing westernization of wealthy Bengali people, and emergence of Calcutta as the capital of the new British India there was decline in temple patronage. Hence architects and artisans who were always dependant on these local patronage found themselves without work and were forced to turn to other craft such as wood or scroll painting or to give up work altogether. By the middle of nineteenth century terracotta work on the temples were already replaced by stucco work. In twentieth century the traditional art of temples building with terracotta and brick has vanished with the adoption of modern materials like steel and concrete. Today the temples are mostly disfigured and also covered with ugly concrete additions.

Figure 16. While conserving the Shyamrai temple one of the roof of the tower was made straight instead curvilinear form

Check your progress –

- 1. Write about the terracotta architecture

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- 2. What is aathchala style?

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.....

11.3 LETS SUM UP

Usually five storeys and sixteen corners, spires and turrets are parts of the temple. The hut or chala type of temple have sloping roofs. ... The

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hut or chala type of temples has sometimes been called 'cottage architecture' of Bengal which resembles the thatched roof.

11.4 KEYWORDS

Acharya: Preceptor Bhogmandapa: Hall of offerings Chutar: Carpenter

Durga: The mother goddess, consort to shiva in the form of a fierce woman riding a tiger, the destroyer of evil

Jor Bangla: Twin chala hut

Pancharatna: Ratna temple with five ratna aedicules, four on four corners of roof level

Pankha plaster: Plaster made from snail lime mixed with river sand

Ratna: A type of late mediaeval temple in Bengal characterized by a latina aedicule kept on sloping roofs with curved cornices

Rekha: latina temples as called in Bengal

Shilpa Sashtira: The science of architecture and other cognate arts Shiva: One of the primary gods known as the 'destroyer' Sutradhar: Member of the carver/carpenter caste

11.5 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. Write about the Bankura terracotta temples.
2. Write the different styles of temple architecture.

11.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

Michell, George. "Historical background", in Michell, George (Ed.). "Brick Temples of Bengal - From the Archives of David McCutcheon" Princeton University press, New Jersey, 1983

Understanding for Style of construction is based on David McCutcheon's "Origins and Development" in Michell, George (Ed.)

“Brick Temples of Bengal - from the Archives of David McCutcheon”,
Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1983.

McCutcheon, David , Origin and Development, Opsit,

11.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. HINT – 11.2

2. HINT – 11.2

UNIT 12 – HISTORY OF BENGALI LANGUAGE

STRUCTURE

12.0 Objective

12.1 Introduction

12.2 History Of Bengali Language

12.3 Lets Sum Up

12.4 Keywords

12.5 Questiond For Review

12.6 Suggested Readings

12.7 Answers To Check Your Progress

12.0 OBJECTIVE

To learn about the evolution of the Bengali language from Sanskrit and Prakrit

To learn about the influence of Bengali and its expansion as a literature

12.1 INTRODUCTION

Bengali is called a Sanskrit language by some philological scholars, but what these scholars definitely mean by the term Sanskrit is not always explicitly stated. If we can only tolerate such a loose use of the term as to make it indicate indiscriminately the Chhandasa speech of the early Yedie days as well as the speech which Panini described as Laukika, the nomenclature of the philological scholars may be allowed to stand. I consider it, however, safer to call the Bengali speech as an Aryan vernacular to avoid the suggestion that the* language in which the poets from Kalidasa to Jayadeva composed their works was the progenitor of

Bengali. It has to be distinctly borne in mind that the word “Aryan,” as used by me, has not even remotely any ethnic significance ; it will indicate the Vedic speech and those speeches which are allied to, or have affinity with, the Vedic speech.

12.2 HISTORY OF BENGALI LANGUAGE

There is a line of thinking in today’s cultural historiography on Bengal that extols its language, art, culture, and independent intellectual and associational heritage – beginning possibly with Young Bengal and ending with Tagore. With some variety (marking the religious, ethnic, rural, artisan-centric, and various popular-cult-centric sub-lines) admitted in this nearly two hundred year long history, this history has now its own appropriate major figures – with Ram Mohan as the beginning, Bankim Chandra as the middle point, and as the last figure Tagore symbolising the confluence of all that was best in this long period. The essential features of this received cultural history are supposedly the following: the strong impact of romanticism on literature, hence the dominant presence of Nature and landscape in art, sensitivities, and literature, celebration of nature as life, harmony in the past and harmony of the society, by contrast the calamitous present signified by, above all, the colonial rule, and the making of a new Bengali nation based on this aesthetic feeling amidst the calamity. In this way political and historical identity came to be based on what can be grossly called «affect» and was aestheticised. In short, our self-inquiry has not been through the philosophical route or even as its substitute through historical route, but through an examination and reconstruction of our aesthetic self.

The interrogation and cross-examination of our aesthetic proclivities formed the core of our critical sense of the present. This over-all scenario generated enthusiasm for possessing a total history of Bengal – we may recall in this context for instance Dinesh Chandra Sen’s *Brihat Banga* (2 volumes, 1935) – but this was not enough; we also undertook the task of knowing and writing local histories, no doubt partly inspired by colonial gazetteers, district handbooks, and travelogues of colonial administrators, surveyors, and revenue officials. One has to only note as

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an instance the extensive use of Henry Beveridge's *Were Sundarbans inhabited in Ancient Times?* (1876) and *District of Bakarganj: Its History and Statistics* (1876) in Satish Chandra Mitra's *Jessore Khulnar Itihas* (2 volumes, 1914 and 1922) And, yet, while these local histories gave us glimpses of the micro-chronicles of the conflicts of the past (between local powerholders and the imperial administration, or between revenue officials and peasants, or between despots and benevolent protectors at ground level, or between profligate rulers and victims of famines, likewise between symbols of old relations and new public associations), by and large these micro-histories replicated the model of a total history of Bengal (given by the British writers), yet in the total history that came to be written aesthetics made up for the lack of political history, unity took the place of conflicts, and life was celebrated in place of death, at times effacing death from (account of) life. Possibly it will be correct to say that armed with a sense of local histories, the Bengalis proceeded to write the total history of Bengal in which aesthetics would have the pride of place.

In other words, through this strategy of writing a total history of Bengal, art and culture or correctly speaking aesthetics lent a crucial hand in shaping the particular nature of self-inquiry. If we consider Rakhal Das Bandopadhyay's history of Bengal, *Banglar Itihas* (2 Volumes, 1914 and 1917) or the finely written *Bangalir Itihas (adi parba)* by Nihar Ranjan Ray (1949) and marked by evocative touches, and the variously written history of artefacts, statues, sculptures, verses, etc., we can get a sense of how this picture of tolerant, devotional if trifle quarrelsome, fish-eating, literature-loving, siesta-enjoying, plentifully productive Bengali acquired its frame. History of Bengali literature was crucial in understanding history of Bengal. Joydev was our past. Buddhism, Sufi Islam, and Vaishnavism, were the three sources of our unique spiritual lineage from the middle ages. And, romantic literature coupled with reason-based finely argued persuasive essays composed our present. Aesthetics in this way made up for the absence of politics and indigenous imperial legacy.

In this there were two problems. First, the ambivalence: what would be the best route of this inquiry – knowing the history of Bengal or of the making of the Bengali? Critics may today say that with an emphasis on

knowing the history of Bengal (the land, territory), this inquiry did not make much headway in knowing the subject, known as the Bengali, with the consequence that various conflicts (such as those based on caste, religion, language, class, region, migration, etc., particularly conflicts in periods of transition) that marked the history of the subject-hood were ignored. Second, in this harmonious history, whatever identity was excavated and historicised was found perched precariously between the identity of an individual subject (the Bengali) and that of the subject of a collective history (of the Bengali people, the Bengali nation).

As a consequence, in this long gaze on the past the violent periods of transition, particularly the transition from the Nawabi rule to colonial rule, were shrouded in haze. When we study the confusion in Bengali historiography beginning particularly in the later half of the nineteenth century and demonstrated in the writings of historians, cultural chroniclers, and essayists of that time, I think the lessons are clear. What were required were both a sense of an acceleration of time and a reworking of space to make history intelligible for the Bengalis, in other words, making ourselves capable of knowing that we were part of history. In other words, what was needed was to see this history of the land called Bengal as part of a larger interconnected space called the Bengali suba or later the Bengal Presidency – a matter of reworking of space, and likewise a focus on transition – a matter of acceleration of time, because transition accelerates the dynamics of time.

2. In this background, somewhat simplistically drawn for want of time and space, I want to concentrate on two features: first, the question of death in modern Bengali consciousness, and second, the issue of race. My argument is that the phenomenon of transition loomed large over both these issues of death and race; yet both of them were sublimated in such a way in the course of historicising our identity, that the leap from the romantic to the critical remained abortive. Or, to put it more precisely, to be critically aware of the history of our self-consciousness we have to examine this process of sublimation. What is the critical ontology with which we can examine the question of being? How can we relate becoming to being? Or, how do we explain the fact that in the history of Bengali identity a critical sense could arrive in whatsoever

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limited manner only through the aesthetic? By which I mean the aesthetic negotiation of the two problems of death and race that marked our historical awareness of transition?

First, then, is the question of death, because death was the critical issue in this passage or mutation of the modern – from romantic to the critical. It is not that the romantic framework of searching for identity only eulogised life and did not admit the factor of death. After all the heroic literature that we have in the second half of the nineteenth century beginning with Nabin Chandra Sen (*Palashir Yuddha*, 1875), Bankim's Rajsingha (1882), Ramesh Chandra Dutt's novels (*Bangabijeta*, *Rajput Jiban Sandhya*, *Maharashtra Prabhat*, all published in 1879) and then Akshay Maitreya's *Siraj-ud-daullah* (1896) – some of the novels and writings of that time built probably around the works of Walter Scott, had epic characters dying, and some kind of tragedy enacted as part of the romance of life. Yet, it is also true at the same time, that these characters do not tell us the mortal conflicts of the time of transition. Or, if they tell, the narratives focus on the almost «historically inevitable» demise of heroes of the old age, and the equally «historically inevitable» emergence of the enlightened Bengali as the modern subject leaving the dirt and death of the time of transition behind. These novelists or writers make use of *Sier-ul-Mutakherin* (by Sayyid Ghulam Husian Tabatabai, Volumes, first English translation of part of the work published in 1789), and *Riyaz-us-Salatin* (by Ghulam Husain Zaidpuri, English translation published in 1903) to show that Siraj had to die, and the transition to colonial rule was inevitable given the enlightened ways of the English rule.

The death was of an individual person, not of a society. The prince dies, with his death sovereignty passes hand, but there is no indication of awareness that with this a new type of domination begins. Bengal did not have a Mirza Ghalib, who had viewed things differently in the wake of the suppression of the mutiny of 1857, mass slaughters, and the violent transition in Delhi 2 . To be truthful, Bengali intellectual intelligibility had no room for owning up to the transition of 1757, the famines thereafter, and the peasant revolts characterizing the time. Anandamath

(1882) narrating the peasant revolt ends as we know by mystifying the issue of sovereignty and transition:

When the rebel Jibananda says before the final battle, «Let us hasten, chronicle, massive in size, but an advice to rulers how to conduct public affairs, and restrict private greed and self service. Syed Ghulam Hussain tells us that sovereignty passed from the Sultans to the Company because government failed; anarchy ensued because the princes lost the art of governing. Thus though the transfer of sovereignty from one emperor or prince to another was marked regularly by such public acts such as ceremonial entry of the new sovereign in the capital, public prayers, display of the standard, coining of money in the new sovereign's name, and above all by the murder of the old sovereign and display of the dead body (Tabatabaite of course does not list these like this, but mentions them at several places in his account), yet rule could not be stable, as besides the confusing presence of so many «nations» and «races» (as in Azimabad) , mercenary administration, and «dissensions, ruins, and desolation crept under the columns of the Timurian throne» , and there was now a «tremendous sign in the air by which Heaven signified its wrath». Syed Ghulam Hussain was clear in his advice in this hour of transition, and he put the lines of advice in verse,

See and take warning It was in the manner the wind shifted and the face of the thing changed O World, fickle and fragile! O World, incapable of stability Like a dancer, that goes everyday from house to house You shall carry no more with you than what you have enjoyed or bestowed Do good today, since the field is yours, and have the power of it Make haste, for the next year the field will pass on to another hand»

Another Ghulam Hussain, Ghulam Hussain Saleem Zaidpuri, also wrote in the same vein in Riaz us Salatin (1788) in accounting for the way Sultan rule in Bengal ended and gave way to the Company rule. In the next one hundred and fifty years after its composition the Sier again and again surfaced in discussions on sovereignty. For instance the famous essayist of Bengal Kazi Abdul Wadud referred repeatedly to Sier Mutaqherin as one of most graphic chronicles of the «closed destiny of Bengal» when light simply went out of Bengal's life 10 . And in these

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references the issue that repeatedly comes up is: Why could we not govern ourselves? Why did we lose out? Even if Siraj was a hero, why did he lose out in that tragic way? In all these inquiries, death does not seem to be a necessary ingredient in the history of a heroic race now destined to lead the national struggle, but only a pointer as to why we needed strong and the «right» kind of character. Siraj was weak. «Building up character» became in this way another trope for return to aesthetics. Thus, poems, novels, and plays of Bankim Chandra, Nabin Sen, Akshya Maitreya, Ramesh Ch. Dutt, or the long essays by Wadud and Abul Hussain, and the writings of Abul Fazal perch themselves on the connection between heroism and lack of character, and the connection marked by an ambivalence about death and politics itself.

Even if politics appears essential and we must involve ourselves in politics, we must prepare through inculcating the right character, which can be done only through practice of aesthetics, and aesthetic education. Therefore Bankim Chandra would write *Krishnacharitra* (1886). Even though in this massive work Bankim would address the issue of death – Krishna’s untimely or the self-chosen moment of death – *Krishnacharitra* is an account of character, wisdom, and an exposition of the aesthetics of anushilan or practice. In fact, as I have shown elsewhere, Bankim Chandra’s theory of anushilan in *Dharmatattva* (1888) tried to lay down a path of practice as a path of virtue, what in modern times we call as practical ethics. Developing a political path out of this ethico-aesthetic route required time.

No where do we find a more illustrative case of this dilemma than in the earlier written *Hutom Penchar Naksha* (1862) as well as in Tagore’s distaste for politics (which would mean invariably for him killing, death, violence, and attrition), yet, particularly in Tagore, an equal amount of dedication to prepare the Bengalis as valorous beings ready to counter the scourge of colonial rule. Hence even the child in his poem *Beerpurush* (1903) dreams to be the warrior on horseback and armed with sword, guarding his mother going in the palanquin through the forest in the dense darkness of midnight. Tagore embraced death more tellingly as he grew old. He already had posed the problem of departure in terms of aesthetics in the essay, *Kabye Upekshita* (1900) His

aesthetics became increasingly less and less romantic, there was a Socratic detachment, and this death was more a submission to destiny, and a realisation that with death life would be fulfilled. Bengalis as we all know identified themselves with his songs, poems, plays, and then with his drawings and later paintings, in an impossible and unforeseen way, so much so that while aesthetics became a mark of non-correspondence of a certain philosophy of life to its age, yet till today, politics can acquire mass legitimacy in Bengal only by aestheticising itself.

It must not appear as course and vulgar. You must be ready to go to jail or face the gallows, but you must do so with songs on your lips. Bengal was eternal, beyond history, beyond the rules of life, because it was beautiful, and beauty was virtuous. Kazi Abdul Wadud called this phenomenon as «enchanted Bengali» (sammohita bangali). Yet there remained a problem which we can point out here. If identity means sovereignty of the self, then a sense of collective identity – collective sovereignty – could not be formed without an accompanying sense of achieving some sort of power. Violence and deaths signified the clash of sovereignty. Clash of sovereignty meant that different powers had taken forms, come into contact with one another, and were now making claim over the same people and same country to seek rule and guide people's lives. Clash of sovereignty meant further that contacts must now explode into contentions, rule must be disturbed severely; and uninterrupted and undisturbed rule must now crumble down and give way to collective violence. But if this was the path to attain identity, where was the place of beauty and virtue in this? And in what way this identity would be different from that of the western rulers who symbolised violence?

Therefore the solution that suggested itself was that Bengalis must engage in sadhana (dedication, practice, learning), in which sadhana would involve issues other than god, safety, security, and immortality. Sadhana was linked to anushilan and karma (here meaning action). Sadhana was not principally a demand on an individual, the entire nation of the Bengalis would have to be involved. Through conversations the collective sadhana would materialise.

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This would produce «inner strength» – the collective capacity to face death. Individual death could inspire this collective strength. Death had been thus turned into a matter of virtue, the final aesthetics. As the poet sang, «Death, you are to me like the Lord...» But did this solve the problem of identity of the Bengalis? How could the beauty of the land be transferred to being a mark of collective and individual character of the Bengali? It meant above all building up certain marks that would identify the land with the being; and for that what was required was the presence of an all Bengal public sphere in which the various fault lines in the society would be submerged. But Nawab Siraj-ud-daulah was a Muslim, a non-Bengali prince, known as fun-loving rent-extracting ruler, who might be built up posthumously as a figure of lost sovereignty but not as a figure of the sovereignty of the Bengali self. Again, the numerous peasant revolts were not accepted as actions of the rebellious Bengali – except perhaps in Bankim's *Anadamath* – because caste identities stood here as a big hindrance. We can multiply the examples. But the net lesson is the same. It was easy to extol the beauty of the land as singular and unique, but the transference of this virtue from land to its inhabitants was not easy.

We have to remember, the concept of solidarity serves to define not land, but people as their specific mode of existence, that specific mode being marked by an intervention in individual lives by a specific structure of power. With the demise or more correctly speaking the weakening of kinship ties (most evident in reports of the two great famines of Bengal with one hundred and fifty years separating the two famines) and we can only recall here Hunter's *Annals of Rural Bengal* (1868), wherein he described as to how men ate dogs and dogs ate men, the social bond was affected severely in the Great Famine of 1770 .

We have to take into account the interlude – the second half of the eighteenth century extending to the first two decades of the succeeding one – when early modernity and colonial modernity started interacting with each other, at times forming a single architecture. We have to grasp this specific moment of the arrival of modernity – modern forms of association, language, art, literature, production, city, and politics – in which we find the Bengali thinkers thinking of aesthetics and life that

could escape the brutality of the arrival of the modern yet take what was attractive. In this decision reason played a great role. Our early modernity arrived in this way. What was characteristic in this early phase of Bengali modernity was that, the question as to how did the Bengalis originate (which could link the land and the people) transformed into an idea of an indefinitely receding moment of the past. And consequentially history as the instrument to reawaken that which had been forgotten or excluded and now needed to be rejoined with, was not given importance (except by Bankim Chandra 14) in the period I am alluding to here 15 . Instead, I shall argue, different discursive worlds emerged with their thresholds and disappearances. It was in this chiaroscuro that life and death played their distinct roles out, and the story of our identity was shaped in that background of darkness and sudden shafts of light. Which is why one can say that the composition of Madhusudan's *Meghnadbadh Kavya* (1861) was a unique moment in a hermeneutic narrative of being a Bengali, for not only here death was being celebrated in an unprecedented way (The dramatist Utpal Dutt in the play staged in 1980 Darao Pathikbar interpreted the poem as reflecting on the mass slaughter in Delhi by the colonial army after the suppression of the Mutiny of 1857), but the problem of the hero was solved here by making the anti-hero as the hero of an epic time.

So if the Bengali had been vanquished by the British and Bengal was now a possessed land, so what? Death was the way through which new life could come. To continue: In order to understand how death was recognised gradually as part of identity – and heroism and martyrdom came to be combined in *anushilan* and *sadhana* (practice and dedication), in other words the combination of character of life with the end of life – we may take a brief look into the writings of the early militant nationalists of Bengal. In the militant nationalist discourse the ethos of life (virtuous conduct, a proper theory of practice, and dedication) was combined with a single minded attention to task, a sort of obsession, which the militant nationalists called, *unmadana* (madness), and through this, to sacrifice and death. This ethical reconstitution of life brought in the question of death.

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Yet, this was not enough for a swing away from romanticism to critical awareness of society and social contradictions. But more important, this contributed to a particular dynamics in the process of historical self-discovery. The question remained – awareness, yes, namely that we Bengalis are a part of history and therefore this awareness also is a part of history; but what kind of history? And thus, what kind of awareness is this, its *differentia specifica*? Time was made intelligible in an extremely intriguing way. In the imagination of being, the intelligibility of time and place was thus constantly acquiring new form. It was not a (history of) Socratic self-inquiry, but an inquiry whose history from the days of early modernity to the violent political turn almost a century later (with the publication of «Jugantar») was marked by a different ethics of life and death.

Thus it was reminded in «Jugantar» in March 1906 (the revolutionary journal, the title meaning The End of An Age or The Transformation of An Age) 16 , that without connecting its present, past and future, no society could establish itself, and for «transformation» society needed new ideal, theory, education, and above all «new practice». «Practice» implied *sadhana*.

Sadhana meant doing with away with indiscipline in thought and lifestyle; it further meant the realisation that individual benefit and collective benefit were dependent on each other. The editor pointed out that under alien rule none of these two was possible, and that only with collective good individual good could be assured. But what was collective life? It was above all national life. And what was the fundamental requisite to make national life possible? Again above all, it was «appropriate work», which meant «goal oriented performance» (*upajukta karma ba lakshyabhimukhin anusthan*). «Jugantar» in the subsequent issues went on to illustrate what the group meant by goal-oriented work. Of course it could rarely say that full independence thorough forcible eviction of alien rule was the goal, therefore the goal was always explained through what Lenin had called the compulsion of «Aesopian language». The goal was end of poverty, slavery, bad traits in «national character», of the infantile attitude in disclaiming responsibility for one's own action, of racist marks in the society, quarrels, pettiness,

cowardice, laziness, and finally and significantly, bad literature. Why bad literature? Because, as the writer surmised, «Without a country and without liberty we cannot produce vital art». In this diagnosis of the ills in the body of the country – and «Jugantar» rarely used the word jati (nation), it almost always used the word desh (country) – there was little of the invocation of the past glory of the country. If the disease had been recognised, «Jugantar» argued, redress too had started, first with character (charitra) reformation.

Character reform was possible through suitable readings and actions – both individual and collective exercises, which would drill the body and mind into being appropriate agencies for actions. It assured the readers that Bengal did not lack in capacity or ability, it lacked only in determination and contact. Therefore practice meant finding out «right» people, formation of «societies» at both local and district levels, widen these societies by increasing their membership, organising local movements against ill effects of alien rule with the aim of inculcating collective spirit, pursuing right style of work, and finally «appropriate work», which meant «goal oriented performance» (upajukta karma ba lakshyabhimukhin anusthan). Was this insane thinking? In a letter to the editor published in «Jugantar» (3 Bhadra, 1313 B.S.), an «insane» reader (insane through meditation – jogakhyapa) admitted that currents of new thinking might trigger wild thought in a reader's mind; but then, as he asked, were not these clear symptoms of the end of an age?

«And was it not now Bengal's turn to serve the country with glory?» . Indeed the suggestion came in the next issue that insanity was perhaps understandable given the «hypnotic state of the country» in which some felt that the country belonged to the English. In the epic Mahabharata Arjun the warrior was advised not to behave like a coward; he was further advised to clean his mind of the agony at the prospect of killing men who were foes. This was goal oriented thinking, though this was seemingly an insane state of mind occupied with only one thing.

Aesthetics of insanity also, connecting life with martyr's death, became in this way a feature of being. The Bengali gradually found him/herself at home in this ambivalent milieu of welcoming life and death, aesthetics

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and politics, domesticity and a desire to take to flight paths, and realism and catholicity that at times verged on a healthy scepticism towards all big and sovereign claims. The Bengali is thus at home in writing poems, at the same time discussing politics, and as a matter of humour – in being a doctor. Life consists of intellect, probing, diagnosing, and pointing the ills of society and the body. The combination of aestheticisation, politicisation, and medicalisation of the life-world/s of the Bengali makes the question of being to the Bengali a light hearted one, a matter of vulnerability characteristic to the Bengali. Tagore's character Gora is vulnerable, great characters are vulnerable, the recruit to revolution and war is vulnerable. Life is vulnerable. Death, disillusion, and demise can any time take away the greatness of life and convictions. Let me explain little more what I mean by the phrase «light hearted one».

If one aspect of this is to accept vulnerability of life and situation, it also indicates and as I have briefly demonstrated, in spite of at times heavy prose and thought in Bengali thinking on issues of life and death, being a Bengali has signified an achievement in reaching a threshold in encountering physicality of life, where that encounter would mean locating, deciphering, directing, and interpreting the marks of physicality as marks of virtue and aesthetics. In Bengali thought therefore there is no Nature, Truth, Laws, and other capital meanings. It has become in time a land of hundred deities, gods, dogmas, cults, and Marxisms. Hundred voices are echoing the physicality of things and affirmations of events in terms of different virtues and aesthetic senses – from the time of Bharatchandra to, say, a novel on the war time (Rangroot / The Recruit Sent off to War Zone) written in the forties of the last century.

Such multiple echoes take the heaviness away from the denseness of thought, and make everything appear possible. Everything impossible is drawn into the imaginary of the possible. The poetry loving youth becomes the idealist recruit of revolution. In this sense nothing remains transcendental in Bengali genealogy. Or more correctly speaking the «eternal» is therefore daily, and within grasp. There is ground therefore to argue that the Baul (mendicant mystic) songs of eternity can be experienced also as songs of the everyday. It does not mean of course that art is accepted as the source of being and redemption. It too becomes

another «ground» of the interface between aesthetics and the materiality of life – the interface that marks Wadud's famous title to his collection of the some of the fascinating essays in Bengali literature, namely *Saswata Banga* (1951, roughly translated as *Eternal Bengal*) . That interface marks our being.

3. The issue of race in the making of modern Bengal is equally interesting and relevant. By race if we mean the most concentrated mark of difference, then Bengal's experience suggests what a post-colonial resolution of difference could be. And again, Wadud's writings are enormously suggestive on this. To be sure the question of race appears in modern Bengali thinking in terms of defining who the aliens were, and by that measure, what we would mean by alien-hood. From Bankim Chandra onwards there is a constant attempt to define an «alien race» – beginning with defining the British rulers with different colour of skin (white) and by that token many others with same skin colour as of the British conquerors – providing a clue. Yet colour could not be enough. Language and religion also became factors, complicating the race question.

Till now rulers were «our» rulers with somewhat perhaps different skin colour, language, and by some measure religion. But was this difference so stark as to constitute the rulers into a different race than that of the Bengalis? In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century we do not much evidence of marking out difference in the process of constituting an identity. But after the Mutiny things start happening quickly on this front. Novels, essays, poems, and finally plays have to deal with the race issue. The impact of the Mutiny and the Wahabi rebellion was felt in the distant villages also in the later part of the nineteenth century, as Abul Mansur Ahmed's *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachar* (Fifty Years of Politics As I Saw It, Dhaka, 1968) testifies. We have in some writings indications of anthropometric ideas, but not much. More interesting are the cultural, social, and religious indications. Therefore even though the *Sier* was read by various people in the nineteenth century, the dilemma remained:

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Was Siraj-ud-daullah Bengal's own ruler? Was he a Bengali Prince? Was what Syed Ghulam Hussain Khan wrote of his character calumny? If he was not a Bengali, how different was he? In the generic nature of such inquiry we come across two terms in this respect – bidharmi and jati. These two terms have intriguing connotations. Bidharmi is one with different (bi – biporit, opposite 20) religion. It is not adharma (sin, defiling of religion, sacrilegious). There had always been the problem in modern Bengali being (in both Hindu and Muslim communities), namely, was interaction and relation with a bidharmi an act of adharma? Tagore's famous novel Gora (1910), possibly built around the historical character of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (a missionary revolutionary in the early years of the twentieth century and the editor of Sandhya, the anti-colonial journal), discusses among others the issue of bidharma and adharma, and on the question as to whether universalism and cosmopolitanism can rid the Bengali of this problem. Siraj is bidharmi.

But does that mean that he is not of Bengal? The matter of language is less important here, because Persian was the accepted language of administrative and court work in Bengal. And, even the local and small princes would have many of the protocols in dress and custom as practised by the Nawabs, or previous to that the imperial aristocracy. Race is thus a complex question in defining a nation. Are therefore the Bengalis a nation or a jati (jati meaning here not caste, but people). It seems, notwithstanding the voluminous literature in nationalist studies on Bengal, that in using the word jati again and again Bengali thinking was trying to be non-essentialist. Jati could mean identity of a population group by land, language, religion, caste, colour, etc, yet not all at the same time, or fixed in usage at any time. In this unique idea of singularity with singularities, existing in a somewhat Deleuzian sense of fold, we have an indication of the post-colonial resolution of the question of difference. Sanskritic heritage meant little here. The ambivalence is present in the writings of even in Bankim Chandra or Sarat Chandra, but much more clearly in Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, Akram Khan, Abul Mansur Ahmed, Tagore, Suniti Chattopadhyaya,

Kazi Abdul Wadud, Humayun Kabir – who not, whoever tried to think of difference, history, and co-existence in Bengal in the past? Take for

instance one of the hardest issues in this regard – the Hindu-Muslim difference. Wadud said in his fascinating essay, *Sammohita Musalman* (The Enchanted Muslim), that the last hundred years of Bengal Muslims form a period of sadness and grief, because they could not make sense of conflict and collision (*sangharsha*), when they thought of difference with the Hindus while there was continuous conflict between the «*marfatpanth*» and the «*alempanthi*» . He further told in an address to the annual conference of Faridpur Muslim Chatra Samiti in 1927, «We have remained for long mystified with words», and never saw the reality. And then more directly he posed the question of the nineteenth century idea of the communal difference, divide, and split, by referring to Sier Mutakherin and Hunter's *The Indian Musalmans* . And then arguing that this history was one of closure caused to a substantial degree by resumption proceedings and a narrative of social split, he asked, «When would the Bengali Muslims attain freedom from this closure?» . The closure he suggested was equally of Hindu Bengali history, otherwise why did Ram Mohan's effort remain confined to the Hindus only, why could it not be all-embracing, and the history he initiated was finally known as Hindu renaissance? His own answer was that the educated public sphere was small with fragile connections with broader society and in this way it remained a problem of intellectual endeavour with limited reach 25

This emphasis on self-introspection was a mark of the writings also of Wadud's fellow travellers (Abul Hussain, Qazi Motahar Hossain, Abul Fazal, and Muhammad Shahidullah among others) in search of «*buddhir mukti*» (emancipation of intellect). What is clear is the enormous pain marking Bengali thinking as it tried to make sense of the social split trying at the same time not to fall in the trap of racist thinking. As if the query and therefore the search were: how can we live in our specific existential modes but together, how can singularities stay within a singularity, thus Hindus and Muslims as singularities in the singularity called the Bengali nation/people, or «*Marfatpanthis*» and «*Alempanthis*» in the singularity called the Muslim society, or the Shaktas and Vaishnavas in the singularity called the Hindu society?

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It is this deep ambivalence towards difference, or any sovereign claim, that made discussions in Bengali informal circles a permanent symposium, known in Bengali parlance as *adda*. This catholicity was not always treated as virtue, even Tagore wailed, why Bengalis are not decisive, why they like to depend on others' support, etc. Not that this prevented Bengalis shun the path of hatred or petty mindedness. The Great Calcutta Killings (1946) is inexplicable if we do not consider the complete breakdown of Bengali society in the war time with the famine, the rush of exodus of people leaving the nearest ones behind in fear of Japanese invasion, and the complicity of the Bengali elites and the political class to divide Bengal in order to get rid of the «race» question, and make Bengal homogenous. Bengal's path to *buddhir mukti* was linked to the democratisation of society, which meant a dialogic negotiation of differences. This was a path that Bengal's aristocracy, the land-owning class, and power brokers were not to consider. The great experiment to build-up what Antonio Gramsci had in another context called the «national-popular» was over. When we write of «blocked dialectics», and «passive revolution» in explaining our current stagnation, we often fail in taking into account this slice of cultural history. As if partition is only a sudden wrath of history and a new imperfect world begins in 1947.

But let us also know that this as if carries the whole charge of equivocation, that hangs on the fact that it has no status, no stability, no legitimacy. This nonstatus depends on what we can call a kind of undecidability, an indeterminacy; which marks the attitude of a world born after the transition towards the period of transition. We have been unable in the past two hundred years to judge Siraj, we still do not know how to judge Siraj, we do not know how to accommodate 1947 in our history, and our indeterminacy begins to determine our position, mood, stand, mentality, and being. Once again here the interplay of becoming and being – the interplay we see in the relation of destruction/death and our life. And even though the traces of this indeterminacy are effaced, or sought to be effaced, it is in the nature of thing, in the very structure of the trace, that what is effaced reconstitutes within what we term as indeterminacy. The difference between what we hold as symbolic and

what is imaginary loses all valid distinction. The period of transition, when symmetry was broken and sovereignty lost its meaning, became possibly the most significant factor in constituting subjectivity, Bengal and Bengali as the subject of history.

Is this a description of the Bengali babu culture, on which we find countless articles, books, and stories (from Bankim Chandra to Samar Sen)? Yes, but only to certain extent, and only in certain sense – both the sense and extent marked by the reality of a self flagellating educated middle class. It can also be pointed out that the aesthetics is not an unproblematic field. Yes, we have had several quarrels in the past as to what constitutes the aesthetics of a society, but that only showed how the problematic of aesthetics has remained a critical question in our historical selfawareness. The idea of an aesthetic self has repeatedly floundered on the two rocks of religion and caste. Yet it has not vanished. One of the reasons is that even if we agree that it is a partial, cultural story of who we are, it is also a story of the popular, the popular, which is a field of over-determination. One can also, I am aware, say, that this is again «high culture» and politics – the poetry loving, bullet facing youth is more a romantic imagination confined to the urban literati. Beyond that there is the vast section of agrarian masses, and the still more neglected by developmental history the unorganised petty sections of society, whose culture is defined as «popular culture», by which commentators probably mean the attraction of the unemployed youth to popular Bombay film songs and dances, and other visual, audio, and reading products. Again, there is truth in this, but once more only to an extent, marked by conditions of petty production that led both the local government in West Bengal and the managers of culture-industry to cater to the mass products of culture in the name of the popular. Add to that the more than thirty year long control and grab of every available cultural resource by the ruling political class – and one will have certainly some ground to argue that the earlier attempt to forge an aesthetic-political identity of the Bengali being is facing a difficult moment.

Yet there is reason to contend that while all such stalemates in the making of the national-popular can be explained by political economy,

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they are resolved by/in politics. I am sure, given the long history in Bengal of aesthetics trying to make up for the deficiency in politics, we shall witness once more politico-aesthetic endeavour/s. It is not that Bengal has been unaware of the problematic of aesthetics/politics and has not tried to grapple with the question that had at times bled it from within. Poets have gone to jails, writers have taken up rifles, singers have walked up the gallows, and thinkers and artists have quarrelled in the past as to how to resolve the tension. For the philosophically-minded, at least this much Bengal's history of identity forging shows, in the being the becoming is always at work – not so much as history, but as the constitutive virtue of the subject. There is no original unity of becoming and being, in as much there is no original disjunction or secession. One can of course complicate matter, and say, that this particular style of coming to terms with one's history is a sociological process, as Pierre Bourdieu was never tired of stressing

Why in Bengal the «pragmatic turn» did not take place, and why in the «mirror of nature» the speculative tradition in Bengal always felt itself assured is a question that will call for a rigorous cultural history. Probably in searching for a clue to our longing for what Richard Rorty called «edifying thinking or philosophy»²⁹ we shall find an answer to the stalemate that stares at us and marks our current historical moment.

The antiquity of the names Vanga and Bangla

It is a fact that the Veda Samhitas and the early Vedic literature do not mention the name Vanga either in connection with the names of Indian tribes or in any enumeration of the countries owned by the Aryans as well as by the non-Aryans. The Rigveda Samhita does not know even Anga, but this Anga country is mentioned in the Atharva Veda. In the Atharva Veda Parisista, however, the word Vanga occurs with Magadha as a component of a compound word ; but as the scholars do not attach any value to it owing partly to the lateness of the Parisista itself, I advisedly leave this mention out of consideration. It will be quite unscientific, however, to come to such a positive conclusion on the basis of this silence, that the Vedic fathers had no knowledge of the country or tribe which bore the name Vanga. I cannot too highly speak of the

critical acumen of the learned scholars who have attempted to reconstruct the history of the Vedic times with the materials furnished by the Veda Samhitas, but we have no patience with those who have gone the length of making this bold statement with much confidence that the state of things not disclosed by the Vedic mantras was non-existent in the olden days. The uncritical scholars do not see that, even if it be conceded that all the mantras or prayers to gods, as had been composed at different times by the Rsis, were wholly collected and we get them now fully preserved in the Samhitas, it cannot be asserted that a complete picture of the Vedic times can be presented with the help of the mantra material alone.

Let me take up a hypothetical case just to illustrate the force of my remarks. Just fancy that a cataclysm sweeps away all that we possess and are proud of to-day, and some historical critics arise, after the deluge, to write a history of our time with the help of such a prayer-book as the Brahma Samhit of the Brahmas, or a collection of Ramprasad's songs, unearthed in the debris of some buildings, will the material be sufficient for the purpose? Will not such an inference on the basis of the hymns and prayers of the Brahmas, that the Bengalis of our imaginary pre-deluged era were all monotheists of the Brahma type, be a gross misstatement of fact? Is there anything in the hymns of the Brahmas to indicate that there is such an institution as the Calcutta University or that this country is being ruled by the British people? Ramprasad's songs may supply the information that we had such a thing as oil-pressing machine, and that machine was worked by bullocks being blindfolded; but will not this be a very poor picture of the civilization of Ramprasad's days? We meet with an entertaining passage in a drama of our celebrated dramatist and humourist, the late D. L. Roy, which purports to be a taunting challenge to the effect — should we think that the Gopis of Brindaban did not know the use of jira marich, since there is no mention of this condiment in the Srimadbhagabatam?

We cannot afford to forget that however much the Vedas relate to the general conditions of life of the ancient times, they are but ideal prayers and hymns, which, again, only a section of the Indian Aryans offered to the gods. There is ample evidence in the very Veda Samhitas, that all the

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Aryans of India did not pursue the religion which is reflected in the Vedic mantras.

No doubt we do not meet with the name Yanga in the Veda Samhitas and the Atharva mentions only Anga as the outermost border country lying to the south-east of the territories of the Aryans; but when we come upon this fact, that the later Vedic literature such as the Aitareya Brahmana mentions Yanga as a country held by a barbarian tribe, while the early Buddhist literature (not likely of a date earlier than the Brahmana) is as silent as the Vedas are, it becomes difficult to attribute such a silence to ignorance. From these facts we can only make this plausible inference that Yanga and its adjacent parts were not colonized by the Aryans till the 6th century B. C. Let me discuss this important point of chronology by considering the value of the facts disclosed by the aforesaid literature.

It is evident from the manner in which the border tribes have been mentioned in the 22nd Sukta of the 5th Book of the Atharva Veda that the Magadhas and the Angas were alien barbarous people who resided outside the pale of Aryan country but it is also clear that the countries of these barbarians were in close proximity to the land of the Aryans. In this Sukta this wish has been expressed in offering a prayer to Agni that the fever called "takman" may leave the holy land of the Aryans and may reside in such border countries as Anga and Magadha which are really the home (okah) of the fever. This fever which is considered to be of malarial type has been asked in the prayer to assail the barbarians and specially their wanton fugitive women (described as Sudras) on account of their having left the Aryan protection in Aryan homes. It is rather clear from this mention that the Aryans of the Atharva Veda utilised the services of the people of Magadha and Anga and were particularly keen about keeping the Sudra women in Aryan villages. Looking to what has been stated of Anga we may only provisionally hold that Yanga, which lay still farther off to the south-east, was only inhabited in those days by people other than the Aryans. We get in the *Atapatha Brahmana* of a much later date that the holy sacrificial fire travelled as far east as Videgha (Yideha) in Mithila. It is, therefore, pretty certain that the Aryans did not even then come in any real contact with the Yanga of Bengal. We notice in the Atharva Veda that the Kirata people of the

Himalayan region were the neighbours of the Aryans and the Kirata women supplied such roots and herbs as were used for charms and for medicine; such a peaceful relation with the south-eastern border tribes is not indicated in any Sukta.

In the Aitareya Aram-aka the Vanga tribe finds only a bare mention in conjunction with the Magadha people. Some early references relating to the people of Magadha, of Anga and of other neighbouring barbarian tracts in such a fashion, that they were beasts or snakes, have been misinterpreted by some scholars. We cannot forget the fact that almost all the tribes were known by the totem names of their elans or tribes ; it is therefore strongly suspected that when the Aryans knew the totem names of different tribes, they had some intimate know- ledge of them. When the tribes are not made identical with the names of birds and snakes, quite another inter- pretation has to be given. In the history of the conquest of the rude aboriginal tribes, we get one and the same mythical account all over the world : the rude tribes in their mountain fastnesses and forest tracts are represented as giants or dwarfs with mysterious powers, or they are imagined to possess power of transforming themselves into beasts or birds.

The Rsis were no doubt of superior mental and spiritual powers, but they represent the Raksas and the Yaksas as magicians and May avis, as invested with abiding authority over the elements. The reason is not far to seek. The aboriginal people who knew every part of their land in the hills and the forests, could appear suddenly and could escape unnoticed to places which were difficult of access to the conquering trespassers ; moreover the rude tribes, who were unable to cope with the civilized intruders, took to some subterfuges which made their hostility to be dreaded in proportion to its secrecy. When the blow was struck in darkness, the awe-struck Aryans who had supreme contempt for the valour of their foes, were led to attribute it to supernatural or non-human, rather than to human agency. In any view of the case, knowledge on the part of the Aryans of the people of their country may be presumed.

It has been just mentioned, that in the early Buddhistic literature, where detailed lists appear of many countries and peoples, the name Vanga is

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conspicuous by its absence (“ Buddhist India ” by Rhys Davids, pp. 23-29). The importance of this omission lies in this, that Buddha, who flourished towards the end of the 6th century B.C., had his activities mostly in Magadha which is not far off from Bengal, The story of Vijaya Simha, on the other hand, points to a pre-Buddhistic colonization of Bengal by the Aryans. How far we can rely upon the Sinhalese account, based upon a tradition merely, or rather upon a legendary account, that Vijaya Simha was a king of Bengal and that he led his victorious campaign into Ceylon the very year the Buddha attained his Nirvana has not yet been critically discussed. It can, however, be asserted on the evidence of linguistic palaeontology, that the early conquerors of their land went from the eastern Gangetic valley, and carried with them the speech which prevailed in Magadha at least during the 4th century B.C.

Not only the Sinhalese, but even the Yaeddas and their very wild congeners, use a large number of Magadhi words in their speech, which are of the time I have spoken of. The use of the words- “gini” for fire, ff gona” for cows, “ goya ” and "goyi” (the Prakrta forms of godha and godhika), “vaso” to indicate residence (as in kaeto-vaso, forest residence), “ ini 99 from the root ^=to go (as in gamanini), etc., which occur in the old Magadhi prakrta, by even such Sinhalese as lead a rude life in distant forest tracts, raises a presumption in favour of very early Magadhi influence in Ceylon.

The account that Vi jay a and his successors proceeded to Ceylon from Vanga, cannot also be easily dismissed, for there are indelible marks of the influence of the eastern Gangetic valley on the speech of the Sinhalese. It is a fact that many words and grammatical forms, as had their origin in the soil of Bengal at a comparatively recent time, are current in the speech of even some isolated forest tribes of Ceylon, along with the Magadhi words of earlier date as just now noted above. This argues in favour of the proposition that the later immigrants must have proceeded directly from Bengal. Whoever the early conquerors of Ceylon may be, it will be quite reasonable to suppose that even when the old Magadhi of the 3rd or 4th century B.C. changed its own character considerably in farther east, lots of people of the lower Gangetic valley

continued to pour into Ceylon, to exercise linguistic and other influences upon the aboriginal races of that island.

As to the currency of the modern Bengali forms in Ceylon, I may just by way of illustration refer to the following words, namely — Maeha (fish), gacha (tree) (occurs also as gaha in one tribal speech), petti (small) (the Bengali word peti or pati is used now to signify contempt). A good deal will have to be said in a subsequent lecture, regarding the accent system of our speech, by comparing the prevailing system with the systems of some Dravidian races, and the old and the modern grammatical forms will have to be similarly considered. As such we cannot do anything beyond pointing out here, that in Ceylon, the word “bhumi ” is pronounced as “ bumi ” or “ bind,” the word u bhat ” is pronounced as “ bat” and the form “fearana ” (to do), of which the modern Bengali form is “ kara,” is in use. I may only note in passing, that in some eastern districts of Bengal, “ba” is nearly the sound of “ bha ” and “ karana ” is the form of “ kara the sentence At hi cleon jay for Ar hi cleoa jay occurs in a humorous song composed by our poet Rajani Kanta Sen whose early death we all mourn. As to Sinhalese accent system, the remarks of Mr. R. L. Turner may be profitably quoted. He writes :

“ With regard to Sinhalese, it is hard to come to a decision, because, firstly, all long vowels have been shortened, and, secondly, an extensive umlaut has taken place.” The importance of the phenomenon, noticed by Mr. Turner, will be appreciated by you when you will be treated to our Bengali accent and phonetic system. The facts relating to Ceylon, as have been discussed here rather perfunctorily, do not fail to show, that men of Aryan speech and civilization commenced to colonize Bengal from a time not later than the 4th century B.C.

Probabilities, however, seem to be on the side of the supposition, that an appreciable number of Aryans chose to make Vanga their home, even when the Aryans of the holy Midland country had neither occasion nor liking to take any notice of the eastern tracts of the barbarians. Even when the notice of the tracts was forced upon them later on, they looked down upon those of them who resided among the barbarians. Some statements in the old

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Dharmasastras warrant us in making this inference. There are some good reasons to suppose/ that the Dharmasastras fathered upon Baudhayana and Vasistha, though older than many other Dharmasastras, cannot be placed beyond the fifth century B.C. Baudhayana has given the limits of Aryavarta in the following words : Aryavarta lies to the east of the region, where the river Saraswati disappears to the west of the Kalakavana (the forest region which extended over a large area to the south and south-east of* Hagadha), *o the north of the Paripatra mountains, to the south of the Himalayas

That Bengal is here excluded from the land of the Aryans, is sufficiently clear. After stating the accepted orthodox view regarding the geography of the Aryavarta, Baudhayana as well as Vasistha very grudgingly extends the limits of the Aryavarta, on the authority of u some ” who have been mentioned as “others.” By virtue of the extended definition, Bengal and some other countries fall within Aryavarta ; for, according to this definition of the holy land, Aryavarta lies to the south of the Himalayas and to the . north of the Yindhya range — being limited east and west by the two oceans (Vasistha I, 8 and 9). The conclusion seems inevitable, that the stray settlements of the Aryas, at places beyond the limits of the holy land, commenced long before the time of Baudhayana, and the settlers were being recognized with some reluctance during the time of Baudhayana and Vasistha.

Check your progress –

1. Discuss the origin of Bengali Language from Sanskrit.

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2. Elaborate the influence of Persian words in Bengali language.

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12.3 LETS SUM UP

Bengali language with any old .time obsolete language, w r e have no doubt primarily to look to the Grammatical structure of the obsolete speech, but the examination of phrases and vocables is also necessary, for, peeial idiomatic expressions and peculiar formation of words bear peculiar marks of particular provincial origin ; as foreign words are naturalized according to the genius of every language, proper study of them cannot be also over- looked. Various are the sources from which we have derived material for our language, and there are languages which are allied to Bengali ; how very careful we should therefore be to determine the history of our words and in fine to determine the history of our language, should be duly appreciated

12.4 KEYWORDS

Prakrit, Sanskrit, Pali, Farsi, Urdu, linguistic

12.5 QUESTIOND FOR REVIEW

1. Discuss about the expansion of Bengali language in eastern part of India.
2. Describe how Islamic rule influenced Bengali as a language.

12.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

The History of Bengali Language by Bijay Chandra Majumdar

History of Bengal, Vol 2 by Ramesh Chandra Majumdar

12.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Hint – 12.2
2. Hint – 12.2

UNIT 13 – BENGALI LITERATURE – HISTORY

STRUCTURE

- 13.0 Objective
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 History of Medieval Bengali Literature
- 13.3 Lets Sum Up
- 13.4 Keywords
- 13.5 Questions for Review
- 13.6 Suggested Readings
- 13.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

13.0 OBJECTIVE

To learn about the evolution of Bengali literature from Sanskrit and Prakrit

To learn about the various literary gems that were born till medieval era.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

Bengali belongs to the easternmost branch, called Aryan or Indo-Iranian, of the Indo-European family of languages. Its direct ancestor is a form of Prakrit or Middle Indo-Aryan which had descended from Sanskrit or Old Indo-Aryan. Sanskrit was the spoken as well as .the literary language of Aryandom until circa 500 b.c., after which it remained for nearly two thousand years the dominant literary language as well as the lingua franca among the cultured and the erudite throughout the subcontinent. Sanskrit has always been a potent influence in the evolution of Indo-Aryan through all its stages of linguistic and literary history.

13.2 HISTORY OF MEDIEVAL BENGALI LITERATURE

Historical Background of West Bengal West Bengal is one of the major states of India situated in the Eastern part of the country. The History of Bengal comprises of origin of Bengal as a whole - including West Bengal and East Bengal (now Bangladesh). “Historical information about the Bengal region is available only from the Gupta period (320 - 520 AD)” (“History of Bengal”). The Guptas ruled Bengal from Magadh (now known as Bihar). The kingdom of Gour came into existence in Bengal after the decline of the Guptas. Shashanka (Gour) became the first ruler of Bengal who ruled around 606 AD. The various dynasties which ruled Bengal were: Pala dynasty, Malla dynasty, Senas, Devas, Sahi and Mughal dynasty. The Pala dynasty (Buddhists) in Bengal began when Gopala was elected the king of Gour in 750 AD after Shashanka. Gopala ruled Bengal from 750 - 775 AD and later on succeeded by his son Dharmapala who ruled between 775 - 810 AD. Devapala succeeded Dharmapala to rule Bengal between 810 - 850 AD. They all strengthened the position of Pala dynasty in Bengal and made Pala dynasty most powerful dynasty to rule Bengal region. The decline in the power of Pala dynasty started with the rule of Narayanpala (854 - 908 AD.). Although Mahipala (reigned between 977 - 1027 AD) tried to resurge of Pala powers, but he was defeated by one of the kings from southern India. This defeat weakened Palas in Bengal and therefore witnessed various independent kingdoms. The re-establishment of Pala dynasty took place under the rule of Rampala who reigned from 1077 - 1133 AD and Mandanpala was the last of the Pala kings (1143 – 1161 AD). Apart from Pala dynasty, there were some another important dynasties which ruled in Bengal. Malla dynasty (Hindus) was established by Adimalla towards the end of the seventh century AD which ruled for a thousand year in the western part of the Bengal. The golden age of Mallas’ rule in the region was under the reign of Virhambir. The dynasty of Senas (Hindus) was another important dynasty which came into existence with the first Sena king Hemantasena in 1095 AD. Hemantasena was the ruler under the king Rampala, thus it was only

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after the demise of Rampala that Hemantasena became the independent ruler. Senas became the major power in Bengal under the reign of Viyaysena (1096 - 1159 AD), the son of Hemantasena. Ballalsena and Laxmansena were other Senas who ruled Bengal after Hemantasena. “Since Senas were Hindus, Hindu traditions become stronger and more widespread in their kingdom” (“History of Bengal”).

After Laxmansena, his sons Vishwarupsena and Keshavsena ruled over the Bengal region. After Sena dynasty, Deva dynasty was the last independent Hindu dynasty which ruled the eastern part of Bengal during twelfth and thirteenth century. The ruling period of Palas and Senas witnessed the growth of Bengali language. Jaidev (twelfth century AD), the famous poet of Bengal, was named as ‘Pancharatnas’ in the court of Laxmansena. Jaidev composed Gita Govinda, one of the first literary works in Sanskrit during the reign of Sena dynasty in Bengal. Deva dynasty (Hindus) was the dynasty which ruled over Bengal in twelfth and thirteenth century after the Sena dynasty. Purushottamadeva was the first ruler of this dynasty, followed by his son Madhumathana or better known as Madhusudanadeva. He was succeeded by his son Vasudeva and Vasudeva was succeeded by his son Damodaradeva. Damodaradeva reigned from 1231 to 1243 AD was the most powerful ruler of Deva dynasty. He earned the title of “Ariraja – Chanura – Madhava – Sakala – Bhupati – Chakravarti” (“Deva dynasty”). Dasharathdeva was the last ruler of this dynasty who ruled around 1260 to 1280 AD. The Deva dynasty’s rule ended over Bengal with the emergence of Shahi dynasty. The changing power from one dynasty to another, resulted because of the struggle between Turks and Afghan invaders in Delhi, affected Bengal too which led to the foundation of first Muslim dynasty of Bengal in the form of Sahi dynasty. Iliyas Shah, the founder of the Iliyas Sahi dynasty (1342 -1412 AD), was the first independent Muslim ruling king of Bengal. He ruled Bengal from 1342 - 1358 AD, followed by his son Sikandar Shah (1358 - 1390 AD).

Other Muslim rulers of Iliyas Sahi dynasty were Azam Shah (1390 – 1411 AD), HamzaShah (1411 – 1413 AD), Muhammad Shah (1413 AD), Bayazid Shah (1413 – 1414 AD), Firuz Shah (1414 – 1415 AD), Mahmud Shah (1435 – 1459 AD), Barbak Shah (1459 – 1474 AD), et al.

Alauddin Hussain Shah (1494 – 1519 AD), considered as the greatest of all rulers of Shah dynasty, brought cultural renaissance during his reign. His reign witnessed an incredible development in Bengali literature. Kabindra Parameshwar wrote Pandabbijay, a Bengali adaption of the Mahabharata and eulogised Hussain Shah as the incarnation of Krishna. “Bijay Gupta wrote his Manasamangal Kavya during his reign. He eulogised Hussain Shah by comparing him with Arjuna” (Sen 189). The Shahi dynasty ended its rule with Nasiruddin Nasrat Shah, son of Hussain Shah, who ruled Bengal from 1519 to 1533 AD.

The Muslim rule in Bengal witnessed the expansion of Islam in the region, starting with the independent local dynasty in the form of Sahi dynasty. With the invasion of Turks who were also Muslims, a powerful Muslim empire was established in India. In 1526, Babur, ruler of a small kingdom in Turkestan conquered northern India and paved the way for the Mughal dynasty. The emergence of the Mughals in North India too had a strong impact on the Bengal region. Babur became the first ruler of Mughal dynasty (Muslims) who ruled from 1526 to 1530 and his son Humayun became the emperor after his death. During this period, Sher Shah Suri (alias Farid Khan), an Afghan established himself as the ruler of Bengal. Sher Shah Suri (1472 – 1545) defeated Humayun in 1539 who had marched towards Bengal to rule over the region. Sher Shah Suri's reign lasted from 1540 till 1545 and his successors ruled Bengal till 1553 AD. By 1554 AD Humayun again invaded due to the inner conflicts among Suris. Humayun died in 1556 AD and was succeeded by Akbar (1542 – 1605 AD).

Akbar was a remarkable soldier like his grandfather, Babur. He made Mughal dynasty different from all the rest of the dynasties with his supreme leadership. He paid keen attention to the welfare of the society as a whole. In spite of being a Muslim himself, he showed equality towards other religions also. His nondiscriminating behaviour reduced the conflicts which existed earlier between Muslims and non-Muslims. During the rule of Akbar, the entire region of Bengal passed into the control of the governors appointed by the Mughal emperors who ruled Bengal till 1716. The Nawabs grew in power when the Mughal power began to decline in Bengal. In 1717, Murshid Quli Khan became the first

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nawab of Bengal who was the founder of the nawabi regime in Bengal. He was the first independent ruler of Bengal who released Bengal from the control of Delhi rulers (Mughal Empire). After his death in 1725, he was succeeded by his son-in-law Suja-ud-Din (1725 - 1739).

Other nawabs of Bengal were Sarafraz Khan who ruled from 1739 - 1740, Alivardi Khan (1740 - 1756) and Siraj-ud-Daula (1756 - 57). The nawabi regime ended in Bengal with the defeat of Sirj-ud-Daula in 1757 at the field of Plassey by British army. Thereafter, all the nawabs were mere puppets in the hands of the British army. "After the Battle of Plassey the whole of India came under the imperial control of the British" ("History of West Bengal"). The foreign influences like Portuguese, Danish, Dutch, French and British started affecting the country in late seventeenth century. In 1690, the British came to Bengal as traders and started strengthening their grip over the entire region. This powerful grip was exposed by British army in the Battle of Plassey. In 1764, after the Battle of Buxer, Bengal became the part of British Empire, Calcutta was officially declared the capital of India in 1772 which was shifted to Delhi in 1911. This was also the phase of Bengal renaissance and Brahma Samaj reform movement in the State.

In 1947, when India attained independence, Bengal was divided between India and Pakistan. East Bengal was given to Pakistan whereas West Bengal remained with India. The present day West Bengal is about 300 miles from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal, surrounded by three international boundaries, namely, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. On the east of West Bengal lies Bangladesh, on the west Bihar, Assam lies on the north and Orissa is on the south. Besides the beautiful physical features from the Himalayas in the North to the Bay of Bengal in South, West Bengal is known for its rich literary background as well. Many eminent literary personalities of Indian literature belong to the West Bengal state.

Evolution of Bengali Literature:

The Bengali literature can be broadly divided into following periods: Ancient Period (950 AD – 1350 AD) The spread of Aryan languages in Bengal region started in third century BC with the conquest of Bengal by

the Mauryas. In ancient period, the Bengali literature is survived through forty-eight spiritual hymns known as Charyapada (twelfth century) composed by Buddhist monks. “The composers of the Charyapada hymns include Luipa, Bhusukupa, Kahnapa and Shavarpa” (“Bengali literature”). These are the mystic songs written by Buddhist seer-poets which expressed the experience of enlightened state. Except these spiritual hymns, there is no trace of literature in ancient period; hence, it can be called as dark age in the history of Bengali literature. No significant Bengali literature has been found in this age after Charyapada till medieval age. Medieval Period (1350 AD – 1800 AD)

The medieval period is well known for Ramai Pandit’s narrative poem Shunyapurana. The collection of lyrical poems in Apabhramsa (dialect of medieval period in Bengal) named Prakrtapaingala is the part of Bengali literature in medieval period. During this period, literature developed in three main areas: Vaishnava literature, Mangala literature and translation literature. This period also witnessed the beginning of Muslim Bangla literature. The medieval period in the history of Bengali literature witnessed the growth of literary writings. Besides the composition of lyrics and poetry, genre of translation came into existence in medieval period and many Sanskrit texts were translated into Bangla language. There was also the age of Kavyas which described the supreme power of gods and goddesses. The poet Baru Chandidas was the greatest of Vaishnava writers who translated Jaidev’s Sanskrit lyrics of Radha and Krishna into Bangla. He composed various verses in fourteenth century.

The names of several poets who went by the name of Chandidas have been found in the middle ages: Adi Chandidas, Kavi Chandidas, Dvija Chandidas and Dina Chandidas. The confusion about whether there were one or several poets called Chandidas is known in Bangla literature as the ‘Chandidas riddle’. (“Bengali Literature”)

The Muslim ruler Sultan Alauddin Hussein Shah, his son Nasrat Shah during the rule of Shah dynasty (1493 - 1538) in Bengal, not only led to the social, political and cultural prosperity, but also nurtured Bengali literature. It was during the rule of Narsat Shah that Bengali poets started composing lyrics and Kanka (a Bengali poet) wrote Vidyasundar Kahini

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in 1502. Padavali or lyrical literature became famous in this period where the innumerable poets wrote the story of Radha and Krishna. Some of these poets were Chandidas, Govindadas, Lochandas, Jnanadas, Rayshekhar, Narottam Das, Narahari Das, Balaram Das, et al. Srikrishnavijay, translation of the Sanskrit Shrimadbhagvata was composed by Maladhar Basu in fifteenth century.

The translated work, also known as Govindamangal or Govindavijay was believed to be the earliest translation work in Bangla. Krittivas Ojha (fifteenth century) was the first to translate Ramayana into Bangla. In the seventeenth century, Chandravati, widely considered as the first woman poet of Bengali language, wrote Ramayanagatha. Kavindra Parameshwar's Mahabhart (1525) was the first Bangla version of Mahabhart. The most important and popular Bangla Mahabhart was composed by Kashiram Das, an eminent poet of medieval Bengali literature, around 1602 - 1610. The final version of the Bangla Mahabhart was printed at Serampore Press in 1801- 1803. This version became more popular than other Bangla versions because of its refined language.

The oldest of the extant Mangalkavyas is Manasamangal, composed in 1495-95 AD by Vijay Gupta. Another version of Manasamangal is Manasavijay by Bipradas Pipilai, fifteenth century poet of Bengal. These Mangalkavyas describe the greatness of Gods and Goddesses. "Mangalkavya ("Poems of Benediction") is a group of Bengali Hindu religious texts, composed more or less between thirteenth century and eighteenth century notably consisting of narratives of indigenous deities of rural Bengal in the social scenario of the Middle Ages" ("Mangal-Kavya").

Another genre of Mangalkavya is Chandimangal which belongs to the Puranic goddess Chandi. The famous poets of Chandimangal are: Manik Datta, Madhavacharya, Dvija Madhav and Mukundaram Chakravarti. The Muslim poets also enriched Bengali literature during medieval period. They introduced narrative and romantic poems in literature which were the adaptations or translations of Arabic and Persian romances. Shah Muhammad Sagir, Jainuddin, Muzammin, Sheikh Faizullah, Daulat

Uzir Bahram Khan were important and renowned Muslim poets in the medieval history of Bengali literature. Other Muslim poets of medieval period included Nabi Bangsha, Syed Sultan, Haji Muhammad, Musar Sawwal, Seikh Paran, Shab-i-Miraj, Muhammad Khan, Sheikh Muttalib, Abdul Hakim, Qamar Ali, Muhammad Fasih, Sheikh Sadi, Heyat Mamud, Abdul Hakim et al.

There was considerable development of Bengali literature by Muslim poets towards the end of the medieval period. Yousuf Jolekha by Shah Muhammad Sagir and Nabibangsha by Syed Sultan became popular literary creations in the medieval period. Other works of Syed Sultan included Sobemeraj, Rasul Bijoy, Iblish Nama, Gyan Choutisha, Gyan Prodeep, Podaboli and Jaikum Rajar Lorai. Abdul Hakim depicted the life of Muhammad (prophet of God) in his famous work Nurnama (Story of Light), well-known for Hakim's patriotism and his affection for Bengali language. Daulat Qazi (1600 - 1638) a renowned Muslim poet of medieval period wrote Satimayna o Lorchandrani which was the first Bangla romance. Daulat Qazi did not complete the poem which was later on completed by Alaol-Ali Abbas Husaini (1607 - 1680) another popular Muslim poet of the era. Alaol wrote Saifulmulk Badiuzzamal (Persian narrative about the romance of prince Saifulmulk and fairy princess Badiuzzamal). His literary work Padmavati was believed to be his finest poem. Shikondernom, Tohfa, Shoptopoykar and Ragtanama were another works by Alaol. Nasirnama by Maradan (1600 - 1645) and Chandravati by Quraishi Magan Thakur (seventeenth century) became the part of late medieval period.

The decline of the Mughal Empire in late medieval period (around 1700 - 1800) and the establishment of British and European trading powers in Bengal region affected the literary creation. However, the tradition of Mangalkavya, Vaishnava literature and translation work continued. Hindu Puranas and Islamic thoughts influenced the literary productions of medieval period to a great extent which resulted into Padavali and Mangalkavya. Padavali writers of eighteenth century included Natavar Das, Narahari Chakravati, Dinabandhu Das, Jagadananda et al. The versions of Chandimangal continued to be composed in late medieval period. Dharmamangal (subgenre of Mangalkavya) grew in this period,

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with several poets, including Mankiram Ganguli, Ramkanta Ray, Narasingha Basu, Sahadev Chakravarti et al. Bharatchandra Ray (1712 - 1760), the greatest poet of eighteenth century, wrote Nagastak and Gangastak in Sanskrit and Satyanarayaner, Panchali, Rasamanjari, Annadamangal in Bengali. Annadamangal, a Bengali narrative poem, eulogized Hindu goddess Annapurna (form of Parvati) worshipped in Bengal. Annadamangal contained eight episodes and three parts: Shivayan- Annadamangal, Vidyasundar Kalikamangol and Mansingha- Annapurnamangal and narrated the story of Parvati.

In the age of decline in the literary creativity, Ramprasad Sen (1721 - 1781) was an exception because of his sincere devotion to the literature. He composed Shaktapadavali, Vidyasundarkahini and Krishnakirtan. Other poets of this genre were Radha Kanta Mishra, Nidhiram Acharya, Kavindra Chakravarti, et al. Modern Period (1800 AD - present) The modern period of Bengali literature started with the foundation of Fort William College in 1800. The powerful prose literature developed in this period along with the rise of periodical literature and new poetic genres. The writers of modern period experimented with different forms of literary writings. The poets in this period consciously transcended the traditional verses to the modern poetry which brought changes in the theme and structure of the poetry. Essay-writing, plays and novels made their powerful presence in the modern period. Dom Antonio's Brahmin-Roman-Catholic-Sangbad was the first Bangla book to be printed in late seventeenth century. The foreign rulers of Bengal in eighteenth century learnt Bengali language for the compilation of dictionaries and the books of grammar. The Portuguese missionary Manoel da Assumpcam wrote the first grammar of Bengali language named *Vocabolarioem idioma Bengalla, e Portuguez dividito emduas parts* in 1743.

Nathaniel Brassey Halhed (1751 - 1830) wrote the first Bangla grammar titled *A Grammar of Bengal Language* (1776) which was printed in 1778 from Hughli press. This grammar helped the English in learning Bangla. At the same time, apart from grammar, law books needed to be translated for the administrative purposes, thus a lot of law books were translated and published in Bangla. Cornwillas Code (1793) became the major work about the body of legislations and laws in modern period of

Bengali literature. The pioneer of Bangla prose was William Carey (1761-1834) who came to Bengal for missionary work. He composed Mathi Rachita Mangal Samachar, Bangla translation of Bible in 1800.

William Carry fully devoted himself to write text books and later on joined Fort William College which had been established in Calcutta in May 1800 to prepare civil servants for the administrative services. One of the subjects in the course was the local language but this subject faced difficulties due to the lack of Bangla texts books. Then a team of scholars of Bengali language led by William Carey started writing text books in Bangla. The scholars who helped in the development of Bangla prose along with William Carey were: Ramram Basu, Chandicharan Munshi, Tarini Charan Mitra, Rajib Mukhopadhyay, Golaknath Sharma, Mrityunjay Vidyalankar et al. Calcutta School - Book society established in 1817 also took the initiative to write text books in Bangla.

The main writers from the society were Tarini Charan Mitra (1772 - 1837), Ram Comul Sen (1783 - 1844) and Radhakanta Deb (1783 - 1867). The modern period of Bengali literature also witnessed the genre of essay writing, initiated by Bhudev Mukhopadhyay and reached its zenith with Bankimchandra. Some of Bhudev's works in this genre were Bijnan Rahasya (1875), Vividha Samalochna (1876) and Krishnacharita (1886). Other essayists included Troilokyanath Sanyal (1840 - 1916), Kaliprosanna Ghosh (1843 - 1910), Chandranath Basu (1844 - 1910), Ramdas Sen (1845 - 1887), Chandrashekhore Mukhopadhyay (1849 - 1922) et al. The trend of lyrical poems was manifested in modern period through Kavigan and Jatra. The trend-setter of lyrical poetry, Biharilal Chakravarty (1835 - 1894) became popular for his poetic work Saradamangal (1879). Other poets of nineteenth century were Surendranath Majumder (1838 - 1878), Akshay Kumar Baral (1860 - 1919), Rajanikanta Sen (1865 - 1910), Govindadas (1854 - 1918), Girindamohini Das (1857 - 1924), Kamini Roy (1864 - 1933) et al. The blank verse and sonnet form in the Bengali literature were introduced by Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824 - 1873).

Michael initially started writing in English but soon moved to writing in Bangla. His epic Meghnadbadh Kavya (1861) was the combination of

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eastern subject with western techniques and style. His sonnet's collection titled *Chaturddashpadi Kavita* was published in 1866. Michael established modernism in Bangla plays as well. *Sharmistha* (1859), Madhusudan's first play, was based on the Mahabharata. He used blank verse for the first time in his second play *Padmavati* (1860) which was based on a Greek classical story. *Krishnakumari*, written in 1861, was the first successful tragedy in Bangla by Madhusudan Dutt. Dinabandhu Mitra followed Madhusudan and wrote *Nildarpan* (1860) which depicted the merciless exploitation of Bengali farmers by English Indigo traders. The other playwrights who made significant contribution to Bengali dramatic genre were Dwijendra Lal Roy and Girish Chandra Ghosh.

The short stories and novels became part of Bengali literature with the literary creations by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay (1876 - 1938). He depicted the daily life of Bengali people through his novels. Pramatha Chowdhury (1868 - 1946) introduced the format of short stories in Bengali literature. Other wellknown writers of this phase were Jagadish Chandra Bose, Naresh Chandra Sengupta, Ramendrasundar Trivedi, Upendranath Gangopadhyay, Monilal Gangopadhyay, Kedarnath Bandyopadhyay, Jaladhar Sen, Nirupama Devi, Sita Devi, Shanta Devi, Hemendrakumar Roy et al. The renaissance in modern Indian literature started with Raja Rammohan Roy (1775 - 1833). The Bengal renaissance, socio-cultural and religious reform movement during nineteenth century, also began with Rammohan Roy.

During this period, Bengal witnessed an intellectual awakening which questioned the prevailing orthodox thinking of the society - status of women, the caste system, child-marriage, widowremarriage, superstitious beliefs and religion. Rammohan Roy had great command over English language, K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar wrote about his contribution to the Indian writing in English: "Rammohan Roy although he could be named as the first of the Indian masters of English prose, was great in so fields that he belonged to Indian history more than to mere Indo-Anglian literary history" (33). Kashiprasad Ghosh (1809 - 1837), one of the founder pillars of Indian literature also belonged to Bengal. He stood as equal as Henry Derozio in his contribution to Indian English literature.

Ghosh edited an English weekly journal *The Hindu Intelligence*, his collection of poems

The Shair and other Poems (1830) stood at a high place in literary history of India as well. Besides his literary career, Ghosh expressed his opinion of the *bhadralok* (well-mannered person) community in Bengal. As per Ghosh, the *bhadralok* community included all gentlefolk belonging to the rich and middle class segments of the Bengali society. Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824 - 1873), started his writing career while he was at Hindu College in Calcutta. During his student-life at Hindu college, his poems in English and Bengali got published in *Bengal Spectator*, *Literary Gleamer*, *Calcutta library Gazatte* and *Library Blossom*. Through his style and content of writing, he removed the stagnation in Bengali literature. He introduced the blank verse in the play *Padmavati* (1860) which opened the way for blank verse literature. Madhusudan's epic poem *Meghnad-Badh Kavya* (1861), written in blank verse, was based on the *Ramayana*.

The epic was written in nine cantos which gave uniqueness to the Bengali poetry. Madhusudan was the literary figure of real genius who added new dimensions to the Bengali literature with the introduction of Bengali sonnet and blank verse in the literary writings. Bengal was the epicentre for renaissance which gave literary scholars to the world. Another scholar from Bengal was Toru Dutt (1856 - 1877). In 1875, she translated French poetry into English with the title *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*. Despite Bengali, English and French she also learnt Sanskrit and *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* was the compilation of her translations from Sanskrit literature. Another contributor of literature from Bengal was Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909), cousin of Toru Dutt. Romesh Dutt wrote novels in Bengali and translated his two novels into English named - *The Lack of Palms* (1902) and *The Slave Girl of Agra* (1909). He narrated historical surveys in large number like - *A History of Civilization in Ancient India*, *Hindu Civilization*, *The Economic History of British India*, *India in the Victorian Age* and *A Brief History of Ancient Modern Bengal*. His greatest achievement was the Bengali translation of *Rig Veda*.

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Iyengar stated about his achievement: To turn from Toru Dutt to Romesh Chunder Dutt is like passing from the bud and the flower to the ripened fruit; from Erato and Melpomene to Clio and Calliope; from Ushas, rosy fingered and shortlived, to the toiling Sun on the ascendant; from infinite promise to impressive achievement. (44) Manmohan Ghose (1869 - 1924) was another sparkling star of Indian literature from Bengal. He was the elder brother of Sri Aurobindo and had English education at Manchester and Oxford. In 1898, his collection of poems - Love Songs and Elegies got published. Sri Aurobindo Ghosh (1872 - 1950) is the outstanding literary figure from Bengal. His contribution to Indian literature and upliftment of his works at global level is remarkable. His long poetic career has given him the recognition as the literary master of Indo- Anglian literature. Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* - a work of prose art is considered as the greatest philosophical religious book. The most outstanding work of Aurobindo is *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol* which is in three parts, divided into twelve books and forty nine cantos. M.K. Naik observes in *A History of Indian English Literature*: *Savitri* was continuously revised by the poet almost till the end of his days and shaped into an epic of humanity and divinity, of death and the life divine.

A sort of poetic philosophy of the spirit and of life, and an experiment in mystic poetry cast into a symbolic figure. (69) Iyengar too praises *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol* in the following words: Aurobindo created what is probably the greatest epic in the English language. I venture the judgement that it is the most comprehensive, integrated, beautiful and perfect cosmic poem ever composed. It ranges symbolically from a primordial cosmic void, through earth's darkness and struggles, to the highest realms of super mental existence, and illumines every important concern of man, through verse of unparalleled massiveness, magnificence, and metaphorical brilliance. *Savitri* is perhaps the most powerful artistic work in the world for expanding man's mind towards the Absolute. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838 - 1894) from Bengal was an eminent writer, poet and journalist who gave India its national song 'Vande Mataram', written in 1876 and published in 1882. He was not only the key figure in literary renaissance

of Bengal but put Indian literature at different level of excellence. “In his lifetime Bankim became the literary dictator of fiction in Renaissance Bengal. He was the master of the Romantic as well as Historical Novels” (Iyengar 412). Bankim was a superb story-teller and a master of novel-writing: Stories of his novels often turn around a conflict between two inevitabilities, two things that are equally necessary truths of human life. A social world requires definitions, a kind of a basic social map which defines permissions and prohibitions, at the same time, there are elemental drives of human nature which these social constructs are meant to discipline into reasonably safe forms but hardly can. The social and moral worlds in which men actually live are made up of these two dissimilar and contradictory elements - the desire that controls men and the constructs that make society. Much of Bankim’s fictional movements arise from this central conflict between the inevitability of moral orders and inevitability of their transgressions. (Kaviraj 2)

Rabindranath Tagore was an extraordinary artist who made contributions to all genres of Bengali literature in late nineteenth and early twentieth century. He dominated the Bengali literature through his literary genius for an entire generation and continued to do so even after his demise. Tagore’s contemporary poets were overshadowed by him. Some poets tried to establish themselves in their own way like Satyendranath Dutta (1882 - 1922), Mohitlal Majumdar (1888 - 1952), Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899 - 1976) and Jasimuddin (1902 - 1976). Kazi Nazrul Islam’s literary writings explored various themes like love, revolution and freedom. Nazrul wrote essays, short stories and novels but he was popular for his poetic genius. Bidrohi composed by Nazrul in 1922 made him distinct in the history of Bengali literature. In the same year, he started a bi-weekly magazine ‘Dhumketu’ which established him as a rebel poet and aroused the suspicion of British authorities about him. Some of his poetic works consisted of Agni Bina (1922), Sanchita (1925), Phanimanasa (1927), Chakrabak(1924), Natun Chand (1939), Morubhaskar (1951), Sanchayan (1955) etc. Rikter Bedan (1925) and Shiulimala (1931) were the short stories written by Nazrul whereas Badaan Hara (1927), Mrityukshuda (1930) and Kuhdika (1931) were the novels written by Nazrul. He also experimented with drama form and wrote Jhilimili (1930), Aleya (1931),

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Madhumala (1960) and Pile Patka Putuler Biye (1964). Some other well-known poets of this era were Atul Prasad Sen, Kalidas Roy, Karunanidhan Bandopadhyay, Chitta Ranjan Das, Kumudranjan Mullick, Narendra Dev, Bijay Chandra Majumdar, Jatindramohan Bagchi, Sabitriprasanna Chattopadhyay, Umadevi and Radharani Devi et al. Atul Prasad Sen (1871 – 1934) was a Bengali lyricist and poet. His poetry centred on the theme of devotion and patriotism whereas Kalidas Roy (1889 - 1975) focused on the Vaishnava thoughts. He wrote nineteen books of verse. Roy's famous poems included Chhatradhara (The Stream of Students) and Triratna (The Three Jewels). Like Kalidas Roy, Kumudranjan Mullick (1883 – 1970) was also influenced by Vaishnavism. His works included Shatadal, Ujani, Bithi, Nupur, Dwarabati, Kuheli, Mukhoser Dokan etc. Jatindramohan Bagchi (1878 – 1948) was the prolific contributor to the Bengali literature in modern period. Lekha (1906), Rekha (1910), Aparajita (1915), Bandhur Dan (1918), Niharika (1927) and Mahabharati (1936) were popular poetic collection by Bagchi. The modern period in the history of Bengali literature witnessed the various genres of literature. Besides verses; novels, short-stories, dramas and essay writing flourished in this period. The literary scholars of this period experimented with different forms of writings and enriched Bengali literature with their literary creative skills.

THE ARRAKAN POETS AND THE LATER MUSLIM WRITERS

A close cultural contact between Bengal and Arrakan, the neighbouring province of lower Burma speaking a Tibeto- Burman language, was first made early in the fifteenth century when Naramaikhla, the king of Arrakan, dispossessed by the king of Burma, came to Bengal and took refuge in the court of Gaud (1404). After a sojourn of many years he was helped by Jalaluddin the sultan of Bengal to regain his throne (1430). We can reasonably assume that the king had acquired a liking for Bengali poetry and music among other things during his stay in Bengal and introduced them in his own country after he returned home and to power. But there is no evidence to show how far this engrafting of Bengali culture in the Arrakan court was successful and continuous, in spite of the fact that Arrakan continued to be dominated politically by Bengal and its external affairs were controlled by the Bengal governors in

Chittagong. The position was however reversed for some years at least in the third quarter of the century when the Arrakan power annexed Chittagong and kept it under its control until, in the first decade of the sixteenth century, it was recovered by Nusrat Shah, a general of Husain Shah. During the years Chittagong was in occupation by the Arrakanese a very close cultural contact between Bengal (and the rest of India) and Arrakan was established. From this time Bengali was accepted at the Arrakan court as the chief cultural language, mainly because many of the high officials of Arrakan came from Chittagong and the other neighbouring territories whose mother-tongue was Bengali.

After the overthrow of the dynasty of Husain Shah, Arrakan seems to have regained its full political independence. But the influence of the Bengali language did not suffer; on the contrary it grew. The kings of Arrakan henceforth adopted a Bengali form of their names, and sometimes it was, as in the case of Thiri Thu Dhamma (Arrakanese pronunciation of 'Srisudharma'), the only name known to us. The Bengali immigrants or sojourners in Arrakan were mostly Muslims; often too the officials and ministers were Bengali Muslims. Muslim influence in the Arrakan court was therefore far from negligible, and as happened quite often in the seventeenth century, the kings took Muslim names as well. The literary tradition which Paragal Khan and his son Nusrat Khan had started in South-east Bengal reached the court of Arrakan by the end of the sixteenth century.

The people of Arrakan and their rulers had for their mother-tongue, Arrakanese, a Tibeto-Chinese speech closely connected to Burmese, which latter was outside the pale of Aryandom. But from the middle of the fifteenth century the culture of Bengal began to percolate into Arrakan not only- through the officials but also through merchants and adventurers who came across the sea or the hill tracts to seek their fortunes. In about a century the court of Arrakan had accepted some of the manners and customs of the Bengali court. Bengali poetry and Bengali dance and music became highly popular in the cultured section of Arrakan society.

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So far as we know, the first Bengali poet to write under the aegis of the Arrakan court was Daulat Kazi. His patron Ashraf Khan was a commanding officer of king Srisudharma (Thiri Thu Dhamma) who ruled between 1622 and 1658. Ashraf was a Sufi and so presumably was Daulat Kazi. To popularize the romantic tales current in West Indian poetry (Rajasthani, Gujarati, Hindi, Avadhi and Bhojpuri), Ashraf had asked Daulat to render the story of Lor, Candrani and Mayana into Bengali narrative poetry ('Pancali'). The story had been adopted in folk-song and dance, and the mention of 'Lorik Dance' in an early fourteenth century Maithil work indicates that it was a popular amusement in North Bihar in the fourteenth century.

The Lorik song is now popular in South Bihar (where the story has assumed the form of a saga), especially among the Ahirs. But the story of Lorik as now current in South is not its original form. The story was probably not very well known in Bengal. Daulat Kazi took it from the old Rajasthani poem by Sadhan, manuscripts of which have come to light recently. Daulat Kazi died before he could finish his poem. It was completed years later by Alaol (1659), another Bengali poet from Arrakan. The poem has a double title, Satl Mayana and Lor-Candrani. The story is as follows:

Lor I, the ruler of Gohari, was married happily to Mayana (or Mayanamati). After a time a yogi mendicant came to Lor and showed him the portrait of Candrani the beautiful princess of MoharS'. Candrani had been married to a warrior who unfortunately was a midget. The marriage was therefore not happy. Lor was tempted to seek the love of the princess. He went to Mohara and managed to meet Candrani. She reciprocated Lor's feeling and the lovers were united. Candrani's husband who had been away now returned home and the couple had to flee the country. The husband gave chase. The two warriors met in a forest. A duel ensued which resulted in the death of Candrani's husband. Candrani's father now accepted Lor as his son-in-law and made over the kingdom to him.

Here ends the first part of the story (Lor-Candrani). The scene now shifts to Lor's home where his neglected wife was pining for him. The lady's

only solace was her devotion to Durga who alone could bring back her husband. Meanwhile a rich young fellow named Chatan had fallen for Mayana³ and engaged a woman to seduce her. The woman came to Mayana and introduced herself as her old nurse. 'She was a clever woman and her words of commiseration persuaded Mayana of her sincerity. But when she proposed a liaison with Chatan, Mayana became furious.

The woman was thrown out with ignominy. When Mayana was at the end of her tether she sent a trusted brahman, carrying her pet parrot, in search of her husband. He travelled through many lands and at last came to Mohara. When Lor met him he at once remembered his forgotten wife and was all remorse. Placing his son on the throne of Mohara he with Candranl returned home to Mayan. This is the second part of the story (Sad Mayana).

Daulat Kazi was a good poet; he was thoroughly acquainted with the contemporary poet's craft. His acquaintance with Sanskrit poetry was not superficial. He has drawn similies from Kalidasa and some metrical patterns from Jayadeva. His indebtedness to Vaishnav poetry is evident.

The following lyric is from a 'Barmasiya' song describing the procuress's version of Mayana's suffering for the absence of her husband during the month of Sravan (July-August):

(The poet says:) You should know that the love of the true-hearted is a garland that never fades. The chief of the commanders, the General (i.e. Ashraf Khan), is glorious in the world (and he knows this). Alaol, another Sufi poet succeeding Daulat Kazi in the court of Arrakan, was also a good scholar. His knowledge of Persian poetry was deep, and of Sanskrit lore adequate. He was well versed in music too. But as a writer Alaol shows less facility and ingenuity than his predecessor. He was more religiously minded and the religious strain in his writings often dominated his fancy to the detriment of his poetry.

Algol's life was never smooth. He was the son of Majlis Kutub, governor of a Lower Bengal region. While the father and son were once making a journey by boat they were attacked by Portuguese pirates. There was a fight, the father was killed and the son was captured and sold as an army

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recruit in Arrakan. Alaol was taken in the cavalry. In a short time the young soldier's reputation as a scholar and master of music spread around and reached the ears of Sulaiman, a minister of king Srjcandra SudharmS (reigned 1652-1684), who at once took to the young man. It was at the request of Sulaiman that Alaol wrote (1659) the sequel to the unfinished poem of Daulat Kazi and translated (1663) the religious treatise Tuhfa from Persian.

Magan Thakur* the foster-son of the sister of Srjcandra Sudharma and co-regent of Arrakan, became a fast friend of Alaol. Two of his poems including his best work (Padmavati) were written at the instance of Magan. Magan was The name MSgan (literally 'obtained by begging') indicates that he came from a Bengali-speaking family.

She was a clever woman and her words of commiseration persuaded Mayana of her sincerity. But when she proposed a liaison with Chatan, Mayana became furious. The woman was thrown out with ignominy. When Mayana was at the end of her tether she sent a trusted brahman, carrying her pet parrot, in search of her husband. He travelled through many lands and at last came to Mohara. When Lor met him he at once remembered his forgotten wife and was all remorse. Placing his son on the throne of Mohara he with CandranT returned home to Mayan§. This is the second part of the story (Sati Mayana).

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Alaol's life was never smooth. He was the son of Majlis Kutub, governor of a Lower Bengal region.' While the father and son were once making a journey by boat they were attacked by Portuguese pirates. There was a

fight, the father was killed and the son was captured and sold as an army recruit in Arrakan. Alaol was taken in the cavalry. In a short time the young soldier's reputation as a scholar and master of music spread around and reached the ears of Sulaiman, a minister of king Sricandra Sudharma (reigned 1652-1684), who at once took to the young man.

It was at the request of Sulaiman that Alaol wrote (1659) the sequel to the unfinished poem of Daulat Kazi and translated (1663) the religious treatise Tuhfa from Persian.

Magan Thakur is the foster-son of the sister of Sricandra Sudharma and co-regent of Arrakan, became a fast friend of Alaol. Two of his poems including his best work (Padma - vali) were written at the instance of Magan. Magan was The name Mftgan (literally 'obtained by begging') indicates that he came from a Bengali-speaking family. Inclined towards Sufiism and as such was an admirer of Jaisi's poetry. He requested Alaol to render Jaisi's Padmavati into Bengali verse so that it might be readily appreciated by the men of Arrakan. Alaol's translation is neither entire nor wholly faithful. He abridged and revised the story to suit the pattern of a Bengali narrative poem ('Pancali') and also added some extraneous episodes and stories.

Alaol adapted in Bengali verse the story of the Persian romance, Saiful-mulk badiuj-jamdl at the instance of Magan Thakur. The work was interrupted when Magan died and it was resumed and completed years later at the request of Saiyad Muhammad Musa who took Alaol under his patronage after prince Magan's death. At Musa's request he also rendered Haft Paikar of Nizami into Bengali verse. At that time Shah Shuja, son of Shahjehan and subedar of Bengal, had taken refuge at the Arrakan court. Shuja met Alaol and the two exiles were mutually attracted. After Shuja had been assassinated Alaol came under suspicion and was thrown into prison and his belongings were confiscated. When he was released after some years he was a broken man. Saiyad Musa and Majlis Navaraj, both ministers of Sricandra Sudharma took care of him. At the request of the Majlis Alaol wrote Dara-sikandar-nama , a Bengali adaptation of Nizami's Iskandar-namah. Alaol appears to be the first Bengali writer to translate Persian poetry. His good knowledge of several

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languages, e.g. Sanskrit, Bengali, Avadhi and Persian, distinguished his style. His poetic fancy was not always as original as that of Daulat Kazi, but his achievement was more solid.

Muslim writers were not impervious to the influence of the religious poetry of the Hindus. Their first attempts at writing religious narrative poems for their brothers in faith frankly imitated the narrative poems of Hindu authors. Such poems, dealing with the stories of Muhammad and the earlier prophets were entitled NabivamSa (after the Hindu Harivam&a) or Rasulvijay (after the Hindu Pandavvijay). The older Muslim writers of such poems belonged to Chittagong and Sylhet as these two places were the best centres of Muslim literary culture in East Bengal from the sixteenth century.

Saiyad Sultan of Chittagong wrote his Rasulvijay (also called Nabivairisa) in 1654, and he included some Hindu gods and avatars among the prophets. He had also written treatises on Yoga and some 'Vaishnava' songs. The Bengali Muslims had their own Mahabharata in the Jahgrdm (Battle Stories) poems which described either the conquest and conversion of Iran by the followers of the prophet or narrated the cruel fate of the brothers Hasan and Husain, the grandsons of the prophet. The latter story being as tragic as that of Abhimanyu in the Mahabharata became very popular among the Shia Muslims of Bengal. The oldest Jahgnamd poem in Bengali is Malulhosen (Death of Husain) by Mohamad Khan of Chittagong. It was written at the instance of the poet's spiritual master (murshid) PIr Shah Sultan and completed in 1645. Among the other writers of Jahgnamd poems from Chittagong mention may be made of Nasarullah Khan who wrote his poem towards the beginning of the eighteenth century at the command of his murshid Pir Hamiduddin, and of Mansur who wrote at the instance of Muhammad Shah.

Check your progress –

1. Discuss about Charja Geeti.

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2. Elaborate about Manasa Mangal.

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13.3 LETS SUM UP

Bengali literature, the body of writings in the Bengali language of the Indian subcontinent. Its earliest extant work is a pre-12th-century collection of lyrics that reflect the beliefs and practices of the Sahajiyā religious sect. The dispersal of the poets of the Muslim invasion of 1199 broke off all poetic activity until the mid-14th century. Thereafter, the literature is divided into medieval (1360–1800) and modern (after 1800).

13.4 KEYWORDS

Charjya Geeti, Chaitanya Charitamrita, Bhakti Geeti, Manasa Mangal

13.5 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. Discuss about Bengali literature of 13th century.
2. Explain about the Islamic Bengali literature.

13.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

A History of Bengal , Vol 2 by Sir Jadunath Sarkar

History of Bengal , Vol 2 by R C Majumdar

13.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Hint – 13.2
2. Hint – 13.2

UNIT 14 – HISTORY OF BENGALI LITERATURE POST 18TH CENTURY

STRUCTURE

14.0 Objective

14.1 Introduction

14.2 Bengali Literature Post 18th Century

14.3 Lets Sum Up

14.4 Keywords

14.5 Questions for Review

14.6 Suggested Readings

14.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

14.0 OBJECTIVE

To learn about the evolution of Bengali literature in 18th century

To learn about the influence of European powers on Bengali literature of 18th century.

14.1 INTRODUCTION

In the Later Middle Age, the convention of Shakta Poetry or Shakta Padavali develops. The period of Mangalkavya meets its end with the arrangement of Annada Mangal by Bharatchandra. The Baul convention rises as a scholarly symbol with Lalan Fakir. The most significant improvement is the quick development of Eastern Bengal Ballads and Muslim Ghazals are among the most significant parts of this period, especially crafted by writers like Alaol and Daulat Qazi.

14.2 BENGALI LITERATURE POST 18TH CENTURY

The fabric of the far-flung Mughal Empire which was giving way under the stress of the military policy of Aurangzeb snapped in no time after the death of the emperor (1706) and Bengal became almost an independent unit under the regime of the provincial governors popularly known as the Nabobs. In the mean time the interest of the foreign powers engaged in trade was gradually becoming keener in the economic and political life in the lower Gangetic region which was the nerve centre of the province.

These two factors, weakening of the hold of Delhi and the establishment of the foreign mercantile houses along the Hooghly, combined to lay the foundations of a new city culture which had been unknown in Bengal. The Mughal administration had set up zamindar houses that imitated the manners and customs of the semi-independent ruling houses of the earlier days and extended a half-hearted patronage to poets and scholars more as a matter of form than preference. The best known writers of the century (other than Vaishnav) enjoyed such patronage. Ghanaram's patron was Kirtticandra of Burdwan, Rameivar wrote under direction from RajSram Singh of Midnapore and Bharatcandra was a protege of Krsnacandra Ray of Krishnagar.

In the latter half of the century when the British power was established Calcutta became the centre of administration, commerce and culture. Commercial and administrative connection with the British was exceedingly profitable to some Bengalis who were settled in or near Calcutta. Some of these nouveaux riche came forward as supporters of the new semi-literary and cultural trends that emerged in Calcutta and the other townships along the Hooghly, starting from Murshidabad.

One of the main literary tendencies that was gathering force from the beginning of the century was the formation of a prose style. Little headway could however be made in this direction till the beginning of the next century when Bengali printing became well established and the necessity of practical and literary prose began to be very seriously felt. It

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was the Vaishnavs of the earlier century who had attempted a kind of prose in some of their esoteric and catechismal treatises. But theirs was a kind of syncopated and minced diction resembling the Sutra style of Sanskrit and lying midway between poetry and prose. The Portuguese missionaries and their Catholic converts in Bengal took up the cue from the Vaishnav treatises and wrote catechisms in Bengali prose. This was real prose but the style was not smooth and the diction was full of foreign idioms and expressions. The influence of the dialect of East Bengal, which was the main sphere of activity of Catholic Christianity in the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries, is strongly noticeable. The best specimen of this early Christian prose is available to us in the treatise by Dom Antonio, a native Christian from Dacca. The work, which was never primed, is in the form of a dialogue between a brahman and a Roman Catholic priest, the latter seeking to establish the superiority of Christianity over Hinduism. The other important work of this type is by Manoel da Assumpsam who wrote it in Dacca in 1734. and printed it nine years later in Roman type in Lisbon together with the Portuguese Original *Cathecismo da Doutrina Christao*. In the same year (1743) was published his Bengali Grammar in Portuguese with a Bengali-Portuguese Vocabulary. The habit of verse writing in Bengali however was so strong that even these Christian writers could not help occasional lapses into versification and adding distiches at the end of their treatises.

Persian was the official language of the Mughal administration and so it had to be learnt even by a brahman if he had an ambition to do well in life. As a consequence, less and less attention was given to Sanskrit, and so it came about that by the middle of the eighteenth century even Sanskrit pundits and learned Vaidyas (i.e. native physicians) would find it more convenient to have their handbooks in Bengali translation rather than in the Sanskrit originals. Thus came into existence the priest's handbook, the pundit's elemental*)' book of logic and the physician's vade mecum, all in abridged form and in Bengali prose. It was this style of the pundits that reappeared in the early nineteenth century prose of the Fort William College teachers and of Rammohan Ray, to be polished and standardized later by the efforts of ISwarcandra Vidyasagar and his

contemporaries. The popular prose style which appears in epistolary communication and in documents differed from the pundit's style in having less of unfamiliar dictionary words and more of popular Perso-Arabic words and phrases, and it cannot be denied that the popular style was the living style as it was closer to everyday speech than was the pundit's diction. The popular style was cultivated by Kayasthas as it was they who took to Persian learning more than any other caste or group. Ramram Vasu, the vernacular teacher of William Carey and the author of *Raja Pratapaditya-carilra* (1801) and *Lipimala* (1802), two of the best textbooks that were prepared for the British writer-students of the College of Fort William in Calcutta, was the first notable prose writer employing the popular (or the 'Munshi') style.

As a counterblast to the growing domination of the Muslim court culture through the centuries the grip of orthodoxy was tightening—from which Vaishnavism offered a way of escape for a time; but by the eighteenth century Vaishnav orthodoxy had become no less rigid than the brahmanical. As a reaction new faiths appeared, faiths that sprung from Vaishnav heterodoxy and tried to ignore caste, creed and formality in religion. The supremacy of the brahmins was the special target of their offensive, even though some of their leaders were themselves brahmins.

This spirit of challenge was tinged with a critical attitude of disbelief which sometimes also assailed the orthodox faiths and beliefs. Such a modernistic outlook is not altogether absent in the most representative writer of the century, Bharatcandra, who was an orthodox brahmin but at the same time very well read in Persian. Bharatcandra wrote a big 'Mahgala' poem, and it was a 'Mangala' poem to end all poems of that genre. His pen tried to sketch gods but succeeded sometimes only in turning out caricatures, in spite of his more than full command over the then poet's craft. This was because he lacked the faith of his early predecessors. It was Ramananda Yati who expressed unmistakable scepticism in the introductory portion of his *Candimangal* (1766) where he challenges the veracity of Mukundaram's claim—that Candi had appeared to him on his way to Adada. To quote Ramananda in translation:

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If Candi did appear how could it have been told in a narrative poem? Only people who lack common sense say that it is quite true that Candi had appeared to the way-farer. To remove such incorrectness and to impart sense to the people Ramananda Yati writes this poem on Candi at requests from many quarters. Please do not take offence, anybody; I have the approval of many.

Ramananda was a pundit and a sannyasin with many disciples. He wrote several treatises on Yoga and Tantrism and commentaries in Sanskrit. His only other work in Bengali is a Ramayana poem (1762) where he mentions the work of Tulsidas. As regards the general output the eighteenth century saw a continuation of the seventeenth. There was no break in the mass production of Vaishnav songs and biographies and in the repetition of narrative poetry on the various deities.

Among Vaishnav biographical works two are of outstanding importance: Narahari Cakravarti's Bhaktiratnakar (vicariously an encyclopaedia of Vaishnav lore) and Laldas's Bhaktamal (a biographical encyclopaedia based on the Brajabuli poem by Nabhaji and its commentary by Priyadas). Among the notable productions of the narrative ('Mangal') poetry are included the Dharmamahgal poems by Ghanaram Cakravarti entitled Kaviratna (Jewel of Poets), and by Manikram Gaiiguli, written in 1711 and 1781 respectively. Ghanaram wrote in a chaste style while Manikram preferred the colloquial. Both works contain aphoristic lines in plenty, which was really a peculiarity of the verse style in the eighteenth century.

An outstanding work is Rameivar Bhattacharya's Siva- sankirttan (1710). The poem deals with the same topic as in the Introductory part of Candimangal of Mukundaram, but the treatment here is entirely popular and the style is in conformity. The theme in popular poetry had been largely amorous but Rameivar produced very successfully a 'chaste poem' ('bhadra kavya') out of it. In spite of his unpretentious poem RameSvar's claim as one of the best poets of the century is unassailable. His power of observation is keen and his sympathy almost overflowing. RameSvar's poem bears ample evidence of a very low level of agrarian economy in South-west Bengal which had been always a purely rice-

producing area. His hero (Siva) is therefore delineated as a very poor farmer and his heroine (Gauri) a poor farmer's wife who would be satisfied with two square meals a day and a few yards of sari to clothe. But the poet's faith was not shaky. In sincerity also Ramesvar's poem is one of the best of the century, if indeed it is not the best.

Bharatcandra Ray entitled *Gunaftar* (Mine of Virtuosity) is the only poet of pre-modern Bengali literature whose whole career is known to us. He was born some time about 1712 in a brahman zamindar family in the Bhursut area of South Radha. As was then customary, Bharatcandra was married in his teens. For an unknown reason he left home before he had completed his studies and came to a village near Hooghly, where he lived for some years and read Sanskrit and Persian. His earliest attempts in Bengali, two very short poems on the deity Satya-Narayan, were written here (1737). On his return home he was directed by his father to assist him in the management of their dwindling estate which was leasehold property under the Raja of Burdwan. Just after the death of Raja Kirtticandra (1740) the estate of the poet's father was confiscated on some pretext by the manager of the Burdwan raja. Bharatcandra came to Burdwan to appeal to the widow of Kirtticandra. But the manager was too much for him. Before he could put forward his appeal Bharatcandra was put in prison. He somehow managed to escape from goal and took the main road to Orissa. He came to Cuttack and thence to Puri where he stayed for some time and was initiated into Vaishnav mendicancy. Then he set out for Brindavan, but on the way he was recognized by a relative and taken to his father-in-law's place and from there sent home. As it was no longer a home of plenty and comfort and as he was not exactly welcome as a prodigal son, Bharatcandra had soon to go out again and seek his fortune. He came to Chundernagore and found employment under the local agent of the French government. Appreciating his literary qualities the agent introduced him to Raja Krsnacandra Ray of Krishnagar who was then one of the best patrons of brahman scholars. The Raja made him his court poet on a decent salary and gave him farm lands and had him settled at Mulajor on the Hooghly. The poet brought his old father to live with him and also the family deities. He had no

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further connection with his old home. Bharatcandra died in 1760 at the age of forty-eight.

Under the aegis of Krsnacandra the poet first compiled (some time before 1750) Rasamahjari, an erotico-rhetorical work based on a Sanskrit text, and then wrote his magnum opus Annaddmaigal or Annapurnamangal (Eulogy of the Food-giving Goddess) which was completed in 1753. Annadamangal is really a trilogy comprising three practically independent poems: Annadamangal proper (describing the story of Siva and Parvati with the addition of the poet's original episode of Parvati becoming the Food-giving goddess by offering cooked food to famished Siva), Vidydsundar (an erotic romance) and Mdnsimha (an historical romance on the conflict of Jahangir with Pratapaditya of Jessore). The first was written in support of the worship of the Food-giving deity instituted by the poet's patron Krsnacandra. The second treats what was then the most popular theme of amorous poetry favoured by the high society in the townships along the Hooghly. The third was intended to glorify the founder of the family of Krsnacandra. For the treatment of the story of Siva and Parvati, Bharatcandra is deeply indebted to Rameivar Bhattacharya. Ramesvar also belonged to South Radha, and his poem must have been familiar to him.

Bharatcandra's narration of the story of Vidya and Sundar is recognized as his best achievement. He had several predecessors in the field, including a Muslim and a Hindu poet from Chittagong, and more than a couple of followers,* but his poem supersedes them all. For well nigh a century Bharatcandra's Vidydsundar dominated the poetic literature of the Calcutta region. Even as late as the sixth decade of the nineteenth century when English literature was not unknown to the educated Bengali, Bharatcandra was regarded as the best poet of Bengal. The printed literature of the first half of the nineteenth century largely consisted of the various editions (prices varying from rupee one to one anna) and imitations of Bharatcandra's poem.

The story of Vidya and Sundar is briefly this: Vidya was the beautiful and accomplished daughter of king Virasiraha who had no other issue. She had vowed that she would marry only the man that would beat her in

academic contest. Sundar, the only son of king Gunasindhu came to win the hand of the princess. He obtained lodging in the home of a woman Hira who was the florist to Vidya. The woman acting as the go-between arranged contact between the prince and the princess. By the grace of goddess Kali, Sundar succeeded in digging an underground passage from his lodging house to Vidya's quarters in the king's palace. The lovers met every night and Vidya became enceinte. When the fact became known to her parents, they scolded her and set about to catch the unknown lover. The ingenuity of the police chief traced the clues to Sundar and he was ordered by the king to be put to death. When he was being led to the execution ground Sundar prayed to Kali and it so happened that a man who knew Sundar as the son of a king came there. On being properly identified Sundar was released and married to the princess. A son was bom to them. After some time Sundar returned home with his wife and son.

In the poem Mansimha, Bharatcandra occasionally shows a style that abounds in Persian and Hindi vocables and idioms. This style was not his innovation as is generally believed but is an adaptation of the diction that the Muslim writers of Bharatcandra's homeland used. Bharatcandra knew this poetry and he possessed good knowledge of Persian, Hindi and Oriya. The subject-matter of the poem being mainly concerned with the Mughal court and administration it was not wholly unexpected that the poet should use, as occasion demanded, the Hindustani style (known to the contemporary European as the language of the Moors) instead of the pure Bengali style as in the other two poems.

In another respect also the poet was true to the spirit of his time. From the beginning of the century, if not earlier, topical subjects (generally humorous) drew the attention of the unsophisticated writers. Bharatcandra was not unaware of the vogue which had not yet been recognized in high (i.e. traditional) poetry. Accordingly he wrote in a humorous vein a few very short poems (containing two or four distichs) on such subjects as the seasons,

the wind, desire, Krsna to RSdha, Radha to Krsna, the weasel, the flatterer, etc. One such poem is written in Hindustani and another is a

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macaronic composition employing four languages: Sanskrit, Bengali, Persian and Hindustani. Bharatcandra could write good verses in Sanskrit also, the best instance of which is the 'Octet on the Nag' (Ndgastaka). This poem in eight stanzas was written as an appeal to the poet's patron when one Ramdev Nag, an agent of the Raja of Burdwan, attempted to oust the poet from the lands granted to him by Krsnacandra. There is a clever pun on the words 'naga' and 'Krsna'. Just as the people of Vraja had appealed to Krsna when the waters of Yamuna were infested by the serpent Kaliya, so did the poet now appeal to Krsna (-candra) for relief against the oppression of (Ramdev) Nag.

Following a practice of the day Bharatcandra attempted to write a play in Sanskrit with vernacular songs interspersed. The subject-matter was the puranic story of the killing of the buffalo demon by Candi, but the poet died before he could proceed beyond the prologue.

Ramprasad Sen Kaviranjan belonged to Kumarhatta, a place about 25 miles from Calcutta up the Hooghly. His Vidyasundar was written some time in the sixth or seventh decade of the century. The influence of Bharatcandra is noticeable in it. In style and characterization Ramprasad is inferior to his predecessor but in poetic fancy he is undoubtedly superior. Ramprasad's humour is less objectionable. His other works include Kalikirtan and the fragmentary Krsnakirtan. These poems were written in the form of the new 'Pandili' style that had developed from the older 'Kirtan' style.

There are a number of very popular devotional songs of the Mother Goddess bearing the signature of Ramprasad. The simple and appealing melody associated with these songs is also attributed to the poet who was looked upon as a saint. But this melody and the songs pertaining to it were probably the work of another Ramprasad (a brahman) belonging to Calcutta who was reputed as a composer of 'Kabi' songs. This Ramprasad was a younger contemporary of the first (who was a Vaidya). The songs are purely devotional, being appeals to God the Mother, couched in the words of a wayward but repentant child. There is little else, and the very high praise accorded to these songs by some critics is more due to the devotional appeal and to a reaction against the over-

emphasis on the Vaishnav songs than to any profundity of thought or newness of expression. The sentiments evoked by the songs are a combination of homely affection and pure devotion and therefore their appeal is irresistible. The poet-devotee's outlook can be illustrated by one of his best-known songs:

O my heart, you know not the farmer's way of work.

This your person, an excellent area of land, is lying fallow and it would have produced wealth if it had been properly cultivated. Fence it in with the name of .Kali and there will not be any loss of the crop—it is the strong fence of the Goddess with the loose tresses, and even Death dare not come near it. Do you not know that the plot is sure to be confiscated, be it today or a century hence? And it is on mortgage. So, O my heart! do you cultivate the field and harvest the crop to the last sheaf. Sowing the seed lent by the guru, do you irrigate with the water of Devotion. If you cannot do all this alone, O my heart! you may well take Ramprasad as a help.

As the religious interest and the ritualistic substance in religious poetry was wearing thinner and thinner the literary

Tendencies were seeking new outlets from the time-worn patterns of narrative poetry and Vaishnav lyrics, and poetry and music were seeking a divorce which was long overdue. The separation did not actually take place, however, till the middle of the next century when the printing press had made poetry cheaply available to the reading public and when English education had cleared the vision for a truer perspective of literature. But the new tendencies were gathering force by the middle of the eighteenth century. As a result we get, on the one hand, short poems

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on romantic love or on historical and topical subjects and on the other, short secular love songs. There were several attempts, however, at a compromise between the old ways and the new vogues. This is exemplified in the so-called 'Kabi' poetry and in the new 'Pancali' which came into existence towards the close of the century. For more than half a century the 'Kabi' poetry and the new Pancali reigned supreme in the Calcutta region and in its penumbra and almost threatened to swamp the promise of a literary revival. But the vulgar artificiality of 'Kabi' poetry with its elaborate but soulless- music was doomed from its very inception. The new 'Pancali' survived till it was superseded towards the close of the nineteenth century by the vogue of Bengali drama and the new 'Yatra' (musical play) based on it.

The verse tales that came into currency could not at once discard their pseudo-religious frame which tradition demanded. So even the tales including those taken from the Vikramaditya-Bhoja saga and other folklore were treated as Agama® or couched in the form of panegyric 4 to Satya-Pir, Kali, the sun god, or the goddess of learning. There were also secular tales, frankly amorous and without any veneer of adventure. Some of the themes of such tales were a common stock in the eastern region. For instance, the story of Saruf's Daminicaritra (known in a manuscript of the late eighteenth century) is current in Assam as well as in western Bihar. It was the Muhammedan writers who distinguished themselves in such secular tales in verse. Saruf, if his name is not a corruption of Svarup, must have been a Muhammedan. Khalil, the author of the tale of Candramukhi certainly was one. Such tales, narrated or sung in the style of the old narrative poetry, have been popular in north-east Bengal till very recently. Khalil's poem is one of the best and least adulterated specimens of this kind of narrative poetry.

Among the historical poems the best known (though trivial as a literary piece) is Maharastra Puran by Gahgaram. The name is pretentious but the work is a small poem of less than a couple of hundred lines. It describes one of the worst raids in West Bengal led by the Maratha chief Bhaskar Pandit which ended in his assassination. The author was a contemporary if not actually an eye-witness. As an historical document Gangaram's poem has some value. The other historical poems were all written

towards the close of the century or by the beginning of the next. These are mostly short ballads on local incidents and topical matters and belong properly to folk-poetry. As specimens of unorthodox and rugged verse some of these poems are not uninteresting. For instance the 'Song of the Road' by Radhamohan realistically records the plight of the forced labour that was secured by Warren Hastings in laying out the trunk road from Salkia to Candalgarh. To quote some lines:

Leaving the ploughs uncared for in the fields the
ploughmen ran away. Hundreds of men had come to
recruit forced labour. They were as irresponsible as
the devotee-recruiting fellows (for the Siva worship) in
the month of Caitra; they requisitioned the services of
all and sundry and belaboured them and forced them
by physical chastisement if necessary to work on the
road. Canes in hand, they deal blows indiscriminately
and for fear of the chastisement the navvies wear them-
selves out. They allow the labourers no food and no
rest till sundown when they are let off. With shovels
on back and a big basket in hand the navvies wearily
move on to rest. In the dusk when the rations are
distributed there is a hubbub; the navvies are stung
by acute hunger and in impatience they shout the name
of God. Their cry fetches the ration clerk accom-
panied by his assistant who doles out the rations. At
the sight of the rations the navvies sit down in single
file. As they receive the dole they move away quickly
munching fried rice, and then they run together to the

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Tank to drink. Their hunger and thirst thus* relieved they stretch themselves on the dust. Their sleep is disturbed by ant-bites and in uneasiness they turn sides continually.

Another ballad written by a contemporary village versifier from North Bengal is worth mention. On the recommendation of the British collector of the district Mr. Goodlad, a local zamindar had appointed some one as his manager (Dewan) in Rangpur whom the ryots did not like— they wanted one Ramvallabh Ray in the post. They in a body approached the collector to have the appointment cancelled. The collector was ill at ease. He asked his office superintendent as to how he should proceed in the matter. The superintendent gave the only sensible advice. To quote the author Kṛṣṇahari Das:

The Dewan replied: Ryots may do anything; they
may raise one high up to heaven and may cast one
down to death. It is the ryots that account for the
wealth of the land: the golden bangles you see every
body wearing are paid for by the ryots' money.

The collector had the good sense to withdraw his recommendation and appoint Ramvallabh Ray the nominee of the ryots as the manager of the estate.

Towards the end of the seventeenth century Vaishnav poetry had been declining. Yet it remained as the most acceptable form of poetry mainly because its music was still vigorous and its possibilities had not yet been exhausted. But even that could not stave off the stagnation of the Kīrtan poetry in the next century. The limited theme in Vaishnav poetry was wearing thin and in consequence the popular lyric poetry (rather songs) of the late eighteenth century had little connection with the story of the love of Radha and Kṛṣṇa. It is quite true that the names Kṛṣṇa and Radha are not absent in many of them. But the names here are really aliases of mundane lovers. In form the new lyrics (songs) differ entirely from the old. The diction has become somewhat free and easy, though verbose,

and the verse lines of a lyric generally have a single rhyme. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the lyric songs had been much reduced in form, the shortest containing not more than four lines of verse. Bharatcandra, the poet of the century, had been fully alive to the value of the new lyric type, and his very big narrative poem includes more than fifty such songs.

Some of these contain the best lines he ever wrote. Perhaps the earliest of the eighteenth century writers to put Vaishnav lyrics in the new and popular form were Lalcandra and Nandalal. The oldest of the 'Kabiwallah'-s, the two are believed to have been brothers. Most of their songs were written jointly and as such they bear their joint signature. But by far the best writer of love songs was Ramnidhi Gupta, better known as Nidhu Babu (1742-1839). He was also one of the leading sponsors of the semi-classical style of music, called 'Akhdai' (literally 'Clubroom Music'), that came into vogue in Calcutta towards the close of the eighteenth century. Nidhu Babu introduced into Bengali the 'Tappa' (i.e. simple in form and light in execution) variety of song from Hindi. His songs rarely exceed four verse lines. The compact form necessitated terseness of expression, which added much to their literary quality. Thus:

Look, my lover goes away stepping slowly and he is
 looking back. How can you tell me to go home? He
 was in my heart, and now I see him outside. When he
 goes out of my sight he takes his seat back in my heart.

The poet's love for his mother-tongue is feelingly expressed in perhaps the most well-known song of his. So many lands have so many tongues, but none gives satisfaction more fully than one's own speech. There are so many rivers and lakes; but what good are they to the Catak? Her thirst can be quenched only by the rain-drops. Nidhu Babu's contemporary Sridhar was a professional reciter of Purdha stories and so he bore the designation 'Kathak' as a surname. Some of Sridhar's songs are in no way inferior to Nidhu Babu's, as for instance the following:

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I love thee not so that thou wouldst love me in return.

It is my nature that I know nothing but thee. The

Sweet smile of thy moon face, when I see it I flush in

joy. So I came to see thee and not to show myself to thee.

Ram Basu (1787-1829), another contemporary, was a well-known writer of 'Kabi' songs. As compared to Nidhu Babu's and Sridhar's songs, Ram Basu's are oversized and long-winded. Their theme is also less general. There are however occasional lines bright and sincere. For instance:

My dear, my feeling continues as a heart-ache, since

he has departed for abroad. I was about to speak it

out but could not; for the shame of it I could not

express my love to him.

Dasarathi Rao (1806-57) started his career as a song writer to the 'Kabi' troupe led by Aka Baiti, who was herself a reputed singer. After a time he gave up writing 'Kabi' songs and set up his own party of 'Pancali' singers. This new 'Pancali' was a compromise between the 'Kabi' song and the Purana recitation on the one hand and the traditional musical play (Yatra) and Kirttan, on the other. The subject-matter of Dasarathi's compositions was not always traditional, although the themes of most of them were taken. The 'Kabi' songs were almost always sung by two contesting parties, and the only instruments played were the small drum ('Phnl') and the bell-metal plate ('KamsF'). The topic was generally mythological. The first singer would put a question in song, and the second would give a reply and put in his own question. The singer who was unable to give a reply would lose the contest.

From the Krishna legend and some from the Rama and the Siva stories. Dasarathi treated contemporary events of social interest as themes of the light variety of his 'Pancali' compositions, such as re-marriage of widows, profligacy in townlife, and perniciousness of English education. Dasarathi's audience was mainly the rural folk and the devotional sentiment which was the dominant note of his serious-compositions had

tremendous appeal for them. Sweet jingle of alliteration was an attractive feature of Dasarathi's poetry. He adopted many rural tunes for his songs which added much to their attraction. For these three reasons Dasarathi's compositions furnished the best popular entertainment - throughout West Bengal in the middle decades of the nineteenth century.

Dasarathi's rival in Central and East Bengal was Krsna- kamal Gosvami whose 'Pancali' compositions lean more on the 'Yatra' side while his songs are of the Kirttan type. In the attempts at modernization and rejuvenation of Vaishnav poetry the success of Madhu Kan (1813-68) was more effective. Like Krsnakamal, Madhu Kan belonged to Central Bengal and had his training in East Bengal. Madhu was fond of alliteration as Dasarathi was, but not to the same extent.

Unlike Dasarathi, Madhu wrote in a simple language and his compositions were not 'Pancali' pieces but Kirttan songs. Madhu Kan had invented his own melodies and had developed his own style of music which was a pleasing combination of the orthodox Kirttan and the rural dance song.

It was known as the 'Dhap' (i.e. Gesticulating) Kirttan style of Madhu Kan. This style has continued to enjoy popularity, being sung almost exclusively by women singers of Kirttan. The main difference between the new 'Pancali' and 'Yatra' in the early nineteenth century was that the former was sung by one main singer and the latter by at least three, while both had supporting singers and instrument players. The most popular subject was the Krsna stories. Slightly less popular were the stories of Siva and Parvati and the life- story of Chaitanya. By the middle of the century 'Yatra' plays on the love story of Vidya and Sundar obtained an immense vogue in the Calcutta region. The overture of the Yatra compositions generally supplied the comic element. In the Krsna plays the comic figures were the sage Narad and his disciple 'Bas-dev' (i.e. Vyasa-deva). In the Vidya- Sundar plays obscenity was often served for the comic. The songs were the main and fixed feature of the Yatra plays. The connecting prose and/or verse lines were supplied extempore by the actor-singers themselves.

DEVELOPMENT OF LITERARY PROSE

The establishment of the British rule in Bengal in the seventh decade of the eighteenth century did not, for more than half a century, cause any appreciable stir in the economic and cultural life of the people except that there was a growing sense of security based on a belief in legal justice. The introduction of the printing press was soon destined to change the course of the contemporary literary currents. The credit of designing and casting Bengali types successfully and of printing the first book where the Bengali types were used goes to Charles Wilkins, an officer of the East India Company. He was a fine Sanskrit scholar, translator of the *Iliad* and the principal collaborator of Sir William Jones in founding the Asiatic Society of Bengal (1784). The Bengali types were first used in Nathaniel Braney Halhed's *Bengali Grammar* (in English) printed at Hooghly in 1778. Halhed too was a good scholar, and his knowledge of the Bengali language and literature was astounding for the day.

The Bengali books first to be printed in Bengali types were the prose translations of legal codes adopted by the East India Company for administration in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The translations were done under the supervision of the British clerks of the Company. Jonathan Duncan was responsible for the translation of the *Regulations for the Administration of Justice in the Courts of Dewanee Adaulut* (Calcutta 1785). Neil Benjamin Edmunstone supervised the translation of the *Criminal Code* (Calcutta 1791) and Henry Pitts Forster edited the translation of the revenue regulations that were known as the *Cornwallis Code* (1793). These translations closely followed the contemporary documentary style but with a minimum of Perso-Arabic words and phrases. This was rather unexpected. But the British 'Writers' in Bengali had the greatest reverence for Sanskrit and very strong liking for Bengali the language of the province. This is what Halhed says in the preface of his *Grammar* regarding the potentiality of Bengali: 'It is the sole channel of personal and epistolary communication among the Hindoos of every occupation and tribe. All their business is transacted, and all their accounts are kept in it; . . . In short, if vigour, impartiality and dispatch be required to the operations of government, to the distribution of

Justice, to the collection of revenues and to the transaction of commerce, they are only to be secured by a proper attention to that dialect used by the body of the people; especially as it is much better calculated both for public and private affairs by its plainness, its precision and regularity of construction than the flowery sentences and modulated periods

of the Persian.’

The establishment of the Baptist Mission at Serampore in 1800 by W. Carey (1761-1843), W. Ward and J. Marshman was an event in the cultural history of Bengal. The missionaries took to the literary path for the spread of Christianity among the masses. Seeing that the common people of Bengal had a strong liking for devotional narratives and songs, Carey and his colleagues gave every attention to the translation of the Bible. They started a press at Serampore in the same year for printing the Bengali and other vernacular translations of the Bible. The New Testament in Bengali was published in 1801. Before that the translation of the Gospel of St. Matthews was published as a specimen in 1800. The Bengali Bible (Dharma Pustak) was completed in 1809. The draft of the Bengali Bible seems to have been made by the Bengali assistants of Carey, among whom the most notable was Ramram Basu. As Carey's knowledge of Bengali and Sanskrit advanced he began to replace purely Bengali words by lexical Sanskrit words in the subsequent editions published during his lifetime (1833), and he was always seeking advice from some Bengali scholars for necessary corrections. What Carey could never achieve, namely. A readable translation in Bengali of the New Testament was done a few years later by William Yates. It was printed in Roman characters in London in 1839.

In imitation of the Vaishnav biography the Serampore missionaries had the New Testament rendered in Bengali verse also. But neither in the form of the printed book nor in the guise of old manuscripts could this Christian poetry make any headway. The literary path always proved a blind alley.

For the express purpose of teaching Indian languages to the newly recruited British 'Writers' of the East India Company the College of Fort William was founded in Calcutta in May 1800. Carey was put in charge

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of the Bengali (and later also of the Sanskrit) section. He appointed as assistant teachers pundits and munshis, some of whom had been his own teachers and had helped him in the translation of the Bible. The Serampore Mission Press published the Ramayana of Krttivas (1802-03) and the first book of the Mahabharata of Kasiram (1802-04), 1 the first Bengali poems to be ever printed, for the use of the students of the College of Fort William.

As the poetry texts were not entirely suitable for imparting a practical knowledge of the spoken tongue, Carey's first task as the professor of Bengali at the College was to produce prose treatises. At his instance his assistants were engaged in preparing prose texts for the use of the students of the College. The best among these writers were Ramram Basu (d. 1813) and Mrtyunjay Vidyalankar (d. 1819) whose writings represent respectively the 'Munshi' (i.e. the Persian scholar) and the 'Pundit' (i.e. the Sanskrit scholar) style of the contemporary Bengali prose.

The complete text was edited by JayagopSI TarkaiarikJr and printed at Serampore in 1836. Some of the best lines in the vulgate text of the poem come from TarkSIartkar's emendations. He was a good writer of verse and a very well-known professor of Sanskrit poetry at the Government Sanskrit College, Calcutta. All these books were printed at the Serampore Mission Press.

Two prose works by Ramram Basu were published (1801, 1802). In the first book (Pratapaditya-caritra) the author utilized the current stories about Pratapaditya of Jessore as well as references to him in the Persian chronicles of the Mughal Court. The style is easy and entirely narrative. The other work (Lipimala) is really a book of essays and short narratives written in the form of letters. The style here is easier and rather colloquial. As the author said in the preface, Lipimala was intended for helping the Company officers in the acquisition of the colloquial style of Bengali as well as in the acquaintance of the ordinary business life of the people.

Mrtyufijay Vidyalankar's works are mainly adaptations and translations from Sanskrit. Batris Simhasan (1802) and Hitopades (1808) arc

translations of the Sanskrit story books Dvattrimfat-puttalika and HitopadeSa respectively. Some of these stories were already familiar in Bengali verse and also sporadically in halting prose. His Rdjavali (String of Kings), published in 1808, appears to have been adapted from a contemporary Sanskrit work of the same title, based on the works of the Mughal chroniclers. It is the first history of India written in Bengali prose. The best known work of Mrtyunjay, Prabodhacandrika (Moonlight of Awakening), was published posthumously in 1833. It contains much that can be taken as original writing, and it shows both the scholastic and the colloquial prose styles. The popular tales in the colloquial style are really amusing. It is likely that Prabodhacandrika was left unfinished by Mrtyunjay and was completed by his son Ramjay Tarkalankar (d. 1857) who succeeded his father as a teacher in the College of Fort William. Prabodhacandrika had a vogue for more than half- a century as a textbook, first for the College of Fort William, then for the University of Calcutta. The other Bengali prose work by Mrtyunjay, Vedmtacandrika (Calcutta 1817) had nothing to do with Carey or with the College of Fort William. It was written in protest against the Vcdantism and the monotheistic worship sponsored by Rammohan Roy. For the benefit of European readers interested in the subject an English translation was appended. The language is in no way an improvement, and the indirect invectives against Rammohan Roy have detracted much from the effectiveness of Mrtyunjay's challenge.

Check your progress –

1. Elaborate about the Shakta literature.

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2. What is Mangal Kavya?

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14.3 LETS SUM UP

The close of the medieval period was in many ways a period of decline. The decline of the Mughal Empire, the inroads of the European trading powers and the establishment of the British halted the natural flow of literary creation. However, the tradition of Vaishnava literature, mangalkavya, and translation work continued. There was a great deal of influence of both the Hindu Puranas and Islamic thoughts. The main literary productions of the period include padavali and mangalkavya.

Padavali Padavali writers in the 18th century include Narahari Chakravarti, Natavar Das, Dinabandhu Das, Chandrashekharshashishekhara and Jagadananda. Their poems were, however, more full of ornamentation than meaning.

Mangalkavya' Versions of Chandimangal continued to be composed, an important version being that by Ramchandra Yati written 1766-67. Interest also grew in Dharmamabgal, with several poets, including Ghanaram Chakravarti, Narasimha Basu, Manikram Gabguli, Ramkanta Ray and Sahadev Chakravarti, writing different versions. Mangalkavyas also started being composed about new deities, for example, Suryamabgal, Gabgamabgal, Shitalamabgal, Laksmimabgal, Sasthimabgal and Sarasvatimabgal. Special mention may be made of Durgadas Mukherjee's Gabgabaktitarabgini.

Bharatchandra, perhaps the greatest poet of the 18th century, wrote Nagastak and Gabgastak in Sanskrit and, in Bangla, satyanarayaner panchali, Rasamavjari as well as Annadamabgal. Annadamangal contains eight episodes and three parts: Shivayan-Annadamabgal, Vidyasundar-Kalikamabgal and Mansimha-Annapurnamabgal. The character of Annada links the different parts although the main story is how Bhavananda's fortunes were transformed through Annada's blessings. Bharatchandra had originally planned to write an epic on the model of Kavikabkan's Shrishrichandimabgal, but, bowing to the taste of the 18th century and the desire of Raja krishnachandra roy, he turned it into the story of Vidyasundar. As a result, Bharatchandra's poem is a mangalkavya only in form. Although the poet was himself inclined

towards Vaishnavism, he presented the deities as fun-loving human beings. Annadamangal influenced later poets in many ways; the poets of Kalikamangal copied it extensively.

Ramprasad and others In the artificial atmosphere of an age of decline, ramprasad sen (1721-1781) was an exception because of his sincere devotionalism and simplicity of language. Although he was reputed for his Shaktapadavali, he also wrote Vidyasundarkahini and Krsnakirtan. In the songs of Ramprasad the fierce Kali turned into a kindly mother. Some other poets of this genre were Radhakanta Mishra (perhaps the first poet of kolkata), Kavindra Chakravarti and Nidhiram Acharya of Chittagong.

Folklore An important part of 18th century literature was oral literature,' the main theme of which was love. Because this literature was unwritten it kept on changing, right up to the 19th century. In much folklore the main role is played by a woman. The most important folklore collections are maimansingha-gitika by Dinesh Chandra Sen and Purbabanga-Gitika by Chandrakumar De.

Modern period (1800-) The modern period of Bangla literature is usually dated from the foundation of fort william college in 1800. The distinguishing features of Bangla literature of this period were: (a) the rise and development of powerful prose literature; (b) the influence of Sanskrit scholars on prose during the first half of the 19th century; (c) the influence of western literature; (d) the diversification of subjects; (e) the rise of periodical literature; (f) the elevation of colloquial language to the status of a literary language; (g) the development of new poetic genres. The writers of this period were inspired by the ideal of creating a universal, eternal and independent literature. There was also at this time a growing awareness that literature greatly influenced national life and that it was the finest measure of national character.

The modern period may be divided into six phases. In the first phase (1800-1850), the era of prose, Christian missionaries and Sanskrit scholars ushered in modernism through their prose writing. In the second phase, the era of development (1850-1900), Bengali writers, influenced

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by the west, created novels and poems that have stood the test of time. The third phase, the era of Rabindranath Tagore (1890-1930), was dominated by the poet, and, although shorter, was prolific. The very short fourth phase, the post-Rabindranath Tagore phase (1930-1947), from the era of Rabindranath Tagore to the partition of India, is regarded as a separate phase outside the Tagore influence. The fifth phase, the post-partition phase (1947-1970), saw the political division of Bengal and the bifurcation of Bangla literature into the literature of West Bengal and the literature of East Bengal/east pakistan. The six and latest phase is the Bangladesh phase.

Modern period: The era of prose (1800-1860) Bangla prose writing developed in the 18th century mainly for administrative and proselytising purposes. The first Bangla books were those by Christian missionaries. Dom Antonio's *Brahmin-Roman-Catholic-Sambad*, for example, was the first Bangla book to be printed towards the end of the 17th century. The foreign rulers also felt the need to learn Bangla, leading to the compilation of dictionaries and the writing of books of grammar. The Portuguese missionary Manoel da Assumpcam's bilingual dictionary, *Vocabolario em idioma Bengalla, e Portuguez dividido em duas partes*, was printed in Roman script from Lisbon in 1743. Nathaniel Brassey Halhed wrote the first Bangla grammar, *A Grammar of Bengal Language* (1776), to help the English learn Bangla. The book was printed in 1778 from Hughli Press, and Bangla script was used in its examples and quotations. For administrative purposes law books in Bangla were needed. This is why a number of law books were translated and published at this time. Forster became well known particularly for his *Cornwallis Code* (1793) and *Shabdakos* (1799). Although these are not original works, they give an idea of the nature of Bangla prose in the 18th century.

14.4 KEYWORDS

Fort William, Mangal Kavya Ramprasadi, Yatra, Panchali

14.5 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. Discuss about the 18th century Hindu literature.
2. How much influence did the European powers had on the Bengali vernacular?

14.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

A History of Bengal, Vol 2 by Sir Jadunath Sarkar

History of Bengal, Vol 2 by Ramesh Chandra Majumdar

14.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Hint – 14.2
2. Hint – 14.2