Chapter VI

Mutual influences on culture in the Bengali society or Influence of other culture on another society: Symbiosis of culture

The mutual influence of each other and the social activities of the Hindu and the Muslims can be called as the impact of other culture on another culture or symbiosis of culture. It can be said that their aforesaid mutual give and take aspect had been effective not from the theoretical perspective, but from the social perspective, as the part of way of life. The reasons behind it are as follows:-

a) Living together for a long period of time through the several centuries.
b) Syncretist attitude of the Bengalis.
c) Whipping of intense Aryan pride of the Brahmanical (Hindu) Society.
d) Feeling of oneness and mental attachment towards the pre-Aryan folk society of Bengal.
e) Wide influence of the 'pirism' or pir-culture on both the Hindu and Muslim society.245

There are two spheres of influences of the symbiosis of culture:- i) Day to day way of life and ii) Festivals and ceremony/rituals. In both the cases applied form of symbiosis or mutual give and take can be noticed. The festivals are of two kinds – ii)a) Social festivals. These are mostly ceremonial/ritualistic, such as conceiving of the wife, child’s birth and ritualistic confinement of a woman at child-birth(anturghar) christening / naming of a child, giving condensed milk on the child’s mouth (gale khir), Khatna or the Muslim custom of circumcision, marriages, death, Shradha or Chalisha/ Chehlam (funeral rites/obsequies) etc.

245 Sen, Dinesh Chandra, Bangabhasha 'O' Sahitya, Dasgupta & Co, Kolkata, 1356B.S. pp.44-45 and especially see the chapter on 'Islam 'O' LokeSadhana'.

142
ii)b) Religious festivals – Islamic – Shabebarat, Muharram, Eid etc. Influenced by symbiosis of culture, Ursas and fairs and religious festivals of the various folk gods and goddesses.\textsuperscript{246}

Different types of activities and practices in the day to day life of admixtured culture had been analysed here in this chapter. Here customs and rituals of the Bengali Muslim society had been narrated along with mentions of the Hindu customs and rituals.

**Coating/smearing/pasting of home with cow-dung, cow-god, cow-dung(gobar)**

Listening to the azaan (call for prayer) of the fazar (morning) and awakening from bed after having done azu-namaz (washing of hands and mouth for prayer and then praying) washing and cleaning of (‘basi’) utensils uncleansed since overnight and sweeping rooms and doors uncleaned (basi) since overnight. Their coating/smearing the homes with cow-dung especially the kitchens are almost compulsorily performed matters even in the ritual Muslim homes.

In the neighbouring Hindu society coating/smearing homes, tulsi tree’s paved stand and kitchen with cow-dung oare regular activities.

The use of the broom/besom (‘jhanta’) and cow-dung(gobar) has been done to wipe out the inauspicious influences of the nightlong evil spirits in the uncleaned (basi) rooms and courtyards irrespective of the Hindus and the Muslims in the rural house hold.

Then after driving out the ‘Alakshmi’ (inauspicious being/evil spirits) by sweeping with a broom/besom, the broom/ besom (jhanta) has to be washed and then coating/ smearing homes with cow-dung mixed water.\textsuperscript{247}

\textsuperscript{246} Sa’adul Islam’s book, op.cit, p.245
\textsuperscript{247} Ibid, pp.245-46

143
According to Dr. Sa’adul Islam cow-dung has been considered unholy or ‘na-pak’ in Islam. The references of the application of using cow-dung with Muslim religious with Muslim religious books in the medieval period were proof enough of the widespread use of cow-dung in the Muslim society. For example in the following couplet one can see –

“Gavir gobar jatha karo-e-lepan sei sthane ferishtar nahiko gaman” it means when the coating/ smearing of the cow-dung has been done ferishta or the angel does not go there.248 or ‘na lepi-e ghabera golad mishrito’ that means ‘Do not smear/coat homes/fencing with cow-dung’249 or ‘Gobar lipiya ghar apabitra kore’250 that means ‘by smearing/coating cow-dung one makes the home unholy.’

Moreover, according to Safura Khatun, a collector of folk Muslim rituals, in the South 24 parganas, Jaynagar, Diamond Harbour, Magrahat areas in the Bengali Muslim household, pituli/pitali (pituli/pitali normally means a paste made of pounded rice, used as a cooking ingredient, here it means paste made of pounded cow-dung) normally placed in the following areas like thatched roof of a hut(gharer chal) in the kulkanta or a typical place in the rural household/hut in the door of the dwelling house (bastudwar) and in the gola or granary during the night of Kalipujaa or the worshipping of the Hindu goddess Kali.251

Besides that also according to Safura Khatun for curing the illness/ disease of a child after smearing/coating cow-dung in the ‘goal’ or the cow-shed one has to take bath (‘gosal’) and then after wearing good/well clothing (su-kapar) which means drenched/wet clothing after taking bath (normally which is being done in the Hindu households for going to the domestic place of worship or pujar ghar) tel-pani dore(oil-water – holy thread) had been kept in the aforesaid cow-shed. Then

---

248 Sultan, Saiyad - Nabibangsha
249 Alaul-Tohfa
250 Khondkar, Nasrullah - Shariyatnama
251 Personal collection of Bengali Muslim folk rituals, collection, Safura Khatun, Jaynagar, Kalas, South 24 Pgs Dist, W.B and cited in Islam, Dr.Sa’adul’s book, op.citS, p.246
that child is being weltered. After three days that holy thread (dore) has been tied with the child’s hand or on the neck. Then from 7th day till 21st day in the name of Manik Pir activities like using ‘tel-pani’ or oil and water and feeding the child with water washing his ‘dore’ or holy thread continued unabated. 252

Now in the opinion of Dr. Sa’adul Idlam. after analyzing the aforesaid rituals and recorded by Safura Khatun it can be concluded that-

Firstly, Manik Pir is simultaneously being the Pir as a preventer – regulator of disease and illness and protector of the cows.

Secondly along with Manik Pir the aforesaid related cow is also an object of reverence comparable with that in the context of cow-god(Go-devata) of the Hindus, Lord Shiva and the ox as the carrier or riding animal of Lord Shiva. Moreover it is not impossible to have the remnants of totemist belief herein.

Thirdly, the use of cow-dung as an object of preventer of inauspicious things had been analysed in this case. Here the comparable thing can be the idea of greatness of cow-dung as the procedure of repentance of the Hindus.

Fourthly, the use of this ‘na-pak’ or non-sacred object like cow-dung has got its entry in the Bengali Muslim society having been connected with the pirs. 253

**Code for cooking**

Placing the husking pedal(dhenki) and oven on the south side is inauspicious – it has been condemned as ‘Rabana’s mouth’ (Rabaner mukh). It is the folk-belief in the Bengali Muslim families that the golden family or the happy family would be destroyed in the Rabana’s mouth just like the destruction of golden Lanka(Swarna Lanka). 254

---

252 Ibid, aforesaid collection of Safura Khatun
253 Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit,p.246
254 Ibid, aforesaid collection of Safura Khatun
To counter-act inauspiciousness of the act of bathing on the fourth day of woman’s menstrual period(writu snan) and sighting/ touching of the dead body etc. one has to cross by leaping the oven or purify by fire(agnishuddhi).

Agun or fire comes in context of cooking and in the context of agun or fire mother pirs like Shah Mother or Thom(Dom) Mother names come. Most probably Badiuddin Shah mother was the founder of the Motheria sect of Pirs – Fire or agun is the disciple of Mother Pir. It is the folk belief that the fire catches by disobeying the Mother Pir. In order to satisfy him mother’s loot (act of scattering something before a crowd to be picked up,e.g Harir loot) is being burnt. Then the rituals to be followed are as follows:-

Specially made ‘roti pitha’ (a kind of sweet pie made from thin saucer-shaped bread) and rice placed on the banana leaves offered towards the Mother Pir, then some portions of it are buried beneath the ashes and outside in the above sacrificially slaughtered cocks are being burnt. This ritual is known as ‘burning of the mother’s loot’. Moreover a lamp (pradip) and a piece of stone-rod/stick are placed in the granary. The stone-stick is known as ‘mothermoni’. In the event of illness and disease the arrangement for curing has been made after washing the ‘mothermoni’, it is touched on the patient. On every Thursday ‘hajat’ or a kind of offering are given towards ‘mothermoni’. Of course there is the influence of black magic(Krishna indrajal) in the ritual named burning of the mother’s loot. It should be mentioned here it is forbidden in the Shariyat to bury eatable things or food beneath the soil/ earth.

---

256 Personal collection of Safura Khatun, op.cit.
257 Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, p.247
Eating

In the event of death of a person in a home oven is not kindled/ignited for three days in that particular home in the Bengali Muslim family. Besides that on the days of new moon, full moon and on the last day of the Bengali month(Sankranti) many Hindu rules are being followed. On these days it is the custom to eat dry food, leguminous pigeon-pea or pulses(Kalai) thin saucer shaped handmade bread(ruti) and vegetarian food. During the time of preparing sweet pie there is an incantation for removing evil eyes – that incantation is to swear in the name of the Goddess Kali (‘Ma kali’) or the Allah – such as

“pithe gorunir ma pithe gore
chank chchok tel pore
keno re pither furisne
jadi na furis to Allahr dohai”

It means

“The mother of the sweat pie maker
makes the sweat pie
expressing the sound of anything
falling into hot oil
sweet pie why you are not finished
if not finished then swear in the name
of Allah”

In the Hindu society on the east portion of the aforesaid rhyme instead of ‘Allahr dohai’ there is ‘Ma Kalir dohai’ i.e, instead of swearing in the name of Allah, there is swearing in the name of goddess kali. Moreover on the last day of the month of Paush (Paush Sankranti) there is the custom of preparing and eating pithe puli (sweet pie and sweet roll) also in the Bengali Muslim society. Even

among many Muslims beef is uneatable. In the event of the occurrence of measles it is forbidden to eat pulses, leguminous pigeon-pea or pulses. It is also forbidden in the Bengali Muslim society like the Hindus to wash clothes. There is the folk-belief even among the Muslims that it will enhance anger of the goddess Shitala (Shitala Ma).  

**Acrimonious/bitter remark**

Acrimonious remark is the expression of grudge. Behind it is the defeatist affliction and self-satisfaction after the application. Although men and women both apply acrimonious remarks, especially it is being the weapon of the women folk. Elements of acrimonious remarks:- desiring disease and danger to the applied person, indicating ill omen, indicating inferiority connected with the predecessors, applying animal names while calling one, expressing loose character and mentioning illegitimate relationship etc.

a) As act of abuse directly ascribing different diseases like cholera, small pox, typhoid to the applied person (b) desiring danger like major illness, after being beaten by the husband, wife’s remark is husband’s hands should have been mutilated or calling worthless husband as ‘thunto jagannath’ or handless, incapable, powerless( the handless deity of Jagannath) c) acrimonious remark expressing ill omen/ an inauspicious sign is antkuro or childless. Besides that antkuri or childless woman, Bhatarkhaki or husband-eater etc means an ill omen/an inauspicious sign of becoming angry of the goddess has been expressed.

d) Acrimonious remark expressing inferiority of the forefathers – ‘haramzada’ – which means abuse naming the father and then added to it is the issue of the vice or immorality of the father. e) directly abusing someone by ascribing various animal names such as dog/bitch, monkey, swine, donkey, and generally beast. In

---


148
this respect it seems there is the domination of donkey and monkey so far as the abuse is concerned. f) Expression of moral laxity – Here the abuses used are thief, swindler, debauch, harlot, perfidious etc. g) Abuses mentioning relations – here the abuses used from the female mouth is ‘vaj’ or ‘brother’s wife’ and from the male mouth is ‘shala’ or ‘wife’s brother’. Here the ‘nanad-baudi’ relation denoting husband’s sister (nanad) and boudi denoting elder brother’s wife placed husband’s sister in the role of oppressor ‘nanad’ and on the opponent brother’s wife or ‘vaj’ s role placed herself in the oppressed and thus the ‘nanad’ (husband’s sister/ geets self-satisfaction. Besides in some of the acrimonious remarks – there are suggestiveness of a kind of extramundane attachment and savour – uncivilized/wild (asavya in a particular moment from the lover’s mouth and brother-in-law (shala) especially from maternal/paternal grandfathers (dadus) mouth – however on different occasions other than the above there is no need to tell about the bitter taste of both the words.

Among acrimonious remarks there are much applications of black magic, but still in the majority of the cases these are added with coverings, but still penetrating the coverings, these are unfailing to pierce the opponents, because that is inner-penetrating in unfolding the emotions. It is interesting to observe that in the Bengali way of life while expressing natural emotions the Bengalis, irrespective of the Hindus and the Muslims quite often resort to the identical kind of acrimony.260

260 Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op. cit, p. 247-48
Sandhya Dan (Offering to the Divinity in the evening)

Here the rituals being followed with Bengali Muslim society are as follows:- Lighting the lamps (cherag or pradip) in the household and the granaries. After putting mustard oil or castor oil in the Cherag(lamp or pradip) one has to light it up with a candle. Then first of all after encircling the granaries of paddy thrice with the cherag it has to be placed on the door of the granaries and then after some time on the door of the house: comparable things in the Hindu society are by kindling incense burner/incense and incense sticks and lamp(pradip) and then greeting the deity by waving the aforesaid things in the evening. Here it is interesting to observe that while the Muslims call the lamps as cherag, the Hindus call it the pradip. There are even apprehensions in the Bengali Muslim society at the folk level that if there is any delay in offering the aforesaid ‘sandhya’ then the ‘Lakshmi’ (the Hindu goddess of wealth and prosperity) or literally here the property or the good things shall quit and the ‘apadevata’ or the ‘evil omen’ shall penetrate into the household. Again the fear and apprehension of the evening or the ‘Sandhyakal’ is intense in the folk mind. In the full evening or ‘VarSandhya’ the children should not be brought outside their homes – this kind of belief is also prevalent in the folk society irrespective of the Hindus and the Muslims in Bengal. It seems belief in the spirits or ghosts and ‘Lakshmi baran’ or the devotional/respectful and especially ceremonial reception for the ‘Lakshmi’ which brings prosperity and happiness in the household – both these beliefs are working behind the ‘Sandhya dan’ ritual in the Bengali Muslim household.261

261 Ibid, p.248
Social festivals and rituals
The eagerness to keep the memories alive of the joys and sorrows of family life gradually observed by several persons as customs and practices which ultimately paved the way for social festivals. Although these festivals revolved round the personal life of human beings habitually imitative collective mind have given them social recognition. In the majority of cases desire for welfare are prevalent amongst these.

Wife’s pregnancy
For desiring a child different rituals like Saitore (or Sasthi of the Hindus, Rangpur) ‘Barker Chira’ (Mymensingh) etc. are being observed. Comparable rituals are Hindu society’s Sasthi Puja(worshipping of the Sasthi) and ‘barkumarer brata’ (the vow of barkumar). Moreover ‘Pir’s Shimi’ is being observed in the folk society everywhere in Bengal irrespective of the Hindus and the Muslims. During the period of pregnancy ‘byavar’ or ‘machcher tatwa’ (customary gift/present of fish) in the five months and Sadhvakshan( a ceremony for giving desired articles of food to a pregnant woman) in the seven months are observed everywhere in Bengal irrespective of the Hindus and the Muslims. Besides that ‘binnatole baran’ ritual is also being observed on the principke of food-offering(bhog) made to Bon-debi (goddess of the forest) beneath the ‘Shaira’ tree desiring the welfare of a would-be child.

In the Saitore ritual food prepared in a special process is being served from artificial gold container to the desired woman. In this ritual unnatural birth-motif originated out of primitive consciousness is working behind it. In these rituals similarity with the worshipping of the Hindu deities are also being kept.

262 Ahmad, Wakil, ‘Banglar Loke Sanskriti’ Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1974, pp.158-161
263 Ibid, pp.164-165
Again in customary gift/present of fish or 'machcher byavar' and in 'Sadh bhakshan' (a ceremony of giving desired articles of food to a pregnant woman) contain ritualistic process of same kind of sympathetic magic. 264

**Child birth and Room of ritualistic confinement of women at childbirth (Antur ghar)**

Immediately after the child birth ‘ajan’ or call for prayer or ‘namaj’ and ‘ekaamat’ or announcement for the commencement of the ‘namaj’ (prayer) has been uttered according to the Islamic method in the child’s ear. After this at every step there are rituals and sacraments. Then the detached umbilical cord of the child is buried underground in the school or the madrassa in the hope of acquiring learning. 265

On the sixth day of the child birth following after the Shetera puja or worshipping of the Hindus, 'Chchati’ or awakening ‘Saitore’ are being observed by the Muslims. Then on the seventh day of the childbirth Chchaitkala (Chattagram)266 ‘Haityera’ (Mymensingh) or ‘Kaman’ (Karmanto or Kamano , 24 Parganas) are being observed. In the Hindu society this is known as ‘uthani’ or ‘Utthanparba’. 267

In the ritual of ‘Chchati’ or awakening the Saitore, rice left from a meal of a woman who has recently delivered a child(prasuti) (Sheterar bhat/rice) is being thrown into a pond. There is a folk-belief that if this rice be eaten after wiping the rice bowl, then the child may become a wretched person(ha-bhate) or having no means to procure one’s daily food.

---

264 Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, pp.248-49
265 Personal Collection of Begam Mariam at Jaynagar, South 24 parganas, cited in Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, p.249.
266 Ahmad, Wakil, Banglar LokeSanskriti, op.cit, pp.166-167
267 Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, p.249
After the end of 21 days of ritualistic confinement of the woman who has recently delivered a child, during the time of ‘Kaman’ or shaving the hair of the child, the aforesaid woman has to eat ‘panta’ or the rice cooked overnight and kept steeped in water while sitting in ‘Chanchi’ or a covered place beneath the thatched roof of a hut in a manner so that the ‘amani’ (or the water in which cooked rice has been soaked overnight) overflows. This ritual is being followed so that there is enough breast-milk for the aforesaid woman. Besides that the ‘haitkala’ or ‘kaman’ is a purification ritual for coming out of ‘asauch’ or impurity of the ‘prasuti’ or the woman who has recently delivered a child and the ‘nabajatok’ or the newly born child. Smearing and coating of the house with cow-dung and washing the impure clothes are its main things or side. There is no place in Islam of ‘asauch’ or that kind of impurity and the related sacraments. However after the delivery of the child the concerned woman remains unholy for atleast forty days due to the constant passing of the urine – this state of affairs is known as ‘nefas’. later on the Hindu code of conduct regarding ‘asauch’ or impurity has been added along with it.

Actually the arrangement of the room of ritualistic confinement of woman at child birth (antur ghar) is for maintaining the honour and dignity of the aforesaid woman for her advantage. But due to the influence of the folk custom and ritual it has almost resulted in to a despicable abode. Then for ensuring security from the grip of the demon and ghoul net has been placed at the door of the room of ritualistic confinement of woman at childbirth(antur), and two iron sticks like nut-cracker or stick for net, torn shoes and hair are also being kept. Besides this for ascertaining one’s preordained fortune(especially as supposed to have been written on one’s forehead by the god of destiny) paper, pen and ink-pot

---

268 Personal collection, Safura Khatun, Kalas, South 24 parganas, cited in Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, p.249.
269 Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, p.249.
are also being kept. On the very day of the ‘Kaman’ or shaving of the child the refuse or the garbage of the room for ritualistic confinement of woman at childbirth(antur) are being thrown outside but in a shady place, otherwise there is a belief that the child may have burning sensation in the body. Again it is also presumed by taking the clue of the refuse/ garbage the demon may get a chance to spread his evil influence. 270 Among all the above mentioned rituals there are influences of magical powers, of opposite directions excepting only the ritual containing paper, pen and ink-pot there is influence of magical powers of equal phases.271

Akika or naming of the child (Namkaran)

Akika is a sacred ritual. In the Hindu ‘Sastra’ or scriptures ‘Namkaran’ or ‘Naming of a child’ is also a scriptural sacrament. According to the Islamic ‘Sunnat’ or code of conduct on the fourteenth day of the child’s birth akika or naming the child (namkaran) should be done, which can be done in other time also. The lawful (halal) animals like cow, goat and sheep etc after being slaughtered in the newly born child’s name and their meat or ‘gosht’ are being distributed. Its main aspect is the desiring long life of the child after sacrificing the life of the child after sacrificing the life of the animal. Along with it there are the rituals like ‘milad’ and doa-darud. Besides that formalities like presentations in this connection are very much product of indigenous influence. 272

While selecting a child’s name Arabic words used in the Al-Quran and Nabi’s language, i.e. the Arabic are being applied. Names implying the servants of the Allah are being considered to be very good according to the ‘Hadis’, another

---

270 Personal collection, Safura Khatun, Kalas, South 24 parganas, cited in Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, p.249
271 Islam, Dr.Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, p.249
272 Ibid, pp.249-50
Islamic scripture. For example Abdullah or the servant of the Allah, Abdur Rahaman or an extremely kind or merciful person, etc. Other good meaningful words are also being used. Following the Farsi influence names according to the words used in the Farsi language are also used while naming a child like Alamgir or the conqueror of the world, Jahanara or the beauty of the world etc. In the recent period adding Bengali words alongwith Islamic names are also being used like Nurul Islam Kamal(padmo). While keeping in mind the names of the flowers like juin, juin flower’s Farsi word jasmine or yasmin is a name pet enough.

The names implying inferiority are being used so that the child of a ‘mritabatsa’ or a woman giving birth previously to a still-born baby remains alive. It is a folk belief in Bengal generally nobody touches the persons bearing these kind of names such as Pacha, Dukhi. One can compare these names with children being sold to the foster-mother in exchange of ‘Kari’ (a cowrie-shell: formerly used as a coin of smallest denomination in the olden days) like Tinkari, Ekkari, Panchkari in the Hindu society so that the children remain alive. Moreover names like Haran, Palan etc (in order to prevent haraano or getting lost or palano or being fled away) are used in the folk society both among the Hindus and the Muslims.273

Islam does not acknowledge surname or title along with the name. It is because instead of aristocratic descent or lineage, honesty or saintliness is the yardstick of the prestige.274 It is for that reason only by adding father’s name the naming of the Muslim is in vogue. For example Muhammad bin Qasim, or Qasim’s son Muhammad. However after the hijrat, or the flight of the Prophet Hazrat Mohammed from Mecca to Madina for distinguishing the separation between those who have fled from Mecca to Madina and the original inhabitants of Madina and terms like ‘Muhajir’ or those who have done hijriyat and ‘Ansar’ or

273 Ibid, p.250
274 Al-Quran, cite in Ibid, p.250

155
the helpers came to be used. Later on of course genealogical surnames of the famous personalities came to be used like Qureshi, Gazzali, Siddiki etc and also surnames notifying person of religious prestige like Shaikh, Saiyad etc. 

In Bengal surnames like Mondal, Haider, Purkait (Purkayastha) etc have come to be used in the Bengali Muslim society following the indigenous influences. Likewise the Muslim titles/surnames like Mallick, Sarkar, Sardar, Chaudhury, Majumdar, Talukdar, Laskar (soldier which has been changed in the Hindu society as Naskar) have come to be used professionally/ occupationally in the Hindu society. These surnames or the titles have been created by having been added with state policy or strategic policy, connected with ownership of land or by professional / occupational meaning. In this context there is similarity not only amongst the Muslim surnames or titles but also within the process of the surnames/ titles in the world.

The ritual of ‘gale khir feeding’ or ‘condensed and sweetened milk’ feeding in the child’s mouth

Following the ritual of the ‘annaprashan’ ceremony or feeding the child with rice in the Hindu society, the ritual of ‘gale khir’ (or feeding condensed / sweetened milk in the child’s mouth also has been introduced in the Muslim society. Generally this is being celebrated along with the rituals of ‘milad-doia’ at child’s attaining the age of six months. First of all alem, imam or any respectable person has to feed in the child’s mouth khir or condensed / sweetened mulk and then rice. In the marriage ceremony following the ‘aiburo bhat’ or the ritual of feeding the rice in unmarried stage just before marriage of the Hindus, the Muslims have

---

275 Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s Book op.cit, p.250.

156
introduced ‘gale khir’ ritual in the marriage ceremony which is also known as ‘thubra kota’ or ‘thubra khaoa’.

**Khatna or circumcision of foreskin of the penis**

‘Khatna’ or circumcision of additional / extra foreskin of the penis is an important ritual in Islam. This arrangement is for protecting the purity of the penis while urinating, besides hygienic grounds are also there.

This ritual is being performed by calling Hajam or a Muslim barber at the age of three/four of the child. Then the Muslim social ritual to be followed is known as Musalmani. By uttering and reading ‘Kalema’ this ritual is being commenced as if it is an initiation to Islam. Akika and Khatna are purely Islamic rituals. However according to Dr. Sa’adul Islam, there might have been the influence of ‘upanayan’ ceremony of the Hindu Brahmins upon it. But the very few rituals which have been accepted in Islam by carrying the Jewish traditions, Khatna is one of them. 276

**Marriage**

Among all the social festivals in the human life, marriage is the most important one. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, marriage may be defined — “as a physical, legal and moral union between man and woman in complete community of life for the establishment of family.”277 For establishing family the moral, physical and legal union of man and woman has been sanctioned by the society through the medium of marriage ceremony. However in the midst of the saying such as ‘complete community of life for the establishment of family’ – there is an urge for security of life and saving the lineage has also been active.

276 *Ibid, p.251*
277 *Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. XIV, p.950*
As a ceremony marriage is simultaneously a religious sacrament and social festival, holy or sacred and delightful at a time. It is one of the sacraments in the Hindu society, while in Islam it is obligatory or ‘faraz’, which in the Hindu society is for throughout the life and indissoluble, while in Islam it is a contract only, whose main conditions are ‘Ijab’ or proposal, ‘Kabul’ or recognition, ‘gaoa’ or witness and ‘denmohar’ which is compulsorily payable to the bride. In the Bengali Muslim society the bridegroom(‘bar’) is known as ‘daman’ ‘dulha’ or ‘naosha’ (new king) and the bride (kone) is known as ‘dulhan’ or ‘aras’. In the Bengali Muslim marriage there are rites or rituals at every step and innumerable customs. The customs and rituals are mentioned below.

a) Pre-marriage – Panchini, Gayehalud, chailun batii, aiburo unun khola, furul doba, baran dala or teloai, bar-kone snan, maroa Sajano etc.

b) At marriage time – bar baran, kone shingrano, shahnajar or julua, jhonkeduar, geroa or pasha-jantikhela, sampradan etc.

c) Post –marriage – badhu baran, basigosal, olima or baubhat etc various rituals.

a. Pre-marriage rituals:-

One can get the view of wide recognitions of the indigenous culture in the Bengali Muslim marriages. By offering pan-supari (betel leaf and betel nut) – chini (sugar) – batasa (a kind of light convex sweet drop of sugar or molasses)

‘Paka dekha’ or a formal visit to a prospective bride’s house in order to draw up the marriage contract in black and white is known as ‘pan-chini’. It should be noted here that in the Bengali Hindu society the custom of ‘paka-dekha’ is in vogue. Besides that there is also the custom of ‘gaye halud’ or pasting turmeric on the body of the bride and the bridegroom in the Bengali Muslim society just like
the Bengali Hindu society, ‘gaye halud’ would be done for seven times. Total seven things would be kept in the ‘chalni’ or a sieve strainer, like a bunch of 16 bananas, each having been touched with sindur or vermilion, raw turmeric, paddy (dhan), durba (or a kind of white grass), diyar/mrinimay sara (earthen pot), ‘jalanta salte’ or a burning wick, a pair of pan-gua or pan-supari (or a pair of betel leaf and betel nut). This marriage decoration is known as chailun bati. In the Maynamatir kavya or ballad one can get —

“Panchagaachi kalagachh Harishchandra Raja
maholat garilo
Sonali chailun bati takhuni –dharailo”

For imaginary bathing of the bridegroom and the bride the “Aiburo unun kholar” ritual is being observed. Seven ladies of the stature of bhabi/boudi (elder brother’s wife) and dadi/thakuma/didima/granny grip a crowbar (shabal), oil is being poured on it (crow bar) and after some oil flows down, then hit the aforesaid crowbar on the ground forcefully thrice and thus a hole shall be opened out. For the bride ‘barandala’ or ‘teloai’ shall come as a customary matrimonial gift (biyer tatwa) from the bridegroom’s house. That will contain betel leaf and betel nut (pan-supari) raw turmeric to be turned into paste by rolling on a flat mortar with a pestle (kancha halud bata) mehedi, perfume products, sweets, curd and fish.

Then the ritual of deciding the fate/future of the bridegroom and the bride named ‘furul duba’ is being followed. After burning/ lighting a pair of wick on the top/leaf stalk of a banana which is known as furul some one has to float it on a river, pond or in the water of the aforesaid aiburo unun and then the fate of both the bridegroom and the bride are decided depending on how long the furul is being

279 Personal Collection, Coochbehar, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Collection, Sairam bibi, Nishiganje, Coochbehar, cited in Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, p.252.
280 Satura Khatun, Kolas, South 24 Parganas cited in Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, p.252.
281 Ahmad, Wakil, Banglar LokeSanskriti, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1974, p.198.
burnt/lighted. Then sometime both the wicks get drowned meaning extremely close union of the bridegroom and the bride.\textsuperscript{282}

On the marriage day by welcoming the bridegroom maroa(Chandoa or canopy) is being decorated. By planting four banana trees on the four corners, the four trees have to be covered by an enclosure tied with red thread. Besides that mango leaves are being placed on a golden metal/earthen pitcher or pot. One can see the ritual of ‘maroa sajano’ in a rural feminine folk song which is written below:-

"Maroa sajano hailo bichitra sugath
Sthapila rasalopatra subarna ghote"

It means after maroa(mandap) a canopy has been decorated in a novel way, flavoured leaf is being placed in a golden pitcher/pot. Moreover in the articles contained in the chalni or sieve/strainer which is symbolic suggestiveness of desires of the inner soul/hear of the primitive folk life. For example banana (kala) signifies male genital organ, sixteen numbers of bananas indicative of the thorough fulfilment (sholo kalar puranta) of women, sindur or vermilion is a memento of menstrual flow and penetration of chastity of a woman. The halud or turmeric, dhan or paddy and durba or a kind of white grass are the symbols of fortune or prosperity, affluence or wealthiness. Moreover the burning wick in the earthen port signifies the refreshment of the new life in the auspicious pot and pangua/supari or betel leaf betel nut is suggestive of union and amorous caress(milosohag) of the bridegroom and the bride. Then in the songs phase of bathing rituals of the bridegroom and the bride in their respective homes there is the directive of offering salam (salutation/obeisance) to the aforesaid ‘chailun bati’ which is noticeable in the following verse: -

"taktaye charo daman/ aras taktaye charo

\textsuperscript{282} Ibid,p.194 and also see Personal collection Suiron bibi, Nishigunj, Coochbehar.
Bismilah buliya ekbar salamo karo" 283
Dr. Sa’adul Islam commented that it seems it is an instruction to offer salutation/obeisance for wishing lifelong prosperity. Besides there is more directive for the bride which says-
“ghore Basumatike salamo karo” which means offer obeisance/salutation to Basumati, the mother earth. Here it is noteworthy that the concept of Basumati or the mother earth is an indigenous concept which has been transmitted through acculturation to the Muslims.

It can be seen that delightful/pleasant expression of fertility sense of the mother earth and human beings has been made in the imaginations of ‘takta-Basumati-kone-aras’ etc. Here inspite of the Islamic covering international and indigenous folk beliefs have been reflected. The examples of international folk beliefs can be seen in the following line :-

“The view thrown after newly married couples in Euro-American wedding festivities once have been seeds to induce fertility.” 284

b) Rituals in marriage time

This type of rituals commence with ‘bar baran’ or cordial and ceremonial reception of the bridegroom. This ‘bar baran’ ceremony is being done twice. In the first instance after the ‘gosol’ or ceremonial taking of bath in the bridegroom’s home and in the second instance after the bridegroom arrives in the bride’s home along with his friends and relatives. In the bridegroom’s own home generally female relatives of the ‘bhabi’ (elder brother’s wife or females having identical type of relationship) category perform the ‘bar baran’ ceremony.

283 Personal collection, Tahura Khatun, Nishigunj, Coochbehar, cited in Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit p.252
284 Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol XIV, p.950
Normally for this dhan (paddy), durba (a kind of white grass), tel (oil), halud (turmeric), pradip (claymade lamp), kalsi (earthen / metal pitcher), hanri (an urn shaped pot for cooking) have been kept in a new Kula/kulo (a winnowing bamboo platter). This is called ‘baran kula’. Then after ‘gosol’ or ceremonial bath the bridegroom has been made to sit upon pinri/ pinre (a low wooden seat to sit upon a squatting fashion) and the aforesaid ‘baran kula’ is being revolved circularly thrice in front of his mouth/face from the right to the left. This is almost like greeting a Hindu deity by the priest with waving incense stick and censer (dhup-dhunuchi). Besides that many times circularly revolving is being done by the waving of the hands and making peculiar signs made with fingers during prayers (mudra of the Hindus) along with dhan (paddy), durba (a kind of white grass) and pan (betel leaf) in open hands. After that when the bridegroom arrives in the bride’s father’s home accompanied by his friends and relatives, then ‘baran’ or ceremonial greeting is being done by the bride’s relatives before sitting him in the ‘bibaha basar’ or the ceremonial place for marriage (maroa). Generally an aged lady of the ‘dadi’ (granny) relation perform the aforesaid baran. 285

In this occasion the following feminine song is being sung:

‘O maynar dadi lo
sonar batay aniya
daman re tui valo kariya bar
also daaman biso khate
khao batar pan
Sundarmati mayna ha-re
tomay karilam dan’ 286

---

285 Ahmad, Wakil, Banglar LokeSanskriti Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1974, pp.202-203
There is a custom of ceremonial reception of the bride groom or ‘bar baran’ in the Hindu society. At the bride’s house the bridegroom is being received with darvasan (grass mat), padya) water for washing the feet), arghya (offerings) achamaniya jal (water for washing and purification of the mouth and of the body), madhyaparka (an oblation of honey, clarified butter, milk, curd and sugar all mixed together).  

Shahnajar of the Bengali Muslims and the ‘Shubhodrishti’ of the Bengali Hindus are such rituals where the difference is only in name and not in any other respects. it is also known as ‘ayena mukh’ or ‘julna’ - : such as “takteto dohan tuli/ sabhan julna buli/ ashirbad korila bahu”

Moreover ‘jhonkduar’ (North Bengal) and ‘fatakdhara’ (South Bengal) are similar rituals. In ‘jhonkduar’ rituals there are marriage songs from both the side of the bridegroom and the bride.

From the side of the bridegroom :-

“Chcharho chcharho chchubochchunmi chcharo duar
tyal dimo sindu dimo chcharo duar”

From the bridal side-

“na chcharinha chcharhi ajo duar
Manike bandhichche ajo duar – hireke bandhichche ajo duar”

It is interesting to observe that ‘chchubochchunni” ritual of the Bengali Muslims have been derived from the Subhochandi or Subhasuchani/ Subachani of the Bengali Hindus. In it on the occasion of the marriage there is the prayer for opening the door and fervidity to retain their dear confidante(sakhi) by the two confidantes named Heeramanik, which made the ancient martial dress (which is being worn on the occasion of the aforesaid marriage ritual) pleasant and

287 Bandyopadhya, Suresh Chandra, Smritisashtrie Bangali, A.Mukherjee & Co. Pvt Ltd., Kolikata, 1368 B.S p.83
288 Sultan, Syed, Nabibangsho

163
compassionate. At the time of bestowing the bride ceremonially to the charge of the bridegroom or sampradan parba the bridegroom has been told to stand in the 'marhoa' or inside the home and then arrangements were made to give in touch of warm betel leaf in his two jaws and feigning has been done in a special gesture to caress over his whole body. Then keeping bride’s palm over bridegroom’s palm bestowal of the bride ceremonially to the charge of the bridegroom (sampradan) has been done after giving a pair of betel leaf, betel nut and coin. One can see the symbol of three desires like wealth, fertility and fortune (Lakshmi, Prajnan, Sri) in the ritual to bless (ashirbad) by sprinkling dhan (paddy) durba (a kind of white grass) and halud (turmeric).289

Post - marriage rituals
As there is the ritual of 'bar baran' on ceremonial greeting of the bridegrooms is observed in the bride’s home, likewise badhubaran or ceremonial greetings of the bride is being observed in the bridegroom’s house. When the bridegroom returns home after marrying, then first of all there is the ceremonial greeting of both the bridegroom and the bride. The custom of ‘badhubaran’ or the ceremonial greeting of the bride has been in vogue in the Hindu society for a long period of time. Its influence has fallen also into the Bengali Muslim society. Especially there is the imprint of Hinduism in the various upachar of the baran kula or the articles given in religious offering being used in the winnowing platter/ tray for ceremonial greeting (baran kula) like dhan (paddy) durba (a kind of white grass) Kala (banana) misti (sweets).290

Moreover there are customs like ‘pasha khela’ (dice-play), ‘janti khela’ (nut-cracker play). Same kind of ritual has been done immediately after the

289 Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, p.253
290 Ahmad, Waki, Banglar Loke Sanskriti, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1974, p.206.
marriage, that is ‘geroa’ or throwing and catching of flower bouquet (pushpa stabak), which is being performed along with the ritual of ‘julua’. Now in the ‘badhu baran’ ritual along with it there are rituals like showing the cow-shed (goal), granary (gola) kitchen (rannaghar) to the newly-wed wife (badhu). Moreover the ritual of ‘Sijda’ or the act of making obeisance by lying prostrate is also being carried out. Besides the testing of the fate of the ‘nababadhu’ or the newlywed wife is also being done along with cutting of cruel jokes. Also the intelligence of the newlywed wife is also being tested in various ways. One seer (seer is an obsolete Indian measure of weight) paddy is being kept under the cot or bed-stead, that is measured in newlywed wife’s hands, if the measurement is not much then she is considered to be ‘lakshmichchari’ or bereft of fortune/prosperity. Again after keeping rice, gold, silver, cow dung cake (ghunte), garlic, pulses (dal), spices, turmeric in separate small bundles/baggage (putuli), the newlywed wife is being asked to raise or lift the aforesaid articles like a lottery. It should be noted here that all the aforesaid articles are symbolic ones, the test is being only by lifting or raising these. It is accompanied by the songs of banter and humour such as:

“Lau dhum dhum kore re jangi heli pore re
eto boysher meye tui chchili bapo mayer ghare re”

Basar Jaga

The very next day after the marriage ceremony in the bridegroom’s house at night the ‘basar jaga’ ritual or awaking in the bride-chamber is being performed by the married women of the elder brother’s wife or bhabi/boudi relations. They are actually guarding the bridegroom and the bride while awaking whole night. The bride chamber is being lighted and scented by lamps and incense and decorated by

flowers and leafs. When the bridegroom and the bride enter the bride chamber then some coins are strewn and the bride has to draw together and procure these. There is folk belief by it that the bride develops the tendency for savings. That means in future she will save her husband’s money and thus increase the wealth. In reality this kind of folk consciousness is born out of the belief of magical powers.

In the desire for similar result by mimicking a ritual there is same kind of belief in magical powers. The next ritual of the ‘basar jaga’ or awaking in the brides chamber is being performed through singing dancing and cutting joke. Those who participated in the ‘basar jaga’ they usually get tips from the bridegroom.292

**Basi gosal**

‘Basi gosal’ is a ritual related with the bride. This ritual is being performed on the following day after the ‘basar jaga’ in the bridegroom’s house. There is also same kind of folk belief in magical powers in the methods to be followed and the desirable results with ‘basi gosal’. When the desire has been expressed for gaining similar result by pronouncing incantation and observing rituals then it signifies folk belief in magical powers ascribed to it. Moreover the ritual called ‘basi gosal’ is also known as ‘basibiye’ in some areas which is being observed in the Hindu society as well.293

**Boubhat**

(ceremonial serving of rice to the invitees/ relatives by the bride)

There is the practice of ‘boubhat’ being observed in the bridegroom’s house in the marriages of all the societies in Bengal. This is a festival of eating and

---

293 Ahmad, Wakil, Banglar LokeSanskriti, op.cit. p.209
dining. The quality and quantity of food to be served is decided according to the financial means. Generally ‘boubhat’ is observed on the next day after the marriage day or on the 3rd day after it. The invitation to invitees on the bridal side has been done before hand. They along with the invitees on the bride groom’s side take part in the feast being arranged. In the Hindu society the newlywed wife has been taken into the kitchen and food touched by her are being served with relations on the bridegrooms and thus she is being incorporated into the bridegroom’s family.294

Baranta
Generally the relations from the bride’s home come to the bridegroom’s house on the 3rd day after the marriage day for taking the bride and the bridegroom. They will have to be specially honoured and ceremoniously feeded. This is known as ‘baranta’ in Murshidabad. The master of the house can arrange the ‘boubhat’ and ‘baranta’ at a time for saving expenses, again can arrange separately for showing family tradition and vanity. Baranta is a mere social ritual/ceremony. This is called as ‘dwiragaman’ in the Hindu society.295

Melani
Most probably this is the last ritual of the marriage. In the Hindu society ‘astamangala’ is being observed in the Muslim society in the bride’s home on the eighth day of the marriage. On that day ‘gatchanra’ or ‘mangalsutra’ etc is being opened ritually. That can be observed on the 4th or the 10th day of the marriage, then it is known as ‘Chaturtha mangala’ or ‘Dash mangala’. The name arai-ullah is being observed on the same occasion in the Dhaka district. On the two and half day after ‘dwiragaman’ ritual the bridegroom taking his bride has to come back to his

294 Ibid, p.210
295 Ibid, p.210
own home. On that particular day the bridegroom has to give fish, curd and sweets to the bride’s house. Till the fish and curd is being given, in the bridal home, the guardian/father of the bride will have to feed his son-in-law and daughter with ‘pallanna’ or highly spiced dish of rice and meat boiled in clarified (purified) butter. It is to be noted that there is ritualistic importance of fish and curd. After the end of the aforesaid ritual the relations from the bridal home have to bid farewell to the bridegroom and the bride which is called ‘melani’. Actually the term ‘bidaya’ or formal parting is inauspicious, that is why as an euphemism the term ‘melani’ is being used. Therefore the earnest desire of the melani ritual is wishing an auspicious farewell journey and a happy married life for the bridegroom and the bride.

Death and last rites – Sraddha(obsequies) and Chalisha or chehlam
The Death is the inevitable conclusion of life. Human beings are afraid of it. The illness, disease, disaster/danger which are reasons for death, to get rid of it they have not really imagined different types of gods and goddesses but also tried to satisfy them for getting deliverance out of it. The imaginations and rituals for worship for the goddesses like Shitala for small pox, Olabibi for cholera(olautha) and Bishahari for snakebite etc were born in this way. Different types of customs and rituals have been added from the belief of the immortality of the soul. According to the Hindu scriptures the soul is immortal and that gains rebirth for the consequences of one’s actions especially of previous life that governs one’s weal or woe. The concept of rebirth does not exist in the Islam, but on the day of the keyamat or the day of the judgement or doomsday there is the saying of reanimation or resuscitation and according to the consequences of one’s previous

296 Ibid,p.210-11
existence either there will be enjoyment of heaven or jannat (Swarga) or sufferings of jahannam or hell (narak).  

While the Muslim bury their dead bodies which is called as ‘dafan’, whereas the Hindus do the cremation. To the Hindus, a dead body and the things and articles used in the time of death are being considered as ‘asuchī’ or impure. The Hindu society has prescribed the observance of ‘asauch’ or impurities for 10 days for the higher castes and for the lower castes 30 days. Then the ‘Sraddha’ or obsequies has to be performed. The Buddhists perform adyasraddha on the seventh day. 

The custom of ‘asauch’ or impurities does not exist in the Islam, but there is three days of mourning for the elder revered persons (gurujon) and then ‘fateha’ is being done after the recitation of the doadrud and Koran. This is known as ‘Kulkhaoni’. On the fortieth day ‘Chehalam’ (farsi ‘chehel’ means challissh or forty) or ‘chalshe’ (Chalisha) is being observed. There may have been the influence of the ‘Sraddha’ of the Hindus on the ‘Chhelam’. The custom of lighting the lamp at the place of death and at the place of ‘gosal’ or bathing the dead body for forty days is the result of the belief of resuscitation (reanimation) of the soul. There is no provision of obeying a particular lunar day for rituals to be performed (‘tithikhkhan’) praying for peace of the soul. That is why it can be said that the ‘chehalami’ is a custom which has been originated out of the Hindu and the Persian influences and emerged beyond the periphery of Islam. Donating anything without observing the ‘doa’ or prayer (like the ‘pindadan’ in the Hindu society and the custom of burying useful articles in the grave in ancient Egypt) is not sanctioned in the Islam. 

---

297 Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op. cit, p.254  
298 Ahmad, Wakil, Banglar Lokesanskriti, op. cit, p.213  
299 Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op. cit, p.254
However in the Bengali Muslim Society it is considered to be inauspicious for the widow to touch anything in any marriage ritual or during the pregnancy of the wife husband’s touching of the cot of the janaja or the dead person’s burial procession. Moreover there is the fear of ‘baddoa’ (evil prayer) if the place of death remains dark. That is why the ‘gosal’ or bathing the dead body and ‘agnishuddhi’ or purifying by fire have to be done by lighting the aforesaid places. Besides the custom of eating vegetables of slightly bitter taste (tita bhakkhan) is due to the folk belief that nobody dies if they eat food of slightly bitter taste (“tita ana khaile bule kehio na moribo”). Strangely enough there are also customs like calling the napit or the barber on the third day of the death for observing certain rituals (“napit aniya bole kheur koribar”). There are also customs like throwing away outside all the utensils for cooking (“randhaner bhando sab nikali felay”). Also there is the folk belief that bamboo made arch/dome (khilan) of the Kabar or grave is very inauspicious (“aga gunri dile boile sakali moribo”). All the aforesaid customs have grown out of the periphery of Islam. Moreover many among them like ‘tita aanna’ (food of slightly bitter taste) or ‘randhaner bhando felano’ (abandoning cooking utensils) are grown out of contagious magic.

In the writings of many Muslim poets, the messages of warnings have been pronounced regarding these customs and rituals which have emerged beyond the periphery of the Shariyat from the last quarter of the sixteenth century starting from Mujammil’s ‘Sayatnama’ till the eighteenth century. The cultivation of the Shariyat has been in a great measure in the writings of Alaul, Muhammad Khan, Muttalib, Nasrullah Khondkar et al. Although by the extensive endeavours of the movements of the nineteenth century like the Faraizi and the Tarikha-i-

---

300 Personal collection, Safura Khatun, South 24 parganas, cited in Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, p.255
301 Nasrullah Khondkar - Shariyatnama
302 Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, p.255
Muhammadiya or the Wahabi and the Tabligi Jamat of the twentieth century, the 'beshara' or the anti-Shariyat folk customs and rituals have been reduced to a great extent yet these could not be wiped out completely. There one can see that the examples of cultural admixture of the Bengali Muslims and the Bengali Hindus went almost unnoticed.  

**Religious festivals – a) Islamic**

In every festival there is an universal ambience, which although originated out of the enclosures of religious communities, yet unionist, principally pleasure oriented and colourful. Due to this predominance of pleasure and Unionist orientation, “holiday” (here it means festival) has a largely secular connotation. Quite often festivals are born centering round the expression of pleasure on the occasions of addressing the nature, conquest of a state, establishment of a new religious knowledge, showing honour to a national hero, or annihilation of an oppressor. Therefore there is a metaphysical or symbolic aspect of the festivals of each and every country. In Islam equal importance has been given always to the self-austere ascetic practices along with their sociological roles in the festivals.

Just like all the religious ceremonies of the world the Islamic festivals and ceremonies too have been observed in accordance with the lunar months and lunar days (Chandra mas O titi). The name of the Islamic year is Hijri. The principal festivals are Muharram, Fateha Doaz Doham, Shabe Me Raj, Shabe Barat, Shabe Kadar. Besides that the festival held during the evening is Iftar. In all the festivals self-austere ascetic practices and prayer –Munajat are being followed, added with that are social values. By placing direct social responsibilities upon the

---

303 Islam, Dr.Sa’adul- ‘Banglar Hindu-Musalman Sanskritik Oitiya O Mishran’ op.cit, p.255
304 Encyclopedia Britannica, 1970, p.125
306 Islam, Dr.Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, p.255
capable persons, Islam has made the social role of these festivals stronger and effective by making various kinds of charitable gifts and contributions like contributing to the Iftari in the Ramjan, making charitable gift of fitra in the Eid-ul-fitr, distributing gosht(meat) of the Korbani(sacrifice) and making charitable gift of Jakat in the Eid-ul-ajha etc.\(^{307}\)

The following Islamic festivals are noteworthy from the viewpoints of cultural admixture and social significance.

a) Muharram:

On the tenth day of the hijri year first month Muharram, in the mournful memory of the sorrowful death of Hazrat Ali’s son Imam Hussain at the hands of Ejid in the wilderness of Karbala, this festival is being observed. The follower of the Sunni doctrine keep roja and observe mourning through the medium of milad-doa and prayer for desiring peace in memory of the great martyr who has sacrificed his life. Whereas the followers of the Shia doctrine by making taziaa or the artificial Kabar(grave) of Hussain and dress of ‘duldul’ or warhorse organize processions for mourning clad in black dress. By blowing large war trumpet or dunduvi and displaying stick and spear in keeping with convention or form of war acting is being performed. Then they strike their chest repeatedly with the open palm and wailing and uttering repeatedly with exclamation of regret like ‘Alas! Hossain! Alas! Hassan!’ Then the immersion of the tazia with solemnities in the pond is also a part of the ritual of the Muharram.

There is the influence of idolatrous(Hindu) culture in the making of symbols like duldul – tazia, war-acting and immersion of tazia. Its use has been made by the Shias of Iran of the Persian empire.\(^{308}\) However in the very pathetic emotional outburst of mourning of the marsia or the ballads of mourning there are

\(^{307}\) Ibid, p.256-7

\(^{308}\) Siddiqui, Dr.Ashraf, Loke Sahitya, Dwitiya Khanda, p.cit, p.226
expressions of mental affliction not only of the Shia-Sunni, but also equally of the Hindus and the Muslims. The deeper symbolic significance of this festival is that how much awful the impropriety/misdeed might have been, it doesn’t have any immortality of its own, instead it has immortality of truth and justice. Dr. Ashraf Siddiqui has commented that there is similar kind of significance in the slaughter of mahishashur in the worshipping of the goddess Durga. While making a comparative study of Ramayan-Mahabharat with the battle of Karbala, Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah has opined that just like Ramayan-Mahabharat, the memory of the battle of Karbala is now integrated into the great epic tradition of Bengal. Therefore one of the national festivals of Bengal is Muharram.

b. Fateha doaz doham Nabidibas or Nabi/prophets birthday

Prophet Hazrat Mohammad’s birthday is being observed in the 12th day of the third month of Islamic calendar or Rabiul aual (Farsi ‘do aj doham’ means 12th). This is not merely and observation of birthday now-a-days but at present it has been transformed into an international festival. Crossing the periphery of the mosques and the Muslim Mohalla or locality it has gradually been expanded into the schools and colleges (especially in the mixed areas). It is being observed by all irrespective of the Hindus and the Muslims (especially in the mixed areas). It is being through the milad or the review lectures on the life and ideology of the prophet or the Nabi, doa-prayer, distribution of the Fateha sweets etc.

---

309 Ibid, p.226
310 Shahidullah, Dr. Muhammad, ‘Amader Samasya’ (Our problems), Dhaka, 1949, pp.6-7
311 Islam, Dr. Sa’ad-ul’s book, op.cit, p.256
312 Ibid, p.256
Shabe Barat

One of the principal examples of the cultural admixture is ‘Shabe barat’ or night of the destiny (Bhagya rajani). The word ‘barat’ has been derived from the Arabic word ‘bara aat’ whose meaning in dictionary is emancipation. Desire for emancipation through the medium of ‘ibadat-bandegi’ or the charity-county is the aim of this festival. In course of time through the process of conjugation of words meaning of the word has been transformed from ‘bara aat’ to ‘barat’ which means destiny. This is being observed at the end of the day in the night of the fourteenth day of the eighth month of Islamic calendar named ‘Shaban’. It is due to the belief that ‘ruho’ or the spirit of the forefathers come back in the locality in the hope of gaining piety everywhere in the homes, granaries, door, roads, etc have been decorated with illuminations. Moreover fireworks are being carried out. There is resemblance with the Diwali or Dipabali festival. All these are born out of Hindu influences. Although there is apparent similarity of the feeding of the ‘miskin’or pauper in the ‘shabe barat’ with that of the ‘kangalibhojan’ or feeding of the beggars (destitute with Kalipuja of the Hindus, but there is no un-Islamic practice in charity. Still ‘Shabe Barat’ is a shining example of acculturation. 313

Iftar

The ninth month of the Islamic calendar is called Ramjan for throughout the month in the day-time from ‘Sub-he-Sadik’ i.e from the sunrise to the ‘Magrib’ or sunset fasting in which even a drop of water is not permitted along with the self-control of sensual appetites are compulsorily observable or ‘faraz’ for the Muslims. Immediately after the sun is set they would take food and drink water. This is called ‘iftar’. Sanctity, charity, liberalism, and commensal – all these taken together is considered as a festival inspite of being a religious ritual to the persons

313 Ibid, p.256 -7
afflicted by fasting. Since the sanctity and social union are inseparably connected with it therefore the Hindu society also honoured the dignity of the sacred moment of the Muslims. Due to this there are arrangements for ‘iftar’ parties everywhere. For initiating in the great vow for fraternity and communal unity the iftar is the most auspicious moment. For seeking not only the social union within the country but also for international union the importance of this festival is no less. One can remember in this context the arrangement of iftar parties for the Heads of State and the diplomats. 314

Eid

Eid is the festival of pleasure and merriment. It is the best example of the festival for social union. Among the two Eids, first one is known as Eid-ul-fitr. It is the first day time lunch after keeping roja or fasting from sunrise to sunset after one month on the first day of the tenth month of the Islamic calendar known as Shawal. The significance of this festival is going to be lost until and unless there is the awakening of the hesitation free and enmity free feeling for social union. Therefore the universality of the festival is being proved by the social union without any malice, acceptance of sweets, expression of sympathy and fitra charity be compulsively given to the poor, embracing each other, or moaneka(Kolkakuli). Cutting across the religious barriers, this social union is directed also to the separate religionist society. This moanika or Kolakuli (embracing each other) of the Eid festival now diffused into the Vijoya greetings of the goddess Durga. It is ‘wajib’ or compulsory duty for every Muslim to contribute before the Eid as a charitable gift to the poor a particular amount or fitra in accordance with the number of members of the family so that the people irrespective of the rich and poor can enjoy the merriment of the festival. It is obligatory or ‘faraj’ to give

314 Ibid, p.257
charity at the rate of $2\frac{1}{2}\%$ as ‘Jakat’. After completing the namaj or parayer of the Eid the Muslims embrace each other in which the Hindus also take part. Therefore the sociological and cultural value of the Eid is immense.\textsuperscript{315}

Eid-ul-ajha is the second Eid. This day is being observed on the tenth day of the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar Jilhajja by all such Muslims of the world who could not have gone to the Haj on the ‘Qurbani’ or the festival day. Remembering the ideal of life of the Hazrat Ibrahim, Haj is being observed on the ninth day of the aforesaid month in the Arafat maidan or ground of Mecca. Its theme being the immersion of his wife and the child-son on the direction of the Allah and then the memory of the sacrifice or Qurbani of his teenaged son Ismail as an offering to the Master( the Allah/Almighty). This is being observed by offering animal sacrifice or Qurbani to the Allah after the end of the namaj or prayer of the Eid-ul-ajha. There is definite rule in the Islam so that the poor and the destitute get the ‘gosht’ meat of the Qurbani sacrifice. It should be remembered that although the different aspects of the jewish religion and culture like the Khatna or circumcision and roja or fasting from sunrise to sunset have been followed in the Islam, but there is nothing in similar shape or appearance in every detail elsewhere like the Haj and Eid-ul-ajha.\textsuperscript{316}

As one can notice the signs of un-Islamic rituals in the Islamic festivals likewise Islamic rituals also have been accepted in the neighbouring Hindu society. For example ‘moaneka’ (Kolakuli) or embracing each other and community-eating of the Eid can be seen in the Hindu worships and religious festivals. Therefore it can be said that like everyday way of life the festivals of Bengal irrespective of the communities are also examples of unionist culture.\textsuperscript{317}

\textsuperscript{315} Islam, Dr.Sa’adul – ‘Islamer Eid: Sadhanay ‘O’ Samaje’ article, cited in his book, op.cit.p.257
\textsuperscript{316} ibid, pp.257-58
\textsuperscript{317} Islam, Dr.Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, p.258

176
Religious festivals: Symbiosis of cultures

The religious festivals influenced by the symbiosis of cultures were generally created centering round the pir-cultures. We have noticed earlier in the pirism the following features like the non-Islamic influences, role of the pirs in the mentalite of the people, similarity/resemblances of folk gods and goddesses with the natural characteristic features of the pirs etc.

Uras

Now we can see the direct reflection of the pir-cultures in the midst of ‘uras’ festivals and fairs. The observation of the tithi or the lunar date of the birth and death of the great saints, pirs and bujurgs are the uras festivals. The arrival of the devotees and the murids (followers), discussion of the life of the pirs after paying the nazrana or tribute, lying obstinately at the door of the ‘majar’ soliciting for the fulfillment of mental desires irrespective of the Hindu-Muslim men and women, for fulfillment of ‘hajot’ and ‘manot’ or vows, prayers of the women who have taken the vows or manat after taking the bath, and environs of the fairs beyond all these. Above all sacred things favourable for Islam, or ‘Esale Saoal—a—Tabarruk’ which means here ‘mithai-payesh’ (sweets and sweet rice—porridge) and ‘hajote’ or ‘pirer bhog’ means food offering to the pir are in reality similar to the ‘prasad’ or food-offering to a deity of the Hindus. In the ‘Shariyat Nama’ of Nasrullah Khondkar the following couplet in this way may be quoted.

‘Puja jeno rakhi thake buter Sakkhat’ 318

Then for examining the fate the ‘Shirni’ (Hindu sinni) is being floated. This whole process of rituals connected with the ‘Uras’ are creations of the Hindu mentalite being observed by them first of all and later on followed in the Muslim society. 319

318 Khondar, Nasrullah, Shariyatnama

177
It is to be noted that these are inwardly religious festivals, but outwardly fairs (mela). Moreover in connection with the fairs (mela) community oriented religious festivals also became secular or irrespective of religion and pir culture helped in this kind of evolution.\textsuperscript{320}

In this connection one can mention about the important uras festivals of Bengal like the uras fair of Shahjalal (Sylhet) the fair of Lalan Fakir (Kushthia), the fair of Khanja Khan or Khan-i-jahan' Khan (Jessore) the fair of Gazi Saheb (Ghutiary Sharif, South 24 Parganas). The fair of Machchandali Pir or Taj Khan Mashnad-i-Ala (Hizli, Midnapore) etc.

\textbf{Mela or fair}

Rural fair or folk fairs actually are carrying the examples of cultural admixture in all respects. Most of the today's fairs are humanist, where the pleasures and merriment are the central themes and undoubtedly these are commercial.\textsuperscript{321}

Fairs are mainly of the two types :-

a) Religious – of which besides the aforesaid Uras fairs there are fairs like Rathajatra, Gosthajatra, Snan Jatra (Ganga), gajan, Charak, Dol, Paush parban, Baruni etc and fairs of folk gods and goddesses like Bana bibi, Satyapir, Dharmathakur’s Dharmerjat, Burimaa etc. and

b) Secular fairs like Nababarsha, Punyaha and various other kinds of fairs are included in this category.

Festivals itself are union-centric, so there are community-neutral and universal. in course of time even the religious festivals and fairs through the evolutionary process have become secular or religiously neutral and forerunner of cultural synthesis. Therefore it has been aptly commented by Dr. Ashraf Siddiqui that

\textsuperscript{319} Islam, Dr. Sa’adul, article entitled ‘Ghutiary Sharif ’O’ Banglar jano jiban’
\textsuperscript{320} Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, p.258
\textsuperscript{321} Siddiqui, Ashraf, LokeSahitya, Dwitiya Khanda, op.cit, p.229.
although there are diversities of the different festivals and rituals owing to the religious differences of whether the Hindus, the Muslims the Buddhists or even the tribals, but if it can be examined through introspection and caution then it can be seen that there is no difference among themselves.  

As we have seen in the preceding discussions the cultural admixture in the midst of the different elements of the super-structure of the society such as languages, literature, art, music, religion etc, likewise we can also see in the perspective of the economy, sociology of the fairs there are signs of cultural unity in the case of the structure of the society.

Folk beliefs and the Bengali society

The folk beliefs are all the outward/external practices which are in vogue mainly in the non-literate society and also in the somewhat civilized and literate society such as on the one hand the economic, social, religious, political and cultural activities and on the other mental activities such as notions, beliefs, tendencies and natural desires and propensities which includes the name of such elements in which the predominance of unreason is much more than the reason. And when the folk beliefs considered to be unnecessary in the changed circumstances due to the political, social and educational reasons, then that will be known as the superstition. it means then these will be considered as obsolete and unimportant. It is for that reason Dr. Mohammad Shahidullah commented that now-a-days in the light of science we are describing many customs, rituals and beliefs as superstitions. But there was one day when these were like objects of reverence for all religious practices and religious beliefs. In the Bengali language folk belief

---

322 Ibid, p.226
323 Hafiz, Abdul – Loukik Sanskar 'O' Manab Samaj, Muktadhara, Dhaka, 1975, p.2
324 Ibid, p.69
325 Siddiqui, Dr.Ashraf Lokesahitya, pratham khanda op.cit. Introduction written by Dr. Mohammad Shahidullah.
has a very wide and enriched connotation, in which words like belief, superstition, magic etc are being followed to denote the above.

Generally folk belief can be divided into two parts, first one is affirmative which means one can do it, and the second one is negative which means by doing it one may have to face evil omen. Therefore most of the folk beliefs belonged to the taboo phase. Behind any superstition the following folk beliefs remained active :-

i) Taboo or animist tradition oriented forbidden aspects, for example, the notion of impurity or ‘ashauch’ at the time of birth and death. These are negative oriented.

ii) Mana or beliefs out of reverence for the supernatural powers. For example while taking initiation by touching the hand/turban of the Saint/ pir/bujurg, if possessed by a demon/evil spirit or at the time of making active for any impossible task in the Muslim society by pronouncing ‘eya Allah’ feeling oneself powerful/stronger than before belonged to this phase. All these are affirmative.

iii) Belief in the magical power. Beliefs like taking talisman-amulet(tabiz-kabach), enslavement by enchantment or mesmerism or incantation or hypnotization(bashikaran), exorcising of evil spirit by uttering charms and incantations, (jharphunk) etc. are affirmative.

iv) Totem or reverence towards any inanimate object, animal or any kind of living being, tree, etc. Their killing is being considered as inauspicious, therefore these are forbidden. In most of these cases they belonged to the forbidden category. The rituals regarding the cow and crow in the Hindu society are of this phase.

---

326 Hafiz, Abdul - a) Loukik Sanskar ‘O’ Manab Samaj, op.cit, b) Hafiz, Abdul - Loukik Sanskar ‘O’ Bangali Samaj, Muktadhara, Dhaka, 1975
v) Belief in the auspicious and inauspicious things while deciding the future. Folk beliefs relating to the auspicious and inauspicious things belonged to this category.

vi) Keeping confidence towards the experiences belonging to the time immemorial. In this respect Khana’s sayings can be remembered.

vii) Religious restrictions. For example not touching the Koran without ‘aju’ or a special kind of washing the body for purification.

Of course behind any custom/ritual any definite belief may not be present, rather in most of the cases a combination of more than one belief can be noticeable.

In the Bengali Muslim society astrological prediction, foretelling the fate, and the judgement of zodiac sign, auspicious days and lunar date is prevalent from the past. The efficient persons of these aspects are being called as ‘najjum’, ganak, gunin, etc. Just like deciding the horoscope (thikuji-kosthi) of the Hindu society, these aspects have been depicted in the books like ‘Jagnama’, Falnama of Abdul Gani, Khabnama and Agamjnansagor of Ali Ray, Sayatnama of Mujammil in the Bengali Muslim Society. More descriptions of the folk beliefs and rituals can be found with books like ‘Shariyatnama’ of Nasrullah Khondkar and ‘Tohfa’ of Alaul etc. Still today in the Bengali way of life these folk-beliefs and rituals are having the claim of similar role to both the Hindu and the Muslim society. Therefore from the perspective of the cultural unity of the Bengalis the discussion about the folk beliefs and customs and rituals are no less significant.327

Household chores
In this connection precise discussion already has been made in the context of day-to-day life. We are refraining from the detailed discussion in this respect with the

327 Islam, Dr.Sa'adul's book, op.cit, p.262-63

181
hints that the Hindus and the Muslims of Bengal are nurtured with same cultural ambience.

Deciding about the proper time

Auspicious and inauspicious- in these two phases mas(month) bar(day) tithi(lunar date) prohar( a measure of time equal to three hours) or bishesh muhurta( special moment) are being judged.

a) Month (mas)

In Bengal Chaitra, Vadra and paush months of the Bengali calendar are forbidden or inauspicious for marriage, welcoming the bride or badhubaran or any kind of auspicious work (subha karma).

In the Muslim society the month of Maharram, Rajab, Shaban, Ramjan and Jilhajja are considered as sacred war and bloodshed are forbidden in these months. Again we can see the folk beliefs of the Bengali Muslims in the following verse:-

"Srabone nirmila ghar roge-shoke nirantar
se ghare to berha apad
Vhadre griha nirme jabe gaye roge hoye tobe
Ashwine te dandwa bame niti" 328

Again in another verse-

"Srabon mase jadi keho bandhe ghar
sei doshe maribek griher Iswar" 329

It means if one constructs house in the month of Srabon then disease and mourning flow continuously. If constructing a house in the month of Bhadra then illness may

---

328 Khan, Muhammad, 'Satya Kalibibad – Sambod'
329 Ibid
befall on the body, conflict occurs in the month of Ashwin. The meaning of the second verse, shall be as follows:-
if one builds his house in the month of Srabon then on that blemish the household god will pass away.

On the other hand the Bengali Muslims believe in the auspiciousness of the month of Chaitra which can be seen in the following poem:-

“Madhabi maseto (Chaitra) naba mandir bandhibo
dhane putre Lakshmi sab tahar varibo

that means

If one builds a new temple (means mosque) in the month of Madhabi or Chaitra then the wealth, son, Lakshmi or prosperity all of these shall increase.

Bar or day

To the different communities different different days are being considered as sacred. For the Christmas Sunday, for the Muslims Friday and for the Hindus Thursday or Gurubar(preceptor’s day) are considered as the sacred days. In the folk society Saturday and Tues day are considered as sacred or auspicious for offering puja/worshipping and Shirni to the folk gods and goddesses are the aforesaid two days. Saturday is considered to be auspicious for making journey (jatra) trade/commerce (banijya) and hunting(Shikar). it can be seen in the following couplet:

“Shani mrigaya haye
rabi a Grihanirmaaya
briksha jadi rope fale ati.”

---

330 Mujammil. ‘Nitisastrabarta’
331 Khan, Muhammad, Stayakalibibad-Sambad

183
On the other hand on Sunday housebuilding / agricultural activities and planting of the trees are auspicious, but digging of the pond is inauspicious. Journey is auspicious on Monday. Besides ‘Mangale Sangram bhalo ati’ 332 means making war is very auspicious on the Tuesdays, but inauspicious for shaving and cutting the hair. 333

Again in another verse:–

“Budhe to gosol kare vyadhir aushadhi
Rajpae vetibare gurubare siddhi
Sukrabare shank ore unji Sukharati
Pae bahu punya uttam Santali”334

It means after taking bath on Wednesday taking medicines for the disease is auspicious and after taking bath on Friday, if one enjoys sexual pleasures, then he gets a lot of holiness, good progeny.

Again in another verse one can find:-

‘Sukrer bibaha kaj
Ati bhalo Sastramajh
Punyakarma Sukrate Karibo”335

it means marriage on Friday
is very good according to scriptures
sacred works should be done on Fridays.

Besides this on the list of inauspicious things, one can add the following couplet–

‘Tin ashta tero ashtadash bingshatin
ashto bingshaa mase amangal chchay din”336

332 Ibid
333 Alaul, Tohfa
334 Ibid
335 Khan, Muhammad, Satyakalibibad-Sambad
336
Likewise we got the following sermon regarding the month of Chaitra in the Khana’s saying-

‘Madhumase pratham dine hoi jei bar, Rabi shoshe Mangal barshe, durviksha Budhvar, Som, Shukra, Guru aar, Prithwi soyna Shassyer var, panch shani paye mine, shakuni mangsa na khaye ghrine’

Needless to say, there is no scientific reasoning for these. However, in the Khana’s sayings like –

“Jadi barshe magher shesh, dhanya Raja punya desh” (it means if there is rain at the end of the month of magh, then the King will be fortunate and the country will be virtuous). There the experience coming from time immemorial has been arrested, which is not unreasonable altogether. 337

c) Tithi and Prahar (lunar date and a measure of time equal to three hours)

The juncture or meeting point of the month and the day (mas and bar) is considered to be inauspicious. Moreover on the days of Chaitra – Sankranti (Sankranti means the last day of the Bengali month when there is transit or passage from one zodiacal sign to another) paush sankranti, on the lunar dates of the ekadashi (eleventh day of the lunar fortnight) purnima (or full moon day), amabasya (new moon) there is the practice of eating dry food, pulse (dal-kalai) ruti (or a kind of thin saucer-shaped handmade bread) instead of rice still prevalent in the Hindu and the Muslim society. 338 Moreover there is the custom of not to give anything to anybody and not bring children outside just at the moment of sunrise and sunset or

---

336 Alaul, Tohfa
337 Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, p.264
338 Personal collection of Janab Imdadul Haq, Narayanpur Road, Coochbehar, cited in Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, p.264
full evening/advanced evening (var sandhyay). Besides there is the custom of not to lend anything to anybody before cleaning or washing the courtyard (uthon) in the morning which remained uncleaned or unwashed since overnight.\textsuperscript{339} There is also the custom for a pregnant woman not to go at noon by the side of a bamboo-clump or beneath the Sheora/Shaora (a kind of wild tree) ... not to throw the leftover of food and water after the dinner is over at night outside the house, and not to move outside the house if someone calls at the dead of night.\textsuperscript{340}

There is also the custom of not to respond before three calls at the night of worshipping of the goddess Kali\textsuperscript{341} (Kali puja). Dr. Sa’adul Islam commented that various aforesaid customs and superstitions are still prevalent in the Muslim society like the Hindu society.\textsuperscript{342}

**Household metal utensils and allied articles (Taijaspatra)**

As a custom or superstition the use of different kinds of household metal utensils and allied articles (taijaspatra) are in vogue in both the Bengali Hindu and Muslim society as a similar process. The use of iron nut-cracker (lohar janti) net-stick (jaler kathi) are in vogue in the ritualistic room for confinement of women at child birth (Antur ghar) for saving from the evil influence of the spirits. At the time of building a brick-built house broom, winnowing platter, she (jhanta, kulo, juto) are being hung up for avoiding evil influence. The iron which is being used for driving out the spirits, that iron-built engine may be arrested with evil influence of the spirits, that is why the shoe is being used. On the trucks and buses on the one side the picture of the spirits and on the other side the picture of the shoes or sometimes real shoes are being hung up for avoiding evil influence of the spirits. It

\textsuperscript{339} Habiz, Abdul, 'Loukik Sanskar ‘O’ Manab Samaj’, op.cit.p.116
\textsuperscript{340} Ibid, p.116
\textsuperscript{341} Personal collection of Dr. Sa’adul Islam from 24 parganas, cited in Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit.p264-65
\textsuperscript{342} Ibid, p.265
is generally written on the trucks and buses ‘Oh! Buri najar wale tera muho kala’ which means ‘Oh! The person who is casting an evil glance, his face be blackened.’ It seems that superstition is all-India. Moreover different kinds of superstitions related with iron is indeed international. Playing with nut-cracker in the marriage rituals, seemed to be symbolic of union. In the Hindu society the use of the earthen pots or metal pitcher(ghoti) and conch shells(shankh) can be seen in the various ceremonies like the marriages, punyaha or an auspicious day for performing solemn rites and in the pujas or worshipping of the gods and goddesses. In the Muslim marriages also the use of the earthen pots or metal pitchers (ghot), shallow earthen plate(diyair or sara) lamp (cherag/pradip) and a roundish earthen vessel used chiefly for cooking(patil) are in vogue. One can see in the Chailun bati ceremony the use of chaluni or a sieve/strainer and in the ‘bar baran’ ritual or ritualistic welcoming of the bridegroom the use of ‘Chchoto Chailun’ or pakha(fan). Moreover, according to Khana’s sayings, by seeing ‘sunya kalsi sukna na’ which means an empty earthen/metal pitcher which remains dry is very inauspicious for taking any journey. Moreover it is forbidding to enter a home with a dry earthen / metal pitcher. It is considered inauspicious to enter the home along with a spade and an empty earthen /metal pitcher at a time. These are signs of the views of the crematorium. Besides there are practices like to set a cup without handles(bati), plate(thala) and pipe of a kind of a small pitcher with a slender spout (badnar nol) for chasing a culprit by means of occult practices are in vogue irrespective of communities. Although most of the exorcists (ojha/ gunin) are Muslims but their work procedures are according to conventional customs rituals and superstitions(prevalent in Bengal).
Articles used in the marriages

The use of the articles like rice, pulse, mustard seed, turmeric, henna, paddy etc. are in vogue irrespective of communities and symbolic. Besides the use of mustard seed for driving out evil spirits is well known in Bengal. On the Chaitra Sankranti or the last day of the Chaitra for the well being and for the eradication of diseases the use of turmeric, and sandal paste in the body are in vogue which can be seen from the following couplet:-

“Keho keho haldi chandan gaont
bindu bindu nana mote angete deont”. 346

while in toiletry, aguru or a kind of fragrant wood, chandan or sandalwood fragrant and cool paste used as an ointment, atar or a kind of scent, stamen or a pollen bearing part of a flower, benzoin(laban) etc. are being sprayed along the abir or a kind of perfumed and coloured powder being sprinkled – which can be seen in the following couplet :-

“Aguru chandan atar katur keshar
boan sinchanta aar abir Ambar”347

Besides in the ‘Yusuf Julekha’ ballad we find the beautification process of Julekha in the following verse-

“Kasturi, kumkum bindu, kapale tilak chande
chandane charchito ango, keshar sugandhi sange
agar chandan fagu subasito range”348

That means odiferous substance obtained from a kind of deer (musk deer – kasturi), Kumkum or a red paste made from saffron juice used by women as a cosmetic, bindu or a small roundish mark, tilak or a sectarian mark painted in the forehead, chandan or sandalwood powder pasted on the body accompanied by the

346 Khondkar, Nasrullah -Shariyatnama
347 Sultan, Syed- "Nabibangsha’
348 Sagir, Shah Muhammad- Yusuf Julekha

188
fragrance of stamen or a pollen bearing part of a flower (keshar) etc. Moreover in the Bengali Muslim society the use of Surma or sulphate of antimony used as collyrium and Kajal or lamp-black (collyrium) and in the style of vermillion mark the use of Kumkum or a red paste made from saffron juice (used by women as a cosmetic) are widespread. As a sign of a married lady (eyo) these are being used in the Bengali Muslim society just like the neighbouring Hindu society.349

Numerical words

The importance of number is no less in folk beliefs. Numbers marking zero or round shaped ones and fractions are being considered as inausoicous. The numbers like one, three, five, seven etc are auspicious, while making charity and in ‘denmohar’ (ascribed amount of money to be given to the bride by the bridegroom at the time of marriage). Zero crossing one, (for example Rs.101/-), is considered to be auspicious in terms of enhancement of the amount. However anything only one or three should not be given to anybody, for a virgin girl or maiden girl a ‘shalik’ or a kind of small yellow-beaked singing bird of the myna group is considered to be inauspicious. Since the Allah or the Almighty is one therefore the importance /honour being given to the number one is just a superstition or a custom. Just as a religious edict in accordance to the Hadis and the Quran some numbers like three, five, ten, twenty seven, forty, fifty, eighty, five hundred, fifty thousand, one lac, seven lacs etc are being considered to be important. These are generally expressing numerousness or muchness or tremendousnesss. In the namaj or prayer ‘ruku’ and ‘ssijda’ (or special posture of bowing prostrate in obeisance), uttering three times tasbiha (or eulogical incantation) washing the place of azu thrice, in the marriage ‘Kabul’ or confession three times etc. indicate the importance of three number. For expressing numerousness for any kind of honest

349 Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, p.265
work or deed there is ten times ‘saoab’ or piety/virtue, if one utters namaj or prayer in the jamat or assembly that will be twenty seven times virtue/piety than uttering namaj alone, if it is uttered in the Kaba sharif then the virtue/piety will be one lac times etc. Moreover for any kind of work in the religious expedition the saoab or virtue/piety will be seven lac times. For expressing terribleness if skipping ‘ek waqt’ or namaj for one time then one has to suffer ‘ek hokba’ or eighty years of staying in the jahannam or hell and the ‘hashar’ or the day of the great/final judgement shall be as prolonged as the fifty thousand years(in terms of the earthly age) etc.

In similarity with the religious edicts some numbers have been culminated into superstitions or customs, for example uttering ‘tin satya’ or truth three times swearing three times, while uttering ‘doa’ whiffing/puffing into the water thrice, and at the time of pranam (or touching the feet) or ‘Kadambusi’ or touching the feet three times.\(^{350}\) Again by the influence of the number five, one can see there were emergence of the ‘Panch Pir’ or ‘five Pirs’.\(^{351}\) It has already been mentioned before that all the five pirs in Bengal may not be historical. However we can see that in different provinces of India there were different five pirs, but in the Punjab all the five pirs were historical ones. Anyway in Bengal there was not only the influence of the history of the Islam’s five great personalities like that of Prophet hazrat Mohammad, Bibi Fatema, Hazrat Ali, Imam Hasan and Hossain. Behind the emergence of the five pirs by determining five numbers, but also in the imagination of the five pirs there might have been the influence of the Buddhist culture and folk beliefs.\(^{352}\)

Here one can remember the memories of the ‘Pancha Tathagata’ (five Tathagata in the Buddhist Jataka) like Kaksand Buddha, Kankaman Buddha,

\(^{350}\) Hafiz, Abdul, ‘Ioukik Snaskar ‘O’ Manab Samaj’, op.cit.p.143
\(^{352}\) Ahmed, Wakil, Banglar Lake Sanskriti op.cit, pp.311-312
Kashyap Buddha, Gautam Buddha and Maitreyo Buddha. Moreover, for getting results of the Tabiz (amulet) Kabach (talisman) there is the practice of giving ‘Panch sika’ (‘five sika’) to the beggars in the Mosques/temples.

Moreover ‘sat pake bandha’ (tying matrimonial knots for seven times) is part of the marriage rituals of the Hindus. In the Bible there is the instruction of forgiving the neighbour for seven times and again for seven times multiplied by seventy one can forgive the neighbour. Besides the ‘twaf’ or the clockwise circumambulation around the Kabaa also meant for seven times. All are religious edicts. In Bengal one can find seven goddesses like Rankini, Sankini etc (Satdevi) and disease-preventing folk goddesses called ‘Satbauni’ or ‘Satbibi’ like Olabibi, Jholabibi, Asanbibi, etc. They are being worshipped by the Hindus and are getting ‘shirni’ ‘bhog’ or food offering by the Muslims.

Again due to the folk beliefs seven articles (sat drabya) and sixteen bananas (sholoti kala) used to be presented beautifully in the ‘Chilun bati’.

Again one can see the Muslim folk poet’s verse the more greatness of ‘panchash hajar’ or fifty thousand than a lac-

“lakhe lakhe loke more katare katare shumari koriya dekhi panchash hajar.”

Leaves, flowers and fruits

Along with the plant, tree and stone worship of the totemist primitive and pagan/idolatrous mind the special respect for the leaves, flowers and fruits has also come to monotheist society as the remnant of the traditional long standing

---

353 Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op. cit, p.266
354 Ibid, p.266
355 Ghosh, Binay, Paschim Banger Sanskriti, Kolkata, 1957, p.672
356 Ibid, p.672
357 Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op. cit, p.266
358 Garibullah - Sonavan
beliefs and practices. As the leaves of the basil(tulsi), marmelos(bel) banyan (bot) trees considered to be sacred, likewise the Hindu people worship these plants and trees. Likewise by keeping a typical kind of leaves called Vidya leaves inside the books, one can acquire learning (Vidya labh) – this kind of belief belonged to both the society (Hindu and Muslim). These are the examples of identical magical powers. Moreover childless Hindu husband and wife ‘give in marriage of the banyan and a species of fig tree (pakur) or banyan and peepul tree (Aswatha), the objective being to gain child.

Durba or a particular kind of grass is simultaneously a symbol of cure, life and fertility. In any kind of auspicious activities, blessing ceremony and marriage the role of the ‘durba’ is significant. In the folk beliefs the use of the betel leaf (pan) is in carrying message and sending good wishes. The betel leaf and betel nut are being used as a gift or present given to express amity. Ordinary betel leaf and betel nut is a symbol of well-being. But giving touch of warm betel leaf in the bridegroom’s mouth after the marriage and pretending to touch all parts of his body in a manner of special pose is actually belonged to the same category of witchcraft. It is a contagious magic of keeping the husband obedient to his wife.

Besides for the banana tree and the mango leaves the special place is the ‘marhoa’ or the marriage-platform which can be seen in the following couplet:- “Sthapila rasalopatra subarner ghot”.

Moreover, the use of the mehedi(henna) leaves has become almost compulsory in the Bengali Muslim marriages which can be observed in the following verse:- “Mendi(mehendi)makha nokhe jeno Arun shobhae”.

---

360 Ibid, p.166
361 Ibid, p.163
362 Personal collections of 24 parganas & Midnapore cited in Dr. Sa’adul Islam’s book, p.267
363 Personal collections, 24 parganas, cited in Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit, p.267
364 Khan, Bahram, Layla-Majnu
Besides the ‘kala bou’ of Lord Ganesh (banana wife) is too well known to us. Such upgradation of the folk objects (kala gach- banana tree) through the mythologisation can be seen in very few times. The banana tree of the totemist ancient primitive society is being worshipped in the place.\\(^{366}\)

Moreover, the use of the flowers is not only due to the ritualistic reason or folk beliefs, but also for thirst for beauty. Yet the ‘geroa khela’ (geroa play) with the flowers, catching and throwing with the flower bouquet between the two groups of women are much practiced work in the Muslim marriage, which can be seen in the following couplet-

“Kumari Kumari duho mukhamukhi kori”\\(^{367}\)

Throwing of the flower was also in vogue in the medieval Hindu society, which can be observed in the following verse-

“tobe sheshe hoilo pushpomala felafeli”\\(^{368}\)

Again in the Bengali Muslim society one can see the custom of playing with flowers in the marriage ceremony in the following verse:-

“Belful kadamba aar champa nageswar
damade gerua khele dekhite sundar”\\(^{369}\)

Among the fruits the role of the banana is important. One of the seven articles in the ‘Chailun bati’ ritual in the Muslim marriages are the sixteen bananas(sholoti kala) – which is an indicator of the fulfilment of ‘sholo kala’ of the woman (here it means the bride) or woman’s (bride’s) desire to be thoroughly fulfilled. Besides this betel nut is also compulsively used in the marriage, somewhere as a folk belief, or in other places as an article for welcome.

\(^{365}\) Chaudhury, Dona Gazi, Sayafumulk Baddiujjamal
\(^{366}\) Islam, Dr. Sa’adul’s book, op.cit.p.267
\(^{367}\) Khondkar, Nasrullah, Shariyatnama
\(^{368}\) Das, Brindaban, Chaitanya Vagabot, Adilila, Nabam Odhyay
\(^{369}\) Alnuddin, Nikahamangal

193
The black colour is the symbol of mourning and sorrow in the Muslim society. It is the custom in the Muslim society to wear black dress in the Muharram. The custom of the Christian society in the case of death is the same. On the other hand the white is the sign of sacredness and emptiness at a time. It is on the idea of sacredness that the Kafan or the dead person’s body is being covered with white dress. On the other hand wearing of the white loin cloth without any coloured border or edge by the Hindu widow is due to the mental obsession/deep attachment free emptiness. The Hindu saints wear a piece of loin cloth having the colour of red ochere(gerua), while the Sufis(Suf-pashan) wear grey woollen attire. Again the grey colour is the sign of moroseness and pale yellowishness. The green colour is taken to be the symbol of peace in Islam. The flag of the Islam or on the religion of peace and the flag and the attire being used in any Islamic context is green. The red colour is the symbol of blood, danger and revolution. Again the use of red as the symbol of life and glory is abundantly prevalent in the Muslim society. The use of alta(or lac-dye as used by the Hindu women to paint the borders of their feet) KumKum (or a red paste made from saffron juice used by women as a cosmetic) mehedi(or henna) abir( or a kind of perfumed and coloured powder) and sindur(or vermilion) in the marriages can be remembered here. Besides not only the Hindu widows but also the Muslim widows avoid red colour. Turmeric(halud) is the symbol of good luck or fortune or beauty. One can remember in this context the use of turmeric in the marriages and Sankranti(or last day of the Bengali month when there is transit or passage from the zodiacal sign to another). Moreover blue(nil) colour is not only the symbol of poison and death, but also of deepness not easily accessible.\textsuperscript{370}

\textsuperscript{370}Islam, Dr.Sa‘adul’s book, op.cit, p.267-68
In the alpana’ (or painting on the floors of a house with liquefied pigment of rice-powder) there is profound predominance of the white colour and line. The ‘chika’ (Hindi word meaning chchucho or mole/musk-rat) sign is the symbol of expression of danger. The straight line indicates continuity and curved/oblique line indicates danger and death. The diagram, of an amulet is generally rectangular or square having straight line. In calculating ‘rashi’ (or any one of the signs of the zodiac) in ‘falnama’ (or findings of calculation of fate) or jyotish(astrology) this type of diagram can be noticed. In the event of captivating jin/bhut (spirit/ghost/ghoul) and enslavement of anyone by enchantment generally ayat/ mantra (incantation) is being written in an oblique circle. The straightline signifying positive and curved line indicating negative ideas. 371

**Animals, birds and reptiles**

Many customs, rituals and folk beliefs of the totemist society can be observed in this phase. Duck/goose and cock/hen are getting respect as a the guardian god/goddess of a family, so these are uneatable. In the Hindu society, the cow is being worshipped as the goddess, so it is uneatable. Whereas to the different primitive communities believing in Manaism ox/bull eating is being considered as enhancing the strength. In the Muslim society the beef is considered as just/lawful for eating(halal) while the pork is unjust/unlawful for eating (haram). In the Hindu mythology(puran) mythological wishing cow(Kamdhenu) is being considered able to fulfil the mental desires. According to Hindu mythology, having been charmed by the beauty of Kamdhenu (mythological wishing cow), a lustful person transformed himself to an ox and then when he has done sex with her a bull/ox was thus born. The carrier/ riding animal of Shiva the agricultural god is that ox. 372

Lord Shiva’s riding animal ox is the symbol of procreation and fertility. (In the

371 Ibid, p.268
372 Basu, Nagendranath(ed.) Biswakosh, op.cit, p.504-05
context of Shiva, maiden’s phallus worship may be remembered). On the other hand, cow, horse and goat signify the identical symbols in Europe and South America.\textsuperscript{373} The cow is being considered as a wealth in the agnarian society. It is therefore while buying a new cow it is being given devotional welcome(barān). But pouring oil on its horn or head, the mistress of the house devotionally welcomed it. This ritual is being observed even in the Chaitra Sankranti (the transit or passage from one zodiacal sign to another which is being observed as the last day of the Bengali month). By offering sweetmilk rice(payesh) made from the first milk of the cow the Shirni of the Manik Pir and Gorakhnath are being given. Moreover we know about the tiger worship in the Sundarban areas of South Bengal in Gazi’s songs and worship of Banabibi and Dakshin Ray. For preventing epidemics, making vow of clay-made horse or a promise to offer a particular sacrifice to a deity on fulfillment of a prayer(manat) is the universal custom or folk belief of the Hindus and the Muslims in Bengal.\textsuperscript{374} Besides there are folk tales that the women of the banana kingdom by applying witchcraft transform the man into sheep and in the way used to make arrangements for permanent enjoyments.\textsuperscript{375} The long doleful cry of the dogs at night is being considered as the hint of an ensuing epidemic or any other inauspicious event to occur.

In the folk society there is the custom of sacrificing black hen for curing diseases. for the fulfillment of vow white cock is being sacrificed alive in a symbolic way in the forest. As a Buddhist ritual of non-violence this symbolic live-sacrifice is being observed. There is a folk belief that if the pigeon and sparrow set up their nests in a house then the dwellers of that house will flourish. The parrot and the crow are being considered as acquainted with all three ages, past, present and future(trikalagna). The killing of the crow is forbidden in the Hindu society,  

\textsuperscript{373} Leach, Maria Edward(ed.) Standard Dictionary of Folk lore, Mythology and Legend Vol –I, op.cit,p.60  
\textsuperscript{374} Ghosh, Benoy, Paschim Banger Sanskrit!, op.cit,p.677.  
\textsuperscript{375} See the ballads of Gorakshavijay and ‘Mayamatir Gan’
because there is folk belief that the dead person’s soul comes back in the form of a crow. The hoarse ‘ka-ka’ call or cry of the crow is considered inauspicious. However if the crow sitting on a thatched roof of a cottage calls then there is a belief that the kindred/matrimonial relative may arrive at that house. There is a folk belief that the owl by making a call at different prahar(a measure of time equal to three hours) at night declares the time, but the owl’s call at daytime is considered to be inauspicious.

The Muslim society believe that all the inferior living beings other than the human beings and the jin(a demon or a giant) do understand any kind of future happenings. The belief is that they can feel about any kind of natural disasters or calamity like the ensuing epidemic, earthquake, conversation of the invisible horde of the Fereshtas(angels) even the ‘ajab’(punishment) to be meted out to a dead person buried in a Kabar(grave).376

The history of the snake worship is very ancient indeed. The worshipping of the snake goddess Manasa and the snake worship are very widespread in Bengal. The snake related beliefs are also no less. There is a belief that if any snake expands its hood over the head of any person who is asleep then he may become a king. The worshipping of the snake living in a dwelling place for a long time without harming anybody(bastu sap) and its stay in the granary is being considered to promote prosperity for the family in the Hindu society.377

In the incantation(mantra) of ‘bish baran’ (prevention / resistance of venom) Lord Krishna and in the ‘manthan O Shinchiyan’ incantation(mantra) Lord Mahadeb are being remembered. In the incantation (mantra) of rendering the snake-venom powerless or harmless or taking out the venom (saper bish jhara) and in the ‘mukha bandhan’ (tying/binding of the snake’s mouth) incantation not only

376 Islam, Dr.Sa’aduls book, op.cit, p.268-69
377 Ibid, p.269
of Lord Krishna or Mahadeb but also the snake goddess Manasa are also being remembered again and again. Besides many deities, saints/sages apart from the folk gods and goddesses like Ram, Lakshmi, Sita, Bharat, Mandodari, Jaratkaru muni(sage), Andhamuni (sage), Brahma, Kadru, Binota, King Bhoj, Garur, Basuki, Hanuman, Gandharva, Kamrup, Kamakshya, Chandi, Lakshmi, Parbati, Kali, Mahakali, Gorakshanath, Harhi Bin, Hari, Ganesh, Neta Dhopyan, Hemanta Kumari, Ma Rangan, Bhanumati, Bhogdakini, Raul etc are being remembered. In the various incantations to appeal for justice or support or to swear (dohai) in the names of unknown siddhai men and women are being given, in which even the names of the Jaina and Buddhist gods and goddesses are also available. Besides in some incantations local deities like Baba Taraknath, Tripurari, Baba Baidyanath etc have been accorded reverence. In the incantations there is no difference between the Hindus and the Muslims, the incantations formulated by the Muslim exorcists are being applied by the Hindu exorcists. In many places the ‘Khoda’ has been remembered in these Islamic incantations, besides the pirs-fakirs like Shakhi Khan, Abdul Khan, Abdullah Khan, Lochchman Guru, Asmantara, Bhanumati, Narsingh, Lore Singh. Moreover folk goddesses like Ringini, Dingini, Shingini etc. have also been remembered. In the land of Buddhist and Hindu tantrik cult in Bengal the aforesaid goddesses might have been tantric goddess.  

It is interesting to observe in this context the syncretist ideas prevalent in the following snake-charming incantation which is actually an encircling line of the snakes immunized by means of a charm( saper gandimantra) found in the Buddhist Charyapada-

“Shanaki ghar rupaki chal – fatikka thuni kanch ki dal Ratan ki asan biraj mata eyon khodar gandi Ashman niva eyon”.379

379 Ibid,p.120 (cited from Charyapada)