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Delving into Bangalee folklore through
THE WORLD OF GOHEEN

SARA KABIR

There is a certain irony in the fact that one of the most culturally rooted card games to emerge from Bangladesh in recent years began not with a grand mission to preserve heritage, but with a casual evening in the woods.

Mubasher Hasan – the creator and designer of "Goheen" – was visiting his nanabari during Eid in 2024, wandering through a patch of forest with his cousin and revisiting the ghost stories he had grown up with when the idea for the card game was born. Later that night, while unpacking board games he had brought along on the trip, he thought: what if these very stories could live inside a deck of cards?

From that simple thought, Goheen materialised. It is a fast-paced set-collecting card game built entirely around characters and creatures from Bangalee folklore. At a glance, the premise sounds simple: players collect cards, build sets, and earn points. Yet, the gameplay quickly reveals its teeth. Cards can be stolen. Carefully built strategies can collapse in a single turn. Alliances shift. Tension lingers at the table.

Mubasher's background as a gamer heavily shaped the mechanics, as he drew inspiration from a range of existing tabletop systems, reshaping and redefining the rules to form something distinct and unique to Bangalee culture. Interaction and unpredictability sit at the core of the design. Rather than passive point accumulation, the structure

Mubasher Hasan

Thanvir Ahmed Rio

encourages stealing, counterplay, and constant recalibration. Even the rulebook offers variants, allowing players to choose how aggressive they want the experience to be.

However, what truly makes the game stand out is how closely its mechanics are tied to the folklore itself. The characters are not there merely for decoration; rather, their powers reflect their stories. For instance, Behula can revive a card from the discard pile, mirroring her legendary journey to bring Lokhindar back from the dead. Similarly, Shakchunni can steal a male supernatural card already in play, echoing her role in folklore. In this way, the abilities do more than reference myth; they actively shape gameplay, placing characters we know from Bangalee folklore at the core of the experience.

Designing the deck, however, required difficult choices. Bangalee folklore spans centuries, from early literary traditions to contemporary urban legends, and a single card game cannot contain all of it. The list had to be narrowed while maintaining a balance between narrative significance and playability. Assigning lore-appropriate powers that still worked within a fair system was, therefore, one of the most challenging aspects of development.

Meanwhile, the artwork took considerably longer to finalise. Illustrator Thanvir Ahmed Rio worked on 33 pieces over roughly sixteen months. Character designs evolved

Arafat Wasi

through experimentation: colour palettes were adjusted, visual details refined, and certain figures replaced when they did not feel quite right. The title lettering, on the other hand, was designed by Jewel Das, who crafted the visual identity of the name itself.

One particularly interesting creative challenge involved the character of Boga. The difficulty lay in the fact that traditional descriptions are vague. The final design blended serpentine features with elements inspired by native fish like the Shoal fish, tying the mythical being back to Bangladesh's delta landscape. This approach reflects Rio's own commitment to reinterpreting folklore visually rather than simply copying established fantasy tropes.

Interestingly, naming the game turned out to be one of the most challenging portions of the design process. After discarding numerous possibilities, "Goheen" was suggested, representing a dense forest where these fabled creatures reside. The word captures both the physical setting that inspired the game and the metaphorical depth of the culture it draws from.

When the prototype was first assembled, it was entirely DIY: printed names and powers taped onto borrowed cards. Early playtests compared multiple rule variations before settling on the more interaction-heavy version that now defines the experience. Across sessions involving corporate professionals, university students, schoolchildren from Bangla and English-medium institutions, families in urban homes, and relatives in villages, one pattern emerged consistently: the game brought out everyone's competitive side. More importantly, it sparked conversations about folklore.

Arafat Wasi, co-founder of Playground Inc. and production lead of the project, sees Goheen as part of a broader momentum within the Bangladeshi tabletop space. Titles like "Polashi" and "Pyachforon" have already demonstrated that Bangla language, local humour, and regional history can shape modern tabletop experiences in compelling ways.

While the ecosystem remains smaller than global markets dominated by games like Uno or Bridge, the scene is slowly evolving from hobbyist enthusiasm into something resembling a creative industry. Releasing Goheen in Bangla is therefore not a limitation but a deliberate choice.

Ultimately, the game is about gathering around a table and engaging directly with cultural memory through play. It transforms familiar figures into strategic tools without stripping them of their narrative weight. Within a wider resurgence of interest in Bangalee cultural memory, Goheen offers something distinct: an interactive experience. In a market saturated with imported dragons and borrowed legends, it makes a clear and confident proposition: our local stories are more than cultural background; they are living worlds meant to be touched, tested, and triumphantly played.

Sara Kabir is a dreamer, writer, and literature lover. She's currently a lecturer at North South University. Find her musings on Instagram @scarletfangirl.