

The Kalbaishakhi

by Sharier Khan

WE were caught red handed near the mango tree. Mr Baten is an awful character. He is just a landlord, earning his bread and butter from the house rents you know! But he is so mean that even the sparrows which have built their nests in his building, are compelled to pay rents; he is that nasty.

suddenly began to escape from the earth. There were waves of cool air. We felt the mixture of hot and cold air for a while. Then our nostrils were filled with the ancient aroma of the soil which is usually buried underneath the everyday hot stinky air. We could hear the humming of the trees which already began dancing with a violent vigour to



We, meaning Bolu, my pal Ruman and myself, despised meeting Mr Baten who is seldom seen without his *panjabi* and *tungi*. I mean in any other attire. But we loved his mango tree. Now that summer is here, the tree is full of green mangoes. So we ventured to steal some mangoes from Mr Baten's tree. Little did we know that Mr Baten, who claims to have seen Lord Mountbatten in his childhood, had installed a close-circuit TV in one of the branches to catch thieves like us. When we climbed the tree, Mr Baten along with his *neri-dog* Bhola raided us. "So-oo! Stealing my mango? Come down at once. I will teach both of you a lesson," he screamed from down below. "But we have tutors to teach us lessons," Ruman, biting his green mango said. "No, no! Don't bite my mango... ught Better kill me," Mr Baten became agitated. Bhola started barking. But we ignored his pleas. We were caught and bound to get some black and blues. The much we eat, that much is our profit. Mr Baten is a desperate case. He started picking pebbles and throwing those at us. However he had a bad aim. So instead of hitting us with the pebbles, he shot down some green mangoes — aggravating his grievances. At last he gave up, sweating and panting. But he started to climb the tree — himself. We started climbing the tree upwards. We could hear the demonic laughter of Mr (fat and dark) Baten. "I will roast you alive. I will expose you to the public... he-he, ha-ha-ha (cough! cough!)." We were doomed. There were no more branches to climb upon, and Mr Baten is only 10 feet below us. Oh god save us from this monster. Suddenly we felt the cold wind. The outrageous sun suddenly hid its face beneath a sweeping ocean of dark clouds. The dark clouds coming from nowhere must be one mile thick, for the whole world seemed to have been engulfed by a mystic darkness of a premature night. "Kalbaishakhi", Ruman screamed in joy. Mr Baten froze. Me too. The hot humid air had

the tunes of the powerful, ever-sweeping *kalbaishakhi*. Now that the light had almost gone, we started climbing down the tree. Mr Baten, who is clinging to a branch seemed spellbound by the storm and seemed to have forgotten us. We got down from the tree safely, for Bhola had retreated to some shelter near by. But Mr Baten had forgotten where he was? So we started calling him, "Come down Mr Baten... there's going to be a big storm." "Why you... shoo shoo... get away from my plot... get away from my property... I will get you @ \$ & + etc," and again Mr Baten started screaming. The storm brewed rapidly, the clouds from heaven had assembled in the sky for a war among themselves. Clouds started charging the sky with thunders. And their wars released the bag of air through an explosion. The whole sky, roaring, started falling down on the earth. The frozen rain clouds broke into fragments, Hail (Hitler!). It's hail storm. So we ran to a shelter. The next ten minutes were full of fury and rain. The wind swept away many tin sheds. The hails covered the earth with a celestial whiteness. The trees danced together in harmony. And the dusts were all blown away to India (may be). The cool big rain drops soaked us completely as we dared to pick hails from the ground. At last and all of a sudden the rain stopped. The sky became bright again. There was a rainbow in the north-west horizon. We rushed to the mango tree, which is naked of any mango now. Suddenly we noticed this white cloth peculiarly flying from a tree top. "Where did it come from, who raised this 'flag of truce' over there?" we asked ourselves. "You criminals, don't come near me. I will kill you if you come near me," we heard Mr Baten's voice up from the tree. We could not see him for he was hiding behind the leaves. Suddenly there was a wind. The white flag, the gesture of peace, fell from the tree top. We picked it up just to discover that it was only Mr Baten's *tungi* — blown away by the sweet *kalbaishakhi*. And sweet victory of course!

'Hal Khata' in the City

by Aminul Haque Shanto

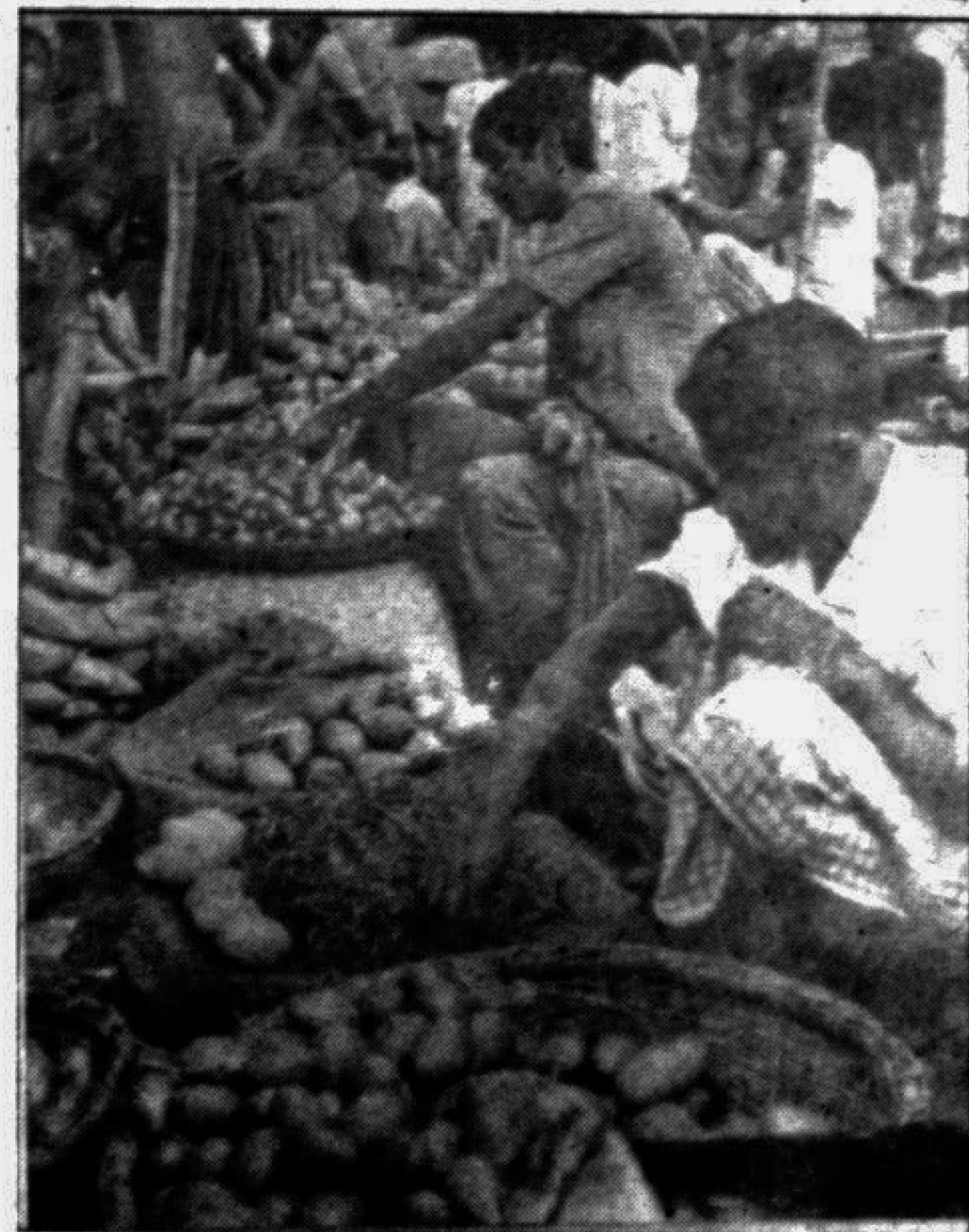
CITY'S restlessness gets into our blood. We are always busy running and rushing forward to get hold of what only we know. We don't have any place to go, any field to play, not enough money to enjoy any luxuries either and above all no free time to plan fun. So, what do we do? We keep ourselves busy in front of the TV set in the long afternoons and evenings even in the holidays we sit there watching. This is actually what city life is all about. But there are some exceptions too. In some occasions and festivals we, the city people, act differently. "Pahela Baishakh" is one of those. "Hal Khata" is an inevitable part of "Pahela Baishakh". This is importantly significant in our business communities. This has become a part of our tradition for time unknown. Traditionally it had been practiced and followed specially by our villagers for generation. Almost every businessman maintains "Hal Khata" in villages, even if he is a small shop owner or a successful grocer. On the eve of the new year they calculate all their accounts of the old year and transfer them on a new account book. They clear all their debts and liabilities before the new year begins. They invite their well wishers, relatives, friends and customers and entertain them with sweets. Thus they begin the new year anew, clearing all debts of the previous year. *Hal Khata* means transferring the accounts from the old sales book into a new one. This is maintained somehow differently in the city. Many businessmen in the city do not follow this and some of them don't know even what is a *Hal Khata*. Those who have a daily sell and give away things on credits, maintain *Hal Khata*. Those who don't have credits, like 'Bata' shoe company do not maintain this. In the city big companies and shops of various types follow this. Small shopkeepers or grocers don't go for it. Jewellers, big departmental stores, wealthy shopkeepers, cloth stores, rice shops etc, specially those from the old town areas, maintain this tradition till now. They don't bother to clear their dues like the villagers but they do record their old accounts on the new *khata*. They send greetings and invitations in the new year to their friends relatives, customers and clients and entertain them with food and sweets. They arrange for some sort of prayers as it is a sacred day to them. They give bonuses to their workers and employees; some even distribute cloths among employees. The shop is painted and decorated on that day and there is an aroma of happiness everywhere. This maintaining of a 'Hal Khata' is important for any business. Businessmen get a clear idea about their assets and liabilities and their income and expenditures of the year gone. Losses and stealing can be prevented this way and at the same time increase the reputation and goodwill of the firm. It helps them to plan their future actions as well. Moreover, this has got a social impact too. We don't have too many occasions or festivals we take a breath of relief and thoroughly enjoy this occasion and event. But unfortunately this traditional practise is becoming less popular day by day. Only a handful of people know about it. The student and young generations are not even aware of 'Hal Khata'. This proves how this is becoming insignificant to our this modern society. This should not happen, we should try to hold on to the good things in our culture and should not let it go of these cultural values.

Fruits of Bangladesh

by Siraj-us-Saleheen Lovell

MUNCH, munch! Slurp Slurp! Gulp! Aah! Delicious. Now what do you make of that? It seems like someone definitely just had a most palatable meal. Of what you ask? That really is a silly question. Don't you know it's the Bengali *Chaitra* month — the season of excellent flavoured fruits. That lucky person (whoever he or she was) was selfishly grinding away any one of the most delectable fruits of our country. Caution: Keep a napkin in front of you so that the greedy saliva lolling from your mouth doesn't destroy your dress. What? You don't care, your want those delicious fruits right now! O.K. let's make a deal. You guys out there help me finish this feature and then you'll get a reward (A full basket of fruit). Well what are we waiting for? Countdown to a most luscious journey. You're walking down the road, it's really hot out there, the scorching heat is burning through your inner parts. Suddenly! Like a bolt from the blue, like an angel in distress, you hear a beckoning — "Step right up! Step right up! Have a glass of ice cold cane-juice." Mesmerized, you go up to the beckoner, give up all your money and gulp-up glasses of juice with a squeeze of lemon of course. You just love the man, how he grinds the canes by a hand made machine and the greenish juice he serves you. Oh! what a feeling when the cane-juice cools and quenches your thirst as it goes down. Nowadays, in programmes such as picnics or get-togethers, oranges are served as snacks. This is another tasty fruit of our country. When served, you take it (rather you snatch it), look here and there and then attack the poor thing's soft luscious skin, peeling it off and mercilessly suck the last drop of juice remaining in the pods. Those unlucky ones who do not know what an orange tastes like, are unable to have the most marvellous experience of the fanta-colored object journeying through the palate and cooling off the heat — Ah! I'm in heaven!

a slight tint of pink or white. It's juicy and yummy beyond description. Of course I am not going to forget *arboria* or light green *tok* (sour) fruit. Then there is the famous *beth fol*, *amlokis*, even a fruit that looks like red



A village market, fresh fruits and vegetables. Courtesy — Bangladesh by Nozesh Ahmed and Naibuddin Ahmed.

beads called *mala* by common people. These beads like fruits are sold in garlands and hence the name. But these heavenly delicacies are on the market, at the most, for three weeks and then gone for a year. You have to be very alert during these seasons to taste these *deshi* fruits. Next, let's have a look on the more harder ones to crack. There's the coconut and his brother the 'Sour Wood-Apple'. In its young age, the coconut is green-colored, and its juice, when served, can easily top

before you go for it. First, you'll have to crack it open like a coconut (you don't need a crane to do that), then mix some salt to the entrails and *Wah!* A very high spirited delicacy is prepared (thank you, thank you, the pleasure is all yours). Don't forget about the 'Pomegranate', its reddish seeds are definitely a treat to anyone served. Even the most snobbish ones would lick the last of it. Now how many of you out there would like to do some monkey business. There's only two requirements for this — first, you gotta be a monkey, and then, you'd better be fond of bananas. Hah! hah! Just kidding. Shaped like a long and fat finger the banana has its own eccentricities. The yellow skin, when peeled off, reveals a most tempting flesh, beckoning a bite from you. Don't try to stash it up your mouth at once. What fruit has almost the same colour combination as our flag? Yap, you've got it right, the watermelon. With its green skin and red flesh it definitely is a marvel. While devouring it, you don't even care if the seeds get stuck in your gums. You keep on devouring until the thick skin (most disgusting) crash lands your journey. There are even fruits, as well as very delectable, also have famous proverbs attached to them. Such as, 'Grapes are sour' (Are they really); 'Oil on the moustache, jackfruit on the tree' (Who knows what it means). Wow! That was indeed a very delicious and tasty journey. I don't know about you, but I'm beginning to feel hungry. Oops! Mayday, Mayday! Red alert! due to unavoidable circumstances (basically my mouth began to water, after such luscious illustrations of all these fruits), this feature must stop here. Happy fruit hunting, in the new year.



Crafts for utility as well as decoration. Courtesy — Bangladesh by Nozesh Ahmed and Naibuddin Ahmed.

Let's talk about the more genuine local delicacies, one of which is the *Kamranga* (star fruit). The geometric extra-ordinaria of this fruit, which can be found nearly anytime of the year, spot-lights itself as a unique product; it's long showy pods, looking like human ears, covered with a thin layer of skin. Dipping it in salt, you munch it up, and the sour juice in your mouth — well, I believe everyone knows what heavenly feeling it creates. Then there's the 'Rose-Apple' or *Jambu*, with its jet-black skin, having more resemblance to a black-berry, when digested, shoots out a blood-like liquid (No, not it doesn't taste as blood) which thrills the human body to the last cellulitis. A distant cousin of the *jambu* is the 'Star-Apple', more commonly known as *Jamrul*. Looking like a diamond with its unique watery taste, this fruit really fits the proper saying, 'A diamond is forever'. Then there are *karanja* the tiny red and green shaded, oval shaped, like a bird's egg, fruit. *Karanja* with salt and green chilli sure is a teaser to those taste buds of yours. 'Lotoni' is a tiny ball like green fruit. The green part is of course the thick skin, which when peeled reveals the almost transparent, may be with

WE Bangalees might generally seem like a lazy, laid-back race, but there are times when we never run out of enthusiasm, for instance celebrating and rejoicing life specially when it comes to occasions like *Pahela Baishakh* or the first day of the Bangla calendar. People from all walks of life — as tradition congregates at the *Ramna Botomul* every year, on this auspicious day, we come the new year in the inimitable Bengali style. The new year sparks off excitement and anticipation among the masses. All thoughts of work and worries are pushed aside and concentration is on simply having fun for one day. Some especially the young get all perked up and plan on what to wear, what to do, the places to visit; weeks ahead and eagerly await the big day. The cultural-minded Bangalees get ready at the crack of dawn and start for the *Ramna* premises. He or she gets swept away by the sound of music and reaches the spot along with the tide of people. There is happiness and gaiety in the air which is so contagious that it touches the very soul of a person and makes him cheerful and full of zest for life. Only the early ones get the opportunity to sit and enjoy the musical programme annually arranged by none other

A Day for the Young

by Lavina Ambreen Ahmed

(sometimes bizarre!) coiffures, they happily escort their lady counterparts — Or is on the lookout for some! While you're mesmerised at the surroundings, people start pouring in. As the show starts at 6 am, by 7:30 the place is crammed and you can hardly move around. You manage to squeeze yourself away from the maddening crowd only to find yourself in yet another at the *Bangla Academy* premises. They too, hold a similar cultural programme featuring songs and recitations greeting *Baishakh*, as well as *Shishu Academy*, *Shipakala Academy* and some others in the

metropolis. But probably, the highlight of *Pahela Baishakh* is the *Baishakhi Mela*, which is going to be held at the Dhanmondi Club field like the previous years. It seems half the city's population tempted by Feedback's raunchy track *'Mela! Jai rey'* make it a point to visit the fete. Irrespective of the crowds and the dust storm

that threatens to overwhelm one, the moment he/she enters the *mela*, the Dhakaites casually stroll along from one stall to another. The makeshift booths are not as eye catching or as decorative as the *boimela* ones, nevertheless attract many a *mela* enthusiast. These are stalls selling handicrafts, leather and cane products, wood and terracotta trinkets, bronze and copper tinted statuettes and flower pots etc. Clothes made out of handloom materials, colourful backpacks and showpieces at the tribal booth are quite impressive. Blasting music can be heard coming from the not-too-few cassette shops playing local band numbers. Not to mention the food stalls that are a big success in every *mela*. Besides the stalls there are also the vendors squatting on the grounds displaying kitchen utensils and the *churtwallis* showing their array of glittering bangles. The multicoloured *churtis* glitter in a kaleidoscope of colours, blinding the eyes. And of course, there has to be the inevitable dilapidated *'nagor dola'* (merry-go-round) at every *Baishakhi mela*. *Pahela Baishakh* is mainly a day for the young. So, it seems as one passes the DU campus, TSC area, Art College, *Ramna* and *Bangla Academy* premises. The animated conversations, the excited giggles, ripples of laughter all together paint a

lively picture of the *jote de* *vivre* of youth. The lovebirds too look forward to this day. As our conservative society normally don't permit going out on dates, the couples take full advantage of the occasion. Young lovers can be spotted, engaged in cosy *tete-a-tetes* or sipping soft drinks or having ice-creams under tree shades. Not such a great day for the poor Romeo who has to treat his Juliet's friends to *Chatpati* to impress his loved one. Or, perhaps the ardent boy friend who waits patiently under the scorching sun for ages, till his partner decides on the six dozens of *churtis* to buy. The *Baishakhi Mela* is not only a pretty picture of fun and merry-making. There are wild, rowdy crowds, and plenty of indisposed people roaming around the mentioned spots. Always on the lookout for trouble, these contemptible and loathsome persons ruin the mood of the day. Despite the chaos and cacophony, the blistering heat and occasional unwarranted and unsavoury incidents, the Bangalees hardly remain cooped up in their homes. After all its end of the year, its time to put all our sorrows and misfortunes behind and look ahead of us 1402 is knocking at the door, full of fresh hopes and promises. Keep smiling and stay happy everyone. *Shubho Nababarshaf*

Potteries and decoration pieces made out of clay, found in a village haat (weekly bazaar). Courtesy — Bangladesh by Nozesh Ahmed and Naibuddin Ahmed.