#PERSPECTIVE

The Bengali ghosts we see in ourselves

In Bengali ghost stories, even the dead have preferences. The Mechho Bhoot wants a share of your fish. The Shakchunni cannot quite give up her attachment to domestic life. The Gechho Bhoot has settled into a tree, and so, everyone else has to take the longer route home.

Their habits are part of what makes them memorable. Look past the frightening appearances, and you might recognise the relative who plans every visit around lunch, the friend who struggles to let go of the past, or yourself refusing to leave your favourite corner of the house.

With a little imagination, these familiar spirits make an entertaining guide to our own personalities. So, which Bengali ghost sounds most like you?

MECHHO BHOOT KNOWS WHAT IS FOR LUNCH

The Mechho Bhoot pesters fishermen and people carrying fish until they surrender a share. Here is a creature that has crossed into the afterlife without losing interest in dinner.

You might recognise yourself if a family lunch becomes more exciting at the mention of ilish. You have a preferred piece, notice when fish has been overcooked and find "all fish tastes the same" personally upsetting.

Food keeps you connected to people and places. Just remember that someone beside you may also have an emotional attachment to the largest piece.

SHAKCHUNNI IS THE ASSERTIVE VOICE



Recognised by the shankha bangles or traditional jewellery associated with married South Asian women, the Shakchunni remains attached to domestic life. In some stories, she takes another woman's place in a household. Often described as a woman who died unmarried or with unfulfilled wishes, the Shakchunni may have loose hair, a dark green skin tone, luring features and backwards-facing feet. Her story varies, but she rarely seems interested in pleasing anyone.

Perhaps you understand the feeling. A relative asks when you will marry, then explains why your answer is wrong. Someone comments on your weight before saying hello. Once, you smiled. Now, you have a follow-up question.

Your Shakchunni tendencies emerge when you stop submitting every decision for family approval. Some call it attitude. You call it having answered this already. The challenge is deciding which arguments deserve your afternoon.



BRAHMADAITYA WOULD LIKE TO ADD SOME CONTEXT

Commonly portrayed as a Brahmin spirit wearing a dhoti and sacred thread, the Brahmadaitya is often learned, helpful or protective. You suspect he would contribute enthusiastically to an adda.

You may recognise yourself if friends come to you for explanations and book recommendations. You enjoy being useful, although a passing remark sometimes activates everything you know. Someone mentions a film and receives its production history. Lunch takes a detour through agricultural policy. Meanwhile, somebody has quietly gone to make tea. Your curiosity is a strength. Knowing when everyone has enough information would make you even better company.

GECHHO BHOOT HAS FOUND A COMFORTABLE SPOT

The tree-dwelling Gechho Bhoot has chosen its address and settled in. You understand this if you have a particular chair that other people are technically allowed to use.

You enjoy company, preferably on your balcony, where everything is already comfortable. Friends say you are difficult to bring out. You wonder why they cannot come over. Your ideal village holiday involves sitting under a tree while relatives ask what you plan to do all day. You have already begun doing it.

There is much to admire in being content where you are. Still, after declining six invitations, it may be time to leave your branch.

However, you may discover that your inner ghost changes with the occasion. The Mechho Bhoot appears when someone reaches for the last piece of ilish, or the Petni takes over when a relative asks about marriage for the third time. Perhaps that is why these ghosts may feel so familiar. Their habits are ours, exaggerated just enough to make a good story.

Nevertheless, keep that in mind the next time you call someone a Petni, they might have a convincing case for what you are.

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