

MUSINGS

GEMINI

M H HAIDER
PHOTOS: COURTESY



"Me thinks you are my glass, and not my brother: I see by you I am a sweet-faced youth."

– The Comedy of Errors by William Shakespeare

Remember the sitcom, Friends? Of course you do. Remember the time how panicked Chandler and Monica became when they discovered that they were going to adopt twins? "We only ordered one!" Monica reminded. And Chandler, not being able to recover from the news, pulled Monica on a side and suggested to give one away. "We can give each of them half a medallion, and then years later they'll find each other, and be reunited," he had proposed. "I mean that's a great day for everybody!"

Monica and Chandler were 'not ready to have two babies'.

That's perhaps how some parents react when they first find out that they have conceived twins. But as time goes by, the joy twins bring can never be overrated. As a saying goes, "God touched our hearts so deep inside, our special blessing multiplied."

But twins were not always seen in such positive spirit in olden times, with many superstitions surrounding them. In some cultures, twins were considered a bad luck, and one from the pair would be drowned. Twins

were believed by many people to be the work of spirits! On the other hand, tales of twins are dotted in mythologies from different parts of the world, comprising of deities and divine powers.

While not all twins are gods and goddesses, most of them do claim to have a special power - that one can feel each other's pain or experience even though they are miles apart. Take the example of Imtiaz and Ijaz Ahmed from Chittagong. Till the age of 26, they were inseparable. However, due to different interests, one went abroad for a postgraduate degree while another stayed back and pursued a different career. However, the bond between them remained strong. "One fine morning, I started feeling pain in my leg, but couldn't figure out why. Later that day, my brother called me and said that he had been in a car accident and had hurt his knee badly," Ijaz says.

Indeed, there are countless such cases and anecdotes about twins experiencing each others' pains or sensations. There's lack of solid scientific proof, but numerous testimonials and studies continue to amuse people.

And twins can indeed baffle and confuse us, particularly when they are wearing the same dresses! Identifying which one is which can be a difficult job indeed. "When we used to work in the same office, strangers often came up to me for a handshake, or even a

quick chat when in the elevator," Ijaz says about people continuously confusing them for one another. "Sometimes, I just ignored and nod along and pretend to be my brother!"

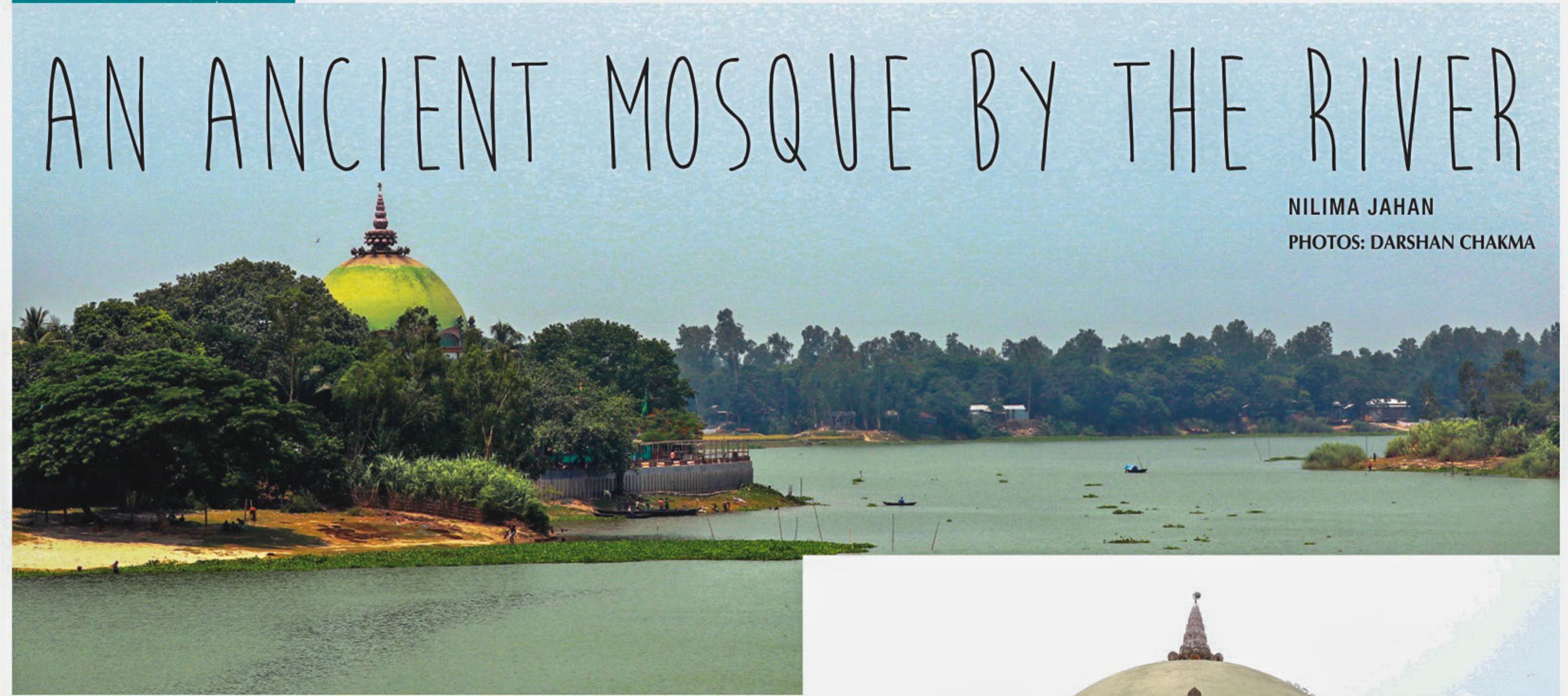
But let's not forget that twins are two different human beings, and even identical twins have different fingerprints. "Friends and families can easily tell us apart," Ijaz concluded. "Although we are apparently identical, we have a lot of differences and lead very separate lives."

Nevertheless, from the ancient world to this day, and from mythology to science, twins continue to be a subject of wonder. ■

HERITAGE

AN ANCIENT MOSQUE BY THE RIVER

NILIMA JAHAN
PHOTOS: DARSHAN CHAKMA



Makhdum Shah Daulah Shahid (R.), the fourteenth century Muslim saint, recognised for preaching Islam in northern India was the second son of a Yemeni king, Muaz bin Jabal. It is said that, together with some 20 companions, including three of his nephews, Khwaja Kalan Danishmand, Khwaja Noor and Khwaja Anwar and their mother (Sati Bibi, daughter of Muaz bin Jabal), Makhdum Shah travelled to preach

District. Prior to that, Vikram Kesari, the then Hindu king of Bihar owned that area.

According to tradition, Makhdum Shah and his companions built a mosque at Shahzadpur, which is, even today, known as Makhdum Shah's Mosque. The mosque stands on the bank of the river Hurasagar at Dargapara, the extreme end of the Shahzadpur. A book named "Sultans and Mosques: The Early Muslim Architecture of Bangladesh" by Parween



Islam with his father's permission. After meeting Shaikh Jalaluddin Bukhari, the famous Sufi Saint at Bokhara, Makhdum Shah got a pair of gray pigeons as a sign of good wishes from him.

When they were proceeding towards Bengal from Bokhara, after passing long waterways, their ships got stuck at one place (Presently, that place is known as Potajia), where there was no sign of land. After a few days, noticing alluvium and sands at their pigeons' feet, they realised the existence of a nearby sand-bed. So, they followed the pigeons and settled there, which is now known as Shahzadpur (it was named according to the "Shahzada" of Yemen), in Sirajganj

Hasan presents an amazing description of it.

The rectangular 15-domed mosque has eight black basalt pillars-- square at the base and top and octagonal at the middle. There are five impressive arched entrances recessed within rectangular frames, five *mihirabs*, (a niche in the wall of a mosque, toward which the worshippers faces to pray), one *minbar* (a platform for a priest in a mosque). The mosque gives people an idea about the stylistic and decorative characteristic of the early Sultanate architecture of Bengal.

The locals have firm belief about the emergence of the mosque. According to them, the mosque is miraculous, as in

prior times, the black basalt pillars of the mosque were not available in Bengal and also, it was not possible for Makhdum Shah to carry those heavy-weighted pillars from Yemen. Furthermore, the equipment for designing and fitting the pillars were not introduced yet.

Makhdum Shah fought several times against King Vikram for preaching Islam. But at one time, Vikram's men beheaded Makhdum Shah, while he was praying at the mosque. His tomb is adjacent to the mosque and Khwaja Noor, one of the three nephews was buried beside him. There is another tomb in the northeast corner and a mass grave on the south.

Every year, in the middle of the Bengali

month *Chaitra*, the authority of the mosque arranges a month-long fair, attended by people from different regions of the country. Apart from that event, people come to pray everyday, and donate rice, sugar, sweets, poultry and candles to the mausoleum. On Fridays, during the *Jumu'ah* prayer, the mosque cannot accommodate all the worshippers, as it becomes overcrowded.

In 1992, the mosque was taken under the maintenance of the Department of Archaeology of the government. Renovated by the authority, local governments and residents several times, the mosque, even today, conveys the glimpse of the early sultanate architecture. ■

PEARLS OF WISDOM



"AS A WOMAN, I ENTERED POLITICS WITH AN ADDITIONAL DIMENSION-THAT OF A MOTHER."

BENAZIR BHUTTO
11th Prime Minister of Pakistan



"WHEN I AM RAPED PEOPLE SAY THAT I HAVE LOST MY HONOUR. HOW DID I LOSE MY HONOUR?...IT IS THE RAPIST WHO LOSES HIS HONOUR, WE DON'T."

KAMLA BHASIN
Indian feminist and activist



"IN A PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY, WHEN HUSBAND EXPLORES THE SUN, THE MOON AND THE UNIVERSE, WIFE HAS TO SPEND HER LIFE IN THE KITCHEN MEASURING RICE, SPICES AND COOKING OIL."

BEGUM ROKEYA SAKHAWAT HOSSAIN
Bengali feminist, writer and social worker