



Our cultural heritage

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WITH the new sun shining with its radiance and vivacity, we, the Bangalis, are celebrating our 1415th New Year today. Another Pohela Baishakh (first day of the month of Baishakh) brings out another spectrum of hope and possibilities assailing over the darkness of despair and glumness.

Each and every year we ceremoniously welcome the advent of the new year as soon as the new sun comes up with its cheerful brightness. We welcome new year with song "Esho he Baishakh, Esho, Esho" echoing throughout the country. Truly, this has been a cultural extravaganza for the Bangalis from all walks of life.

This very ceremoniousness marks the spirit of Bangalis as a nation. On this day we express our pride in many ways of being Bangali. The whole world bears the witness of the sparkle of Bangali life. This festive look has been a testimony of the vibrant nature of Bangali culture. Various cultural programmes organised by different socio-cultural-academic organisations give expression to our true identity.

But do we still possess the same level of cultural wealth that we used to have before? Haven't we diverted a long way from our originality? Does pretending to be Bangali on a few selective days really show the true Bangali spirit? Whatever may be the answers of these questions, the unprecedented shift from our original culture to a culture mixed with global influence is pretty much evident.

Let us come to the language aspect first. Not many below thirty years are actually able to speak using perfectly pronounced Bangla words. We even see a new Bangla accent developing that mimics the English pronunciation. Mixing Bangla with English in our conversation is a common phenomenon. These people are unable to speak fluently either in Bangla or English.

I believe that in order to compete in this global community, we must learn English language properly.



But at the same time we must not forget our own language the language for which people did not hesitate to sacrifice their most precious lives. Many can say that there is another variety adding to the list. However, it is for the scholars and researchers to decide whether replacing the standard Bangla with Bangla/English Mixture is justifiable or not.

Food has been an integral part of our culture. From hospitality to diplomacy, food has its mark. Speaking about food, I still can remember the variety of rice cakes my maternal grandmother used to prepare. Splendid in taste is a justification that I must give. She used to send cakes to our house. *Paatisapta* is still my most favorite one.

My mother is a person who



is known in the family and friend circle as the one with a magic recipe of the milk food items. Her items, such as *payesh* (made of rice, milk and sugar), *kheer* (rice, milk and molasses), *halua* (a kind of sweet-meat made of melted butter, sugar, suji, daal, egg, carrot etc) are our all time favorites. Whenever mother prepares these food items I always remain to be the first person to taste and devour most of it.

In the village and suburban communities women still make traditional rice cakes and other food items. But in the urban areas, especially in the metropolitan cities, where people are more busy, they hardly find time to prepare these traditional delicacies at home. But that does not mean you don't at all

get these items in the cities and towns. Go to a large shop and you will find *patishapta*, *phoolpitha*, *moa*, *naru*, *kodma*, *batasha*, *dudhkodu*, *gajorer halua* and so on. But what is missing here is the ceremonial aspect of making these items at home. Something readily available cannot taste as good as one for which you have to wait half a day.

On the Bangla New Year's day Bangalis usually have *khichuri* (a food item made of rice and pulses together) at home. When I was in Mirzapur Cadet College, we were served *chiraa* (beaten rice) with yogurt during breakfast as a special menu. In the Cadet College we used to celebrate the New Year's day by publishing Bangla Wall Paper and organising a cultural

programme. I have been enjoying the Bangla New Year festivity in Dhaka University since I joined there as a student.

These days, I see people on the New Year's day, eat *pantabhaat* (rice soaked in lots of water) with *hilsha* fish because they feel it as the tradition. Maybe a lot of people do not see a point in it but no doubt it has become popular. But my question is, if we cannot internalise the true Bangali spirit, we should not do such things for a day and forget all about it for the rest of the year.

Fusion of our original songs with that of western templates is not new for us. It is not a bad idea as it is getting good response from the target audience. But in this way aren't we killing the originality

of our music? I have no problems with rock music as it is adding a new dimension. I am concerned that our original music does not become extinct. This also goes for our other cultural aspects.

On two occasions I feel missing Bangali spirit within the environment surrounding me. One is *Pohela Falgun* (first day of spring; on 13th February) and another is *Pohela Baishakh* (first day of the new year; on 14th April). The rest of the days of the year we pass our lives as usual. In that case, are we Bangalis for only two days?

Traditionally we have a very rich and diverse culture. But cultural dynamism and globalisation have been contributing to a continuous shift within our culture. This obvious shift has been

depleting the richness of our cultural legacy. Change is good, but not at the cost of the original. Our culture is changing, it is shifting from its traditional focal point. Whether this phenomenon signifies the setting of a sun or the rising of a new star, can be found with the passing of time. It is up to us now to decide how to preserve our traditional culture. It is the root and the rest are the branches and other body parts of the tree. Can a tree live without its root?

I wish all of you enjoy happy and prosperous times ahead.

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Bengalis through the centuries

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Initially they developed British education here for the sake of their administration. But it transcended their initial motivation and we got real taste of education. Calcutta and later Dhaka University were established on the pattern of British universities and they also helped development of the Bengali Language.

They at the end of their rule also gave us a taste of Parliamentary democracy. India acts of 1909, 1919 and 1935 led the subcontinent gradually to parliamentary democracy. Special mention may be made of 1935 Act. Under this act, provincial elections were held in 1937 and Sher-e-Bangla A.K. Fazlul Huq became the Chief Minister of Bengal. When he was expelled by Jinnah from Muslim League, he formed a coalition Ministry with Hindu Mahashaba. When this ministry collapsed, Khaja Nazimuddin became the Chief Minister as leader of Muslim League. Sher-e-Bangla was in the opposition then and nobody could restrain him from making fiery speeches in the legislative assembly. In the 1946 provincial election, Muslim League obtained a

resounding victory and this time H.S. Suhrawardy became the Chief Minister because he was the architect of the Muslim League victory in Bengal. This victory of the Muslim League in Bengal was a decisive factor in the creation of Pakistan as in no other Muslim majority province of India, Muslim League could win majority seats in Parliament. Suhrawardy of course proposed an independent Greater Bengal. He was deprived of the leadership of newly formed Parliament in East Bengal by a conspiracy. If Suhrawardy was made Chief Minister of the newly formed East Bengal, the history of Pakistan would have been different. We all recognize Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the Father of the Nation. Moulana Bhashani is also given the credit for raising his voice in favor of independence. But very few people know that when Jawaharlal Nehru was invited by the Viceroy to form the interim cabinet in 1946, Suhrawardy warned the Viceroy that if Congress forms the interim Govt, Bengal would declare independence and form its own Cabinet. Later of course, a coalition interim Govt. by both Congress and the

League was formed. Thus a psyche of independence was there in the hearts and minds of all our genuine leaders. Those who think that Parliamentary democracy of Westminster type has failed in independent Bangladesh, they should go

Bangladesh, we never allowed parliamentary democracy to function. I shall throw more light on British Parliamentary democracy during my writing on Britain.

Sher-e-Bangla Fazlul Huq moved the Lahore Resolution

should read Jinnah's letter to Viceroy on 1 July, 1941, which reads, "No statement should be made by the Government which would in any way militate against the basic principles of Lahore Resolution regarding creation of Muslim States in the

Rabindranath Tagore, Subash Chandra Bose, C.R. Das, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Raja Ram Mohon Roy, Sree Ramkrishna, Swami Bibekananda, Arobindo Ghosh, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Iswar Chandra Bidyasagar, Bankim Chatterjee, Michael Madhusudan Datta, Amartya Sen, Satyajit Roy, Jagadish Chandra Bose, P.C. Roy, Satyen Bose, Meghnad Saha and many others.

Of the eight personalities, who received Nobel Prize from this subcontinent, five are from this region. They are Rabindranath Tagore, Amartya Sen, C.V. Raman, Mother Teresa and Professor Yunus. C.V. Raman though born in South India, got the prize while working in Calcutta. Mother Teresa though she came from outside became a citizen of Bengal. Dr Khorana and Dr Chandrasekhar, the two Indian scientists who got Nobel Prize, lived in USA. Professor Abdus Salam of Pakistan who got Nobel Prize lived in U.K. and Italy. It is no mean achievement for a region.

Bengal had a well settled civilization and culture at the time of Aryan penetration. Bengal had its own dynasty of independent rulers, namely the

Palas, the Senas and the Muslim Sultanate who occupied Bengal and they shaped a distinct identity of Bengal. Bangladesh is characterized by a unique coming together of many races, languages and religions. Its culture is distinctive to which Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians have all contributed. The people of Bengal had never accepted the land of Bengal as a mere province of India. They looked upon it as a separate country and called it Bangladesh and not Bangla Pradesh. When Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman named the province of East Pakistan as Bangladesh after his six-point program, everybody thought that independence was his ultimate aim and it was a very bold step. The psyche developed by our original inhabitants guides us in all our affairs. It inspires us to die for the preservation of our language and to die for the achievement of our independence and it will again inspire us to make our country a prosperous one. Let our glorious past inspire us towards a glorious future.

(The writer is a former Academic)

Bengal used to produce enough agricultural products to feed its population and export the surplus to feed the imperial army. During the Muslim rule in Bengal, many Muslim saints came to this region. Mention may be made of the great saint Hazrat Shah Jalal accompanied by 360 of his disciples who conquered Sylhet. In each of the sub regions there had been more than one saint, they spread Islam among the masses and this helped making Bengal a Muslim majority state.

through the proceedings of the Bengal legislature during 1937-1947 period. This would show how in very restrained circumstances under an imperial rule and highhandedness of the political party chiefs, democracy functioned. In

as the Chief Minister of the only Muslim League Govt. in India. In the resolution there was the provision that more than one sovereign Muslim states could come into existence and those who say that "s" in the word states was a typing mistake

north-western and eastern zones." Here he categorically puts states in the plural.

We are very proud of our past. In spite of many adverse circumstances, this region has witnessed the birth of many eminent personalities like

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