

# TEENS and TWENTIES

## Pahela Baishakh: A Brief History

by Nameer Rahman

EVERY major date in any calendar has a history behind it, from the Chinese twelve-year cycle to the Christian solar based year, and certainly the Bengali year.

The Bengali calendar can have its roots traced right back to the Moghul era in the subcontinent. Before that the Moghul rulers of India and Bengal had brought with them the Islamic calendar which was based on the lunar system.

The lunar calendar may have been very well suited to the dry and deserts of Central and East Asia but was not at all compatible with the subcontinent.

The reason was simple. The lunar calendar is in fact very fluid, each lunar month having no fixed number of days. A single month can have twenty seven, eight or nine days so each year all the months start a couple of weeks before the previous year. As a result the lunar calendar could not adequately mark out the specific dates or times for the frequent seasonal changes in the subcontinent.

Yet the most important factor leading to the eventual "discarding" of this calendar was the fact that the using the calendar the Moghuls could not mark out a specific date or day during which the revenues were to be collected from the farmers, a fixed number of days after the fields were harvested. So faced with these problems the Emperor Akbar asked courtier, intellectual and close friend Abu Fazal to devise a calendar more suited to the subcontinental climate and way of life.

Abu Fazal after studying the seasons and astrological and astronomical charts finally devised a calendar more suited to the sub-continent based on the solar system. Yet he still needed a particular day to mark the new year.

After carefully studying the customs of the time he decided that the new year would begin on the day commonly referred to as "Hal khata" amongst the traders of the day they opened a new ledger. This became the Bengali new years day and also the day the Moghul rulers collected revenues or taxes from the farmers and land owners.

However, this new years day or Pahela (meaning first day of) Boishakh remained a working day right until the British era in the nineteenth century when Hindu intellectuals and writers such as Bomken and Tagore felt it was a day fit to celebrate. The festivities of Pahela Boishakh have now become a cherished ritual of Bengali society and culture, a custom which hopefully will continue for centuries to come.

## More Junkies!!

by Shahed Latif

P AHELA Boishakh is the first day in the Bangla calendar, it marks the end of one year and the beginning of another.

One thing becomes clear that day: that even though we differ in opinions, support different leadership, but on the 1st of Boishakh every one seems to be committed to one thing and that is enjoying oneself and showing some appreciation for our rich culture. Hypocritical it may sound, but we do become Bengalis that day, all venture out to the month long Boishakhi mela and enjoy the Bengali version of junk food and take part in the funfair the Bengali way.

I was walking down the streets of Bailey road when I suddenly came across a *badamwala* (peanuts vendor). *badam* is an item sold in the *mela*, and called him. I bought some *badams* from him in an effort to start the conversation and asked him his name. He told me his name was Jamal and with a smile on his face gave me a brisk idea of his business. He informed me that he usually gets his *badams* from Kawran bazar and *daalbooti* from Raibazar. Jamal told me he buys these for Tk 22 per kg each. Jamal also told me that they have big sized *badam* which costs Tk 32 per kg.

Then I asked Jamal where does he usually sell his items and does he go to the *mela*, usually the Baishakhi *mela*? And instantly he replied, "Yes, I do go to Baishakhi *mela*, we sell a lot there and make quite a profit from the *mela*. Usually most of the people buy from us." He also told me everyday he sells them near the schools and colleges because students buy them. Jamal told me that he does not sell his *badams* usually in the same place, once a week maybe on Thursday or Friday he goes to the AKC ground during the evening when the players are usually practicing. Then I paid him and began my walk down the road back home.

The next day, around the same time I was on my way home from Bangabazar when I came across this *chatpatiwalla* who was pushing his cart down the road and suddenly remembered they also go to Boishakhi *mela* and called him. At that time of the day they usually don't sell this *chatpati* and was quite surprised. I asked him whether I could ask him a few questions regarding his spicy

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