CHAPTER 4

SOCIAL FOLK CUSTOMS
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Social folk custom is one of the most important parts of folklore studies. According to Dorson, 'in between oral literature and material culture lie areas of traditional life facing in both directions. One such area we may call social custom.' (Dorson R.M., 1982, p. 3)

The field of social folk custom is very wide. It includes the folkways, mores, traditions, and taboos etc. of the society which are recognized by society as social habits or social behaviours. People obey the customs without any hesitation. From his very childhood man forms the habit of obeying them and he follows them without raising any objection. He comes into possession of these customs when they come down to him in the form of social heritage or inheritance and it is these very customs which he bequeaths to his successors.

The daily life of almost all the members of society is facilitated by the customs. They are the determinants of the actions of individual members of society, in respect of dietary habits, marriage, festivals, education, rituals, behaviours and so on. Different society possesses different customs. These are as divergent that an action looked upon as commendable and laudable in one society may even be condemned in another. Sometimes harmful custom continue to prevail for long periods because most people do not consider them harmful and they are habituated to obey them. For this reason Shakespeare has called custom 'a tyrant', Montaigne 'a violent school mistress', and Bacon, 'the principal magistrate of man’s life.' Whatever it may be, custom has great utility from social standpoint and each society emphasizes its own customs and organizes the life of society in accordance with them. Folk customs and beliefs afford an opportunity to conjure up a vision of the development of human faculty.
The folklorists have divided the wide field of social folk customs into four major subdivisions. These are:

(i) Festivals and Celebrations
(ii) Folk Religion.
(iii) Recreations and Games.
(iv) Folk Medicines.

4.1 Festivals and Celebrations

Festival is not only a particular kind of behaviour, it is a set of traditional behaviour. This behaviour helps an individual to establish relations with other members of society. According to Robert Jerome Smith, 'thus the festival is a prime device for promoting social cohesion, for integrating individual into a society or group and maintaining them as members through shared, recurrent, positively reinforcing performance.' (Dorson, 1982, p. 167)

Edward Frank stated, 'Festivals and feasts are periodical recurring days and seasons set aside by a community for rest from labour and more or less of the heroes or days of general humiliation for disasters. (Edward, Vol. V., p. 633)

According to L. Barmelon, 'Festivals held by primitive people consisted of collective magic or religious rites for propitiation of evil spirits and invocation of friendly supernatural powers and were held on such occasions as the admission of new members to a tribe, disposal of the dead and preparation of fisherman for the catch, hunters for the chase and warriors for battle. (Barmelon L. Vol. IX, p. 429)

Including all the characteristics of primitive and modern festival R.J. Smith has presented the following statement:

'Most, if not all, of the societies of the world periodically set aside positions of time for celebration. These are moments of special significance of the group or community. They may be moments of transition, from one season to another or from one stage of life to another; they may be
anniversaries of historical events, of the legendary day of the birth or death of a hero or a god; or symbolic reenactments of events in the life of a religious leader or the founder of a society. They may be moments set aside to honour some living person or some group, or occasions for communal work, with feasting and play added. These recurring moments of special significance with the celebrations that fill them, are called festivals. (Dorson, 1982, p. 159)

People obey some socially accepted behaviour that have magical and sacred potency, during the time of some festivals and celebrations as a matter of duty. According to Dorson ‘custom that have acquired magical and sacred potency are known as ritual. (Ibid, p. 159)

Rituals are modes of behaviour recognized by society and they reflect the individual’s awareness toward society. Almost all societies different special occasions warrant the observance and performance of specific rituals. Some such occasions would be in case of marriage, construction of a new house, starting any new work, some activity concerned with agriculture, fishing etc. Country like India, all the rituals that are performed on various festivals and celebrations have as much social as religious importance.

Like other parts of India, people of the Bengali community in Chamariya and Nagarbera Mouza in Kamrup district of Assam also observe various festivals in all the year round. These festivals can be divided into four subdivisions:

i Seasonal Festivals
ii Limited Participation Festivals
iii Calendaric Festivals
iv Sacramental Festivals and Domestic Festivals.

Some important festivals and ceremonies are discussed below:

4.2 Seasonal Festivals

People need periodic times to escape from work and like to spend some joyful moments with their family members, friends and neighbours.
Changes of seasons provide such time to the people of every society in the world. Taking this opportunity of nature they observe different festivals and celebrations through which they can express their mirthfulness and establish a network of social relationship. Some such of the Bengali community of the study area are mentioned below:

4.2.1 Tero Sak or Sat Sak

Tero sak or sat sak is a popular folk custom of the Bengali community. Generally this custom is celebrated on the seventh or eighteenth day of the month of Baisakh. The women folk of the Bengali community collect various types of green vegetables from the agricultural field. After collecting the vegetables they come back to their homes and cook all the ingredients together in a pan and serve among the members of their family as a special traditional dish. Although the Tero Sak or Sat Sak means a combination of vegetables consisting thirteen or seven variety, it may become more or less than that. Sometimes the day of celebrating this custom may differ from village to village depending upon the availability of vegetables or according to the custom of their ancestors.

4.2.2 Gorakhya Nath Puja or Gorkhu Nath Puja

Generally this puja is celebrated by the people who have their milch cow in cow shed. The main purpose of this puja is to worship Lord Krishna for the welfare of the cows and at the same time to satisfy the cow-boys. On Thursday or Sunday of Sukla Pakhya of the month of Baisakh, people celebrate this puja with deep regards.

It is remarkable that the Aroi Saul, which is kept especially after the first round of thrashing is only used is prasad. Firstly the rice is fried in an open earthen pan and grinded in an Ural or Dhenki and then it is strained in a thick strainer. By this rice powder they prepare three different types of ladoos, (i) mixing the powder with sugar, jaggery and scale of milk (ii) mixing the powder with some hemp leaves, sugar and jaggery and (iii) mixing the rice
powder with sugar and jaggery. The prasads are offered to Garakhya Nath in a milking pot. The pot is called Duna. Besides ladoo some other items like mistanna, pitha, batcha etc. also offered to Gorakhy Nath. A stool is decorated by a new piece of cloth, a new rope of jute (used for tying cows) and a new twig of bamboo (nari). In a winnowing fan some flowers, tulsi, paddy and bent grasses are taken for puspanjali. Two or three boys are asked to sit before it as the priests, by wearing new gamocha and ganzee. They are called ‘Rakhals’ (cowboys). A person sits near by the rakhals and sings the Ranas. The ranas are of two types, Pachali and Nachari. During the refrain of Pachali the priest’s throws the puspanjali towards the decorated stool and the other devotes also follow them. At the beginning of the puja the rana singer utters ‘Hari Bol, Hari Bol, Hari Bol’, for three times and the women give Mangal Uruli along with him. Then the rana singer starts to sing the Pachali and during refrain he utters ‘Bol Rakhal sib sib bol’, and all the people sitting around him also utter a word, ‘AA-hoh, AA-hoh, AA-hoh’, for three times by covering their mouth with palms.

After Pachali the rana singer starts to sing the Nachari. This song is also known as Hatcho gan. People utter the word Hatcho frequently during the refrain of his singing.

At the end of the rana the main priest (rakhal) enter into the cowshed with an earthen lamp and some incense sticks in his hand. Other rakhals also follow him by taking some pieces of banana-leaf, mistanna etc. Then the main rakhal wash the legs of the cows and smear oil and vermilion on their horns. Finishing these rituals the rakhals take the prasad from the distributor by saing Hurrah, Hurrah, Hurrah with joy.

At the end of the puja the rana singer again utters the Hari Bol for three times and the woman give uruli with him. The main rakhal takes the main Ashan (decorated stool) on his head and two others take the duna and other
offerings on their heads and keep these on the floor of the main house of the host.

The last part of the puja is the distribution of prasad. The distributor arranges some pieces of banana leaves with prasad for the rakhals. Rakhals take this prasad by performing different physical exercises, one by one. The prasad is called 'Bagh Naru' and the act of taking this naru is called 'Bagh Naru Khawa'. The prasads are distributed in three rounds. In first and second rounds the same quantity of narus are distributed but in third round half of the previous rounds are distributed among the devotees.

4.2.3 Nasta Chandra

It is celebrated on the Kojagari Laxmi purnima in the month of Bhadra or Ashin. On that day the young boys of the villages steal some household equipments like broom, mop, axe, knife, stool fruits etc. from others houses. It is believed that goddess Laxmi visits the houses of her devotees on that night and those who keep awake, promised wealth by her. Therefore to keep awakening all the villagers the young boys perform this act throughout the whole night. This act is socially accepted and therefore it is not regarded as an evil task or an indecent work. Moreover, it is remarkable that, they keep some portion of theft articles on the gateway of the owners house to indicate that the goddess Laxmi had came to their houses at night. The audible things are taken by the young boys with great pleasure.

4.2.4 Ambubashi or Amati

It is a seasonal festival of the Hindus, associated with agriculture. It is a fact that fertility is an utmost necessity for agricultural production. People believe that there is no difference between the uterus of women and the mother earth. Regarding the manifestation of life giving power of women during menstruation G. Thomson said, 'It is important to observe that the magic of human fecundity attaches to the process, not to the result ......to the lochial discharge, not to the child itself: and consequently all fluxes of blood,
Menstrual as well as lochial, are treated alike as manifestations of the life giving power inherent in the female sex. In primitive thought, menstruation was regarded quite correctly, as the process of the same nature as child birth. (Thomson G. 1949, vol. I, p. 8)

People believe that the mother earth become menstruation once in every year. According to the Bengali Calendar, from 7th – 9th Ashin, the people of this community observe the Ambubashi or Amati as the menstruation of the mother earth or the Goddess Kamakhya. Ambubashi ceremony is basically associated with an ancient fertility cult and also incorporated into the mother-goddess cult with Kamakhya as its centre. ‘According to Jyotisha, when three quarters of Mrigasira are over and within first pada of Adra, the earth attends menstruation. This period of time is known as Ambubashi.

It is a mental phenomenon that, during those days rain continuous for several days at a stretch and the earth becomes wet, cool and comfort. Therefore these serial showers of rainfall is called the Sat or Santh. Sat means seven and Santh means the cool and comfort.

During Ambubashi some righteous widows never touch the earth by their foot and keep away from taking any kind of cooked food. The cultivators also restrain themselves from digging and ploughing the earth. Moreover the women who have their living husband and unmarried girls also offer puja for a fruitful life. It is observed that, on that day some Bengali women buy a piece of red cloth as a symbol of fortune.

4.2.5 Tera-Bera

At the end of Shravan the cultivators finish their harvesting and bring various types of crops to their homes which they believe as Laxmi. Therefore on the thirteenth day of the month of Bhadra, each and every family celebrates this joyful day as Tera-Bear. The women of the Bengali community prepare different types of cakes and ladoos viz., charpi pitha, kuli pitha,
patijora or patisepta pitha, til gurer pitha, polo pitha, til pitha, tiler naru, bhetew naru, dhemsi naru, narkoler naru, mowa naru etc. The main purpose of this custom is to arrange a get-together in every family and to enjoy the various types of foods along with their family members, friends and neighbours. The intensity of this custom is so high that even the poorest of the poor people also celebrate this function according to their ability and capacity.

4.2.6 Garchi Sankranti or Gashir Sankranti

Garchi sankranti is celebrated on the last day of the month of Aswin. Various types of seeds, grains, vegetables like bos, mutha, paddy seeds, bent grass, gourd, ginger, mustard oil and its seeds, turmeric and its flower, onion, man kashu, neem, lemon, coconut, jaggery, cane and bamboo shoots, collorium etc. are taken in a new kula or on the opposite side of an arum leaf and kept in the court yard for the whole night to become moistened. This act is called ‘Garchi or Gashir jagano’.

In the next morning, the cattle are taken out to bath and some amount of these seeds, grains and vegetables are given them to eat. The rest of these edible things are taken by the members of the family. In the evening they lights the earthen lamps in the field, cowshed, granary etc. This night is called ‘Gashir Ratri’. There are some folk beliefs associated with this night. The incantators believe that the charms become activated in that night and therefore they should recite them to make more powerful for future. They also transmit the charms to the new learners in that very night. Another belief associated with this night is that, the night has a magical power to forecast the weather of the coming year. Therefore, in the court yard they put twelve arum leaves serially to indicate the twelve month of the year for whole night and, in the next morning they measure the quantity of the dew gathered in each arum leaf and thus they forecasts the weather for coming year.
4.2.7 Bhalla-Bhuilla

It is a very brief and limited celebration, celebrated by the young boys of the villages. In the evening of the Kartik Sankranti, the young boys of the villages make an apparatus by joining two stems of jute and wrap the stem with paddy straw. Some flies, mosquitoes and singri (or singra) fishes, Isha or Khoilsha fishes etc. are enclosed in the three sides of the stems. Then they burnt the apparatus. A boy runs by turning round this apparatus and another boy follow him by creating sounds by beating a ‘kulas’. A group of boy’s follows them by singing the following rhyme:

i

‘Ishar guira, Khailchar guira
Bhut jai dakshin muira,
Bhalla ahe, Bhuilla jai
Kheta nak Kumure Khai.’

ii

‘Bhalla ahe Bhuilla jai
Mosha mashir mukh pura jai.’

The main purpose of this celebration is to drive away the wild animals or insects from the field.

4.2.8 Pushura or Poush Sankranti

This festival has much similarity with the Magh Bihu of the Assamese community. On the day of Makar Sankranti, the people of this community take their cattle to bath in the river and tye them with a new rope. Next day, different types of pithas and ladoos are prepared. But of these items Takti is one of the most favourite items of the Bengali people which is specially prepared by some women for this occasion.

Like the Assamese community the people of the Bengali community also construct a Mezi or Vela and burn it on the first day of Magh. The women of this community draw some household equipment like da, katari, duli, dheki, etc. on the ground establishing a ghat. Eating polo pitha ini poush sankranti is a great tradition of this community.
4.2.9 Go-Phaguniya

Cow is worshiped as Laxmi by the Hindus. Therefore the last day of the month of Falgun people of the Bengali community celebrate the day as Go-Phaguniya for the welfare of the cows.

After harvesting, the people of this community store a very small portion of all their agricultural products very carefully in their granary for the whole year. On Sankranti, they bath their cattle inside the cowshed and wets the cowshed with cowdung. After taking bath, the woman of the family keep some small lumps of cowdung in front of each house and put it in the cowshed, granary, kitchen etc. and decorate the lumps with some small branches of flowers. In the evening, after tying the cattle by new ropes the master of the family or any other male person collect the lumps and mix it with the preserved crops, paddy straw and some other plants and burns all the substances in front of the cowshed so that the smoke of the burnt substances can prevent the various diseases that occurs from flies, mosquitoes or any other insects. Apart from the other items mistanna is offered as the main prasad in this puja. At the end of these rituals, firstly the prasad is distributed among the cowboys and the other children and then the rest is taken by the others.

4.3 Limited Participation Festivals

Limited participation festivals are generally confined within some occupational groups like fishermen, kumars, kamars, carpenters etc. Before starting the new profession or restart the old one after some duration, or in the eve of conjugal life etc. they arrange some ritual act through which they periodically comes together to interact ceremonially and festively.

According to R.J. Smith, ‘The act of celebration is not limited only to communities: smaller, more exclusive groups also have their festivals. (Dorson, 1982, p. 164). Some such festivals and celebrations performed by the people of the study area are mentioned below:-
4.2.1 Natai-Puja

It is performed by the women folk in the month of Agrahayan. The puja is performed in three Sundays continuously following different procedures. They wets their houses and the court-yard and obeying the religious vow for the whole day, offer the puspanjali to the goddess. This religious fasting is observed only by the women and the puja is done by young unmarried girls without chanting any hymn. They collect some arum leaves, bent grasses, new paddy seeds etc. in equal number (7, 14 or 12 nos.) for puspanjali and offer equal number of pithas as prasad in a banana leaf. They also offer the equal number of gua-pan to the goddess. After the puspanjali a women story teller tells 3 or 5 stories (which they called the sastar) about the miraculous power of the goddess. At the end of the puja the prasads are distributed.

They believe that only those who will get the salted pitha their desires will be fulfill.

4.3.2 Patai-Puja

Patai-puja is celebrated by only a few Bengali folk in the study area. In the bright half of the Poush or Magh month, Patai puja is celebrated by making an idol of Ban Durga which is made of binna or birina (a kind of long grass). Equal number of pitha, ladoo and curries (veg. or non veg.) are offered as prasad. The Alter is decorated by flowers and surrounded by colourful cloths. The puja begins at night and in the next morning the prasads are distributed. This puja is celebrated in the Sukla Saturdashi, according to the Bangla Calender.

4.3.3 Nabanna

Like some other parts of the country the people of the Bengali community in the study area celebrate the harvest-feast in winter season, after harvesting the Sali dhan. The main purpose of this celebration is to satisfy the goddess Laxmi, to remember their forefathers and to enjoy the new rice with
others. Apart from various food items they prepare a special item with the newly husked rice powder. They mix the powder with scooped coconut, sugar, jaggery, milk, ginger, raisins etc. and offer it in the name of goddess Laxmi and their forefathers.

4.3.4 Bhai Chatu

One of the most important custom; prevailing among the Bengali community is Bhai Chatu. It is celebrated in the Saitra Sankranti.

Chatu powder is prepared by the fried sola dal and barly. On the day of Bhai Chatu, a kind of gruel is prepared by mixing the jaggery, milk and chatu powder, wishing a happy, healthy, long and prosperous life the sisters feed their brothers by their own hand.

4.4 Calendaric Festivals

The people of the Bengali community celebrate so many calendaric festivals and ceremonies according to the Bengali calendar. Most of these festivals and ceremonies are associated with religious beliefs, birth and death of some great personage etc. Moreover some seasonal festivals and celebration are also included in this wide field. Some of the festivals are:

4.4.1 Jamai Sasthi

Jamai Sasthi is celebrated on the auspicious day of Aranya Sasthi of the month of Jesthya. Sometimes according to the almanac, this lunar day may fall in the month of Ashar also, on that day the father-in-law family invites their son-in-laws (Jamai) to their home and bless them for a bright, happy and prosperous conjugal life. Therefore the Aranya Sasthi of Sukla Pakhya (the bright half of the month) is called the Jamai Sasthi. They offer new cloths and other things as a token of love and prepare various kinds of foods for them. Similarly the son-in-laws also offer various gifts to the members of the father-in-laws family. Some well to-do family offer puja to Sasthi Devi for the welfare of their son-in-laws. Sometimes at the presence of one or more son-in-laws the entire situation turns into to a festive mood.
Interestingly it is found that some families who have no son-in-law at present but once it was a tradition in their family, also celebrate the custom by offering puja to Sashti Devi to continue to ancestorial tradition to the next generation.

4.4.2 Tal Nabami

On the ninth day of the lunar half of the month of Bhadra, the brat of Tal Nabami is celebrated by the women folk. Tal is a delicious fruit and it ripe during the month of Shravan and Bhadra. Therefore the women folk prepare some delicious traditional cakes from the juice of this fruit. Some righteous women observe this day with fasting and put the seeds under moist soil for germination of a new seedling.

4.4.3 Kartik Brat and Katir Kirtan

On the Bishnu Padi Sankranti of the month of Kartik some people of this community observe the Kartik brat and Kartik puja by establishing an idol of Kartik, who is believed as the lord of beauty, the general of Indra's army and the son of Siv and Parvati. According to the almanac it is a religious month and therefore most of the Bengali people take bath at sum rise and spend the morning and evening by singing the Kirtan with some musical instruments. People who are engaged in the observance of this religious fast offer Bhog to Gobinda (Lord Krishna) in the evening and then they take 'Habishanna' with Santa and Baishnava. They also read the Holy Gita and Bhagawat for the whole month for the shake of religious merits.

4.4.4 Bhai Phonta or Bharatri Dwitiya

The second day of the lunar half of the month of Kartik is called Bhratri Duritiya. On that day the sisters put mark on their brother's forehead. It is a popular tradition among the Hindus. Like some other parts of the country the women of this community also celebrates this custom with joyful haste. They prepare a paste by mixing the sandan and dew drops. The sisters
mark the tilak on the forehead of their brothers for three times using the title
finger of the left hand.

On that occasion they prepare different types of food items for their
brothers. In return the brothers also give some gifts to their sisters. Basically it
was a magical belief but in course of time it has become a tradition among the
people. (Chakraborty B.K., 2005, p. 39)

They use the above verse so that the regent of death can never come to
take away their brothers lives. Besides these the Bengali folk celebrate some
other folk customs on some particular days which are associated with great
traditions. For instance:

4.4.5 Dasamir Yatra

Durga puja is one of the greatest festivals of the Hindus. This festival
takes place in autumn. It has been said, prince Ram Chandra of Ajodhya
worshipped goddess Durga in autumn to kill Ravana the demon king of
Lanka. As the puja is performed in autumn, it is therefore known as Saradiya
Durga Utchav.

The puja begins from the evening of the 6th day of new moon and ends
on the 10th day of the bright fortnight. The end is called Vijaya Dasami. On
the 7th, 8th and 9th day Goddess Durga is worshipped with deep regards and
therefore most of the people keep away from taking any non-vegetarian foods.

On 10th day the idol is thrown into the water and it is called ‘vashani’. The Bengali women look very jubilant on those days. They put on new cloths
and adorned themselves properly.

Before going to enjoy the Vashani, they perform some rituals in their
houses. They establish a ghat with all offerings in the yard and keep some
articles like Kula, Dala, Da, Katari, Pira etc. Besides these some reading and
writing materials, five pots of vermilion and a pair of fish-either Puthi or
Hilsa or any other fish having scales are also kept on a banana leaf by putting
the marks of vermilion.
After performing all these rituals they gathered in the river bank to enjoy the vashani. It is observed that most of the Bengali women folk buy some articles like betelnut, betel leaf (panchupari), turmeric, vermilion, balacha etc. and after coming back they distribute these things among the neighbours and family members. This prasad is called ‘Harir loot’. Some married women exchange their ‘Kouta’ by wishing a long life of their husband.

The day is regarded as a very fortunate day to start any new work like construction of new houses, to discuss any marital issues etc.

4.4.6 Laxmi Puja

The day of full moon after Bijaya Dashami is known as Kojagari Purnima. According to the Purana, it is the call of Laxmi to all the people who keep awake, such person being promised wealth by the goddess. Therefore almost all the family celebrates the puja on that night, following the traditions of their ancestors.

They make some ‘bers’ by the sheath of banana tree and filled them with turmeric, yatrar Kauta (pot of vermillion, bought in Dashamir yatra), and some grains. They also draw alpana on the floors of their houses to indicate the entrance of Laxmi Devi. Some well-to-do family offer puja by the priest and others offer puspanjali and prasad to Laxmi Devi by establishing a ghat, portrait or idol in their court-yard. After two and half days they float away the offerings in the river.

4.4.7 Ganga Puja

Ganga Puja is locally known as Ashokastami. It is celebrated in the month of Chaitra (March-April). On that day people assembled on the bank of river for the libation of their ancestors. They offer pindas, (balls of uncooked rice mixed with milk, sugar and banana) to the names of deceased person. Some people float away the frontal bone of the dead person by pronouncing the hymn. Ganga puja is mostly arranged by the Bengali folk on the bank of
river in their respective places, but some devotees go to take holly bath in the river Brahmaputra also. It is believed that taking the holly bath in the mighty Brahmaputra a sinful man can purify his sin by the blessing of Brahma, the first of the Hindu trinity, and the creator of the universe.

Some people worship Ganga by establishing an earthen image or ghat with the Brahman priest in the month of Jyasthya. Besides these they also perform some other calendaric festivals which are celebrated by all the Hindus. Such as Biswakarma puja, Kali puja, Saraswati puja, Siv puja, Manasha puja, Janmastami, Satyanarayan puja, Trinath puja, Jagannather Rath Yatra etc.

4.5 Sacramental Festivals

Like other communities there are also some occasional celebrations among the Bengali folk. According to R.J. Smith, ‘Most of these celebrations are associated with formalized transitions of individuals from one stage of life to another, and thus are occasional, not periodic. One’s life in most cultures of the world is not only a simple biological progression from birth to death but also a social movement from one status and role to another. The occasion for passing from one such stage to another is marked by special ceremonies and festivities, by rites of passage. In most cases, each of these celebrations will be directed toward any given individual only once in his life, but he will participate in such celebrations any number of times.’ (Dorson, 1982, p. 165)

The life cycle rites are varies immensely from culture to culture. In Hindu societies these are known as Samskar. Samskar means the purification. According to Manu, Samskar purifies the body starting with Garbhadharan to the end of Antyestikriya. There are ten purificatory rites prescribed for Hindus which are known as Dasabidh Samskar. These are, (i) Garbhadharan, (ii) Punshavan, (iii) Simantonnayan, (iv) Garbhadharan, (iv) Jatakarma, (v) Namkaran, (vi) Niskraman, (vii) Annaprasan, (viii) Surakaran, (ix) Upanayan, (x) Marriage.
The study reveals that, in the study area there are six out of ten samskaras are prevailing among the Bengali folk. These are, (i) Garbhadhan, (ii) Punshavan, (iii) Simantonnayan, (iv) Jatakarma, (v) Namkaran, (vi) Surakaram, (vii) Annaprashan and (viii) Vivah. On the basis of the stages of the human life these Dasabidh Samskaras are divided into four samskaras.

i **Garbha Samskar:** It is a post-natal samskar for woman which includes garbhadhan, punshavan, and simantonnayan.

ii **Saisab Samskar:** An infantile samskar which includes jatakarma, Namkaran and Annaprashan.

iii **Koishor Samskar:** Samskar in childhood. It includes surakama, upanayan and samabartan.

iv **Youban Samskar:** Samskar in adolescence. It includes the vivah.

A Brief Description of these Samskaras is given below:

### 4.5.1 Garbha Samskar

i. **Garbhadhan**

The main purpose of this samskar is to acquire some good qualities like gentleness, virtue and honesty during pregnancy. It is believed that human body is formed by six elements viz., bone, nerve, marrow, skin, flesh and blood. Out of these elements first three are produced from the body of the father and the rest are produced from the body of the mother. Therefore to purify the body of the parent before producing a child, this samskar is performed. After marriage the couple sacrifices to the fire and pray to the Almighty so that they can give birth a gentle, honest and virtuous child.

ii. **Punshavan**

Punshavan means to produce a male child. According to the Dasabidha samskar Punshavan is the second samskar and it is performed by the pregnant women in the third month of her pregnancy. But it is observed that instead of third month they observe this ceremony in the fifth and seventh month in the name of Panchamrit or panch fal deoya and kapor deoya respectively.
iii. Panchfall Deoya

In the fifth month the pregnant father’s family arrange this function in their son-in-laws house with relatives. They arrange five different fruits in a plate. The pregnant women is asked to sit in a stool and her mother then give a bowl containing milk, banana, ghee, honey and sweets in her hand. After giving the paddy, bent, grass, basil, new cloths etc. on her head she feed the sweets to her daughter. The relatives also give her new cloths and bless her to fulfill her desire.

iv. Kapor Deoya

On an auspicious day in the seventh month of pregnancy the father’s family arranges to feast in their son-in-laws house. On that day the pregnant woman will sit on a stool or a mate with five women. A dish will arrange with some fish, meat, cakes, mistanna, naru etc. and give it to them. All the five women, those who has not miscarriage baby will take this foods together. Then the relatives will give her new cloths and bless her to get powerful son. After this ritual they will enjoy the feast. In some family the pregnant women take the meal offered by her father’s family in the next day also.

v. Simantonnayan

Simantonnayan is the third samskar of the pregnant woman. It is observed in the fourth, sixth or eighth month. The main act of this rites is to make a simanta (a line by parting the hair on the head) on the head of the pregnant women. After this ceremony the pregnant woman have to keep away from the copulation and smearing the body with unguents. Generally it is performed in the eighth month of the pregnancy in a very simple manner.

4.5.2 Saisab Sanskar

i. Jatakarma

According to Hindu Samskar the impurity arises from the very moment of the birth. Therefore to purify the mother and the child the Jatakarma is performed. In some family immediate after birth of the child the father give
some honey in the tongue of the baby. On eleventh day they invite a barber to their home and purify the baby by shaving the hair. On that occasion they arrange an winnowing fan with some banana, turmeric, besil, bent grass etc. and perform some rituals. Then the barbers shave the hair of the baby and the women folk both the baby and give new cloths. The barbers also take bath after shaving the hair of the baby.

On thirteenth day they invite a priest and purify the mother and baby again. On that day they arrange a banana leaf with some rice, banana, flower, besil, bentgrass etc. and after taking the bath the mother and the child wear new cloths. Then the mother pray God Surya by taking the baby on her lap and offer the things that arranged in the banana leaf. Most of the family performs the Namkaran or Naming ceremony on that very day.

4.5.3 Koishor Samskar

It includes Surakaran, Upanayan and Samabartan. It has already mentioned that most of the family performs this ceremony on the eleventh day of the child. In course of time Upanayan and Samavartan ceremony has been vanished from the society.

5.5.4 Youban Samskar

Vivah is that last samksar of an individual which is performed after attaining the puberty. According to Jacobs and Stern, ‘Marriage is a term for social relationship of husband and wife or of plural males; it also used for the ceremony of uniting martial partners. (Sarma R.N., 1990, p. 12).

According to this definition marriage is a ritual which unites the male and female in the form of husband and wife. This definition lays emphasis upon the ceremony in marriage.

The Hindu marriage is a religious sacrament in which a man and a woman are bound in permanent relationship for physical, procreation and observance of dharma.
Although there are some differences in 'Striachar' among the different casts of the Bengali community, the basic concept of marriage is the same. The marriage system of the Bengali community is described below in brief.

It is observed that generally the process of marriage starts by the negotiation with the help of a negotiator. The first step of the process is known as Rashi jora Lekha. After choosing the boy and girl the horoscope or any other particulars of both bride and bridegroom are consulted. It is favourable for both of them, then the bride grooms family invite the bride’s family to their house and discuss about the lena-dena (money paid to the guardian of the boy sought in marriage). After that, on an auspicious day the bridegroom’s family invite a priest and the bride’s party. Along with the relatives and the villagers they confirm a date of marriage according to the Panjika by putting a mark of vermilion on that day. This ceremony is known as Pati-Patra.

One or two days before the marriage day a party from bridegroom go to the bride’s house with cloths, Sankha-Sendur and other ornaments, food stuff etc. and present all these things to the bride. This ceremony is known as 'Telar-Bhar' or 'Sona-Kapor deoya'.

The day before marriage is known as 'Adhibash'. On that day the women perform some stri-achar. Some such 'stri-achar' observed among the Sahas are describe below:

On the day of 'Adhibash' the mother of the bride take some mistana, pan-supari and bata-batacha in her mouth and grind some raw turmeric in an ural or a dhenki along with five women. They are called Ayoti. After grinding the turmeric they enter into the house. The bride is dressed with a new Sari, which is called 'Abhibasher Sari.' Taking her on the lap, the mother smears the turmeric thoroughly all over her body. The five Aioty also smear the turmeric in the same way. In a bamboo platter they arrange five earthen lamps, some amount of paddy, bent grass, a ghat etc. The mother feed some
mistana to her daughter and give the above mentioned articles on her head with bless. The pancha Ayoti or panch Ayoti also do this. After smearing the turmeric they bath the bride performing some stri-achar. For instance, they give an earthen lamp to break by the sole of the foot (the bride have to break it by the left sole, and the bridegroom with the right sole). Then she is dressed beautifully with the bridal dress.

On the other hand, on the gateway the bridegroom will be welcome by the bride’s party. He will stand under an umbrella and a twig of bamboo taken by the bridegroom man. Then the bride will take out with five boys. One of them must be the brother of the bride. The bride will circumambulate around the groom for seven times and each time they will changed their garlands. This rite is known as mala baddal. They are also blessed by launching the holy gita and the idol of Narayan on their head. The marriage is performed by the priest according to the Vedic laws. At the end of the marriage they are asked to place their hands on the Briddhishraddha ghat and then the father of the bride give away her daughter to his son-in-law. On that night the daughter will take the meal with her father, which is called Aiburo Bhat. The bridegroom sleeps together with her groom along with others as a symbol of conjugal life. The ceremony which takes place at night is known as Sanjobia.

The next day of Adhibash is known as Upabash or Bashi Biya. On that day also some stri-achar are done by the women folk. They arrange some pan-chupari, elachi, mustard oil, sweets and five pots of vermillion in a bamboo platter, which is shared by the pancha Aiuty. Then the bride and bridegroom will go out by taking a pan-chupari in their hand and pray to God Sun. they also go to the village temple to worship. After coming back home they take some food.

On Bashi-Biya, five women bath the bride and bridegroom by the water of the Briddhi-Shraddha ghat. After bath they brake the by the sole in the same way mentioned above.
After dressing by their bridal dress they are taken out to the court-yard. On that day the bride is dressed by the cloths given by the groom and the bridegroom also dressed by the cloths given by his uncle.

In the court-yard they make an artificial pond and keep fourteen pieces of pan-chupari on the bank of the pond. The bridegrooms cross the pond by taking the bride on his lap. After that they circumambulate around his pond for fourteen times and each time the bridegrooms give a mark of vermilion on the forehead of the bride. Oblalition of ‘Homa’ in fire is an integral part of this ritual. It is a kind of Agni Samskar or the purification by fire.

After solemnization of the marriage the bride and bridegroom are taken inside the house, where the young boys and girls make an arrangement of play like pasha khela, kori khela, chara kata etc. between the bride and bridegroom for entertainment. A ring is kept conceded in a quantity of rice a bowl and the bride and the bridegroom are asked alternately to find it. Then one who can find out the ring, wins.

Another play is that, the relatives pluck two pieces of paper from the crown of the bride and groom of different colour and sink it into the water. Then they observe the colour of the pieces. If the colour of the bride’s piece became faded then they declare that the bride will be dominated by the groom. Similarly, if the groom’s piece became faded then the groom will be dominated by the bride. If both the piece became faded then it will indicate that their combination will be highly mellifluous.

At the end of the marriage, the bride is taken out by five women and gives her to the bridegroom party to start a new conjugal life. In bride house, they arrange a feast, which is called Bou Bhat.

4.5.5 Rites observed at Death

The rites observed at death by the Hindus are not much more different form those observed elsewhere in the region. When a grown up person in the family dies, they take out the dead body from house to the court-yard and
dressed with new cloths. After showing the adoration to the departed soul they carry the body to the cremation ground where after the performance of some scriptural rites, it is cremated. Some pieces of bone of the burnt body are brought home for the performance of the sacred rites in future. From that day the whole family observes some restrictions which are called ‘Asush or Ashoush’ (liberally, un-cleanliness). During this period the sons of the dead person wear a wet, unwashed new cloth and observe some strict restrictions in eating, sitting, sleeping, shaving, smearing oil, combing etc. Although these restrictions are not so strict in case of other members still they observe some rites as per the Vedic rules.

The tenth day is known as ‘Daha’. On that day the sons shave their hair by inviting a barber ceremonially. From that day they are relaxed from some restrictions. On the day of Shraddha, they offer panda to the deceased person. These rites are performed for the propitiation of the soul of the deceased. The state of un-cleanliness is formally removed from that day. This purification is performed by a Brahman according to the Vedic rules. Immediately after this ceremony another ceremony is held which is known as Mas Chuani, Mas Mukh or Matchya Sparcha. On that day they invite some guests and arrange a big feast with non vegetarian food items. Firstly these are offered to the departed soul and then it is taken by the family members with their guest.

Besides this they also perform some rituals for the miscarried and premature death of the child. Of course, these are not so strict and there is no compulsion. These short term rites are usually observed by the mother only.

4.6 Folk Religion

According to Max Weber, India has always been a country of villages. The major occupation of the countryman is agriculture in pursuing which man has to struggle constantly with nature. Whenever they compelled to face natural hardships and dangers, storms, floods, lighting, famine, deluge, scarcity, dangerous animals etc. They starts to worship them and even tries to
gain command over them by magic. Moreover, they also believe that disease and epidemics are caused due to the wrath of some god and goddess and some evil spirits. In this way faith in religion and sometimes even in magic is found in the life of the villagers. Sociologists have defined religion from different point of view:

According to Ogburn and Nimkoff, ‘religion is attitudes towards superhuman powers. (Ogburn and Nimkoff, 1950, p. 411) H. M. Johnson has defined religion in the following words, ‘Religion is more or less coherent system of beliefs and practices concerning a supernatural order of beings, forces, places or other entities. (Johnson H.M., 1967, p. 392)

‘According to MacIver and Page, ‘Religion as we understood the term, implies a relationship not merely between man and man, but also between and some higher power.’ (MacIver and Page, 1967, p. 168)

The definitions mentioned above reveals that no society can survive without religion. In the words of A.W. Green, ‘Man and Society have been proved capable of serving without science. That man and society can survive without religion is unproved. (Green A.W. 1956, p. 412)

‘Every religion recognizes several or all of the following entities: one or more deities, spirits and demons, personal and impersonal power, one or more souls, ghosts, fate, luck, magic and witches. In addition, each religion attaches religious significance to certain objects and places, such as the insignia of a priest or the mountain abode of a deity.’ (Dorson, 1982, p. 217)

Religions not only free man from all kinds of fears and tensions but also create a consciousness of depending upon supernatural power. As existence of the group is much more important than that of individual, hence he has to make sacrifices for the group.

The Bengali community in Chamaria and Nagarbera Mouza also worship most of the god and goddess for the welfare of the individual, family, society and nations, those who are worshipped by all the Bengali Hindus
round the year. But it is found that in course of time many of these religious beliefs have vanished but quite a few still persist among them. Some of these are enumerated below:

4.6.1 Manasa Puja

Manasa is one of the most powerful non-Aryan goddess among the Bengali community. She is known by different names such as, Bishohori, Padma, Marai, Ketaka, Nagmati, Sakambhari, Brahmani etc. According to the belief of the Hindus, Manasa is the goddess of the serpent race but she is worshipped for another various purposes also.

P.K. Maity has mentioned that, 'In Bengal Manasa is worshipped for various purposes – as a powerful goddess, as a rain giver, as a wealth giver and also as a curer of diseases etc.' (Maity P.K. 1966, p. 269)

Similarly, 'Manasa is not only snake deity although the power to eradicate snake venom is admittedly one of her attributes as one of her name, Bishohori, itself implies. She is also the goddess of the welfare of the household and of abundance both in grains and in progeny.' (Dutta B.N. 1973, p. 64)

Generally Mansa puja is performed in Dashahara, Shravan Sankranti, Bhadra Sankranti, and Nag Panchami by establishing an image and performing the scriptural rites by the Brahman priest. Besides this the puja also sometimes offered, by simply installing a ghat, that represented the goddess.

On the first day of the month of Shravan the people of the Bengali community organized this puja publicly by the community members. Sometimes it is also arranged by a particulars family at any time of the year.

It is observed that, from the first day of Shravan, they begins to recite the Panchali from the Padma Puran or Manasa Mangal Kabya melodiously. The listeners of all ages listen the narration of the legend of Behulla and Lakhindar very attentively. They became very joyous on that day when the
narrators recite the description of the marriage of Behulla and Lakhindar. Even the devoted women folk prepare cakes to enjoy the marriage ceremony of Behulla and Lakhindar.

The puja is performed on the Shravan Sankranti and therefore the recitation of the panchali must be completed on that night. The women folk offer milk, sugar, banana, flower, besil, bent grass etc. to the goddess and exchange the pots of vermilion among them. They spent the whole night by dancing and singing with the sound of Dhak and Dhol etc.

Besides this, some women of the Bengali community offer milk and banana to Manasa on every Tuesday and Saturday. Because it is believed that on those days the poison of the snake is increased.

4.6.2 Surya Puja

Surya puja is performed on Makar Saptami by the women folk. They arrange this puja in someone’s house with religious fasting. The devotees take both before sun rise and collect soil from the field. After installing a ghat they make an idol of Surya Devata, by this soil on the court-yard. The idol looks extremely odd, because, they just put some clay to make an imaginary god. Batacha, kadma, sugar etc. are offered as the prasad. The offering of puspanjali continues till the evening. In the evening they pray to the god by singing his bandana and distribute the prasad. Before the sun set the devotees take vegetarian food together. The main purpose of this puja is to get the blessing of god Surya in every respect of life.

4.6.3 Bastu Puja

It is observed by the Bengali folk in order to save their domestic properties from natural calamities or any unprecedented loss. The term Bastu means the residence, the root, the origin of foundation etc. on Puch Sankranti they clean their court-yard and establish a thin bamboo twig, wrapping round a red cloth in it. They offer a pair of Boyal fish, panchupari and establish a small ghat (khuti) by putting mark of vermilion. After puja they keep the
water of ghat carefully for the whole year. They believe that this holly water has an unworldly power to protect the property from burn.

4.6.4 Subachani Puja

Generally on Tuesday or Thursday in the month of Baisakh the women of the Bengali community observe this puja or brat. The women folk especially whose husband is living (sadhaba), abstain form taking food, drinks, copulation etc. on that day. In the evening they clean their court-yard or near the sacred besil. These are known as pukhur. The pukhurs are filled with milk, water, and mustard oil and the bank of these pands are also marked with vermillion. They install a ghat and offer betel nut, betel leaf, bent grass, besil etc. to the deity. At the end of the puja an expert women read the panchali or a story teller tells 3/5 or 7 stories before the devotees. The stories are about the miraculous powers of the goddess. It is found that most of the story tellers are illiterate women and therefore these are transmitted orally from one generation to another.

It is believed that those who observe this brat can get worthy son, worthy daughter, worthy husband etc. Therefore at the very beginning of the conjugal life the bride observe this brat by wearing a wet cloth. It is an integral part of the marriage ceremony of the Bengali community.

Moreover, this puja is performed by the women folk before starting an auspicious occasion like annprasan or before starting any new business or after getting some unexpected benefit also.

Besides this, some women regularly offer milk banana, gua-pan etc. in every Tuesday and Thursday for the welfare of their family.

4.6.5 Karakari Puja or Khuti Puja

This puja is performed by the women folk on the Poush Sankranti. The main puja is performed by the unmarried girls of the village. The community girls arrange this puja collectively in someone’s house by keeping the brat.
They clean the court-yard properly and draw some small squares on it with the rice powder. All the devotees prepare some small earthen jars which are called Khuties. These are filled with milk, water, rice, til etc. and decorated by some small garlands of season seeds, flowers of mustard plant, farm leaf, drona puspa, billa patra etc. After putting some rice or paddy seeds in each square they establish their khutis one by one. The puja is performed their khuties one by one. The puja is performed without chanting any hymn. They offer fruits, batacha, jaggery, sugar, rice, chira, muri etc. as prasad.

Besides this khuties they also make some small holes in the yard and filled with milk, water, mustard oil, rice etc. to offer puja to Devi Subachani along with Ma Karakari.

All the devotees take some flower, til, tulashi etc. in front of them for puspanjali. A woman folk tells 3-7 stories about the divine power of the goddess and the devotees throw the puspanjali in the midst of the story by raising the uruli. ‘Umna-Jumnar Sadhu, Gowelini – Chandalinir Sadhu’, ‘Kharikatar Sadhu’ etc. are some popular folk tells narrated by the story teller. The women folk take oath before Ma Kara-Kari that, if she fulfills her desires in time she will offer more and more khuties in the next year.

After puja they take away their own khuties to their home and keep them for 3-7 days. They also prepare cakes with this rice and preserve the water very carefully for the future, which is used as a medicine for the various skin diseases of their children.

4.6.6 Charak Puja

Out of the various religious folk customs Charak puja is wroth mentionable as it is one of the greatest religious festival of the Bengali community of the study areas. The main puja is performed on the day of Chaitra Sankranti, but, the puja festival continues for several days at a stratch.

The main priest of the puja is known as Mathuma. He observes a strict religious fasting for a month. From the 23rd of Chaitra, a group of devotees
(15-20) goes village to village to beg money. It is called ‘Gaon Parikrama’. The group of boys is called Sanyashis. They wear a red gamocha and take a trishul in their hands. The main priest or any one of the Sanyashis take an wooden idol of Lord Shiva on his head which is called ‘Nil Pat’. The Sanyashis goes door to door for baging. They put the ‘Nil Pat’ on the courtyard and the host of the family offer puja to the Nil Pat with some red hibiscus flowers, fruits, bataeha etc. The group of boys sings the Chabki git and Kabita, creating a thundering sound of dhaks.

The Charak tree (a very big trunk of a sal tree) is regarded as a symbol of Parvati. It is kept under water of the river for the whole years. Before two days of the main puja the Matthuma and Sanyshais goes to the river and perform some rituals according to the direction of Matthuma. On the previous day of the puja the Sanyashis goes for bagging to their surrounding villages. Two boys are attired like Har-Gauri and joined with them. On that day the Sanyashis are called Mani Hazra. The people worship Har-Gauri on that night by reciting Dik Bandana. At the end of the puja a magical atmosphere is created by beating dhaks and spreading a huge amount of smoke of resin and at that moment, suddenly a person possessed by a spirit and leaves the scared place quickly by holding a sword in his hand (which is already kept before him). Immediately he runs towards the grave-yard for searching humans skulls and comes back before dawn. Simultaneously for the whole night the main priest offers puja to the Nil Pat.

The main puja begins in the last day of the month. The Sanyashis along with Matthuma goes to the river and bring the Charak tree to the field. On that day the Sanyhashis are called Kali Hazra.

On the top of the Charak tree two hollow bamboos are tied up vertically with a strong rope. After scattering the holy water and smearing vermilion on the charka tree and in the skulls, the skulls are hanged on the both ends of the bamboo. Then the Charak tree is erected in a deep hole. The
Matthuna begins the puja at the bottom of the tree with red hibiscus flowers in a peculiar manner. The devotees offer various types of offerings like cira, muri, batacha, oil and sacrifices pigeons, goat etc. At the end of the puja the Matthuna becomes faint and then the rest of the people try to bring him into sense.

The last part of the puja is performed in grave-yard at mid-night. Therefore it is known as Smashan puja. The Matthuna, Sanyashis and some other people goes to the grave-yard to offer puja to the ghosts with pitha, mistana, fried rice, fish fry, fruits etc. It is believed that ghost comes to eat these things by disguising themselves as dog, fox, cat, or a shadow and take half of each item. Then the priest distributes the rest among the people.

Besides these some horrible activities are also performed by some people in the last day of Charak puja.

4.6.7 Saraswati Puja

Saraswati is worshipped as the goddess of learning. Therefore to get the blessing of Saraswati, the school boys and girls worships her in Sukla panchami tithi in the month of Magh. But it is almost confined to educational institutions and has not much to do folk in general.

4.6.8 Biswakarma Puja

Biswa karma puja is celebrated on the last day of the month of Bhada. Biswakarma means the creator of the universe. According to the classical dictionary of Dowson, 'This name seems to have been originally an eipthel of any powerful god, as a Indra or Surya, but in course of time it come to designate a personification of the creative power; it is also applied to the architect or artificer of the gods.' (Baruah H.C. 1989, p. 727) People of this community celebrate this puja with priest or without priest and either publicly or individually during day time.
4.6.9 Sitala Puja

Sitala is believed as the goddess of small pox. She is also believed as the protector of the small children. According to William Crooke ‘......Sitala, she that loves the cool, so called euphemistically in consequence of the fever which accompanies small pox the chief infant plague of India, which is under her control.’ (Crook William, Vol. I, p. 126)

Sitala puja is performed during spring season, (in the month of Phalgun, Chitra, Baisakh and Jyasthya). The puja is performed with or without priest. The women do not take any fried or non-vegetarians foods on that day. After puja, the throwing away the idol of the goddess in river is prohibited.

Apart from these the Bengali folk observe some other brat, such as, Sivratri, Janmastami, Ashokastami etc. There life is influenced by a big number of religious beliefs. Beliefs are generally not based on scientific basis but they are something which has been handed down since generations, helping to build a society into single unite.

Although in course of time many of these beliefs have vanished, at the same time due to some other causes like, lack of education influence of superstitions and wrong notions, they are still following some of these in their individual or community life, either in modified or in original form.

Some such beliefs prevailing in the folklife of the Bengali community in the study area are enumerated below:

4.7 Omens

Omen means ‘a sign of some future event.’ In their day to day life, Bengali folk follow most of the Omens predicted by the famous female astrologer ‘Khana’, which are known as ‘Khanar Bachan’. A few of these are mentioned below:

Omens associated with journey:

i  Jadi dekha mukunda chopā
Ek pao na barhao bapa.

(Meaning:- If one sees one who does not have facial hair even at an appropriate age, one should not begin such a journey)

ii  Bhora hote Sunya bhalo
    Jadi bharte jai,
    Age hote piche bhalo
    Jadi dake mai.

(Meaning:- It is considered auspicious if one sees an empty vessel. However, if the vessel is full with water, it is considered auspicious. During travel if someone calls from it is considered inauspicious, however, the only exception to this is if one’s mother is the person calling out the name)

iii Hanchi, jyathi parbe jobe
    Asta gune babhya hobe.

(Meaning:- If someone sneeze or a liz and drops during a journey the good results obtained from such a journey is multiplied eight times)

**Omens associated with Agriculture:**

vi Purnima amay je dhare hal
    Tar dukha Chira kat.
    Jar balader hai bat,
    Nahi thake ghare bhat.

(Meaning:- A farmer who holds the plow in Amaboshya (new-moon-day) and on purnima (fool moon day) he will be unhappy throughout his life. The bullocks will not move as they will suffer from musculoskeletal disorders due to the tunar tides. The farmer will have rice to eat)

4.8 Some other influential folk beliefs

i) During pregnancy a pregnant woman should take a betel nut and betel leaf in the anchal of her sari. Otherwise her baby may die in her womb or she may give birth of an abnormal child.
ii) A stem of jute should put recline on the wall by measuring the height of the pregnant women, during eclipses. Otherwise she may give birth of an ailing child.

iii) To save the pregnant mother from abortion a thread or a scrap of banana tree should wrap around the waist of the pregnant women.

iv) If there is an ever ailing child in family, during earthquake he should lay down on the ground immediately by removing his cloths.

v) If a child cannot walk properly in time, some husks of paddy (got from the first round of grinding) should smear thoroughly on toes of the child and then the husk should keep in a junction of three roads. It should be done either on Saturday or on Sunday only.

vi) To get long, strong, thick and beautiful hair, a long stem of jute should keep under the pillow of a new born female baby.

vii) A woman should not eat a twin banana or any other twin fruits, because she may produce twin babies.

viii) Broom sticks should never keep by turning the down side up, because it causes the quarrels in the family.

ix) If the tip of the broom sticks touches someone's body during sweeping, the sweeper should brake a small piece of it and throw towards the person again by spiting in it to slave him form sick.

x) One should not give alms to a bigger under the eyes of the house. Because, it is harmful for the family.

xi) If a baby dance by looking the shadow of his own body, cast by a lamp, he will have an attack of some diseases.

xii) Jackal always howl in a chorus. But if it howls singly then some evil will effect the family or in village.

xiii) If a dog or some dogs make a groaning sound with the face upward, an epidemic will breakout in the village.

xiv) If a cat lick his own legs, then guest will come to their house.
xv) If an unknown dog or a black dog enter into the room, one must fall in sickness or one may die also.
xvi) If an owl howls within the compound of a house or sitting on the roof, one may die soon.
xvii) One should not comb hair at night, because she will be possess by the evil spirit.
xviii) Paddy should not husk at night, because the ghost will hear the sound and size her. Another belief is; the Laxmi Devi will leave their house.
xix) One should not draw line, picture etc. on the ground by a knife, because he will sink in debt upto his throat or will be a borrower for ever. The act of drawing lines on the ground is locally called ‘Dena Kata.’
xx) If somebody steps on a bone, he should take bath immediately or scratch on the calf of his leg. Otherwise he is considered as unpurified.
xxi) If lime adheres in somebody’s lip, he cannot avoid quarreling with others.
xxii) One should not plant an ‘Ox tree’ in his campus, because it can vanish the family.
xxiii) An evil spirit calls maximum thrice to a person by his name during night.
xxiv) A ghost has a great fear of mustard seeds and weapons made of iron.
xxv) A spirit has no shadow.

4.9 Magical Control of the Weather

According to Beals and Hoijer, ‘Magic is a body of technique and methods for controlling the universe, on the assumption that if certain procedures are followed minutely certain results are inevitable.’ (Sarma R.N. 1990, p. 422)

It is observed that, while in religion one prays to god for help, in magic he tries to force supernatural power to help him. According to M.F. Keesing,
'A magical act is a rite carried out to twist nature in a specific way to satisfy human desire.' (Ibid, p. 422)

The Bengali folk perform some magical activities to control the weather. Such as:

i To control the cyclone or continuous rain they throw a small flat stool (Pira) towards the court-yard. They believe that sitting on this pira, the angry god of rain relaxes his anger and immediately stops the rain.

ii A ‘gacha’ is thrown by turning the upside down to the court-yard to stop the heavy rain.

iii To stop the excessive rain, the women of the village theft some important things from others house, so that, they use some obscene or slang language to them and hearing these obscene language the god of rain (Indra) will immediately leave the place.

iv In Assam the monsoon rain starts from the first week of June. Therefore during that pre-monsoon period the farmers prepare their agricultural land for summer cultivation. But sometimes the rain does not come in time, and the farmers have to wait for rain helplessly. In such a drought situation the women folk arrange the frog marriage to invite the rain to come to the earth. Basically it is an effort to show the power of man in controlling the nature through magic and to give an expection to the helpless farmers also.

They arrange this marriage ceremony with all rites like human marriage. They collects two frogs and bath them by collecting water from house to house. They sings the marriage songs, decorates the frogs like bride and bridegroom, recites the hymn like priest, give presents and arranges the refreshment for bridegroom party etc.

v The women folk of the Bengali community in the study area observes a brat to invite the rain. If the rain does not come till the end of Chaitra or Baisakh, the women folk gathered in a village Kalimandir. They hold a kula
on their head and establish a ghat with full of water on it. In the courtyard of the mandir, they pour the water from their kula as a symbol of rain. After that, they enjoy fully by dancing and singing and smearing the mud each other.

The concept of performing Pagla Mela is based on magic. It is a fact that, when a person compelled to face any hardships, tension, agony, disease etc. they try to find out an alternative way to get rid of such embitterness. In such a state some people satisfy themselves by blaming their fate but others try to find out the causes of their problems, wants to know their future and at the same time they also need some remedial measures from a fortune-teller. They have faith on the measures given by the fortune-teller and follow them without any hesitation.

Taking this belief in mind, people observe this pagla mela whenever they feel it as necessary. In Pagla Mela, the hosts of the family install a ghat in the court-yard, by observing the religious fasting. The prasad is prepared by mixing milk, banana, sugar, rice powder etc. and offered it in a banana leaf, dividing into 52 parts. Probably these 52 parts of prasad is offered in the name of pithasthan in India, where the different parts of the body of Sati were perished. The most important articles of this puja are three silims, some amount of ganja, khili-pan, three earthen lamps etc. The puja is performed by the priest. People sing the songs of divine power of Lord Siv. In the last part of the puja, a person suddenly became frenzy. Which is called as jank dewa or deodha laga. People believe that at that state, Pagla Siv enters into his body. They immediately sited him on an ashan and presents their problems very politely before him and asked him for remedies. The person also answers these questions profoundly and gives some advices to follow strictly. If he keeps quite in answering someone's question, then he will have to confirm that there is no hope of remedy of his problem. The person who gets the power to predict someone's future, after sometime comes back to the natural state.
Through the conversation with some people of Chamaria Mouza, the author comes to know that, even the educated people also strongly state that, they have got palpable proofs of it.

4.10 Recreations and Games

'Play is a form of expressive behaviour common among all human beings and manifested overtly in all cultures.' (Dorson, 1982)

The primitive people have to do various physical and mental activities in order to escape from wild animals, evils and also from the detrimental forces of nature. Some such activities are, jumping, running, swimming, climbing, throwing, hiding, fighting etc. but in course of time, due to the creativity, struggle of survival and rapid change of culture and civilization, the people became able to control such situations and got more and more leisure time to spent a comfortable life. Therefore, the techniques once they acquired for this safety has now become the sources of entertainment.

In his famous book 'An outline of psychology' W. Mc. Daugall has stated that, play is a general innate tendency of the child. According to him, 'It is a primal libido or vital energy flowing not in the channels of instinct, but overflowing, generating a vague appetite for movement and finding outlet in any or all of the motor mechanism in turn.' (Mc. Dougall, W, 1949, p. 172)

Moreover, different philosophers have propounded different theories to explain as to why the child plays. Such as:

(a) Cultural recapitulation theory
(b) Surplus energy theory
(c) Anticipatory theory
(d) Recreative theory
(e) Cathartic theory etc.

But no of these theories is able to give a complete definition of play. Robert A. Georges has rightly mentioned that, 'Like art, language, and
recreation, play is a complex phenomenon that can not be defined succinctly.' 
(Dorson 1982, p. 173)

Play is a creative, active, inborn, self assertive, self aimed, free and pleasurable tendency of the child. It has physical, mental, emotional and social values.

Like other communities in India, the Bengali community also has some traditional games and sports which are still most popular among them. These plays are of different types, such as:

(a) Experimental play (throwing, breaking etc.)
(b) Movements play (hide and seek, box khel etc.)
(c) Constructive play (making of house of clay etc.)
(d) Fighting play (kabadi, foot ball etc.)
(e) Intellectual play (chess, playing cards etc.)

The main characteristics of these plays are:

(a) The rules of plays are very simple and easy to understand.
(b) One can participate without much skill.
(c) Most of these play have no time limit, one can play according to the ability of his time and will.
(d) The materials used for games are very simple and cheep. Even some games are played without any materials.
(e) Any person of any age and sex may take part in these plays and can enjoy the play.
(f) In some plays there are no needs of particular places to perform the play.
(g) Some meaningful or meaningless rhymes are associated with some games, which are most attractive parts of the games.
(h) According to the number of participants the games are of different types. Such as: single play, double play and group play.
Some interesting plays, played by the village children are described below:

4.10.1 Nambata

Nambata is not a play itself, but it is an integral part of some group plays. Nambala means the distribution of names. In this process, two leaders are selected amongst the players for two different groups. Then the players form some pairs and go aside keeping each other’s hand on their shoulders and both of them keep two secret names. For example, if one is Golap, then other is Tagar. After keeping the secret names all the pairs come back to their leaders and ask them to whom they will select, either Golap or Tagar etc. If one leader chooses the name Golap, the Tagar goes to another group. Through this process all the players are equally distributed into two groups.

4.10.2 Golla Khela

Golla Khela is one of the most popular game among the young boys and girls of this community. By the process of nambata, the players are divided into two groups before starting the play. The play ground is demarcated by drawing a circle in one side of the arena. The distance of the boundary from the circle is about 20-25 metres.

After grouping, the two leaders decide the beginner by toss. The winner of the toss is called the golla party and the circle is called golla. Another party play as defender. Generally the player who stands on the centre of the Golla party stands in a line catching each others hand connecting with the golla and runs around the golla to touch the defender’s group. At the same time they also try to take chance to run away from the golla to cross the boundary without being touched by defenders. If one can cross the boundary line successfully he comes back to the golla usually and kneel down on the ground by stretching his hand towards golla to keep his hand and at the same time he also stretches his leg backward as much as possible. Then the golla changes his centre to that point and thus he will proceed towards the
boundary. If somebody slip or fall off from the connecting hand and touched by the defender at that moment, then he will be out. Again if the golla touches the line of the circle and at that moment any player of the golla party is touched by the defender than all of them will be out. On the other hand if somehow the golla can cross the line without being touched than the game will over and the defender party will have to play again as defender till they will not be able to defeat the golla party. If both the party get equal score then the play will be draw or they can continue the play till to become winner.

4.10.3 Kachur Pat

It is an outdoor game, played by a group of young boys and girls. The number of player is not limited. At the beginning of the game, the players select a leader amongst them who is called master. Sometimes they follow a procedure to select the master of the first round. As per rule, a participant starts a rhyme pointing his forefinger towards him at first and then to all the participants one by one in clock-wise. The participant on whom the last word falls, he will be out and will not be eligible to become the master. Thus, the participant who lasts till the end, he will be the beginner of the game. There are so many rhymes to select the master, which are generally nonsensical words.

After selecting the master, each and every participant takes their position on the play ground and draws a circle around him and stay in it taking a rod in his hand. The other participants keep a arum leaf in their respective circles. Then the masters announce a name of a particular leaf and ask them to collect this immediately. The participant runs to collect the leaf which is available within the imaginary boundary of the playground and come back to their circles and keep it on the arum leaf. Then again the master announces another name and the players go to collect the leaf in the same way. After the collection of some different kinds of leaves, the master will ask
tem to make a small bundle by this arum leaf and ask them to conceal it in a secret place. The players than go in search of a hidden-place and keep their bundles carefully, so that the master can not find it out easily. If the master can find out someone’s bundle, he will beat the concealor with his rod. On the other hand, if the master fails to find out the bundle, then he will have to surrender before the players and the concealor will punish him with the rod. In the next game he will take the role of the master. If there is more than one concealors whose bundles are remains secret, then again they follow the above mentioned procedure among the winners.

4.10.4 Lash Guti or Panch Guti

Lash guti or panch guti is a very popular game among the young girls. It is a kind of pitch and catch type game, which is played by 2-5 players. The material of this game is five small round stones of equal sizes.

In the beginning a player takes all five stones in her palm and throw upward and catches them again by the back of her palm. If he or she can catch all the five stones, then she will get ten scores. On the other hand if she can catch only one, two or three guti, then she will have to through the stones upward and have to catch by the palm again and taking one stone from these she will have to pick up remaining stones one by one from the ground by throwing the stone which is in her hand.

In the second step, she will have to cast all the stones on the ground and have to pick up any one stone from these. This time she will have to pick up two stones together by throwing the stone upward. If she can pick up the remaining two stones in the same way, then she can proceed to the third step.

In third step, again she will have to cast all the stones on the ground bend by taking any one stone from these, she will have to pick up three stones together by throwing the stone in the same way, and then she will have to pick up the remaining stones again by the same procedure.
In the fourth step, she will have to pick up all the stones by casting a stone upward. In the fifth step, again all the stones have to throw upward and to catch by the back of her palm. Out of these stones, she will have to keep one stone in the gape of forefinger and middle finger carefully and have to pick up all the stones from the ground by her palm and then casting the stone, which is in the gap of her finger, she will have to catch it again by the palm, along with other stones.

In the sixth step, she will have to put her left palm on the ground by stretching the thumb finger horizontally. Then casting all the stones on the ground, she will have to take anyone from them. Again casting the stone upward, she will have to bring all the stones one by one near the palm and again throwing the stone, she will have to pick up all the stones in one attempt.

In the seventh step, she will have to touch the tip of the middle finger by the thumb finger to make a hole. Keeping it on the ground, she will have to enter all the stones into it following the same procedure. She may get two or more chances according to their own rule to enter the stone. After entering all the stones she will have to remove her hand and have to pick up all the stones by throwing the stone upward and catching it again carefully.

In the last step, she will have to cast all the stones upward together and have to catch them by the back of her palm. Again throwing the stones upward immediately she will have to pounce them by the palm. If she can pounce only one stone, then she will get two scores, and if she can catch all the stones, she will get another ten scores, (two scores in each guti). Thus the total scores will be counted by adding the starting and the finishing scores.

If she can complete the game without missing, then she will play again from the beginning. On the other hand, if she fails in any step, then she will have to stop her game on that step and the other participants will get the chance to play. If she also became failure in zany step, then again the first
player will get the chance to play from that step, where she stopped her playing.

4.10.5 Tulki Bari

It is a very simple but most popular game played by the cowboys at the time of watching their cows in the field. Tulki is a stick of bamboo, of about 2 feet long. One side of this stick is pointed. A cowboy sticks a small piece of bamboo from one side to another side very tactfully. The another player who stands at a distance of about 30-35 feet from him will have to strick the piece of bamboo by his stick on air. If he can strick it, then he will get the point and in the next game he will be the stricker. Sometimes this game is played by a small group of boys. If the player or players of the opposite party can not strick the stick on air, then the stricker will measure the ground by his tulki-bari from the striking point to the dropping point by saying:

\[ \text{Kadam/Dali/Chakkar/Taira/Diba/Full.} \]

Thus he will count up to 7 fulls, and if it exceeds than 7 fulls, then he will buy one player of the opposite party. In this way he will buy all the players one by one. After buying the players, he will buy some valuable things like, aeroplane, train, jahaj, truck, bus, hati-ghora etc., verbally. At last if he cannot recollect any name, then he will deposite one dhol, two dhol, three dhol etc. In the meantime if he could recollect any name of valuable things then he will exchange his dhols with it. The player who can collect the highest fulls, he will win the game.

4.10.6 Bou Khel

This interesting game is played only by the young girls. In this game two parties of equal number of players are selected by the procedure of nambata. Generally the number of players required for one group is about 7 or 8, and the size of arena is about 20 meters. The arena is divided into two equal parts by a centre line, on which one party plays as bou party and the another party plays as defender party. After grouping they toss up to select the bou
party. The party who wins the toss will play as bou party. The bou party will select a king or bou amongst them, who will stand on a suitable position of the opposite party. The players of the bou party will gathered in the opposite side of the bou. On the other hand, the players of the defender party will gathered around the bou, so that she can not run away from this centre to that centre.

A player from bou party will come towards the defender party by producing a sound by her mouth or singing a rhyme without taking breath, and try to touch any player of the opposite party. If she can touch any player, the player will be out from this set of game. On the other hand, if she loses or changes her breath during this time, and touched by the defender party, then she will be out. So, if she can not touch anybody and feel short her breath then she may come back to her centre again and then another player will go in the same way. Meanwhile, the bou will try hard to take chance to run away from this centre to the opposite centre, without being touched by the defenders. If she can arrive successfully, then they will win that set of game. On the other hand, if she is touched by any player of opposite party during the time of disconnecting from her centre, then this set of game will over and they will be defeated. In the next set of game they will have to play as defender party.

4.10.7 Ud-Macher Khela

In this play at least 8-10 players are required. Except two players, remaining players makes a circle by holding each others hands. This inward place is called Pukhur (pond). One of these two players, one will stay in the pukhur and he is called ‘Mash’ (fish) and the other player will stay out side the Pukhur. He is called the Ud (otter). It is known to all that, by nature the otter likes to eat the fish and therefore in this game the Ud will try to enter into the pond to catch the fish. Then naturally the fish will try to escape from the claws of the Ud and he will try to run away from the pond, and on the other hand the Ud will try to run in. But the other players will be barrier for
both of them. If somehow the Ud can enter into the pond then the fish will run out, and when the Ud goes out then the fish will come back again to the pond. Thus the play will continue until the Ud can catch the fish. If the Ud can catch the fish, then he will win the game. Otherwise he will have to surrender before the players and then another player with play as Ud and thus the new set of game will start.

4.10.8 Ample-Jample

It is a very favourite game among the girls, but sometimes the small boy also takes part in this game. The players are distributed into two groups by the procedure of nambata.

The playground is divided into two equal parts by a centre line. After formation of the two groups the players of both the group will go to their respective sides. They can choose any side they like and stay on the boundary line by keeping their hands behind. The distance between the two groups is generally about 20-25 feet. The centre line is supposed to a river and the group leaders are called the kings. The kings of both the teams will stand behind the players of his own team, by taking a small round piece of stone in their hands. The stone is called guti.

Before starting the game the two leaders will toss up and the winner will start the game first. After taking the position the king of the winner party will ask the other party whether they are ready or not. If they say ready, then she will put the guti secretly in someone’s hand of her party and ask the opposite party to say in which hand the guti is kept. If they can answer correctly, then this set of game will over and in the next set the opposite party will keep the guti secretly and the first party will have to answer. On the other hand if they can not answer correctly then the first party will disclose it and the player in which hand the guti was kept, will give a long jump towards the river and will stay there. Again in the next game they will get the chance to hide the guti. In this way all the players of both the party will proceed towards
the river, because, the party who will cross the centre line first, they will be the winner in this set.

In the last stage, when only one player will stay on line, then the king will keep the guti either in the hand of any player or in his own hand, or in the fold of her gown or somewhere in her body or in her dresses. In case, if the two players of both the party falls in the centre line, then the set will be cancelled. The play may end in one set or more sets, according to the decision of the players.

4.10.9 High Spring

It is a very simple game in which there is no winner or defeater. Generally the funny young boys play this game at any time as an amusement. In this play, only two players are needed. One boy will kneel down by keeping his hands on the ground, just like a four footed animal and another boy will cross him with a high jump by singing a rhyme.

Apart from these games, there are innumerable games which are usually played by the young boys and girls of this community. Some such games are, kabadi, chor-police, ganga-rani, biku khela, kusti, marble, kari, chardar bari etc.

Due to the influence of modernization different types of games and means of recreations are gradually increasing among the Bengali folk. To-day the people of the rural areas can enjoy radio, television, mobile phone video etc. sitting in their homes. Therefore games like cricket, volley ball, Chinese Cheker, etc, are also become popular among the new young generation.

4.11 Folk Medicine

Since the time immemorial folk medical treatment has been occupying an important role in the field of curing diseases of man and animal. In India, it was predominantly practiced by the villagers and tribal people but even today due to the lack of modern medical facilities, road communication and some
other factors, the people of the rural societies have to depend upon folk medical treatment with full beliefs.

Folk medicine refers to healing practices and ideas of body physiology and health preservation known to limited segment of the population in a culture, transmitted informally as general knowledge, and practiced or applied by anyone in the culture having prior experience.

According to Swald Erish and Richard Beitt, ‘folk medicine is the substance of all the traditional viewpoints on sickness and healing methods applied against diseases which exist among the people.’ (Dorwon 1982, pp. 193-94)

Folk medicine consists of two varieties or two branches, (i) Natural folk medicine and (ii) Magico-religious folk medicine. The natural folk medicine consists of some material components like, herbs, plants, minerals and animal substances etc. These are used in their raw forms to cure some common diseases like cold, cough, diarrhea, fever, constipation, joint pain, stomach pain, worms, fractures, vomiting, blood pressure, diabetes, toothache, head ache, various menstrual problems etc. This type of treatment is also known as herbal folk treatment.

On the other hand non-material components consist of religious and spiritual items. Therefore it is sometimes called occult folk medicine. The non-material folk treatment or magico-religious treatment is based upon the removal of causative factors through the propitiation of god and deities, counter magic, use of charms or religious verses from holly books, holly actions and giving amulets etc. Spiritual items include communicating with spirits or ancestors through human media to enquire the causes of diseases and to take solution or remedial measures or to drive away the evil spirit through incantation. Generally this type of treatment is applied on the patient having psychological problems like, insanity, fobia, menia, hysteria, epilepsy, dispersion, fear of supernatural creatures etc. Moreover, this treatment is
used to cure some other cases like snake bite, dog bite, leech and scorpion bite etc.

According to O.P. Jaggi, 'Folk medicine has its own concepts about the causation of diseases: wrath of gods, evil spirits, magic, witchcraft etc. It has its own diagnostic tools and techniques which lean heavily on deviation. Treatment is based upon removal of the causative factor through propitiation of gods, exorcisms, counter magic, use of charms, administration of some herbal preparations – a perfectly rational approach in so far as it is intended to remove the basic cause.' (Jaggi, O.P. Folk Medicine, Preface, Vol. III)

Folk medicine and folk religion is often overlapping. According to R.M. Dorson, 'Folk religion overlaps at points with folk medicine in instances where a famed miracle-maker saves souls and heals bodies.' (Dorson R.M. op. cit, p. 4)

The practice of folk medical treatment found in the Bengali community of Chamaria and Nagarbera Mouza is very old and it has been transferred from one generation to another either directly from older practitioner or indirectly from books. They practice both the natural folk medicinal treatment and magico-religious folk treatment.

Locally the herbal magical practitioner is called a kabiraj or baidya. He prepare the medicine from plants, herbs, minerals or animal substances which are available in his surroundings. He strictly maintains the secrecy of the formula which is either inherited or manufactured by himself or learnt from the books or from his master. He also follows some rules in scarping bark from the tree or shrub, the direction of the parts of the scrubing, the time or the month in which the herb is picked and dried and the time and technique of the application etc.

The magico-religious practitioner is called on ojha. He apply the incantation on water, oil, mustard seeds etc. and scatters on the body of the victim or give it to eat or drink.
The folk medical practitioners need not to have any formal educational qualification of medicine. His, exparilzation depends upon the belief and reputation.

According to Davis Adam Brooke, 'use of folk medicine knowledge is not restricted within the society to those who have served on apprenticeship, undergone some short of training or testing, or have achieved a specific social status. Theories and practices of folk medicine may influence or be influenced by the formalized medicine systems of the same culture. From a folkloristic point of view, folk medicine is characterized by a reliance of narrative patterns and folk statistics, (counting the hits and ignoring the failure) rather than rigorous empiricism.' (wikipedia)

Like other parts of the country, the people of the Bengali community of the study area have their own coinage of words to explain the symptoms of the diseases, which are significantly different from the formalized medical terms. Some of these are mentioned below:

i  **Dudher haga:** Loose motion of small children causes for the overfeeding of mothers milk.

ii **Ghuish-Ghuisha Jwar:** A feverish excitement.

iii **Nari Utha:** Griping pains in the bowels.

iv **Sutika haga:** A cronic loose motion of a recently delivered women.

v  **Amasha:** Loose motion with griping pain.

vi **His-Phisi:** Asthma.

vii **Kara bhanga:** Neomoniah

viii **Najar laga:** Evil eye, that causes the weakness, disorder of bowels etc. this evil eye is explained bellow:

Almost all over the world it is believe that, there are some people who have a tendency to cast a spell on others by just looking at them. Some people do it intentionally out of jealousy and others do it spontaneously. Whatever it may be, as a result of this a person may fall in ill seriously; he may have to
face a mishap on injurious accident, or a calamity. Even, a non-living thing may perish due to his evil eye. Generally the children are considered to be very susceptible to the evil eye. The Bengali folk also believe that, if a person utters a sentence, looking a child, ‘How sweet the child is!’ or if he looks at the child with a desirous eye when the child is eating, then the child is bound to suffer from some diseases like diarrhea, flatulent, vomiting, fever etc. He may cry too much, loose his wait and many more. They believe that, only the healing magical practices can cure such diseases. This practice is locally termed as jar-phuk.

ix. Batash laga or Alga Batash:

The rural people believe that, there are some wicked wretch and intangible spirits who wanders through wind and penetrates the human body whenever he get a chance. As a result the victimized person suffer from various physical and mental disorders like fainting, sever pain, disorder of bowels, he many show deranged behaviour, delirious taking, loud loughing, dashing etc. In such condition people invite Ojha to drive away the sprit from his body through incantation. People believe that the non-contagious diseases penetrates the human body easily rather than the contagious diseases, through this type batash or alga batash.

The Bengali folk medical practitioners have their own tools and techniques to cure various diseases. Such as:

i. Bharan

Bharan is a cold application used to reduce the high temperature of the body. It is a paste of different types of herbs or a single herb, applied on the crown of the head. For example, to reduce the heat from head, they sink a tender leaf of castor oil plant in mustard oil and keep it on the crown of the patient.
ii. Jal Pati

It is a strip of wet cloth used in wounded area or on forehead to reduce the excessive heat of fever.

iii. Kash

It is a thin incanted twig of cotton thread used to protect the body from diseases or to cure some minor diseases like flu, mizzles, start from sudden fright in sleeping etc.

iv. Kabash

Kabash is a kind of armour to protect the body and mind from evil spirit or wicked wretch. The word Kabash, derived from two Sanskrit words, Ka and Bach. Ka means the wind and Bach means, to deceit. People believe that, one who weares the Kabash even wind can never penetrate in his body. Another meaning of Kabash is a small container in which the ‘Bhoja patra’ is kept by applying the charms either orally or in a written form to destroy the impediments. Kabash are of two types, (i) Maduli and (ii) Tabiz.

(a) Maduli:- It is a dram shaped Kabash which is made up of iron, silver or copper. It is worn around the neck, waist or in arms. The sizes of maduli is generally from 1 ½ to 2 cm. The components of maduli is herbs, animal substances, metallic items, like fishing hook, niddle, and some parts of plants etc. The open side of maduli is sealed with wax or sealing wax. It is worn by a red or black twig.

(b) Tabiz:- Tabiz or Tabish is an Arabic word, which means the Kabash. It looks like a locket of different sizes and shapes. Tabiz is worn around the neck or arm. Before wearing, it is purified by raw milk or ganga jal. The person who wears this kash has to take bath and with wet cloth he should wear it. This act of purification is called, Sodhan Kara. The person who wears this Tabiz should obey some strict rules. Such as, he should not go to graveyard, any ceremonially impure places etc. During the impurity of his
own family he should remove it from his body until the impurity is over. Then again before re-wearing he should purify it by following the same process.

v. Rudrakhya

Rudrakhya is a hard tubercled nut which are polished and made into rosaries and bracelets. There are about fourteen types of Rudrakhya. According to its forms they are known as ek mukhi, dui mukhi, tini mukhi etc. and each of them have some specific power. Before wearing the Rudrakhya, it is purified with raw cow milk, card, honey, sugar and ghee or with milk, ghee, card, cowdung and cow’s urin (pancha gabya). It cures and protects the body from diseases and provides physical and mental strength. It is observed that, there is a wide use of Rudrakhya among the Bengali folk in the study area.

vi. Jar-Phuk

It is an oral incantation used to cure some diseases like pain, cold, caugh, snake bite, dog bite, frecture, menstrual problems, nocturnal pollution etc. For this, the incantator uses some articles. Some local names of these things are:-

a. Ram Kisti. (a small stone vessel used for mixing medicine)
b. Ram Tulashi. (besil)
c. Hati Chara or Ganesh Gash. (a kind of thorny shrub)
d. Bilay Ashra or Bhot Lengra. (a king of big chilli)
e. Kanta Kumra (a king of gourd)
f. Man Kanta or Main Kanta (a kind of thorny tree)
g. Bura-buri glash
h. Rate Chura Pakhir thont (beak of paddy bird).
i. Beler sipa (root of aegel marmelos)
j. Era or vendra sipa (root of castor oil plant).
k. Champa lata (Michelia champaca).
l. Kakila macher thont (beak of esox cancila).
m. Iswar mul (a kind of medical plant)
n. Rakta chandan (red sandal wood).
o. Kanai dinga. (a king of wild plant)
p. Banar Lari (a kind of parasitic plant)
q. Kachimer matha (head of tortise).
r. Tepa mach or ganga top (gloabe fish)
s. Ghila or gila (a seed of a kind of creeping plant)
t. Patal jinga (Snake gourd).
u. Deshal patar guti (Seeds of jute).
v. Bhoj patra. (a kind of big leaf)
w. Jai Phal. (nutmeg)
x. Sishu tel (oil of river dolphin).
y. Kamakhyar jagiyr kath (sacrified wood of Kamakhya)
z. Katari or Katuri . (The wild turmeric)

vii. Ban phaora or Ban Mara

Ban is an injurious incantation. It is applied either through some articles or by reciting charms with muttering sound to drive away the evil spirit or to spoil the effect of philteration. Generally the bez or ojha uses some articles like, mustard oil, water, mustard seeds, ginger, black paper etc. and sprinkle it on the body of the patient following some rules. It is believed that the article used by the ojha or bez creates severe burning sensation which the spirit, ghost or the witch cannot bear and leaves the body of the victim. There are various types of bans, used by the ojha for various purposes. Such as, Rudra ban, Agni ban, Bishnu Ban, Saktisel Ban, Bira Ban etc. Moreover, the ojha uses a kind of plant and its root to stop the effect of batash or alga batash and any other effects caused by the wicked man or women for harmful purposes. This plant is known as Katuri or Katari. The Katari is of different types. Such as, Am Katari, Jam Katari, Laxmi Katari, Hanuman Katari etc.
According to the symptoms of the diseases the ojha or kabiraj uses these kataries by applying proper incantations.

viii. Dhai

Like Kabiraj and Ojha, there is another kind of folk medical practitioner called Dhai. The woman appointed to take care of the pregnant mother before and after delivery is known as dhai. For the rural women parturition is a natural process and generally the case of delivery is conducted by the relatives of the pregnant woman at home. For this purpose they make a separate temporary room either in a corner of the court yard or in a side of verenda which is locally called a kura ghar. This practice was prevalent only few years ago but, now it is almost on the verge of disappearance. In some critical cases a dhai is called off, and for quick and easy delivery, she conducts the case by using her own tools and medicines and applying her own techniques.

ix. Special Bath

During some specific days the people of the Bengali community take bath by putting some natural drugs into bathing water to cure diseases or to protect the body from diseases like itching, ring worm, boil etc. The drug is prepared by mixing some herbs like, bas, mutha, besil, turmeric, some kind of medicinal flowers etc. This drug is called ‘Sarbaousadhi’.

x. Taboos

Taboo means the religious prohibition. The folk life of the Bengali community is highly influenced by the taboos. Most of these taboos are associated with eating. Some such taboos are mentioned in the following list:-
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lunar days</th>
<th>Name of food</th>
<th>Diseases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pratipad</td>
<td>Kumra (Pumkin)</td>
<td>Bron (Bron)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwitiya</td>
<td>Brihati (Tita Bhekuri)</td>
<td>Arbud (Tumar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tritia</td>
<td>Paal (A kind of cucumber)</td>
<td>Batrakta (Gouty)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturthi</td>
<td>Mula (Radish)</td>
<td>Ambat (Urticaria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panchami</td>
<td>Bel (Aegle marmetos)</td>
<td>Pitta (Gastric)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sasthi</td>
<td>Neem (Neem)</td>
<td>Gala ganda (Goiter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saptami</td>
<td>Narikal (Coconut)</td>
<td>Ajirna (Indigation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Astami</td>
<td>Kala (Banana)</td>
<td>Sleshma (caugh)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navami</td>
<td>Lau (Gourd)</td>
<td>Bat Slesma (Rheumatic pain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dasami</td>
<td>Kalmi Sak (An water plant)</td>
<td>Amla pitta (Acidity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekadashi</td>
<td>Sim (bean)</td>
<td>Jwar (Fever)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwadashi</td>
<td>Pui Sak (A kind of pot herb)</td>
<td>Jakhma (Tuberculosis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traiyodashi</td>
<td>Begun (Bringal)</td>
<td>Sulkani (Ring worm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturdashi</td>
<td>Mash Kalai (Pulse)</td>
<td>Udaramai (dropsy)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**References:**


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