



LS PICK

Banglar Bhoot: Creatures of the beyond

Some of us are strong believers of other realms, while others strictly believe we mortals are the only ones treading the earth. No matter which side you belong to, taking a stroll down a dark lane has probably made you wonder about the creaks that seem to follow.

The same can also be said about the space under your bed—did it never give you the chills?

Have you, as brave as you might be, never wondered about the sounds of the suspicious noises that seem to come alive when you are alone or the tap that keeps dripping only when no one else is home?

No? Really? Well, we are not judging. Just guessing—about what those noises might have been!

THE MALICIOUS MECO BHOOT

You are not a Bengali if you are not a fan of at least two types of fish, and of course, this is true for our ghosts. Mecho Bhoot, which literally translates into Fish-eating Ghosts, have a boundless love for fish, and will do anything to get them. Folk stories usually set them around lakes and rivers where fishermen would be out late fishing, and the greedy mecho bhoot would not only scare, but even kill to get their fish if need be. Bottom line, do not go fishing at night.

THE PRETENTIOUS PETNI

Although a word we often use for women we dislike or think peculiar—no matter how vehemently you deny that—we all know deep down a real 'petni' would scare the daylight out of us. Pale, bony, and usually with long black hair covering their faces are the usual depictions of a petni, which are the comfort-seeking souls of women who died unhappy or had some unfilled desires.

Petnis can shape shift and take forms of beautiful women to lure men only to scare them afterwards with their true form, all just for fun. Never regret things left undone when you die, unless you want a Shayora or tetul tree as your hangout as a petni for eternity.

THE DISGUSTING DAINI

Often in our childhoods we were scared with stories of the daini, the old hag who would come to take us away if we were naughty, and make slaves out of us, or fatten us for eating, or even drink our blood in her quest for immortality!

This is the Bengali version of the old-fashioned spell-casting witch. They are

neither spirits nor souls, they are simply women who are thought to have evil magical powers, and a lot of cunning, grotesque appearances, as well as no scruples for hygiene.

THE ALLURING ALEYA

Australians call it the Min Light, Europeans call it the will-o'-the-wisp. In Bangladesh this odd little orb of green light seen over marshes and bogs are known as the Aleya.

Dwellers of the night take note, for the Aleya is said to attract people with their apparitions and make them lose their way until these night owls find themselves in some nasty old marshy water in the dark.

Some also believe these are the ghosts of fishermen who sometimes call upon men who end up drowning, while at others they show the correct way in the dark with their lights. After all, not all dead that refuse to pass over are necessarily evil.

THE BROODING BLOODSUCKERS

A hundred years ago one would carry holy water or wooden stakes in case of an encounter with a vampire, although many teens today might want to attract a shiny one of their own, thanks to pop culture's glamorous depiction of these brooding bloodsuckers.

Contrary to modern literature and movies where vampires are often charismatic, handsome, charming—except the evil villain—originally vampires were thought to be women who seduced men and feasted on their blood. It later evolved into terrifying men who like to live like bats or in a coffin in fancy dark but spooky castles.

THE PREYING PENCHAPECHI

A scarier local ghoul of Bengal, this one actually like to eat its victims, and roams

about at night in the form of an owl to stalk lonely travellers to make a feast out of.

THE ROWDY RAKKHOSH

A scary demon creature with sharp claws for fingers and fang-like teeth and super-human strength, this ghoul of Bengal has a favourite slogan all its own—Hau Mau Khau, Manusher Gondho Pau (Random rhyming sounds, I smell a human!).

Imagine that going chomp chomp chomp on a person... scary indeed. A shorter version of this demon is often called a khokkosh. A less bloodthirsty version, but larger than a rakkhosh, is called a Doyitto or giant.

THE PETRIFYING PISHACH

Pishach is yet another demonic ghoul of Bengal, with a taste for human flesh, and that too of the dead kind. Meaning that these prefer to eat cadavers. Of course, creatures of the dark like the others, they haunt graveyards and cremation spaces, for obvious reasons. They

are also shapeshifters and can become invisible at will. They also like to possess people and force them to do things or make them insane.

They prowl the places associated with death and filth for fresh victims. Stay away from the open drains, will you!?

THE BRAINLESS BETAAL

Somewhat like the more known zombie, these also inhabit the same areas as the pishachi, but are less nefarious for preferring mischief to outright murder or consumption of dead people. They do sometimes possess human dead bodies to move around, but do not always need to. They prefer to tell tales and confuse nighttime travellers.

THE JEALOUS JOKKHO

Jokkho can be the Bengali equivalent of the leprechaun, jealously guarding their hoards of riches. Considered to be a combative supernatural being, they are the tireless guardians of wealth on earth. They are strict in their duty, but also thought to be benevolent, bestowing wealth and fertility to those they think worthy as devotees.

THE PETRIFYING PORI

You might have been mocked dressing up as a fairy at a "How scary can you be" party, for fairytales are often sugary sweet with happily ever afters. But in many cultures, including folk Bengal, poris are entities to be scared of, especially in their true forms.

Mostly they appear in alluring beauty with lovely voices to lure human beings, but all that is glitter is not true goodness. In fact, they steal children from their homes replacing them with one of their own.

GUEST APPEARANCE: THE JAPANESE JORO-GUMO

One can always count on the Japanese to come up with the most hair raising and terrifying creatures. The Joro-Gumo is a spider woman, but not like our 'neighbourhood spiderman' of the Marvel universe. The blood-curdling Joro-Gumo usually takes the form of a beautiful woman, who bewitches men with their beauty only to wrap them in their webs and eat them later on.

If you ever come across a woman asking you to hold her baby in a dark deserted place, chances are the baby will burst into a million spider eggs, and the mother and babies will gladly feast on you together.

Most of these serve the sole purpose of making stories interesting and campfires memorable. They also were great tools for our parents and grandparents to keep our mischief in check. The memories of those scares still haunt us sometimes, on lonesome walks or house-sitting at night. They did teach us to not follow strange voices, no matter how lovely, and not to take appearances for absolute reality.

The world would indeed be a very dull place without these ghosts and their supposed shenanigans, their legends and myths.

Let's hope nothing but a jokkho crosses our paths.

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Photo: Collected

