

Where Past Glories Leave Lingering Lessons

by Ashit Choudhury

ONCE known for many glories, Tarash upazila is now one of the most underdeveloped areas in Sirajganj district. Before being upgraded as an upazila, this area was termed as the 'trash' (terror) of the district. Only three years ago, six alleged activists of the defunct 'Sarbahara Party' were killed in a deadly encounter with police. But the situation is different now.

Knowledge-seeking people from home and abroad are coming to Tarash to visit the places of historical importance. There are many old temples and buildings in Tarash upazila which are fast declining in the absence of even a modicum of maintenance work. Some of the temples have collapsed and some are on the verge of total extinction. Knowledgeable people feel that Tarash's archaeological riches have to be preserved in the interest of the nation's heritage which, in the bargain, would also help attract tourists from abroad.

The three-storied 'Dol Manch'

One of the main attractions of Tarash old monuments is the three-storied 'Dol Manch' situated at the Tarash Bazar itself. It is gathered that in 1720, after the death of King Ramkrishna Sanyal, his wife Queen Sarbani Devi took over the charges of the kingdom which has Sautals as most of its subjects. Due to lavish expenses indulged in by the king, the queen inherited a big burden of debt. Later, she appointed one Ramram Roy as 'Dewan' for the smooth running of the kingdom. Ramram Roy was a wise minister and administrator and soon brought the kingdom into a profitable concern. A brother of his was a top man in the

employ of the Nawab of Dhaka. When mother of Ramram Roy died in the process of ageing, her funeral was done gorgeously. Both the brothers wished to spend Tk. one lakh each for the funeral rites. After completing the ceremony, Dewan Ramram Roy constructed the three-storied temple known as 'Tribal Dole Mancha' at Tarash Bazar which is still a spectacle in this age of skyscraper, steel-and-concrete giants.

The two-storeyed 'Dole Mancha'

Balaram Chowdhury of Tarash served in the opening

of the 18th century under Subedar Murshid Kuli Khan of Bengal and earned much money. In 1718, he constructed a palatial residence at Kunjaban of Tarash. He constructed the two-storeyed 'Dole Mancha' for worshipping their family deity Radha-Govinda. The house of Balaram Chowdhury is demolished but the temple still stands but as a neglected building. By the sincere efforts of Balaram Chowdhury the Tarash-Dhaka road via Chatmohar was constructed about three hundred years ago.

The Kapileshwar Temple is situated at village Chebcharia,

about 12 kilometers from Tarash upazila sadar. In past days, Basudev Talukder alias Narayan Dev Chowdhury was an influential employee of Nawab Islam Khan.

Being satisfied of his service, the Nawab presented Basudev two hundred 'mouzas' as 'jaigir'. One day when Basudev was walking, he found a cow giving milk in a bush. His curiosity discovered a 'Shiva' deity in the bush and brought it to his house. The Zaminder then established a temple locally known as 'Kapileshwar Temple' and offered Gopinathpur and Charia

Tapuka to bear the expenses of the deity.

Birth place of Behula

Binshara village, about six kilometres from Tarash upazila sadar enjoys renown as the birthplace of Behula, a heroine of the Chand Sawdagar tradition.

At that time the village was known as 'Niharinaragar'. Bacho Bania alias Sai Sawdagar was the father of Behula. In this village there is a big well known as 'Bachobantar Jiyon Koop'.

There are four more small feeder wells inside the big well. Each small well was covered by red earthen jars which were filled with snakes. More than 360 small and big ponds were dug here for general use of the common people.

The 'Jiyon' well was repaired by Tarash upazila parishad in 1986. Besides, the upazila authority also constructed a road which has already fallen into a state of disrepair.

The house of Bacho Bania is situated on about 40 bighas of land full of buildings, fruit gardens and ponds. Most of this area is occupied by the intruders. The house of Bacho Bania had long been demolished by earthquake and has not yet dug up out of the rubble even within more than a century.

There was a milk pond of Bacho Bania's house full of poisonous snakes where the subjects dropped milk everyday instead of selling it in the market.

Behula used to go to the market of Chand Sawdagar by boat through a canal known as 'Behular Khari'. There she met Lokhinder, the son of the fabled merchant Chand and later was married to him. It is said

ment Primary school at the residence of Bacho Bania. The name of Behula is also engraved there.

Other than the mentioned temples and buildings, there are more places in Tarash

Tarash is feasible with the districts of Natore, Pabna, Bogra and Sirajganj. Yet it takes more than five hours to reach Tarash upazila sadar from Sirajganj. Economic condition of Tarash is also very bad. There are many tribal people living in this upazila known as the 'Buna'. The tribals also have so



Three-storied 'Dol Manch' at Tarash Bazar in Sirajganj.



House of Behula, now Binshara Government Primary School.

that while going to Chand Bazar the boat of Behula capsized in the canal. And it is believed the boat is still there under the soil but no one dare dig it out because of dire consequences, according to tales, that are to follow.

Local people of Tarash have constructed Binshara Govern-

ment Primary school at the residence of Bacho Bania. The upazila, situated in remote area of Sirajganj district needs development. The archaeological department also can take initiatives to preserve the past glories of Chalanbeel oriented Tarash upazila.

Communication network of

far been upholding their cultural tradition even in these days of cultural degeneration and general decline.

A better access to the upazila and an effective campaign to attract tourists may bring about a welcome change in Tarash's days of misfortune.

Novel Literacy Programme Benefits Nepali Girls

by Jan Sharma

WHEN some primary school were surveyed in Nepal's remote Doti district in 1981, many were found to have no female enrollees at all.

Four of the 11 schools surveyed had no girls while the rest had only a few. Today the situation is pretty much the same. But with a difference.

Ask any girl trotting up and down the treeless Doti hills, and she will tell you she wants to be like Kamali.

Kamali is the main character in a textbook now being read by hundreds and thousands of young girls who are too busy with house and farm work to go to school, but who can manage two hours a day in winter to learn numbers and the alphabet.

Kamali cooks after helping her mother fetch water from a nearby stream. She tends goats and buffaloes in the afternoon when she also collects fodder and firewood. She washes the dishes and keeps her home neat and clean.

"O mother, please let me take time out from housework. Let me go with friends to class. I'll get up early in the morning to help you. Let me go for a little while," says Kamali.

She sets the example for young girls taking part in the Cheli Beti (meaning unmarried girl) programme run by the government with support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific

and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

Under the programme, girls aged six to 15 years are taught with the use of familiar examples and experiences such as kitchen gardening, farming, health and sanitation. Classes are usually held under a tree in groups of about 20. Those completing the six-month course qualify for enrolment in Grade 4.

Each lesson, 125 in all re-

Kamali is a textbook character who sets the example for young girls taking part in a unique literacy programme. Classes are usually held under a tree

volves around the daily life and activities of Kamali, which the students then discuss. Reading materials are provided by a resource centre for each cluster of schools within the 'walking distance' of five to six hours.

Teachers for the programme are recruited from among the village's educated women, who undergo a month-long intensive training especially designed for the course.

Started in 1983 in the Doti, Bajhang and Bajura districts in the Seti zone, the programme has been extended to cover 19 districts where female enrolment is lowest.

Some Nepali teachers are worried that the Cheli Beti programme may in fact de-

prive young girls of proper schooling.

Children should be encouraged to go to regular school and not just attend classes for six months. As I understand, Cheli Beti courses should be for teenagers who missed formal schooling in their early years for one reason or another," says Ton Thapa, a teacher.

But for others, the Cheli Beti course is an acceptable

the highest dropout rate.

So far, some 5,000 girls have undergone the Cheli Beti programme which is gradually being extended to other districts.

Aside from its informal teaching style, a Cheli Beti Course is remarkable in a number of ways.

Conventional learning is one-way with the teacher as the source of knowledge. The students merely repeat what the teacher says without giving the information much thought. Not so with Cheli Beti where teachers encourage their students to think for themselves.

For example, a teacher hangs a poster showing rats attacking a grain storage. Kamali wonders what to do. The students, guided by the teacher, discuss what is going on and what could be done to the problem of rat infestation.

When the girls return home, they take up the problem with their mother and other members of the family.

Pictures and visual aids are used extensively to encourage creative thought.

A lot depends on the dedication and creativity of the teachers. To spur them to work harder, they are paid on the basis of work performance.

Cheli Beti teachers are also expected to be change agents in the community, from convincing parents to send their children to school, to enhancing self-reliance among villagers.

— Depthnews Asia.

China's First Tots' Encyclopedia an Instant Hit

by Xie Jinjin

EVERY day a dozen curious students of the Beijing No. 12 primary School would linger on in the classroom after school.

They would satisfy their curiosity about the world through the pages of the Chinese Children's Encyclopedia, a gift to the class from their teacher Li Huantang.

From the colourful and descriptive 'World of Animals,' in one of the encyclopedia's four volumes, they have learned where little sea horses come from — it is the male, rather than female, sea horses that give birth. They also know that they never have to worry about drowning in the Dead Sea, because its water is so salty that they could float effortlessly on its surface.

"The book is simply fascinating," says one of the enthusiastic readers, he Jiaojiao. "We've learned so many things from it."

Her teachers, 32-year-old Li Huantang, agrees: "It's really a wonderful teaching aid to widen my students' horizons."

She says the four-volume encyclopedia's rich content, simple language, and beautiful illustrations especially appeal to children.

Actually, the encyclopedia published by the Zhejiang Education Press marks the first effort of scholars and publishers in China's mainland to produce such comprehensive work especially for children in the past 40 years. A popular book named "100,000 Whys"

was published in the 1960s, and has been updated and revised several times ever since. But it is purely devoted to science.

To publish an encyclopedia for children had been a long cherished dream of Chinese educators," says Li Chunsheng, one of the encyclopedia's editors and an associate professor with the Beijing Normal University.

However, there were other

world's children," says Lin Chongde, the encyclopedia's editor-in-chief and professor of psychology with the Beijing Normal University.

Mr Lin, also director of China's Children and Educational Psychology Research Association, and four colleagues, were determined to catch up with such countries as the United States, Britain and Japan by working out comprehensive, integrate, scientific

'We felt it a shame that we didn't have our own encyclopedia for Chinese children for so many years, although China accounts for one-fifth of the world's children'

priorities in education and publishing in the 1950s and frequent political movements throughout the 1960s and 1970s made such a formidable project impossible. When China's cultural and educational life came back to normal in the 1980s, the lexicographical publishing work became an imminent task.

Although the 'Concise encyclopedia Britannica' was translated into Chinese and the China Greater encyclopedia was published gradually, specialised encyclopedias were still void.

"We felt it a shame that we didn't have our own encyclopedia for Chinese children for so many years, although China accounts for one-fifth of the

cally up-to-date and readable encyclopedia for Chinese children. They set to work in 1986.

The completed encyclopedia, which costs 80 yuan (US\$15), came off the press in May, 1991, in time for Children's day on June 1. The first printing of 23,000 copies sold out within weeks, and the second printing of 50,000 last October are also selling fast. The book has become so popular in Shanghai and Hangzhou that people there have to buy it with tickets.

At the Xidan Children's Bookstore in Beijing, Li Yingjie, a 58-year-old engineer with the China Civil Engineering and Construction Corporation under the Ministry of Railways, was ready to buy a whole set of the encyclopedia for his 10-year-old grandson.

"I saw the book at a neighbour's home and I think it's just what the children need the most," Mr Li says, adding that 80 yuan is not expensive for such beautifully designed and bound books. The price is equivalent to about 30 per cent of monthly income.

"I remembered that about 25 years ago I bought a set of '100,000 Whys' for my son and two daughters," he says. "But that book is no longer comprehensive enough for my grandson."

To make the encyclopedia for children "comprehensive enough," editor-in-chief Lin says, the editors decided to try to distill some "drops" from the "sea," and let the children have a taste of the "sea" by "touching these drops."

The editorial board involved some 100 scholars in various fields. After repeated studies and discussions, they finally divided the encyclopedia into four volumes: Nature and Environment, Science and Technology, Mankind and Society, and Culture and Art. The four volumes on the whole incorporate 5,000 entries and more than 60 branches of learning in about 4 million Chinese characters.

Most foreign encyclopedias arrange their entries in alphabetical order. "But we could not follow suit," Mr Lin says, "as that kind of arrangement looks boring and doesn't appeal to Chinese children. It

might even kill their interest."

For example, says Wang Desheng, editor of the Nature and Environment volume, the 'World of Animals' section attracts the children's attention with such headings as "peculiar animals," "animals' tricks to enemy," "how smart animals court," "animal architects," "animals detrimental to mankind," and "animals that can give off light."

In contrast, says Jiang Lu, editor of the Science and Technology volume, the entries in this volume proceed from something both interesting and familiar to children. The entry on remote sensing begins with the Monkey King, a popular hero in classic Chinese literature who has a pair of magical eyes and can easily distinguish monsters disguised as ordinary people on earth, even from heaven. The text likens remote sensing to such a pair of magical eyes, which can "perceive" underground mineral resources.

The encyclopedia also differs from its foreign counterparts in that it pays due attention to Chinese contribution to world civilisation in various branches of knowledge.

The Science and Technology volume alone presents 41 famous Chinese scientists along with more than 90 foreigners, from Cai Lun, the inventor of paper in the Eastern Han Dynasty (A D 25-220), China's "Pharmaceutical God" Li Shizhen of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), down to the present 'Father of the Hyord-Rice,' Yuan Longping.

To ensure readability, the editors brought their draft to various primary and high schools to see whether students could understand the entries. They also invited many primary and high school language teachers to comment on the writing and rewrite the version where necessary.

"Most of the entries were revised at least twice or three times," says He Bengang, editor of the Mankind and Society volume. One professor of biology rewrote his article on blood types five times to meet the editorial standard.

The nearly 4,000 illustrations were also designed to inspire the reader's imagination. More than 20 artists were involved to do the pictures for the encyclopedia.

Their works represent various schools of paintings in China, such as gongbi, the traditional Chinese realistic painting style featuring fine brushwork and close attention to detail; splash-ink, a technique of traditional Chinese ink-painting characterised by simple and bold lines with heavy ink marks.

To keep up-to-date with the fast-developing world, says editor-in-chief Lin, it is necessary to renew the encyclopedia, especially the Science and Technology volume. The editorial board will hold a meeting in 1992 to discuss how to update and revise the four volumes.

Do-it-yourself Plan to Beat School Vandals

by Anyal Dalo

RENEWED efforts are being made in Zambia to rehabilitate dilapidated government schools and end waste and damage to them. The aim is to cut the enormous expense caused by neglect, theft and vandalism.

For about a decade now many education facilities and amenities have been steadily ruined and even disappeared. This has had a disastrous effect on the morale, discipline and performance of teachers and students.

One report said: "No school has sufficient chairs and desks. It is quite usual to find some classrooms without any furniture. All schools have lost practically all carpentry and most metalwork hand tools. No school has sufficient facilities to carry out a teaching programme."

At least two schools had to close because they had been vandalised, although neglect and vandalism have been noticeably less in girls' schools.

An autonomous body under the Ministry of Education, known as the Zambia Education Project Implementation Unit (ZEPUI), has the task of giving 80 schools a facelift, under the charge of expatriate Norwegian civil engineer Arne Ohlsen. Funding for the project comes from the Norwegian Agency

for Development Cooperation (NORAD).

Ohlsen says one of the most crucial things he is fighting is a shortage of water. It is not much use renovating schools if they are forced soon afterwards to close because they have no water.

There are two immediate problems: borehole pump motors and other parts are often stolen and the amount of water in the boreholes or the distribution system is continually insufficient.

ZEPUI director James Banda says new boreholes will be sunk and powered by electricity or diesel.

Sometimes schools are vandalised as soon as repairs have been completed, so project officials have now turned to working on long-term solutions. They are giving priority to a concept they call preventive maintenance — a do-it-yourself approach that involves teachers, school workers, parents, students and members of local communities.

Attempts are being made to convince people connected with the schools that they are responsible for looking after them. They must prevent damage or theft and

do wear-and-tear repairs themselves. ZEPUI is educating people through seminars, courses, lectures, briefings, posters and radio programmes.

People are also being trained to make the repairs

and those concerned with a particular school are being persuaded to see that surroundings are kept clean and the toilets remain in order. Each person looks after part of the school compound and does whatever is good for the

school's welfare.

All this can help cut costs and stop specialised firms being called in to do minor repairs.

Rehabilitation programmes have been going on for some years and in the



In the developing world one billion people are still illiterate

first period, 1986-89, the whole exercise seemed a waste. Schools were repeatedly plundered as soon as they were rehabilitated.

In 1989 NORAD insisted that if they were to continue to help preventive maintenance must be seriously promoted. Banda admits it was a difficult concept to get across, but he believes students and parents now understand it.

One suggestion is that it should be incorporated into the school curriculum. Girl students seem much more willing to take up the do-it-yourself concept than the boys do.

In the past, government pronouncements have often been seen by aid officials as merely symbolic, with little done afterwards to rectify wrongs. Since the Kaunda government was toppled at the polls last October, though, changes are expected from Arthur Wina, the Education Minister in the government of President Frederick Chiluba. Wina is working out a new policy aimed at revamping the whole education system.

— Gemini News

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