The Promise of River and Sea

The promise of river-and-sea is eternal – always loyal. Yet as the world has changed so the advantage of Jhalakathi's trading geography is lessened. Evidence of past commercial success isn't difficult to find. Along the town's waterfront are godowns and stately homes with a story to tell. In Nalchity Bazar lies the century-old grave of a Chinese businesswoman. There's the engineering feat of the Gabkhan Channel to admire. The future is less certain but trade is likely to continue to play a role of significance in the life of the district and town of river-sea memory.

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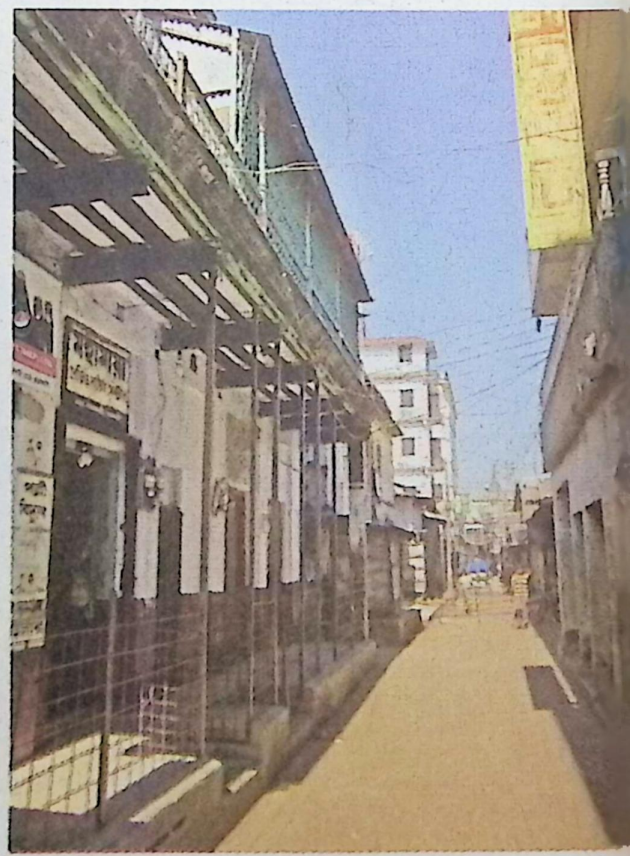
How did she feel at first, when she stepped off the boat? Was there a reluctant, deep sigh as her leading foot made landfall; was she consumed with thoughts of what she'd left behind? Or was it with determination and the quiet grin of a plan that she resolutely strode ashore?

We don't know much but we can assume there was a boat. Even today Nalchity Bazar in Jhalakathi District is most accessible by local ferry across the broad Sugandha – the Fragrant River. Besides, she'd come from some distance around a century ago and there was certainly no aeroplane to account for that.

Was it winter then? Did she step, shivering, onto an unseeable riverbank that had without warning from some foggy nowhere nudged the boat? Or perhaps it was spring, on a morning announced by the cuckoo's call when there might've been the red of polash or krishnachura blossoms to lift her spirits. Those flowers are not famed for fragrance but red is the colour of happiness for the Chinese. They might've made her feel welcome.

Did she speak Bangla, not to mention Borishailla-Bangla, and how did it all go, each day after that very first one? How exactly did that Chinese woman manage to settle in Nalchity for some years, alone?

Because in the end it was Nalchity that assumed a most important post in her life – her final resting place.



A laneway near the waterfront, Jhalakathi.