



ECHOES BY
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Pahela Agrahayan and Nobanno

I
 All the months of the Bangla calendar are named after a constellation in the heavens. Except for Agrahayan, which starts in mid-November. Translated as “the first one”, the Bangla New Year was celebrated on Pahela Agrahayan for centuries. That was until Emperor Akbar decided to change the calendar to Pahela Baishakh in 1584 AD, but calculations started from 1556 AD, the year he ascended the throne.

Pahela Agrahayan is known as Nobanno - the new food (feast). Rural Bengal had two harvests: Aush and Aman. Aman was the harvest farmers prayed for. It's reaped in Kartik, a month before Agrahayan. With food surplus in their house, and pleasant weather, ancient rural Bengal was ready for a series of festivities. Durga Puja in Kartik. Nobanno, Lakshmi Puja, and Diwali in Agrahayan.

II
 The Aman harvest determined the fate of farmers. When the harvest was good, there was surplus. The surplus would transform into *pithas*, *khoi*, *muri*, *mowa*, *firni*. The list continued.

The people of Bengal never needed an excuse to celebrate. With surplus food, songs and dance weren't too far away. Kites would fill the blue skies. *Nouka baich* would fill the rivers.

The fields would fill up with fairs. Artisans would bring their products to sell.



PHOTO: STAR

Kids would queue in front of the *nagordola*. The squeaking noise of the *nagordola* would leave a seal in hearts forever of nostalgia.

Villages would turn into funfairs. Bengal had its own version of the circus with animal playing, juggling, shooting, throwing rings and what not? People were happy in the breeze of Hemanta, perhaps the best breeze of the year.

Villages of southern Purba Bangla (today's Bangladesh) had one special treat. Water buffaloes. Villages with large fields would organize water buffalo races. Some

parts of Bhola, Lakshmipur still have this tradition. The icing on the cake? Buffalo yoghurt with molasses at the end of the race.

Women of rural Bengal may have stayed at home. That didn't mean they weren't playing their role. At home they were weaving *nakshi kanthas*. Each *kantha* had a story of Nobanno to tell in their tapestries. And that wasn't the end.

The night was always too young in Agrahayan. The evenings would see *jatras* - a tradition that's now almost lost. Mystic singers would sing in the light of *pidims*.

Poets would recite their *puthis*. The party would go on till wee hours of dawn.

III
 Nobanno had a dark side. The weather from the heavens could destroy farmers. If the Aman harvest was a waste, so was the fate of farmers for the rest of the year. Farmers would find it hard to pay crop taxes to landlords. And the vultures came to prey. The poor farmers entered an inescapable bondage with money lenders.

There was another dark side. Farmers who had daughters living in far-off villages couldn't invite them for *naiyyor*. There weren't messengers in those days. The helpless daughter would wait, gazing at the path to her parents' house.

IV
 Emperor Akbar may have changed Pahela Agrahayan to Pahela Baishakh centuries ago, but people don't give up traditions easily. Times have changed, but never the spirit to party when there's an excuse. Maybe celebrations of today won't be what they were in yesteryears. But they do give an inkling. People of this side of Bengal did know and still do know how to celebrate festivals in festivity.

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The students in an online class

As told by a teacher

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This pandemic has changed many things in our lives. In the lives of teachers and students alike, this pandemic has also added an extra woe called “online classes”. The last few months have seen the rise of online classes everywhere from primary school to universities. In-person classes always had all kinds of students ranging from goody two shoes to the absolute brats. Online classes are no different, though the types may have changed a bit. Let's discover some common categories of students in this new era.

THE “VIDEO ON” GUY

This person will always have his video on during the Zoom class. However, it would focus on anything in his room but his face. On rare occasions when he would actually face the camera, it would be at a strange angle. The worst angle I've

seen is a student focusing the camera at his nose, while he was picking his nose!

THE MUTE GUY

The opposite of the “video on” guy. This student will always mute his microphone, even when you're asking him questions. He will enter and exit the class silently and will never contribute to the class discussion.

THE EXCUSE SHOP

This type of student will always have excuses ready to deliver for any kind of situation. Whether it is the case of missing a viva voce or not submitting an assignment on time, this person will always come up with ways to defend himself. They're also the philanthropic ones as they not only make up excuses for themselves but also supply their friends when the need arises.

ALL ABOUT THE ATTENDANCE

While many students participate in

online classes only for attendance, there is always one person who is extra serious to make sure their attendance is noted. They would interrupt the teacher every five minutes to ask about it. If the teacher puts them on mute, out of annoyance, they will email the teacher after class asking if their attendance has been counted.



THE RESOURCE HOARDER

This one doesn't bother with what is going on in the class. The only thing they care about is when and where the slides and class recordings will be available. They won't let the teacher finish talking before asking about it. They will keep asking for those resources to be supplied immediately as if the world would end if the material is delivered one second late. Another characteristic of this kind of student? They will never study said material.

Adjusting to the new normal has been tough for everyone. The world is changing and so are we. The traditional classroom may have taken a break for the time being. But students, the life of the classroom, are managing to leave their mark even in this new reality.

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