Chapter II

Historical Background

Since time immemorial, Bengal has seen the intermingling of diverse races, creeds, religions and cultures. Unlike in the north, where there is Aryan domination or in the South where there is Dravidian domination, the heterogeneity of the Indian history and culture is nowhere in the entire length and breadth of the sub-continent so markedly pronounced as it happened in Bengal. Bengal can rightly be called an ethnographic museum or an unique cultural mosaic. This uniqueness of Bengal’s diverse and heterogeneous cultural mosaic also manifests its assimilative character. It can be said that in anthropological and sociological terminology, various types of culture-changes have taken place in Bengal, for example assimilation, acculturation, diffusion, syncretism and transculturation. Another pertinent characteristics of the Bengali society is its pre-Aryan or non-Aryan legacy. It is a established fact that the process of Aryanisation in Bengal had taken place much later on. The original inhabitants of Bengal were not the proto-Austroloid or the Austric people. Then there was a migration of the Dravidians into Bengal and there was admixture of the Austric people with that Dravidian group. Then came the Aryan speaking Alpo-Dinaric racial group. It should be noted that this Alpo-Dinaric Aryan speaking people were ethnically different from the Nordic Aryan speaking people of the Punjab who had established Aryan settlements for the first time in the North West Frontier province and the Punjab.

A characteristic feature of this late Aryanisation process of Bengal was that this process have taken place in several centuries and during that period and even long
after that the process was far from being complete like Aryavarta or North India which was the heart land of the Aryan colonization. Here it was partial, rudimentary and incomplete. Even after this long and arduous process bulk of the population used to consist of non-Aryan elements and on them the impact of that late Aryanisation was rudimentary and partial. Not only that the pre-Aryan influences was so all-embracing that even the so called higher castes of the Bengali population were influenced by it and non-Aryan elements are still visible in every aspect of the customs rituals and usages of the Bengali people including the so called higher castes. We may call it as the folk element or the folk tradition. Therefore from the anthropological point of view it can be said that there existed the Little and great traditions of Hinduism in ancient Bengal side by side and influencing each other. This anthropological approach first developed by Robert Redfield while studying Mexican communities and later on applied by Milton Singer and Mckim Marriot while studying Indian society; is based on the evolutionary view that civilization or the structure of tradition(which consists of both cultural and social structures) grows in two stages: first through orthogenetic or indigenous evolution and second, through heterogenetic encounters or contacts with other cultures or civilizations. The social structure of these civilizations operates at two levels, first that of the folks or unlettered peasants, and second that of the elite or the ‘reflective few’. The cultural processes in the former comprise the Little tradition and those in the latter constitute the great tradition. There is, however, a constant interaction between the two levels of traditions.11.

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Unity of a civilization is maintained by its cultural structure which perpetuates a unity through cultural performances and their products. These cultural performances are institutionalized around the social structure of both Little and Great traditions. These persisting and important arrangements of roles and statuses appearing in such corporate groups as castes, sects or in teachers, reciters, ritual leaders of one kind or another, which are concerned with the cultivation and inculcation of the Great tradition, form the social structure of this tradition. The social structure of the Little tradition consists of its own role-incumbents such as the folk artists, medicinemen (unlettered folk doctors), tellers of riddles, proverbs and stories, poets and dancers etc. Changes in the cultural system follow through the interaction between the two traditions in the orthogenetic or heterogenetic process of individual growth. The pattern of change, however, is generally from Orthogenetic to heterogenetic forms of differentiation or change in the cultural structure of traditions.

Now while studying Bengali society, whether Hindu or Muslim, one can see the dichotomy of the Little and great traditions can be applied to both the communities. As we have seen the process of Aryanisation of Bengal which started very late, was hardly complete as late as 4th Century A.D when the people of Bengal were looked down upon by the people of Aryavarta and the latter used to call the former as the Vratyas or outcaste, a derogatory term.

Indian history especially the Bengal's social history was that of syncretism. The nature and mobility of this syncretism arrested the attention of the social scientists long ago and as the researches on the social anthropology and sociology

\[12\text{ Singh, Yogendra - Modernization of Indian Tradition, op cit, p.13}\]
\[13\text{ Singer Milton—Traditional India : Structure and change, op. cit, p.94.}\]
\[14\text{ Singh, Yogendra, Modernization of Indian Traditions, op.cit p.13}\]
makes further progress we came to know that what we consider as the Hindu religious pantheon or the Aryan-Brahmanical pantheism, is actually a syncretist form of pre-Aryan and non-Aryan religious beliefs and practices on the one hand and the Aryan religious beliefs and practices on the other. That syncretist process was in evolution when roughly in the 5th, 6th and 7th century A.D the process of Aryanisation was in strong current in Bengal. In the middle ages this syncretist tradition was included in the social thought process and consciousness and this is still continuing without public attention. We can say that syncretist tradition is possible due to the prevalence of folk elements in Bengal’s culture, society and in the population.

Now coming to the issue of the background of the advent of the Islam in Bengal one can see that it was preceded by the orthodox Brahmanical Sena rule, which was again preceded by four centuries of the liberal Buddhist rule of the Palas. As we have already seen due to the process of the late Aryanisation of Bengal, the Brahmanical Hinduism could never establish its firm grip on the population of Bengal the majority of whom consisted of pre-Aryan/ non-Aryan elements although there was a racial admixture of Aryan elements with the non-Aryan elements. Naturally therefore the four centuries of Pala rule saw the flourishing state of Buddhism in Bengal which was very popular among the masses. However there still remained a sizeable number of Hindu population in Bengal which was mostly dominated by the so called higher caste Hindus. But the most noteworthy feature of the Pala rule was that although the Pala rulers were Buddhists they have never discriminated between the Hindu and the Buddhist subjects. On the other hand, they have shown adequate regards to the Brahmanas

and the Hindu Gods and Goddesses. So there was considerable amity between the Hindu and the Buddhist populace. Moreover during the later Palas when there was the considerable decline of Buddhism, there was an attempt of syncretism between the Buddhism and Hinduism. There was an attempt of fusion between the two religions in the form of Tantrik Buddhism on the part of Buddhism and the acceptance of Lord Buddha as one of the ten avatars (ten prophets) of the Hindus on the part of Hinduism was nothing but an endeavour of Hindu-Buddhist syncretist fusion.\(^{16}\)

However that liberal syncretist tradition of Bengal and the Little tradition of the folk Hinduism which was nothing but a fusion of the Aryan Brahmanical pantheon and non-Aryan / pre-Aryan religious beliefs and practices and all along popular in Bengal side by side with the Great tradition of Aryan Brahmanical Hinduism, was hampered for the first time with the introduction of the orthodox Brahmanical Sena rule in Bengal that immediately preceded the advent of Islam in Bengal.

The revival of orthodox Hinduism in the Sena period, when the society emphasized and upheld the caste differences, produced another significant result – the Sahajiya doctrine which dominated towards the end of Hindu rule in Bengal. The twelfth Century saw the growth of mysticism which found reflection in the Charyapadas, the early Vaishnava and Sahajiya literature. The rational spirit of the age and its freedom of thought are reflected in the scattered statements found in the Dohakosa. The horizon of social attitude, manifest in these dohas was definitely very broad. They may very well be taken as representing the reaction of a tolerant

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\(^{16}\) Majumdar, R.C. History of Ancient Bengal, Calcutta, 1972 also see (a) Sur, A.K., Pre-history and beginnings of civilization in Bengal, Calcutta, 1969; b) Dasgupta, P.C., Exploring Bengali past, Calcutta, 1966; and (c ) Dasgupta P.C, The Excavations at Pandu Raja’s Dhibi, Calcutta, 1964
society against the introduction of orthodoxy and if these are taken to represent the mental framework of the age we may very well think of a situation when any new thought will have an easy acceptance. This may partly explain why Islam found an easy and good ground in Bengal. An important example of the acceptance of the Muslims by the oppressed Buddhist masses is provided by the story contained in Niranjaner Rusma of Sunya Purana. Though the exact date of its composition and the name of its author are unknown, it may be taken to resound the fact that as a result of the Hindu-Buddhist rivalry during the Sena rule the former did welcome the Muslims and joined hands with them. Thus the conversion process to Islam in Bengal has a congenial factor in this socio-religious phenomenon.  

In the case of Indonesia we have a situation similar to Bengal in many ways. Indonesia had fostered an indigenous civilization and long before historical period a society and social organizations were developed based on irrigated cultivation and sharing the benefits and problems of monsoonic Asia. It is on such an indigenous substratum that the late cultural superstructure, based on Indian and Chinese influences was erected. The process of Indianisation of South East Asia and especially of Indonesia was long and eventful.  

In the first period of Indianisation, the Brahmanical Hinduism found its sway in Indonesia. In the second period, the Buddhism became very popular and had a widespread following among the masses, although Brahmanical Hinduism existed side by side with Buddhism during that period. In the third period which

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immediately preceded the advent of Islam in Indonesia the Buddhism did run into difficulty and soon a syncretic cult of Shiva-Buddha was evolved and Tantrik Buddhism developed. In the period immediately preceding the decline of Buddhism, Brahmanism more specifically Saivism reasserted itself over Buddhism in Indonesia.\textsuperscript{19}

Therefore while making a comparative study of the process of conversion of Islam in Bengal and in Indonesia, one can see that Islam came to Indonesia in the context of this socio-religious background. The Buddhist-Hindu rivalry, accommodation of Buddhism, Brahmanical predominance in the last phase and rigid hierarchical society – all these features curiously resemble the situation in Bengal before the advent of Islam. And when Islam came to Indonesia, by sea and on the heels not of conquest but of trade, it constituted an alternative to the whole Hindu view of the world and it implied a doctrine of equality which could offer a powerful solvent for the hierarchial order of the orthodox Brahmanical empire of the Madjapuhit. And the process of Islamism in Indonesia – with a definite role of the Sufis, “Wali Sanga”, the “Ulema”, “Kijaji”, showing a great genius for syncretistic forms both in pre-Muslim and Muslim societies which absorbed Islamic concepts and practices... into the same South East Asian folk religion into which it had previously absorbed Indian ones, locking ghosts, Goddess, Jinns and prophets together into a strikingly contemplative even philosophical animism, was not very different from Bengal.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{19} Geertz, Clifford Ibid, Ibid. Also see (a) Vlekke, B.H.M – Nusantara (A book on Indonesia), 2\textsuperscript{nd} Edition, The Hague, 1969, Chs. 1-3;
(b) Hall, D.G.E – A History of South East Asia, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Edition, London, 1968, Chs 3-4
(c) Coedes, G – The Indianised States of South East Asia (ed. by Vella, W.F and tr. by Couling, S.B), Honolulu, 1968, CHs VI-VII;
(d) Lege, J.D Indonesia, Englewood Cliffs, 1964, Ch-II
(e) Chowdhury, Abdul Momin – Conversion to Islam in Bengal An Exploration, op.cit.
\textsuperscript{20}Ibid.
Therefore it can be safely said that the popularity of the Ramayana and other Hindu mythological traditions, the widespread use of the Sanskritized names by the Muslims and the adoption of Gaduda as the Indonesian national emblem bear ample testimony to the prevalence of syncretist traditions even in the present day Indonesia.

After the advent of Islam in Bengal, during the medieval period, we find at least seven Bengali Muslim Vaishnava poets, like Syed Martaza, Fakir Habib et al. It is well known that the Vaishnava movement in Bengal was the continuation of the medieval Bhakti movements which was a synthesis of the Islamic and Hindu traditions.  

Then coming to the modern period, we find in the Murshida/Murshidi songs – one of the most original songs coming out of sentimental hearts of the rural Bengalis, there is adequate admixture of the sweetness of the Vaishnava Lila. In the Murshidi songs there is a wonderful synthesis and symmetry of the Buddhist Mayaism and Lui Siddhai’s Guruism or the preceptorism, Vaishnavavite Lilaism and avatarism or reincarnationism, Islamic Pirism and Sufism.

Then the Muslim aauliyas or aauls like Shah Lial Fakir, Kusum Diyar Fakir, Tinu Fakir, Kalu Fakir, Gani Fakir et al introduced the Marefati tradition which was an admixture of Sufism and Vaishnavita Lilaism. In the Marefati songs we also find the influence of Sahajiya ‘Shringer’ songs and Bouddha dohas.

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21 Kadir, Abdul - Banglar Lokayata Sahitya (The Folk Literature of Bengal) bangle Academy, Dhaka, 1985
22 Ibid
23 Ibid
Then in the Muslim Jari songs although there is no influence of Buddhism or Vaishnavism, but it cannot be denied that there is an unmistakable influence of the Bengali Hindu Kabial songs on it.24

In the Great Baul tradition of Bengal we find the wonderful synthesis of the Buddhist Sahajiya, Nath-Yogi and Vaishnavite traditions. According to the Sahajiya tradition the Siddhas or the Abadhuts are the Bauls. The goal of their life is to identify the “Sahajiya Manusha” or the simple folk. Both the Hindus and the Muslims are included in the Baul order. Lalan fakir who was a great Baul mystic philosopher and composer even influenced our universal poet-philosopher Rabindranath Tagore. Moreover fundamentally there is no difference between the Fakiri songs and the Baul songs. Only difference being that the Bauls call their object of worship Almighty as the Niranjan or the Sain, while the Fakirs address their Almighty as the Allah-Niranjan or the Sain-Allah.25 They are the most liberal humanists who can be seen in the each and every district of Bengal even today.

Then in the beautiful folk songs of Bengal like the Bhatiyali and the Bhaoaiya, we find the syncretist tradition of folk-Islam and folk-Hinduism of which one of the most famous modern exponents was Abbasuddin.

The Muslim converts in the rural areas, like their Hindu neighbours, depended mostly on agriculture, crafts and the attendant occupations, namely fishing, wood cutting, boating, weaving etc for a living and this provided the basic foundations of their social culture. The rice-cultivator, the wood-cutter, the fishermen, the boatmen and others living in this part of the Gangetic Delta, whether Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist or even the Christian, found themselves pitted against a nature rich but unpredictable and unkind. The desire to tame their

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid
immediate surroundings distinctively affected and shaped their visions of religion and culture. This was reflected inter-alia in the unusual reverence paid, for example to the Ojhas or exorcists, by both the Muslims and the Hindus of Bengal. Until recently, the wood-cutters, the fishermen and the boatmen would not enter the deep forests of the Sundarbans until the Ojhas (exorcists) also called ‘Faqir’, had gone through his charms and incantations and performed the ‘pujas’ for the dispersion of Noxious animals. The ojha’s charms are considered strong in certain areas of Bengal even today and the average person would prefer to go to the Ojha than to physician for the cure of snake – bites and other ailments.26

In the Chittagong district Pir Badr was venerated in much the same fashion both by Hindu and Muslim sailors, who sought protection from the Pir during their voyage by water ways, saying ‘we are but children, the Ghazi is our protector. Similarly mythical personages like Zindah Ghazi, the patron saint of the wood-cutters and Khawaj Khizr, the protector of the sailors, wasermen and water carriers (also associated with Pir Badr) were part of the popular mythology; the worship of Satya Pir and Panch pir were equally common. Such beliefs rooted in the historical experience of isolated peasant communities reflected man’s immemorial efforts to cope with the insecurities of existence and were not peculiar to Bengal.27

The syncretistic model of Islamization held its ground until early 19th century, the fundamentalist and the revivalist forces, in Islam, stirred by a massive combination of diverse factors, sharply focused on the need for a deeper Islamic consciousness, and launched a vigorous assault on the syncretistic and acculturated

27 Ibid
tradition. Bengal’s Muslims were gradually drawn towards the heterogenetic model of classical Islam as an answer to the whole range of religious and secular problems and challenges facing the community in contemporaneous Bengal, with the consequence of widening the hiatus that already existed between the exogeneous (growing by outside) Islam and the indigenous Bengali culture and of deepening the crisis of Bengal Muslim identity. 28

In a struggle between traditional life styles and fundamentalist reform the dice are often loaded against the latter: Bengali Islam proved no exception to the rule. The battle against the popular beliefs and practices, described not very correctly as Hindu accretions, had little chance of success. The reformists succeeded in converting only a fraction of the total Muslim population to their point of view; the vast majority remained steadfastly opposed to any new dogma and instead clung to the local beliefs and practices. The Gods and Goddesses, pirs and their dargahs – to whom the common man looked for immediate protection, in times of trouble – were too near and dear to be discarded outright. In a sense these elements of popular Islam were neither characteristically Hindu nor Muslim, nor even a product of syncretist rapproachments, but represented the folk religion of rural Bengal with its roots in a prehistoric past. 29

As we have seen the combined currents of thoughts, consciousness, contemplations and ideas of diverse races and tribes are conglomerated and evolved with the folk life and culture of Bengal that makes the Bengali culture. It

can be easily said that – the glories, diversities and the syncretic forms of the Bengali culture mostly descended from the folk culture. And the foundations of that folk culture had been laid out by the primitive people of Bengal, when the Bengali language was not born yet, and when there was not even dreams of its possible appearance.  

But how could we of the present age who had been conglomerated through the evolutionary process perceive the characteristic features of our predecessors or how could we identify the seedlings and vitalities of our diverse syncretistic culture? Its only way out is to open out the closed doors of the people termed as tribes living in the frontiers of Bengal. And after their opening out, we can see all the streams of the ‘folk literature’ of Bengal, nursery rhymes, grandmother’s tales called “Thakurma’s Jhuli”, or the flows of folk tales known as “Kathamala”, the popular prosody of Bengal, the distinctive style of the Bengali sentence construction, the strange rituals and customs surrounding the birth death and marriage, the use of shell bangles and vermillion marks on the forehead as a symbol of married women, the origin of the blowing of conch-shell, the use of claymade water jar full of water as a good omen on auspicious ceremonies and the custom of typical religious rituals called ‘Brata Katha’ – all these originated out of the tribal people’s way of life and culture, not only that, the characteristic features and ideas of our totems and taboos can be noticeable among the tribal people and that proves that those things originated out of them.  

Now coming to the issue of the folk elements in the Bengali culture and its relations with the Bengali Muslims, let us examine certain strange rituals and

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30 Bhowmick, Suhrid Kumar – article entitled “Bangalir Sanskriti O Adibasi Aitijhaya” (The Bengali Culture and the tribal tradition) in Lokesruti (a journal of folk-culture), Lokesanskriti O Adibasi Sanskriti Kendra, (Centre For Folk – Culture & Tribal Culture) Calcutta, 12th issue, February, 1996.

31 Ibid
customs surrounding the birth, death and marriage of the Bengali people which are common amongst them irrespective of caste, creed and religion.

Broadly speaking, from the anthropological and ethnographical standpoint, the Bengali people are generally carrying the legacy of aboriginal lineage more or less in them. The religious beliefs and rituals like the animism, totem, taboos, magic etc. are signs of the primitive consciousness prevalent among the Bengalis. The primitive consciousness is continuing in a undistorted way among the tribals presently living in Bengal. Therefore the seedlings of the previous beliefs (inherited from their tribal origin) are preserved in the minds of the Bengali womenfolk. Moreover in the female mentalite the traditional allegiance is more deeprooted than the tendency to eradicate superstitions.\textsuperscript{32} Most of the beliefs and rituals concerning the childbirth prevalent in the Bengali folk society are signs of the magic and taboos. In the folk rituals there is much influence of magic and magical power, while in the folk beliefs there is predominance of the taboos or the code of conduct regarding what to do and not to do.\textsuperscript{33} The origin of the magic lies in the possession of the supernatural powers through work of meditation, while the taboos originated from the rules of warnings regarding the work-procedure. Prof. Debiprasad Chattopadhyay has stated, “The sterile woman binds stones at the branches of the trees in the hope of giving the birth to a child”. This is a folk ritual concerning magic.\textsuperscript{34}

Likewise, there are various customs, rituals and superstitions also prevalent in the Bengali Muslim Society. Especially their influence is very much in existence in the unlettered rural society. Generally many Hindu customs and rituals are

\textsuperscript{32} Ahmad, Wakil – Banglar Lok Sanskriti (The Folk-Culture of Bengal), Bangla Academy, Dacca, 1974, pp 154-55
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Chattopadhyay, Debiprasad – Lokayyat Darshan (The Folk Philosophy), Calcutta, Bhadra, 1363 B.S., p.348
prevalent amongst them either in a distorted or in a transformed manner. The Muslim custom of praying and offering Shirni (Hindu Sinni) to the Pir’s Dargah(tomb) in the hope of getting a child is wholly modelled on the Hindu custom of worshipping and offering before the Gods and Goddesses to fulfill the vow for desiring a child. The ritual named ‘Saitore’ for the removal of sterility is also prevalent in the Muslim Society in certain areas of Bengal. The Hindu custom of ceremonial coming out of necessary confinement from the confined room at childbirth (after 21 days) is also followed in the Muslim families in the name of purification ceremony called ‘Suddha Haaa’. As an occasion ‘anna prashan’ (Hindu ceremony) and ‘ankika’ (Muslim ceremony) or the ceremonial offering of rice & other food cereals after a male child attains the age of six months & female child attains the age of seven months; are almost identical ceremonies. Moreover Christening or name – giving ceremony(namkaran) is almost an universal custom (which is prevalent among both the Hindus and Muslims).Besides that there are also different rituals according to religious and social differences(between the Hindus and the Muslims). Generally the ‘byavar’ ritual is being practiced by the Muslim families. Although its inner significance lies in the primitive belief and rituals, it can also be considered generally as a mere formality.35

The rituals connected with the childbirth prevalent in rural Bengal can be divided in the three periodic stages:

1) Pre-Pregnancy Stage-

a) Saitore (b) feeding of wetted and parched rice(Chira) to the ‘barkar’

2) The pregnancy Stage –

35 Ahmed, Wakil – op.cit, pp. 157-58
a) Binnatale baran, b) byavar, c) Sadbakshan etc.

3) Post Pregnancy stage (After child birth)-

a) Chati, b) Haitkala, c) Ekcharar beri, d) Atur bandhan, e) Namkaran, f) Garhgarha etc.  

The folk rituals which are being observed in the marriage ceremonies in the rural society originated out of two things – superstitions and fond for amusement. Marriage is an auspicious ceremony. Therefore nobody wants that suddenly any kind of danger or ominous thing occurs or an evil spirit’s anger befalls; so it is desirable that happy married life initiates with the good wishes of all. Chiefly the folk rituals have grown out of such good wishes and desires to free the couple from any danger. The common feminine rituals of both the Hindus and the Muslims of Bengal are ‘sohagmaga’, ‘panibharan’, ‘barandala’, ‘barsnan, ‘kurulbharan’, ‘meheditola’, ‘gayehaud’, ‘khoi chhitano’, ‘shajya tulani’, ‘umalibarha’, ‘bou baran’ etc. If we want to search for their origins and sources, then we will have to go back to the customary and ritualistic life of the primitive stage when life was supposed to be under the control of providential animistic powers. Actually there are many similarities between the folk rituals of the Bengalis with that of the tribal customs. It means that the primitive way of life have come into the social life(of the Bengali’s) in the form of customs, rituals and superstitions. It is noteworthy that most of the rituals of the marriage are feminine rituals, the male folk participate in only one or two of the rituals, for example ‘jyotish ganona’ (astrological analysis) ‘kusthi bichar’ (the analysis of the horoscope) ‘marhoa sajano’ etc.  

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36 Ibid, p.158.
Moreover regarding the use of colours in the marriage ceremony it can be said that turmeric (halud), vermilion (sindur), kumkum, mehendi etc. are used in various marriage rituals all over Bengal irrespective of the Hindus and the Muslims. The turmeric (halud) is used on the body, the mehendi is used on both the hands, the kumkum is used on the forehead while vermillion mark (Sindur) is used on the hair-parting (sinthi)\textsuperscript{38}. However it should be noted here that the use of mehendi was not all popular among the Bengali Hindus previously although outside Bengal, it is generally used by the Hindus during marriage ceremonies. Now-a-days of course, it is being used even by the Bengali Hindus in certain areas.

Now if we analyse the rituals connected with the disease and death in the folk society of rural Bengal, we can see here also there are many resemblances between the Bengali Hindu and the Bengali Muslim customs and rituals. Here also one can see that the flow of various tribal customs and rituals continue in the folk society of Bengal for generations after generations. The people are practicing multifarious customs and rituals, regarding death and disease since time immemorial. Behind these customs and rituals the influence of primitive consciousness is noticeable either in a latent or in a changed form. One has to struggle with fear psychosis of death since birth. Life can be endangered due to disease and illness, epidemic, providential accidents, the inauspicious influence of the evil spirits etc. In order to save themselves from sorrows and mournings the ignorant masses take certain measures in simple folkways. The main source of their code of conduct, customs and rituals is nothing but superstitions and blind faith.

In the rural life of Bengal, the use of medicinal herbs and plants, charms and incantations, tabij (amulet prescribed by the Muslim pirs), Kabach (talisman

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid, p. 178.
prescribed by the Hindu saints) for the treatment of disease and illness is continuing since time immemorial. People do not have realization that the bacteria is the cause of disease and illness, they imagine the role of various kinds of evil spirits for various kinds of illness leading to death. The unlettered folk vow before these evil spirits, offer shirni (Hindu Sinni) and worship them. From this kind of mentalité the origin of different types of Gods and Goddesses like Sitala devi (Hindu folk Goddess) for the cure of chickenpox, Olabibi (Muslim folk Goddess) for the cure of cholera (Ola Utha), Jwar Jwari for the cure of running of temperature (Jwar), Ghentu for the cure of itch and scabies (Khos-Punchra), Bishahari for the cure of snake bite have been imagined and different rituals and worships of medicine men/ unlettered folk doctors, (amulet or talisman prescribed by the Hindu/ Muslim pirs/ saints or medicine men/ unlettered folk doctors) are born. Besides, after someone’s death, certain rituals and customs are observed for the well being of the departed soul.39

39 Ibid, p.214