

# Indigenous Theatrical Performance in Bangladesh:

## Its History and Practice

Volume 1

Ph. D.

**SYED JAMIL AHMED**

Dissertation Presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
at the Department of Bangla

University of Dhaka

in January 1997

**Indigenous Theatrical Performance in Bangladesh:  
Its History and Practice**

**Volume 1**

**SYED JAMIL AHMED**

Dissertation presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
at the Department of Bangla,  
University of Dhaka  
in January 1997.



382314

....বাড়ির কাছে আরশীনগর

সেথা এক পড়শী বসত করে ....

(লালন শাহ, ১৭৭৪-১৮৯০)

.... my neighbour

who lives in a city of mirrors

near my house ....

(Lalan Shah, 1774-1890)

## Abstract

This dissertation attempts to study a wide variety of indigenous theatre genres of Bangladesh and build a diachronic construct of historical development from c. 4th century AD to the present.

- Introduction** Deals with the aim of the present study, current trend in evaluating the indigenous theatre performance and history, methodology adopted for the present study and its geographical area, definition of key terms and the main theme of chapters.
- Chapter One** Provides relevant background required for the study which includes information on the geo-physical features of Bangladesh, the racial origin and socio-economic conditions of the people, an out-line of socio-political history and the doctrine, philosophy and characteristic features of religions and cults important for this study (i.e., Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Nātha cult and Dharma cult).
- Chapter Two** Attempts to identify the salient characteristics of indigenous theatre in the neighbouring regions of Bangladesh, such as classical Sanskrit theatre in ancient India, theatre in Mithilā, Assam valley, Orissa and the Nepalese kingdoms, Buddhist theatre in ancient India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Tibet, Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal and adjoining Himalayan belt, and the theatre of Dharma cult and Śaiva cult in West Bengal (India).
- Chapter Three** Attempts to study over seventy-five genres of indigenous theatre of Bangladesh, in which brief and relevant information on social background, performance space, text, costume, musical instruments etc. have been provided and brief structural analysis of the major genres have also been given.
- Chapter Four** Strives to reconstruct historical development of the indigenous theatre in four periods: (i) the Ancient (c. 300 AD to c. 1200 AD), (ii) the Early Medieval (c. 1200 AD to c. 1500 AD), (iii) the Late Medieval (c. 1500 AD to c. 1750 AD) and (iv) the Modern (c. 1750 AD to late 20th century). Development in each of these

periods have been traced from the view-point of patronry: of the people and of the court. The former has been further subdivided in accordance with various cult systems, secular genres and supra-personae genres; the latter has been studied under the heads of classical Sanskrit theatre and its derivatives, Buddhist theatre and the court theatre of Muslim rulers.

## **Conclusion**

Summarizes the highlights of the above chapters :

1. that there existed a continuous tradition of theatre in the eastern part of Indian sub-continent;
2. that the classical Sanskrit tradition bears close affinity with the indigenous theatre of ancient and medieval Bengal;
3. that the history of the indigenous theatre of Bengal/Bangladesh stretches back to at least 4th century AD, from which period various cults and religions (Buddhism, Nātha cult, Dharma cult, Islam, Vaiṣṇavism, and Śaiva-Śākta cults) helped develop a large number of genres, quite a few of which still exist today;
4. that many existing genres in Bangladesh today follow dramaturgy and performance techniques distinct from European theatre; and
5. that in terms of essential characteristics, there exists a large variety in dramaturgy, mode of performance, performance space and performance techniques of the various genres of indigenous theatre of Bangladesh.

## Acknowledgement

As a student of the National School of Drama (New Delhi, India) in mid seventies, I was fascinated by the deep interest in indigenous theatre and quest for national identity among noted theatre practitioners of India. The vast amount of work, both in theory as well as practice and the wonderful variety of indigenous theatre of India created a strong urge in me: why should not Bangladesh have a national theatre idiom rooted in its indigenous theatre tradition which would be capable of reflecting the hopes, dreams and aspirations of the people of the country - a theatre both popular as well as meaningful? Today, as I submit this dissertation, I bow with deepest respect to all those stalwarts I was inspired by as a student, specially B.V. Karanth and Bansi Kaul. Born and brought up in urban and Euro-centric educational tradition, I owe it to them, Karanthji and Bansi, for inspiring the desire in me to discover my own country. Indeed, this work has been a flight back home for me: a flight back to confront myself as though in a mirror. And at the risk of uttering an outmoded form of expression, I must say that this land of mine, Bangladesh, is the most beautiful on this earth and I am proud to be a Bangladeshi.

I am proud, because in all my 'voyages' to different parts of this country I have discovered for myself a tradition of wisdom and creativity which is the collective product of the people and which is their strength. During these 'voyages' I have met people - especially the performers - who showed me a glimpse of the *acin pākhi*, the bird unknown, in its flight to the boundless sky. I have been deeply impressed by their skill and knowledge and also their hospitality and patience. To these masters, whom I have noted separately while discussing their performances, I bow with sincere respect. I can only hope that I have been able to do some justice to their work. I can only hope, too, that some day at least, I will be able to be a part of this vast ocean and acquire the secret of "the moon surrounded by moons".

In all the 'voyages', I have always been received with gracious hospitality. Bijan Kumar Sen, Anupam Moni, Jasim and Khoda Buksh of Thakurgaon, Advocate Abdul Hai and Mrs. Hai of Dinajpur, Molla Abdul Wahed, Shumon and Rumon of Durgapur, Rajshahi, Rasamohan Simha, Kamini Kumar Simha and Chandra Kumar Simha of Madhabpur, Sylhet, Muhammad Taslimuddin, Rantu, Obaidul and Manik of Natore, Tayeb Hasan Babu of Satkhira, Abu Hossain of Gopalganj, Kazi Panna and Ruhul Amin of Gopalpur, Tangail, Nazrul Islam and Wahidul Islam of Bagerhat, Śaktipada Cakravartī of Narail, Muhammad Mustafa of Lohagara, Munibur Hasan Quddus of Pangsha, Mohammad Saleq of Bogra, Badruzzaman Alamgir of Bajitpur, Kishoreganj,

Shyamaprasad Bhattacharya of Srikail are only a few to whose kindness I am helplessly indebted: a debt which is hardly possible to repay in one's lifetime. To the hundreds of others, anonymous faces of brief encounters who led me in my 'voyage', I offer my most sincere gratitude. And you, Ashok, Rashed, Shiraj, Nantu and Selim, companions in my voyages, thank you for having been there, for otherwise, I may have been quite lost.

At the University of Dhaka, I am indebted to the former Vice Chancellor Professor Emajuddin Ahamad for granting me leave of four months and partial support for typing this dissertation, to the Dean of the Faculty of Arts Professor Aminul Islam and my colleagues at the Department of Theatre and Music, Wahida Mallik and Israfil Shaheen for taking responsibilities off my shoulder which enabled me to concentrate on this work. I am also grateful to Professor Naren Biswas and Dr Mridulkanti Chakravarti for their invaluable consultations. I offer my heart-felt thanks to Babul Prosad of Department of English for his tireless effort in making final corrections of this dissertation and to the Chairman, Department of English for making available the computer at the Department for the above work. I would also like to tender my gratitude to Mr Shamsuzzaman Khan, the former Director, Research and Compilation, Folklore Division, Bangla Academy for permitting me to see the video tapes of a few performances preserved at the Folklore A/V unit. Needless to say, without the support from all of them, this work would have been quite impossible.

But acknowledging gratitude to my wife Tahmina and my daughter Nishita would be too little. They have been patient with my obsession with this work, they have stood by me and supported me - all through their pain and loneliness. May this work prove to be worth all they have been through. And my parents, who always had faith in me and who have always staunchly supported me all through my periods of trial, I bow with all my reverence: may this life of mine, which they made so lovingly a gift for me, prove to be worthy of their love and faith.

In the indigenous theatre of Bangladesh, it is customary and obligatory to offer ones respect to ones preceptor. This I do at the end, to Professor Anisuzzaman, because he provided me the solid ground to stand on, my anchor in all my 'voyages'. Because of him, I have had the courage. I feel proud to have had this opportunity to work under his supervision. He has been a true preceptor and this work is the only offering I can make for him.

## TRANSLITERATION

All italicized titles of literary texts and technical terms in Bangla and Sanskrit and also names of authors from ancient, medieval and non-urban Bengal and India have been transliterated in the following system.

অ = a	ক = k	ঠ = th	ব = b	ড় = ḍ
আ = ā	খ = kh	ড = ḍ	ভ = bh	ঢ = dḥ
ই = i	গ = g	ঢ = dḥ	ম = m	য় = y
ঈ = ī	ঘ = gh	ণ = ṅ	য় = y	ং = ṁ
উ = u	ঙ = ṅ	ত = t	র = r	ঃ = h
ঊ = ū	চ = c	থ = th	ল = l	° = ~
ঋ = r̄	ছ = ch	দ = d	ব = v/w	ক্ষ = kṣ
এ = e	জ = j	ধ = dh	শ = ś	
ঐ = ai	ঝ = jh	ন = n	ষ = ṣ	
ও = o	ঞ = ñ	প = p	স = s	
ঔ = au	ট = ṭ	ফ = ph	হ = h	

The plural form of all technical terms have been shown with non-italicized 's'. The names of modern (urban) Bangladeshi and Indian authors and their works are presented as they themselves transliterate them. In case such is not available, conventional usage has been followed for the names and the texts have been transliterated following the above system. Conventional usage has also been followed for all Muslim names and all other names and terms from outside Bengal and India. All ancient and medieval names of places have been transliterated; but conventional usage has been followed for the modern period.



## CONTENTS

### Volume 1

		Page No.
Abstract	:	i
Acknowledgement	:	iii
Transliteration	:	v
Table of Contents	: Text	vi
	List of Illustrations:	
	Maps, Plans and Sketches	xii
	Photographs	xvi
Introduction	:	1
Chapter	1 : An Outline of Socio-cultural Background	11
	1.1 : The Land	11
	1.2 : The People	12
	1.3 : History of Bengal	13
	1.4 : Religions and Cults of Bengal	25
Chapter	2 : Indigenous Theatre in Neighbouring Regions	60
	2.1 : Classical Sanskrit Theatre	60
	2.2 : Theatre in Mithilā	77
	2.3 : Theatre in Nepalese Kingdoms	78
	2.4 : Theatre in Orissa	81
	2.5 : Theatre in Assam Valley	82
	2.6 : Buddhist Theatre in Ancient India	85
	2.7 : Buddhist Theatre in Sri Lanka	91
	2.8 : Buddhist Theatre in Myanmar (Burma)	95
	2.9 : Buddhist Theatre in Tibet (China)	96
	2.10 : Buddhist Theatre in Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal and Adjoining Himalayan Region	104
	2.11 : Theatre of Dharma Cult and Śaiva Cult in West Bengal (India)	104

Chapter	3	: Indigenous Theatrical Performances of Bangladesh	130
	3.1	: Tales Related to Manasā	130
	3.1.1	: Padmā-purāṇ Gān (Rangpur)	130
	3.1.2	: Rayānī Gān	134
	3.1.3	: Manasār P̃ācālī	139
	3.1.4	: Padmā-purāṇ Gān (Natore)	141
	3.1.5	: Bhāsān Gān	143
	3.1.6	: Bhāsān Pālā Gān	146
	3.1.7	: Biṣaharīr Gān	148
	3.1.8	: Beilyā Nācārī	149
	3.1.9	: Bhāsān Yātrā	151
	3.1.10	: J̃hāpān Khelā	155
	3.2	: Tales Related to Kṛṣṇa and Caitanya	156
	3.2.1	: Līlā Kīrtan	156
	3.2.2	: Pālā Kīrtan	163
	3.2.3	: Kṛṣṇa Yātrā	164
	3.2.4	: Sāj Kīrtan	167
	3.2.5	: Maṇipurī Rās Nr̥tya : Rās Līlā and Goṣṭha Līlā	170
	3.2.6	: Janmāṣṭamī Michil	176
	3.2.7	: Naukā-vilās Michil	177
	3.3	: Tales Related to Rāmacandra	178
	3.3.1	: Rāmāyaṇa Gān	178
	3.3.2	: Kuśān Gān	182
	3.3.3	: Lakṣmīr Gān	186
	3.3.4	: Rāma Yātrā	189
	3.3.5	: Maheśā Khelā	191
	3.4	: Performances Related to Śiva and Kālī	193
	3.4.1	: Saṅg Yātrā	193
	3.4.2	: Performances of the Māndāi Community	199
	3.4.3	: Mukho Nācā	202
	3.4.4	: Kālī Kāc	207

3.4.5	: Aṣṭak Gān	211
3.4.6	: Aṣṭak Yātrā	212
3.4.7	: Gamīrā Nāc	214
3.4.8	: Śīva-Gaurī Nāc	215
3.4.9	: Nīler Gājan and other festivals of Śīva	215
3.5	: Performances Related to Buddhism and Nātha Cult	216
3.5.1	: Yogīr Gān	216
3.5.2	: Yugi Parva	220
3.5.3	: Jyā	221
3.5.4	: Buddha Kīrtan (Pālā Gān), Gāyener Nāc and Bulu	223
3.6	: Tales Related to Muslim Saints and Legendary Heroes	224
3.6.1	: Jārī Gān, Jārī Gazal and Bānglā Jārī of Eastern Mymensingh	224
3.6.2	: Jārī Gān of Northern Bangladesh	229
3.6.3	: Jārī Gān of South-western Bangladesh	231
3.6.4	: Nāicer Jārī	235
3.6.5	: Jaṅg Jārī	236
3.6.6	: Imām Yātrā (Jārī Yātrā)	237
3.6.7	: Gāzīr Gān	238
3.6.8	: Gāzīr Yātrā	244
3.6.9	: Mādār Pīrer Gān	249
3.6.10	: Satya Pīrer Gān	254
3.6.11	: Satya Pīrer Yātrā	258
3.6.12	: Mānik Pīrer Jārī	258
3.6.13	: Mānik Yātrā	262
3.6.14	: Mā Māi Campār Kicchā-kāhini Jārī	262
3.6.15	: Beḍā Bhāsān	264
3.6.16	: Paillyā Yātrā (Pātilā Gān)	266
3.6.17	: Kaḍcā	269
3.6.18	: Pūthi Pāṭh (Kitāb-paḍa)	270

3.6.19	: Sawāl Jawāb (Kitāb-paḍā)	271
3.7	: Secular Tales	272
3.7.1	: Yātrā	272
3.7.2	: Jhumur Yātrā	278
3.7.3	: Pālā Gān and Kecchā Gān of Eastern Mymensingh	281
3.7.4	: Maittyā Tāmsā	287
3.7.5	: Pālā Gān (Bogra)	291
3.7.6	: Kecchā Kāhini	293
3.7.7	: Kecchā-bandī Gān	295
3.7.8	: Śāstra (Hāstar Gān)	297
3.7.9	: Ḍhak Yātrā	297
3.7.10	: Ḍhaṅg Yātrā	298
3.7.11	: Ghāṭu Gān	300
3.7.12	: Pālātiā Gān : Raṅg Pācālī	303
3.7.13	: Pālātiā Gān : Śāstriya Pācālī	306
3.7.14	: Gambhīra Gān	308
3.7.15	: Gambhīra Yātrā	310
3.7.16	: Ālkāp Gān	311
3.7.17	: Tāḍi Gān	315
3.8	: Tales Related to Other Deities and Hybrid Performances	316
3.8.1	: Pācālī	316
3.8.2	: Performances of the Santhals	318
3.8.3	: Kavi Gān	319
3.8.4	: Putul Nāc and Putul Yātrā	323
3.8.5	: Lāthi-khelā	326
3.8.6	: Paṭuā Gān	329
Chapter 4	: History of Indigenous Theatre of Bangladesh	352
4.1	: Ancient Period (c. 300 AD - c. 1200 AD)	352
4.1.1	: Classical Sanskrit Theatre and Its Derivatives	352
4.1.2	: Buddhist Theatre	356

4.1.3	: Theatre of the People	371
	1. Nātha Cult	371
	2. Dharma Cult	376
	3. Śaiva Cult	379
	4. Popular Kṛṣṇa Cult	380
	5. Secular Genres	380
	6. Supra-personae Genres	382
4.2	: Early Medieval Period (c. 1200 AD - c. 1500 AD)	382
4.2.1	: Derivatives of Classical Sanskrit Theatre	383
4.2.2	: Buddhist Theatre	384
4.2.3	: Theatre of the People	385
	1. Śaiva Cult and Dharma Cult	386
	2. Nātha Cult	388
	3. Cults of Kṛṣṇa and Rāma	388
	4. Śākta Cult	393
	5. Secular Genres	395
	6. Supra-personae Genres	396
4.2.4	: Court-theatre of Muslim Rulers	396
4.3	: Late Medieval Period (c. 1500 AD - c. 1750 AD)	398
4.3.1	: Court-theatre of Muslim Rulers	399
4.3.2	: Court-theatre of Hindu and Buddhist Rulers	401
4.3.3	: Theatre of the People	404
	1. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism	404
	2. Cults of Aryan Pantheon	417
	3. Śākta Cult	420
	4. Śaiva Cult	424
	5. Nātha Cult	424
	6. Dharma Cult	425
	7. Islamic Genres	426
	8. Secular Genres	434
	9. Supra-personae Genres	436

4.4	:	Modern Period (c. 1750 AD - late 20th century)	436
4.4.1	:	Derivatives of Classical Sanskrit and Buddhist Theatre	438
4.4.2	:	Theatre of the People	439
		1. Gauḍīya Vaisnavism	439
		2. Śākta Cult	443
		3. Cults of Aryan Pantheon	444
		4. Śaiva Cult	445
		5. Nātha Cult	445
		6. Dharma Cult	446
		7. Islamic Genres	446
		8. Secular Genres	449
		9. Supra-personae Genres	455
Conclusion	:		472
Bibliography	:		482
Appendix	:	Tables	500
		Glossary	506
		Maps, plans and sketches	510
		Photographs	volume 2

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

### A. Maps, Plans and Sketches

	Page No.	
Fig.1	Various territorial units of ancient Bengal	510
Fig.2	Rennell's map of Bengal (1779)	511
Fig.3	Current administrative districts	512
Fig.4	Erstwhile districts, referred to as "greater districts"	513
Fig.5	Sanskrit Theatre : The Medium Rectangle	514
Fig.6	Sanskrit Theatre : The Small Square	515
Fig.7	Sanskrit Theatre : The Small Triangle	516
Fig.8	The Amphitheatre at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa	517
Fig.9	Open-air Theatre for Kolam	518
Fig.10	Courtyard of Likir Gompa	519
Fig.11	Ground-plan of the Royal Monastery at Teng-gye-ling, Lhasa	519
Fig.12	Courtyard of Shey Gompa	520
Fig.13	Courtyard of Tikse Gompa	520
Fig.14	A set of <i>mudrās</i> (hand gestures) used in Tibetan theatrical performances	521
Fig.15	A female dancer, two actors and three musicians of an indigenous performance in the Himalayan region	522
Fig.16	Itinerant story-teller at a festival in the Himalayan region	522
Fig.17	Padmā-purāṇ Gān (Rangpur)	523
Fig.18	Rayānī Gān	523
Fig.19	Manasār Pācālī	524
Fig.20	Padmā-purāṇ Gān (Natore)	524
Fig.21	Bhāsān Gān	525
Fig.22	Bhāsān Pālā Gān	525
Fig.23	Biṣaharī Gān	526
Fig.24	Beilyā Nācārī	526
Fig.25	Bhāsān Yātrā	527

Fig.26	Īhāpān Khelā	527
Fig.27	Līlā Kīrtan	528
Fig.28	Pālā Kīrtan	528
Fig.29	Kṛṣṇa Yātrā	529
Fig.30	Sāj Kīrtan	529
Fig.31	Maṇipurī Rās Nr̥tya	530
Fig.32	Naukā-vilās Michil	530
Fig.33	Rāmāyaṇa Gān	531
Fig.34	Kuśān Gān	531
Fig.35	Lakṣmīr̥ Gān	532
Fig.36	Rāma Yātrā	532
Fig.37	Maheśā Khelā	533
Fig.38	Saṅg Yātrā	533
Fig.39	Mukho Nācā	534
Fig.40	Kālī Kāc	534
Fig.41	Aṣṭak Gān	535
Fig.42	Aṣṭak Yātrā	535
Fig.43	Gamīrā Nāc	536
Fig.44	Yogīr̥ Gān	536
Fig.45	Yugī Parva	537
Fig.46	Jārī Gān (Eastern Mymensingh)	537
Fig.47	Jārī Gazal (Eastern Mymensingh)	538
Fig.48	Bāṅglā Jārī (Eastern Mymensingh)	538
Fig.49	Jārī Gān (Northern Bangladesh)	539
Fig.50	Jārī Gān (South-western Bangladesh)	539
Fig.51	Nāicer Jārī	540
Fig.52	Jaṅg Jārī	540
Fig.53	Imām Yātrā	541
Fig.54	Gāzīr̥ Gān	541
Fig.55	Gāzīr̥ Gān	542
Fig.56	Gāzīr̥ Yātrā	542



Fig.57	Gāzīr Yātrā	543
Fig.58	Mādār Pīrer Gān	543
Fig.59	Mādār Pīrer Gān	544
Fig.60	Satya Pīrer Gān	544
Fig.61	Satya Pīrer Yātrā	545
Fig.62	Mānik Pīrer Jārī	545
Fig.63	Mā Māi Campār Kicchā-kāhinī Jārī	546
Fig.64	Pāillyā Yātrā (Pātilā Gān)	546
Fig.65	Kaḍcā	547
Fig.66	Ṣūthi Pāṭh (Kitāb-paḍā)	547
Fig.67	Sawāl Jawāb (Kitāb-paḍā)	548
Fig.68	Yātrā	548
Fig.69	Jhumur Yātrā	549
Fig.70	Jhumur Yātrā	549
Fig.71	Jhumur Yātrā	550
Fig.72	Pālā Gān (Eastern Mymensingh)	550
Fig.73	Māiṭṭyā Tāmsā	551
Fig.74	Māiṭṭyā Tāmsā	551
Fig.75	Pālā Gān (Bogra)	552
Fig.76	Kecchā Kāhinī	552
Fig.77	Kecchā-bandī Gān	553
Fig.78	Śāstra (Hāstar Gān)	553
Fig.79	Ḍhak Yātrā	554
Fig.80	Ḍhaṅg Yātrā	554
Fig.81	Ghāṭu Gān	555
Fig.82	Ghāṭu Gān	555
Fig.83	Ghāṭu Gān	556
Fig.84	Pālātiā Gān : Raṅg Ṣācālī	556
Fig.85	Pālātiā Gān : Śāstriya Ṣācālī	557
Fig.86	Gambhīrā Gān	557
Fig.87	Gambhīrā Yātrā	558

Fig.88	Ālkāp Gān	558
Fig.89	Ṭāḍi Gān	559
Fig.90	Ṣācālī	559
Fig.91	Kavi Gān	560
Fig.92	Putul Nāc	560
Fig.93	Lāṭhi-khelā	561
Fig.94	Paṭuā Gān	561

Volume 2

B. Photographs

	Serial No.
Padmā-purāṇ Gān (Rangpur)	1-4
Rayānī Gān	5-7
Padmā-purāṇ Gān (Natore)	8-11
Bhāsān Gān	12-14
Beilyā Nācārī	15-17
Bhāsān Yātrā (Natore)	18-21
Bhāsān Yātrā (Tangail)	22-25
Līlā Kīrtan	26-29
Kṛṣṇa Yātrā	30-32
Sāj Kīrtan	33-36
Mañipurī Rās Nṛtya: Rās Līlā	37-39
Mañipurī Rās Nṛtya: Goṣṭha Līlā	40-42
Janmāṣṭamī Michil	43-46
Naukā-vilās Michil	47-49
Rāmāyaṇa Gān	50-53
Kuśān Gān	54-57
Lakṣmīr Gān	58-60
Rāma Yātrā	61-64
Saṅg Yātrā	65-67
Saṅg Yātrā Make-up	68-71
Mukho Nācā	72-75
Kālī Kāc	76-78
Aṣṭak Gān	79-82
Yogīr Gān	83-85
Yugī Parva	86-89
Jārī Gān (Eastern Mymensingh)	90-92
Gāzīr Yātrā	93-96
Mādār Pīrer Gān	97-100

Satya Pīrer Gān	101-104
Mānik Pīrer Jārī	105-108
Mā Māi Campār Kicchā-kāhini Jārī	109-112
Ṣhūthī Pāth (Kitāb-pada)	113
Bānglā Jārī	114
Kicchā Gān	115-116
Yātrā	117-120
Jhumur Yātrā	121-124
Pālā Gān (Eastern Mymensingh)	125-128
Kecchā Kāhini	129-131
Ghāṭu Gān	132-135
Pālāṭiā Gān : Raṅg Ṣācālī	136-138
Pālāṭiā Gān : Śāstriya Ṣācālī	139-141
Gambhīra Gān	142-145
Ālkāp Gān	146-149
Kavi Gān	150-152
Putul Nāc	153-155
Lāthi-khelā	156-159
Paṭuā Gān	160-162
Goddess Manasā	163
Paṭ	164

## *Introduction*

It is still the view of majority of scholars and theatre practitioners of Bangladesh as well as West Bengal (India) that theatre in Bangla (Bengali) language originated in 1795, the credit of which is entirely due to Gerasim Stepanovich Lebedeff, a linguist and musician from Russia. The fervour noted in bi-centennial celebration of the event, held in Calcutta and Dhaka in 1995 and the laudatory praise showered on Lebedeff is but one example of the widespread belief which still holds firm roots. The belief is based on the theory that central to theatre is conflict as propounded by Freytag, Brunetiere and Archer.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, there also exists studies devoted to the so-called 'folk' theatre which have made serious attempts to study non-European 'traditional' theatre of Bengal/Bangladesh. Important among these are Asutosh Bhattacharyya's *Bānglār Loka Sāhitya*, Gourishankar Bhattacharya's *Bānglā Lokañāṭya Samīkṣā*, Sukumar Sen's *Naṭ Nāṭya Nāṭak* and Asit K. Bandyopadhyay's *Bangala Sahityer Itivritta*.<sup>2</sup> What is characteristic about all these work, not undermining their merit, is their inherent hesitance as to whether 'folk' theatre can be rightfully acknowledged as 'legitimate' theatre at all. The hesitance is derived from complete faith in European dramatic theory introduced during colonial rule, according to which 'folk' theatre of Bengal/Bangladesh is at best quasi-theatrical. Two other aspects which seriously limit the scope of these works are (i) predominance of literary materials over actual performance and (ii) general tendency of placing the history of 'folk' theatre in the Brahminical tradition which traces the growth from the Vedas, relegating the contribution of the Buddhists to marginal position and failing to mention the contribution of the Muslims.

In recent years, three institutions in Bangladesh have also made important contributions to be study of 'folk' theatre. These are the Bangla Academy (Dhaka), Lokenattya O Sangskritik Unnayan Kendro (Khulna) and the Gram Theatre (Dhaka). The work of Bangla Academy, which is most important of the three, is valuable for its documentation, field-work and publication of various performance texts. But its approach is generally that of the folklorists and lack detailed description of important elements of theatre such as performance space, performance technique and elements of performance. The Lokenattya O Sangskritik Unnayan Kendro's attempts are limited because it too views 'folk' theatre as being quasi-theatrical. Finally Gram Theatre, which attempts to be a national movement with over 160 branches all over Bangladesh, is limited because most of its activists are unclear about the historical development of 'folk' theatre and lack critical insight to systematically evaluate available 'folk' theatre materials.

Since the 80s, there has also been a tremendous surge of interest in 'folk' theatre among the urban theatre practitioners of Bangladesh. The interest, in most cases, is derived out of an urge to claim the 'roots' of theatre tradition of the country and evolve a theatre idiom which can claim to be the national theatre of Bangladesh. The work of Dhaka Theatre in productions such as *Kīttan-kholā*, *Kerāmat Maṅgal*, *Hāth-hadāi*, *Cāka* and *Jaibatī Kanyār Man*, of Dhaka Padatik in those of *Ingit* and *Biṣād Sindhu*, of Theatre (Bailey Road) in *Biṣalakkhyār Churi* and of Theatre (Arambag) in *Rūp-bān* are expressions of the concern mentioned above. On the other hand, in West Bengal, the interest in 'folk' theatre goes back to the 60s, specially with the growth of *Yātrās* on contemporary historical and biographical themes such as *Lenin* (1970) and *Hitler* (1969). Of course, in this context it is imperative to mention the name of Jasim Uddin, who, with works such as *Beder Meve*, *Madhumālā* and *Pallībadhū*, championed the 'folk' heritage of Bengal in the 50s and 60s.

Towards the very end of 20th century there exists quite a strong interest in the 'folk' theatre tradition both among the practitioners as well as the scholars but it lacks critical insight based on observation of actual performance and its systematic analysis. Predominance of the dramatic theory which identifies the 'folk' theatre tradition as quasi-theatrical and also misconceptions about its historical development appears to be primary hindrances to obtaining necessary critical insight. It is important, therefore, to observe and analyse actual performances of the 'folk' theatre, not from the point of view of dated dramatic theory but that out of which it has grown. It is also imperative to attempt to reconstruct its history, taking into account the contribution of the Buddhists, the Muslims and other cult practitioners. The present study has been undertaken with the objectives noted above.

The methodology adopted for the present study is based on (i) field work (witnessing performances in actual condition, interviewing the performers and the spectators, studying written texts or audio recording of the performances and photographing the same), (ii) study of various literary sources (including literary texts, critical studies of them by various scholars of repute as well as ancient and medieval travel accounts), (iii) study of archaeological sites and (iv) study of ethnographic parallels in the field of theatre, drawn from regions neighbouring Bangladesh.

The geographical area of the study has been what constitutes Bangladesh today, since the country constitutes the major area inhabited by the people who speak Bangla language and since most of the varieties of 'folk' theatre material exist in this area. Moreover, paucity of available fund and limited time also went into limiting the field work to the above mentioned geographical area. But the history of the country is inseparable from that the

Bangla-speaking area outside Bangladesh (i.e., West Bengal and parts of Assam and Tripura in India). Therefore the historical development encompasses the whole of Bengal till nearly the very end (i.e. 1947, corresponding to the partition of the region), following which it too has been limited to Bangladesh.

This study has made use of a number of terms which are necessary to be defined at the very outset. The term 'theatre' denotes any action produced by an individual or a group for another individual or a group in any three dimensional space.<sup>3</sup> The said action can be totally predetermined and based on written text or it can be totally improvised and based on oral text, with innumerable variations between the two poles. Dramatic conflict as a structural device is not an indispensable element to construct a piece of theatre. The term 'indigenous theatre' encompasses all forms of theatre which either originated in the region of Bengal (generally known as 'folk' theatre) or were assimilated by the inhabitants of the region over a considerable period of time from cultures organically related to it. The present study includes classical Sanskrit theatre as produced and performed in the region of Bengal because the north Indian (Aryan) culture, of which classical Sanskrit theatre was a product, was organically assimilated by that of Bengal, definitely by the end of 1st millennium AD. On the other hand, the forms of theatre based on European dramaturgy and (mostly) proscenium theatre conventions have not been included in this study for precisely opposite reason.

For the purpose of this study, the term 'performance' will denote the act of presenting a piece of theatre, while the agents who present the said piece are 'performers'; they include actors, dancers, singers, musicians, puppeteers (both male and female) and (in at least one case) those skilled in the martial arts; 'performance space' is where a performance is given. A performance can be composed of (i) dance, (ii) instrumental music and (iii) speech rendered in prose, verse or lyric, either in the form of narration or that of dialogue. The term 'narrative performance' denotes an act of presentation in which a single performer describes an event and/or portrays various characters related to the event, all in third person. 'Narrative performance in prose' refers to that in which the performer renders his/her lines in prose speech; 'narrative performance in verse' refers to that in which the performer renders his/her lines only in verse, and 'narrative performance in lyric' refers to that in which the performer sings his/her lines and sometimes also dances. As usually is the case, the performer makes effective use of vocal inflection and physical gesture in his/her portrayal of the characters; sometimes s/he also readjusts his/her basic costume and uses a few props to make the portrayal more effective. In all the three variants of narrative performance, the performer may be accompanied by instrumental and/or vocal music

rendered by a group of musicians and choral singers. In contrast, 'dialogic performance' refers to an act of presentation in which more than one performer enact an action in first person and enter into dialogue with each other, either in prose, verse or lyric. 'Dialogic performance in prose' is that in which the dialogue is in prose, 'dialogic performance in verse' is that in which the same is in verse and 'dialogic performance in lyric' is that in which the same is in lyric. In the last of the three variants, the performers may also dance. The performers in a dialogic performance may simply readjust their basic costume or may be specifically costumed for each character they portray. In all the three variants the performers may be accompanied by instrumental and/or vocal music rendered by a group of musicians and choral singers. The term 'mimetic performance' denotes enactment of characters in first person by one or more performers without the use of speech but accompanied by lyrical passages rendered by a choral group of singers and musicians. The enactment of characters is usually presented in dance movements; sometimes the performers may also be masked. Finally, the term 'recitative performance' denotes that in which a narrator renders his/her text in prose, verse an/or lyric (with or without choral and musical accompaniment) but entirely sitting, thus putting in effect hardly any physical gesture or movement which is intended to visualise the action being rendered. The three variants in each of narrative and dialogic performances along with the mimetic and the recitative have been cited as the 'elements of performance'. A performance may contain any one or more or all the eight elements. It would also be important to remember that the term 'genre' has been used in this study to signify bodies of performance distinct because of their form (which is determined by the elements of performance, performance space, music etc.) and content (which is determined by the objective of performance and the narrative, i.e., the story). Each genre has its inherent set of 'rules' and conventions adhered to by the performers and accepted as given by the spectators.

The genres of performance discussed in this study have been categorised in eight broad types. These are, (i) the Narrative, (ii) the Supra-narrative, (iii) the Dialogic, (iv) the Song-and-dance, (v) the Processional, (vi) the Supra-personae, (vii) the Performance-as-contest and (viii) the Recitative. The narrative genres are those in which the elements of narrative performance (prose, verse and/or lyric) predominate and the dialogic are those in which the elements of dialogic performance (one or more of the three variants) are dominant. The supra-narrative genres are those in which both narrative as well as dialogic elements are present. The song-and-dance type is characterised by dance rendered by performers enacting roles in the first person; they may render their dialogue in lyric or dance silently to the lyric rendered by a group of choral singers and musicians. The processional genres are



characterised by tableaux (often on vehicles), music, song and dance, all of which form a part of large processions attended by adherents of a particular religious faith. The supra-personae performances are those in which the human performer is distanced because of mask, puppet or painting, thereby creating the supra-personae. The characteristic feature of performance-as-contest genres is the pivotal role played by the aspect of contest between two groups of performers, which encroaches on fields of human activity known as 'games' or 'sport'; there may or may not be narrative content in these. Finally, the recitative genres are those which are composed of the recitative element of performance.

This study accepts the view that 'culture' is the sum total of material as well as intellectual production of a society. It is, in the words of Raymond Williams, "a whole social process"<sup>4</sup>, which is, as N'gugi Wa Thiong' O put it, "fashioned by a people in their collective endeavour to live and come to terms with their total environment"<sup>5</sup>. As a derivative of the above, it is assumed that theatre, as a cultural expression of a society, is first shaped by the people and then refined by the elite. In this 'bottom-up' process, the court theatre of the elite is always preceded by popular theatre and the two together form the organic whole of culture in a given society. Where this is not so, there is disjunction. In the 'bottom-up' process mentioned above, oral texts precede those that are written. And because till 19th century, written account of history has always been composed by the elite, there is little evidence of popular theatre in written form. Therefore, in order to reconstruct the history of popular theatre, oral texts and performances should be the primary sources. But because these have changed over the ages, the alternate source of information has to be looked for in the passing references in literary texts and corroborate them, if possible, with ethnological parallels drawn from neighbouring regions.

The present study has been divided into four chapters. These are:

1. An Outline of Socio-cultural Background;
2. Indigenous Theatre in Neighbouring Regions;
3. Indigenous Theatrical Performances of Bangladesh and
4. History of Indigenous Theatre of Bangladesh.

Chapter One provides necessary background information about Bangladesh which includes geo-physical data, ethnic composition, economic condition, racial origin of the people, political history from 4th c. AD to late 20th century including relevant socio-cultural aspects of significance and major religious systems which have influenced the people (i.e., Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Nātha cult and Dharma cult). Chapter Two examines theatre tradition of neighbouring regions of Bangladesh. These areas, such as India, Myanmar (Burma), Nepal and Tibet (China) are linked with Bengal/Bangladesh because of political and religious developments. Various political conditions and religious contacts have led to cultural diffusion from Bengal and

also assimilation of external influence in Bengal. Some of the salient features of theatre in the neighbouring regions can serve as corroborating evidence for reconstructing history of theatrical performance of the country. In this regard, India offers wide-ranging materials which are of interest and importance for this study. On the one hand, it offers classical Sanskrit theatre, refined and patronised mostly by royal courts aligned to Brahminical order. Secular in nature and urban in flavour, it is distinct from that developed by the Buddhists. Although play-texts and performance conventions of both appear akin to each other, nevertheless, there does exist distinction in philosophy and objective. It is also important to treat them under separate heads because, as will be seen in Chapter Four, they led to two distinct trends: the classical Sanskrit enjoying greater favour in the court and the Buddhist and its derivatives, among the people. In four later sections, the theme of Buddhist theatre is examined in relation to Myanmar, Sri Lanka, the Himalayan belt and Tibet, only with the objective of drawing corroborating evidence for theatre in ancient Bengal. On the other hand, various regional cults and religious movements of early medieval and late medieval periods gave rise to a number of theatrical genres. Of interest for this study are those developed by the Vaiṣṇavites in Assam Valley (north-eastern India) and the cults of Dharma and Śiva, which at one time exerted sway over greater Bengal but today enjoy vitality only in parts of West Bengal (India). The derivatives of classical Sanskrit theatre led to the development of medieval court-theatre in Mithilā (northern India), Orissa and Nepal. These three cases have been briefly examined with a view to drawing materials for medieval theatre in Bengal.

Chapter Three focuses on theatre performances currently seen in Bangladesh or used to be seen till recent times. The areas (former districts, at present referred to as greater districts) which have been covered in the field-work are as follows: Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bogra, Pabna, Rajshahi, Jessore, Khulna, Barisal, Faridpur, Dhaka, Tangail, Mymensingh, Sylhet, Comilla, Noakhali and Chittagong. Over seventy-five genres have been studied and analysed. Of these, studies of over seventy genres are based on actual witnessing of performances and/or interviews with two or more performers of the genres. The remaining five, from the tribal belts of Chittagong Hill Tracts, Tangail and Rajshahi (and adjoining areas) and an Islamic genre, are based on eye-witness accounts published recently. Excepting the minor cases, most of the genres have been studied in terms of: (i) background information of the genre, its performers and sponsors, (ii) performance space, (iii) texts, (iv) structure of performance and (v) miscellaneous information related to the genre. In terms of subject matter, the genres have been categorised under the following heads: (i) Tales related to Manasā, (ii) Tales related to Kṛṣṇa and Caitanya, (iii) Tales

related to Rāmacandra, (iv) Performances related to Śiva and Kālī, (v) Performances related to Buddhism and Nātha cult, (vi) Tales related to Muslim saints and legendary heroes, (vii) Secular tales, and (viii) Tales related to other deities and hybrid performances.

Having studied theatre in the neighbouring countries as well as existing genres in Bangladesh a reconstruction of historical development will be attempted in Chapter Four. The reconstruction will be conducted in four periods. These are: 1. Ancient Period (circa 300 AD to circa 1200 AD) : The period stretches from the occupation of Bengal by the Guptas in c. 300 AD, through the rules of various independent dynasties including the Pālas and the Senas, down to the advent of the Muslims in c. 1204. For convenience, the end of the period will be marked in c. 1200 AD. 2. Early Medieval Period (circa 1200 AD to circa 1500 AD) : The period begins with Muslim occupation of western Bengal, runs through major part of Sultanate period and ends with the advent of Caitanya. For convenience, the end of the period will be marked in c. 1500 AD. 3. Late Medieval Period (circa 1500 AD to circa 1750 AD) : The period begins with the advent of Caitanya and rise of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. Historians mark the end of medieval period with the Battle of Plassey in 1757. Therefore the end of Late Medieval Period will be marked in c 1750. 4. Modern Period (circa 1750 AD to late 20th century) : The period begins in c. 1750 when traces of colonial influence becomes evident and ends in the present time. In each of the first three periods mentioned above, development has been studied from the view-point of patrony: that provided by the people and that by the court. The theatre produced under court patrony has been studied under the heads of classical Sanskrit theatre and the court-theatre of the Muslim rulers. The Buddhist theatre, patronied indirectly by the court, has been studied separately because its history, shrouded in oblivion, needs special attention. On the other hand, theatre produced under the patrony of the people, has been studied under the same title and has been further sub-divided in accordance with various cult systems, secular genres and supra-personae genres. Although the history<sup>of</sup> people's theatre in any country is difficult to trace because the historians are usually from the ruling class and the ruling class always tends to overlook the culture of the people as unworthy and vulgar, nevertheless, attempts have been made to reconstruct the same from all possible sources and circumstantial evidences. In the fourth period, indigenous theatre of Bangladesh is virtually reduced to the theatre of the people (except Buddhist theatre of Chittagong Hill Tracts). Therefore, the period has been studied mostly under the components of theatre of the people which had already developed in late medieval period.

Finally, the conclusion of this study is drawn in the culminating chapter. A glossary of musical instruments, costumes and months of Bangla calendar follows the bibliography.

Maps, sketches and plans of classical Sanskrit theatre, Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and performance space of various genres of indigenous theatre of Bangladesh, along with photographs of performances are given in the Appendix. It should be noted here that the plans of the performance space are not in scale, that dotted lines represent non-elevated areas and running lines, elevated areas (with elevation marked in each) and only the position of stationary performers have been indicated in them. The dissertation has been presented in two volumes: all written matter, plans and sketches have been compiled in volume one; the photographs (164 in total) in volume two. The separate volume of photographs was necessary because of technical problem arising in binding laminated sheets.

Before concluding the preliminary business of introduction, it is acknowledged with all sincerity that the description and analysis of all the genres given in this study, in no way attempts to claim to be a complete representation of all existing materials available in Bangladesh today. The descriptions are mostly based on a single performance (witnessed in the rural areas in actual performance condition), supported by intensive interviews of the performers and the spectators. But, one of the essential characteristics of popular theatre is its ever-fluid nature which continues to evolve and readjust with every performance. Therefore, variation from what is given here is bound to occur. The detailed study of each genre, particularly from a careful ethnographic perspective, such as Philip Lutgendorf's *The Life of a Text: Performing the Rāmacaritamānas of Tulsidās*, which studies performances based on *Rāmacaritamānas* in north India, has not been the objective of this study. But it is hoped that it will be able to provide an authentic overview of the rich and intricate mosaic that the indigenous theatre of Bangladesh offers, which could then lead to further detailed work on each genre in future. Because the field study such as that reported in Chapter Three, has not been done before.

As for the reconstruction of history of indigenous theatre in Bangladesh, this is the first attempt which traces a diachronic development from the ancient to the modern period. It is acknowledged that a few links will prove to be at best 'tenable hypotheses' for scholars who look for 'concrete evidence', by which they imply 'evidence in written form'. Given that, it is important to remember that much of what is generally accepted about the Greek theatre and the Elizabethan theatre are also hypotheses. Richard Schechner clearly proves the case of classical Greek theatre. He show that towards the beginning of 20th century, scholars such as Frazer, Cornford, Harrison, Murray and their colleagues and followers (grouped together as the Cambridge school) expounded the thesis on the origin of Greek theatre. "Studying survivals of Greek ritual, these scholars found what they thought to be traces of

a 'Primal Ritual' from which they felt both attic tragedy and the surviving rituals derived."<sup>6</sup> But Schechner points out that "the assumptions of the Cambridge group have never been proven", although a great deal of archaeological excavations have been carried out in Greece since the theory was first propounded.<sup>9</sup> The same is also true about Elizabethan theatre: the entire range of scholarship on the shape of Elizabethan public theatres is based on a sketch (by oft-quoted Johannes de Witt, 1596), a contract (of the Fortune theatre, 1600) and scant references in play-texts from the period. At home, in Bangladesh, much of the problem of 'dating' medieval poets and their works has also been based on indirect corroborative evidence. It is hoped that if all the above can be accepted by the scholars as viable thesis, the reconstruction of historical development given in this study can prove to be a thesis of equal, if not greater, degree of logical argument.

End-notes: Introduction

1. Gustav Freytag, in his *Technique of Drama* (1863) formulated a triangular model composed of introduction, rising movement, climax, reversal and catastrophe, through which he showed that the action of a tragic plot gathered movement because of conflict with counteraction. The 'law of conflict' was further developed in F. Brunetiere's *Law of Action* (1894), in which he showed that "Drama is a representation of the will of man in conflict", A. Nicoll's *The Theory of Drama* (1937), in which he claimed that "All drama ultimately arises out of conflict" and John Howard Lawson's "The Law of Conflict" in *American Drama and its Critics* (ed. Allan Downer, 1965), in which he stated that "The essential character of drama is social conflict". For details please see William Archer, *Play-making* (Boston, 1912), Allardyce Nicoll, (New York, 1937) and *American Drama and its Critics* (Chicago, 1965).
2. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Banglar Loka Sahitya* (Calcutta, 1962), Gourishankar Bhattacharya, *Bāṅglā Lokanāṭya Samikṣā* (Calcutta: 1972), Asit Kumar Bandopadhyay, *Bangala Sahityer Itivritta* vol. 3, part 1 (Calcutta, 1993) and vol. 4 (Calcutta : 1985) and Sukumar Sen, *Nata Nāṭya Nāṭak* (Calcutta, 1372 BS). A PhD dissertation by Salim al-Deen from Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Bangladesh was completed in 1995 which has traced out historical development of medieval 'folk' theatre from literary sources. Unfortunately the dissertation was not made available during the time when the present study was being made. Another work, titled *Hajar Bachhar: Bangladesher Natak O Natya-kala* by the author of this study was also published in 1995, in which the history of theatre in Bangladesh, both 'folk' as well as urban, was briefly reconstructed. But detailed examination of various 'folk' theatre forms could not be incorporated in the work.
3. Peter Brook, in his *Empty Space*, discusses theatre from the same point of view. Richard Schechner, in his *Performance Theory*, also follows the same view point, except that he uses the term 'performance' for 'theatre' as used in this study. Please see Brook, *Empty Space* (Harmondsworth: 1972), 11, Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York: 1988), 30, 72; Eric Bentley, *The Theatre of Commitment* (London: 1968); Syed Jamil Ahmed, "Theatre Kī?" , *Sampratik Shilpabhabna*, ed. Ashok Karmakar (Dhaka: 1993).
4. Quoted in *Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Joseph Childers and Gary Hentzi (New York: 1995), 24.
5. N'gugi Wa Thiong 'O, *Homecoming* (London: 1972), 2.
6. Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*, 2.
7. *Ibid.*, 2.

## *Chapter One : An Outline of Socio-cultural Background*

### 1.1 The Land

The geographical area which has been encompassed in this study has varied considerably over the ages. At its core is what today is recognised as Bangladesh. But for ancient and medieval periods (i.e., till mid-18th century), the region referred to as Bengal extended beyond the current political boundary to include, as Niharranjan Roy shows, a territory bounded by the Himalayas, the Himalayan kingdoms of Nepal and Bhutan and the Indian state of Sikkim in the north, the Brahmaputra in the north-east, Garo-Khasia-Jaintia-Tripura-Chittagong hill ranges in the east, the Bay of Bengal in the south and north-eastern parts of the Indian state of Orissa and eastern parts of the Indian state of Bihar in the west. In ancient period, the geographical area mentioned above was divided into various territorial units such as Gauḍa (north-western Bengal), Puṇḍra or Varendra (north-western Bengal), Rāḍha (western Bengal), Suhma, South Rāḍha or Tāmralipti (south-western Bengal), Samatata (eastern Bengal), Vaṅga (central Bengal), Harikela (north-eastern Bengal) etc.<sup>1</sup> (Please see fig. 1) Most of the geographical area encompassed within these territorial units began to be referred to as 'Bengalah' by the Muslims since 14th century and the English traders adapted the name into 'Bengal'.<sup>2</sup> Their subsequent administrative division reduced the region of Bengal to what today roughly is West Bengal and Bangladesh together. The same region is also referred to as 'Bengal' in this study. The partition of Bengal in 1947 led to the creation of East Bengal, subsequently called East Pakistan, which formed the eastern wing of Pakistan; the same territorial unit constitutes Bangladesh since 1971. Similar nomenclature has also been followed in this study for 1947 onwards.

It is important for this study to note that Renell's map of 1779 shows Brahmaputra flowing along what today is the Old Brahmaputra and the current channel of Jamuna was merely a minor tributary (please see fig. 2). According to Roy, Brahmaputra changed its course sometime in mid-19th century, when Yamuna was transformed into the primary course. Other authorities believe that the change took place some-time in 18th century. Currently Bangladesh is divided into 64 administrative districts (fig. 3) which were created from what was earlier a division of 19 districts. These were Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bogra, Rajshahi, Pabna, Kushtia, Jessore, Khulna, Patuakhali, Barisal, Faridpur, Dhaka, Tangail, Mymensingh, Sylhet, Comilla, Noakhali, Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts (fig. 4). In everyday parlance, these former districts are more in use and are often referred to as the

'greater districts'. Hence, for the purpose of this study, the same system (of 'greater districts') have also been used.

## 1.2 The People

The population of Bangladesh is estimated at 11.2 million (1992-93), about half of which is believed to be comprised of children under 15 years of age. 98% of the people speak Bāṅglā (Bengali), which belongs to the Indo-Aryan group of languages of which Sanskrit is one. The country is one of the most densely populated areas in the world, with an average of about 850 people per square kilometer. Average life expectancy of the people is slightly over 56 years. The rate of infant mortality and birth-rate are both high.

Scholars are divided on the question of racial origin of the people. Only so far everyone is agreed: that the region has been a melting pot of races. According to Niharranjan Roy, Bengal was inhabited by the Negrito local race, who contributed the earliest layer in the racial mosaic. The next significant contribution is believed to have been derived from the proto-Australoids whose remnants are the Santhals, the Mundas, the B̃ās-foḍs and the Māl-pāhāḍīs of Rāḍha. Apart from traces of two or three other races of lesser significance, the Alpines or Homo Alpinus contributed the next major layer in the racial mosaic. The Brahmins, the Kāyasthas and the Vaidyas of Bengal display these characteristics quite evidently. Besides, a branch of the Mongoloid race is also believed to have contributed to the racial mosaic, specially in the north-western regions of Bengal. These characteristics are evident among the Coach, the Pāliyā and the Rājvansīs.<sup>4</sup> Roy also assumes that Bengali Muslims have descended from low-caste Hindus who were converted to Islam. But a few scholars contest this view and believe that "a substantial proportions are descendants of Muslims who reached the (Indian) sub-continent from else-where".<sup>5</sup>

The overall economic condition of Bangladesh is largely agricultural, with about 60% of the population engaged in farming. The condition is best reflected in per capita calorie intake which was 2215 kilo calorie in 1988, per capita income, which was US\$ 220 in 1991 and per capita cultivable land which was 0.18 acre in 1989-90. About 60% of the people live below poverty line and over 50% are land-less. Rice is the most important crop and also the staple diet of the people. But density of population and vulnerability to environmental and climatic conditions have reduced the country into a region of food-grain deficit. The rivers are still one of the major communication routes for the villages. It is these rivers, eternal and slow, yet powerful beyond reason, that sets the essential rhythm of the life of the major parts of Bangladesh - the interior villages.



But such was not always the condition. As Subhash Mukhopadhyaya points out, from around 1st-2nd century AD to 6th-7th century AD, the primary source of wealth for the people of Bengal was trade and commerce. Since 6th - 7th century, the people became entirely dependent on agriculture. Nevertheless, it was an affluent economy.<sup>7</sup> Since 16th century, European traders have been struck by the cheapness as well as abundance of Bengal goods. Even in the first half of 18th century, Bengal possessed a stable and sophisticated economic infrastructure, which was marked by flourishing domestic and international trade, abundant and cheap food-grains and well-established silk, cotton and sugar industries. According to P.J. Marshall, sugarcane, indigo, betel-nut, tobacco and poppy were widely grown and agricultural produce were also exported. It is believed that abundant labour and very low cost of food-grains were responsible for the cheapness of Bengal goods which gave them market advantage in international trade. For example, silk from Bengal was cheaper than those from China and Persia.<sup>8</sup>

By 1800 when Bengal was already occupied by the English colonisers, the cheaper machine-made goods from England, product of the Industrial Revolution, began to pour into the local market and as a result the local artisans lost their market. By 1820s, Bengal was turned into a colonial market with its role of supplying raw materials for the English mills and consuming their manufactured articles. All the ruling dynasties of Bengal since circa 12th century have been of foreign origin. But it were the English colonisers who effected qualitative change in the economic infrastructure of the land, reducing it to the status of dependence. As a result, the economic condition of the people have gradually worsened. The reversal of the above could not be effected even after fifty years of independence from colonial rule. Any cultural study of Bengal/Bangladesh must be reckoned against this process of economic destitution of the people.

### 1.3 History of Bengal

For the purpose of this study, a brief outline of the history of Bengal needs to be presented, from the beginning of recorded evidence up to the present. The time-frame mentioned above will be divided into four periods: (i) ancient, (ii) early medieval, (iii) late medieval and (iv) modern.

#### **1.3.1 Ancient Period (4th c. - 12th c. AD)**

From scant references to various regions comprising Bengal as seen in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, it appears that for the first five or six centuries of the first millennium BC, the land was inhabited by people who lived in tribes and whose culture

was entirely different from that of the Aryans. We are informed that sometime in 4th century BC, tribal society gave way to monarchy and there came to exist the kingdom of Gangaridai, situated on the eastern bank of Ganges-Bhāgīrathī rivers. Sometime in the third quarter of 4th c. BC, King Augrasainya of Nanda dynasty united Gangaridai with neighbouring Prasioi to form a large empire stretching west-ward all along the Gangetic plain. Not long after, Candra Gupta Mauriya (317-293 BC) destroyed the empire of the Nandas. Scholars are certain that north-western Bengal (Puṇḍra-varḍhana) was a part of the Mauriyan empire.<sup>9</sup>

Nothing much is known about Bengal during the period between the Mauriyans (late 4th c. - early 2nd c. BC) and the Guptas (early 4th c. - 7th c. AD). But there is ample evidence from the beginning of 4th c. AD when Samudra Gupta (320-380 AD) of the Gupta dynasty occupied nearly the whole of Bengal except the eastern part (Samatata). The sway of the Guptas over Bengal continued till mid-6th century. During most of this period, the primary centre of Gupta empire in Bengal was Puṇḍra-varḍhana (north-west Bengal). The ruling dynasty was clearly inclined towards Brahminism, although state patrony was also extended towards Buddhism and Jainism. It was also during this period that Aryan culture engulfed Bengal, reducing indigenous culture to marginal status.<sup>10</sup> Two major offensives of the Huns (454 and 495 AD), although repulsed by the Guptas, resulted in weakening the very foundation of the empire. The weakness prompted Vaṅga and Gauḍa to operate independently in the 6th century. At the same time there appeared quite a few monarchs who ruled most of Bengal with fair amount of freedom.<sup>11</sup>

Towards the beginning of 7th c., Śaśāṅka (c. 606-637 AD) appeared as an independent monarch of Gauḍa and his state-mechanism was similar to that of the Guptas. All the monarchs and feudal kings of Bengal from this period were Brahminical, although a substantial section of the population were Buddhists. Śaśāṅka in particular was staunch Śaivite and is ill-famed for his oppression of the Buddhists.<sup>12</sup> After his death, the super power of northern India, Harṣavardhana (606-647 AD), also a famous Buddhist playwright, annexed the kingdom of Śaśāṅka.<sup>13</sup> From mid-7th to mid-8th century, the region was torn by strife and political turmoil as parts of Bengal were successively occupied by Bhāskaravarmāṇ of Kāmṛūp, Yaśovarmāṇ of Kānyakujva and Lalitāditya of Kashmir.<sup>14</sup> The region was also invaded a number of times by Tibet, from mid-7th to mid-9th centuries. The turmoil and political instability was so great that the period of hundred years from mid-7th to mid-8th centuries has been frequently described as *mātsyanyāya* (lit., "practice of fishes", here implying the practice of big fish eating up the little in a situation of complete lawlessness). Finally, when the reign of anarchy became

unbearable, the feudal lords of Bengal elected a monarch from amongst them. He was Gopāla, the founder of Pāla dynasty.

With the emergence of the Pālas in mid-8th century, political stability returned in Bengal. Although the reign of the dynasty is spread over about four and half centuries (c. 750-1200 AD), the extent of their kingdom varied immensely. The Pāla monarchs were mostly Buddhists, but three of the lineage, Nārāyaṇa Pāla (c. 861-917) AD), Mahī Pāla I (c. 977-1027 AD) and Naya Pāla (c. 1027 - 43 AD) are believed to have been Śārvaites. As a result Buddhist religion, education and culture received state patrony and flourished in Bengal.<sup>15</sup> But the Buddhist movement which gained dominance was that of Tantrism. At the same time, Brahminism also expanded greatly, primarily under the monarchs inclined towards Śāivism and also the Brahminical ministers of the Pālas.<sup>16</sup> But what is most important to note is that during the rule of the Pālas, the earliest extant literary composition in vernacular (i.e., *Caryā Gītī*) came to be written. The earliest stage of Bengali culture also dates from this period.

From c. 865 to 1055 AD, central part of Bengal (Vaṅga) was ruled by the Candra dynasty, who are believed to have been tributary monarchs or allies of the Pālas. Although they have been described as Buddhists, at least two of their latter monarchs, Laḍaha Candra and Govinda Candra, are now believed to have been devotees of Viṣṇu and Śiva respectively.<sup>17</sup> The Candras were possibly succeeded by the Brahminical Varmaṅs (c. 1055-1145). The Senas occupied Vikramapura, the capital of the Varmaṅs, thus bringing the dynasty to its end.<sup>18</sup>

Scholars believe that the Senas were originally from Karnataka (south India), the earliest of whose lineage assimilated power and established himself as a feudal lord when the Pāla monarchy was faced with internal dissent. His successors gradually extended their control over whole of Bengal and even beyond.<sup>19</sup>

During the Sena rule, the society came to depend more heavily on agriculture while trade and commerce declined. The state mechanism came to acquire more bureaucratic characteristics than it was during the Pāla reign. The Sena state was completely dominated by the Brahmins and established Purāṇic ideals of Brahminism. On the whole, the society was greatly fragmented by Brahminical dogma. However, Tantric Buddhism and cults influenced by it enjoyed great support among the people.<sup>20</sup>

### 1.3.2 *Early Medieval Period (c. 1200-1500)*

Early medieval period of Bengal commences with Muslim invasion and conquest of north-western part (Gauḍa) by Ikhtyar al-Din Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji in 1204-1205 AD.<sup>21</sup>

Following a disastrous campaign against Tibet, Bakhtiyar Khalji was murdered by his own men in 1206. There ensued a period of internal strife within the Muslim ruling class in Lakhnauti (Gauda) from 1206-12, which ended with Ghyasuddin Twaz Khalji assuming power in 1213.<sup>22</sup> The sultanate of Lakhnauti expanded a little in the south and possibly also gained overlordship in the northern and north-western parts. It also enjoyed virtual independence from the sultanate of Delhi. But the spell of independence ended in 1227 when it was turned into a province of the Delhi sultanate.<sup>23</sup> From 1227 to 1281, a total of fifteen governors came to office. Finally Bughra Khan, declared independence of Lakhnauti upon the death of his father, Sultan Balban of Delhi, in 1287 and assumed the name of Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah. From then till 1300, he and then his son Kaikaus ruled as independent monarchs and were succeeded by the house of Shamsuddin Firuz Shah which retained power from 1301 to 1327. From the reign of Kaikaus (1291-1300), the sultanate of Lakhnauti began to expand.<sup>24</sup> It was briefly occupied by the house of Tughlaq (Delhi) in 1324.<sup>25</sup> In 1338, Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah occupied power in Sonargaon and declared independence. His example was followed by Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah who occupied Lakhnauti in 1342 and declared independence from Delhi. He and his descendants who formed the Ilyas Shahi dynasty, brought nearly the whole of Bengal under the rule of the Muslims.<sup>26</sup>

Political instability in Bengal began again after the death of Ghyasuddin Azam Shah of Ilyas Shahi dynasty as three monarchs successively occupied the throne within a span of four years from 1410 to 1414. Gaṇeśa, a Hindu feudal lord, seized power in 1415. During the reign of his son Jadu, who was converted into a Muslim and assumed the name of Jalaluddin, the sultanate of Bengal was extended southward.<sup>27</sup>

In 1436, Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah, a descendant of Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah, came to power to mark the beginning of what has been termed as the Later Ilyas Shahi dynasty which ruled Bengal till 1487. There followed a brief spell of six years during which four monarchs of Abyssinian lineage ruled Bengal. With their exit, the throne was occupied by the Hussain Shahi dynasty which ruled from 1493 to 1538. The period has often been cited as the golden age of pre-Mughal Muslim Bengal. The founder of the dynasty, Alauddin Hussain Shah (1493-1519), extended his kingdom in the north by annexing Kāmrūp-Kāmtā, in the west by occupying northern parts of Bihar, in the south-west by occupying a small part of Orissa and in the east where a small part of Tripura was annexed.<sup>28</sup>

The above account shows how the Muslims expanded from a small kingdom in the north-west (Gauda) in early 13th century, to nearly the whole of Bengal in mid-14th century and

by 1500, even beyond. It is important to remember that outside the boundary of the sultanate, there existed Hindu kingdoms, some of which successfully warded off Muslim invasion. Some of these were kingdoms of the Senas in Vaṅga (which existed till mid-13th century), the Devas in Samatāṭa (14th century), Paṭṭikerā (1st half of 13th century) and a Hindu kingdom in Sylhet. Located near Mainamati Hills in Comilla, Paṭṭikerā was ruled by a monarchy favourable to Buddhism.<sup>29</sup>

There can be no question that the introduction of Muslim rule had qualitatively changed all aspects of life in Bengal. Politically, it brought an end to orthodox Brahminical hegemony, which hitherto had sought to extend its dominance over the followers of Buddhism, Nātha cult and Dharma cult. Culturally, it introduced the concept of God who could be reached without intermediaries like Brahmins and also negated social stratification of Brahminism. But the most important aspect was perhaps the matter of language, where Sanskrit lost state patronage, leaving open the possibility of infusing a new breath of life to the vernacular (Bangla). It is important to remember that the popularization and spread of Islam during this period was effected mostly, if not solely, by Sufi saints. The most prominent of them are Shaikh Jalaluddin Tabrizi (d. 1225), Shah Jalal of Sylhet (d. 1347), Baba Adam Shahid of Vikramapura (Dhaka), Shah Sultan Mahisawar of Bogra, Syed Abbas Ali Makki or Pir Gora Chand in 24 Parganas (West Bengal), Badruddin Allama or Badar Shah in Chittagong, Maulana Ata in Dinajpur and Makhdum Shah Mahmud Gaznavi or Mahi Pir of Burdwan (West Bengal).<sup>30</sup>

Muslim rule in Bengal also had its adverse effects. To begin with, it dealt the final blow to Buddhism, already considerably weakened by Brahminical hegemony. As a result, there appears to have been an exodus of Buddhist scholars to Nepal and Tibet. The last trace of Buddhism in Bengal remained in Chittagong, that too because of protection and influence of the Burmese and the Ārākānese monarchies. Initially, Brahmin scholars also migrated and sought refuge in Nepal, Kāmārūp-Kāmfā and Vaṅga (central Bengal) which were under Hindu dominance; but changes in the political condition in the sultanate during the next half of early medieval period made it possible for them to live congenially under the Muslims. No mass conversion of local population into Islam was effected because of the resilience of indigenous tradition which stands on assimilation and acculturation. This principle led to qualitative transformation of social life in Bengal, in the following aspects: (i) closer contact among the 'high' and the 'low' caste Hindus, and (ii) rise of cultural resistance in the form of Śākta cult.<sup>31</sup>

From mid-14th century onwards the Muslims were busy consolidating their position. As a minority ruling class (with only 3% of the population as followers of their faith in 14th

century),<sup>32</sup> they realized that in order to maintain their independence from Delhi, it was important to gain support of the Hindu feudal lords and people in general. As a result, they went all out to win the confidence of the people, which was important for their own interest. Thus began an era of cooperation between the rulers and the ruled, in which the former merged themselves gradually with the latter and became a part and parcel of Bengal.

### 1.3.3. *Late Medieval Period (c. 1500-1750)*

The event which marks the beginning of late medieval period was the inception of Caitanya's Vaiṣṇavism (c. 1508). On the other hand, the most important political event which was to have far-reaching consequences in the years to come was the advent of the Mughals.

Hussain Shahi dynasty was dethroned in 1538; the same year marks the end of nearly two-century-old independent sultanate of Bengal. From 1539 to 1576 Bengal was ruled by the Afghans, of which the first few years passed as a province of Delhi under the Sur dynasty, but political instability continued. In 1553, the governor of Bengal, who belonged to the same dynasty, declared independence. Till 1564, the throne of Bengal was occupied by five independent monarchs (possibly all from the Sur dynasty of Bengal) and a governor of Delhi. For the next twelve years, the Karranis ruled the region independently.

The Mughals occupied Bengal in 1576 but they had to continue to fight for a number of years a sizeable number of feudal lords of various areas commonly known as the *bara bhuyans*. By 1612, the Mughal viceroy Islam Khan (1608-13) had contained the *bara bhuyans* and established imperial supremacy over most of Bengal. From 1576 to 1717, Bengal, now a province, was administered by about thirty-five Mughal viceroys (*subādārs*) who changed the capital twice: to Rajmahal in 1595 and to Dhaka in 1612.

In 1717, the viceroy of Bengal was bestowed the title of *nawāb*. Although he and his successors were required to send annual revenue to the imperial court in Delhi and the appointment was made by imperial decree, the position became hereditary and the authority became virtually absolute. Till 1757, a total of five *nawābs* ruled Bengal from the new capital of Murshidabad. The period of the *nawābs* can generally be described as unstable. Apart from general decadence of the ruling class, the Marathi army (known as *bargī* in Bengal) wrecked havoc in the western parts and caused extreme misery to the people during the rule of Alivardi Khan (1740-56). But more important was the rising influence of European traders in the political arena of Bengal. The earliest of them were the Portuguese who were permitted to establish trading posts in Chittagong and Saptagram

in 1517. The Dutch began trading in Bengal from the beginning of 17th century and in 1653 they built their principal trading post in Chuchuda near Hugli. The French began to gain prominence after 1740 and built their principal trading post near Hugli, in Chandanagar.<sup>71</sup> In 1650, the English obtained imperial decree to trade in Bengal. They established their first trading post in Hugli in 1651 but shifted to Sutanati in 1686. In 1696, they leased three villages of Sutanati, Calcutta and Govindapura, which gradually grew to be the prosperous city of Calcutta because of rising fortune of the English. Seizing upon the opportunity provided by the division within the ruling elite, the English East India Company virtually took over the administration of Bengal after the Battle of Plassey in 1757.<sup>35</sup>

The era of cooperation between the rulers and the ruled, which had began in mid-14th century, produced in its wake a distinct culture and the concept of an independent socio-political life in Bengal. The rule of Hussain Shahi dynasty marks the high point of this development. The conquest of the region by the Mughals was a turning point for it brought to the fore-front the conflict of two forces: that of Bengal as mentioned above which operated in isolation in one hand and the scheme of political unity of the whole sub-continent and imperial social system coupled with cultural pattern of the Mughals on the other hand.<sup>36</sup> Their rule brought extraordinary economic prosperity for the region.<sup>37</sup> But in the long run, both politically and economically, Bengal was reduced to being vulnerable to the interest of the European traders.<sup>38</sup> Finally it was they who played the key role in the politics of Bengal and subjugated the region under their sway.

The Mughals also introduced their culture which was highly influenced by that of the Persian court. Soon Mughal culture became part and parcel of the elite in Bengal.<sup>39</sup> Although Persian was the court language prior to Mughal conquest, its cultivation rose dramatically during Mughal rule. Its influence on literature was also greatly enhanced.<sup>40</sup> But it is also significant to note that unlike the pre-Mughal rulers, the Mughals did not extend patronage to Bangla literature and theatre. From hence, the responsibility continued to be shouldered in the grass-root level by village heads, local chiefs and land-lords.<sup>41</sup>

Influence of Shi'ism also increased greatly during Mughal rule as large number of their officers were adherents of the faith. "Shi'ite festivities such as Muharram and Beda made their way into the social life of the Muslims of Bengal and these were celebrated with great pageantries".<sup>42</sup> Also during Mughal rule Sufism gained immensely. In pre-Mughal period, the fountain-head of Sufism in Bengal was outside the sub-continent; in the Mughal period, north India became the fountain-head. The Sufi orders which had large followings in Bengal were the Suhrawardi, the Qadiri, the Naqshbandi, the Chistia, the Qalandari, the

Madari and the Ahdami.<sup>43</sup> Orders such as the Madari were syncretistic in nature, having enriched itself by cross-fertilization with Buddhist and Hindu mystic concepts. Some of the Sufi orders also played dynamic role in the development of indigenous theatre.

During the rule of the *nawābs* when Bengal enjoyed virtual independence, the influence of Mughal culture continued. The same is also true of the political system.<sup>44</sup> In the social and economic sphere, the rise of the *nawābs* also marks the rise of Hindus as a new social and political force.<sup>45</sup>

The rise of Vaiṣṇavism in early 16th century was of immense consequence in the life in Bengal. It was the most effective means of resisting the onslaught of Islam. Vaiṣṇavism also reformed Hindu society by freeing it from Brahminical hegemony. As a result a huge corpus of literature was produced and also a number of performance genres developed, all of which sought to disseminate the ultimate truth that 'Love is God' and that He needs no intermediaries or rituals. But by the end of 17th century, the great rebellion against Brahminical hegemony fell to the influence of Brahminism as the six *gospvāmins* shaped the teachings of Caitanya on a theological and material basis.<sup>46</sup> As a result, Vaiṣṇavism was a weakened force in 18th century. The above is also reflected in the rise of Muslim population in Bengal during the century. Beside Vaiṣṇavism, Śākta cult continued to enjoy substantial following as well. There also developed a few syncretistic cults such as that of Satya Pīr, where the popular faith of the Hindus and the Muslims met on a common ground.<sup>47</sup>

#### 1.3.4 *Modern Period (c. 1750 - late 20th c.)*

After the ignoble defeat of Nawab Sirajuddaulah in the Battle of Plassey and his subsequent death (1757), the English East India Company installed Meer Zaffar as the *nawāb* but retained substantial authority to manipulate state mechanism for its own benefit. Strengthened with imperial decree of 1765 from the then titular Mughal emperor, the Company decided to emerge in the open. But in 1769-70, rampant corruption, economic mismanagement and exorbitant taxation led to devastating famine in which  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the population (i.e., 10 million) perished. In 1772, the Company abolished dual rule of the *nawāb* and itself and took over administrative responsibilities. Furthermore, the capital was shifted from Murshidabad to Calcutta. But continued mismanagement gave rise to political instability during second half of 18th century as a number of popular revolts erupted. These were the peasants' uprising in north Bengal (1783) and the rebellion of *faqirs* and *sannyāsīs* belonging to various Sufi and Hindu mystic orders in various parts of Bengal (1760-1800).<sup>48</sup>



In 1793, the Company instituted the Permanent Settlement Act with a view to extracting maximum revenue from Bengal. It extended the right to proprietorship over substantial land holdings to *zamindars* in return of revenue fixed in perpetuity. The brunt of the system was borne by the peasantry whom the *zamindars* sponged for maximum revenue regardless of crop failure or natural disaster. The system benefited the caste Hindus most as they controlled the trade and had the capital to invest on land holdings.<sup>49</sup> The Company administration effected qualitative change on the economy of Bengal by transforming it from self-generation to dependence.<sup>50</sup>

As Bengal moved towards political stability from the beginning of 19th century, the East India Company was extending its sway over rest of India. It had the whole of the sub-continent to its control, but the glory did not last long. The rebellion of Indian troops in 1857, generally known as the Sepoy Mutiny or the War of Independence, was effectively crushed but in its wake had shaken the very foundation of Company administration. As a result the British monarchy directly took over the responsibility of governing the sub-continent. Except for a minor uprising in Dhaka, Bengal remained quite aloof from the entire event of the Mutiny.<sup>51</sup>

The history of 19th century Bengal is important for a number of reforms and changes in government policies. Perhaps the most important of these concerned education. Following Macaulay's famous Minutes of 1836, the then Governor General of India William Bentinck decided to introduce western learning through the medium of English. As a result there grew "a network of English schools and colleges in Bengal, some managed and others aided by the government which attracted students from the aspiring Bengali Hindu upper and middle class families."<sup>52</sup> These institutions not only disseminated the best of Western learning but also built a class of native administrators who served as a buffer between the English rulers and the native subjects. In 1830s and 1840s, the government also implemented two major policy decisions as results of which Persian was replaced by English and vernaculars as languages for transaction of business in the judiciary and the administration and preference began to be given to those applicants for government service who had been educated in English.<sup>53</sup> Finally, setting up of Calcutta University in 1857 ensured systematic development of English education in Bengal. In years to come, it would produce English speaking political leaders who would lead national movements.<sup>54</sup>

The first half of 19th century is also significant for literary reform in Bangla which led to the development prose literature. Fort William College in Calcutta, established in 1800 with the intention of teaching the civilians Indian language and culture, published a few text-

books which led to the growth of Bangla literature in prose. The development is important because till then literary endeavours in Bangla were essentially in verse. The development of prose composition was very much an urban phenomenon and as a result the medieval tradition lost ground rapidly and receded to the back-waters of rural areas. More important was the effect that, in most cases, the new body of litterateurs, educated in European thought, disassociated itself from the medieval-rural tradition. Thus there came to be two distinct streams in Bangla literature: (i) urban based 'modern' literature which grew with European contact and (ii) rural based 'folk' literature which continued in the medieval spirit for the most part.

19th century Bengal is also important for quite a few social and religious reform movements, both among the Muslims as well as Hindus. The Faradi movement of Haji Shariatullah and his son Dudu Mian (1820s to 1860s) for instance, aimed at pristine purity of Islam by attempting to purge what is termed *bedat* (anti-Islamic, such as *Jārī Gān*, *Beḍā Bhāsān* and celebration of Muharram) and *shirq* (sin, such as worshipping of *pīr*). It also "manifested an attempt to stop the internal decay of Muslim society and direct resistance to the imperialistic and colonial tendencies of the foreign race."<sup>55</sup> Concentrated mostly among rural Muslims, the Faradi Movement generated fundamentalism and considerably weakened Islamic syncretistic tradition of Bengal.

But the failed Sepoy Mutiny had brought home to the Muslims the reality that the English were there to stay. Soon a few reformers came up to revitalise the Bengali Muslim society. Two of them who played leading role in this direction were Nawab Abdul Luteef (1828-93) and Syed Amir Ali (1849-1928). The former was a retired government servant who worked hard to disseminate English education and allegiance to the British Raj and the latter was a lawyer who initiated social reform among the Muslims.

The Hindu reform movement of Bengal originated out of historic confrontation between the traditional Indian and post-Enlightenment European cultures. There were two major developments in the reform movement of Hindu religion. These were (i) the Brahma movement (flourished in the first three quarters of 19th century) and (ii) the Neo-Hindu movement (flourished in the fourth quarter of the same century).

In terms of religion the Brahma movement offered a monotheist alternative to Hindu polytheism and sought to eradicate irrationalities in religion. The Neo-Hindu movement confronted the problem of religious plurality with pervasive pantheism that sought to unify and regenerate rather than set up new sects and engage in endless controversies.

The Brahmo movement was spearheaded by Rammohan Roy (1774-1833), Debendra Natha Tagore (1817-1905) and Keshub Chandra Sen (1838-84). On the other hand, Neo-Hindu movement was championed by Bankim Chandra Chatterji (1838-94), Bhudeb Mukherji (1825-94), Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-86) and Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902). It is also important to note that a significant part of Neo-Hinduism sought regeneration of Vaiṣṇavism under the leadership of Bijoy Krishna Goswami (1841-99).<sup>56</sup> The Neo-Hindu spirit was largely responsible for arousing passionate response among the Hindus against the partition of Bengal in 1905.<sup>57</sup>

Although Hindu religious reform movements played vital role in social reform, nevertheless, the contributions of Rammohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-91) and Keshub Chandra Sen deserve special attention. Central to all their work was the emancipation of women. As a result of Rammohan's agitation, the practice of *sati-dāha* (self-immolation of widows on their husbands' pyres) was abolished by law in December, 1829. Vidyasagar's contribution lay in introducing the practice of widow remarriage, raising awareness against polygamy and dissemination of female education. Keshub Chandra is also responsible to a large extent for the abolishing of early marriage. But any review of 19th century social reform is incomplete without the mention of Henry Derozio and his band of Hindu youths (better known as "Young Bengal") who championed radical rationalism and challenged orthodox Hinduism and its social maladies.

The reform movements noted above transformed the Hindu society of Bengal by the end of 19th century, specially in the intellectual system of thought. At the same time the spirit of nationalism was on rise in the political arena. Dominated by the Hindus and swept by Neo-Hinduism, the nationalistic spirit attained a communal colour by the end of the century and alienated the Muslim intelligentsia. In the mean time the Indian National Congress (founded in 1885), an all-India political organisation of land-lords and bourgeoisie had been formed, but it was still alienated from the mass and was toeing a conformist line with the British Raj. The event which precipitated into confrontation of the Raj and the nationalists of Bengal was the Partition of 1905 when a separate province (comprising of roughly what today is Bangladesh and Assam-Meghalaya) was carved out of Bengal. The above decision was taken to serve the interest of the Raj who sought to be benefited by containing the rising nationalists, mostly centered in Calcutta, by cutting them off from their economic resources which lay in what was to be the new province. The rising Muslim bourgeoisie also saw in it a chance to gain politico-economic power. They sought to consolidate their position by forming a political party, the Muslim League, in 1906. On the other hand, the Hindu *zamindars* and the bourgeoisie saw the division as a

direct assault on their economic interest. The Congress abandoned its line of conformation and launched anti-British "*Svadeśī*" (lit., "Nationalist") movement, in which Bengal rose to the fore-front. The movement aimed at boycott of all British goods and instead sought to promote those of India. The Partition also gave rise to terrorist groups, which secretly organised students and youths (mostly Hindus) to carry out armed action against the British. Finally the Raj had to give in to the pressure created by financial loss incurred by British capital because of the boycott and decided to annul the Partition in 1911. They also shifted the capital of India from Calcutta to Delhi in the same year.

The annulment of Partition disillusioned the Muslims about the British Raj and they realised that mere loyalty to the latter would not earn them their rights. Gradually the policy of the Muslim League shifted and its leadership was taken up by the liberals and the nationalists, who sought to promote the cause of all sections of Muslim society. Attempts were made towards rapprochement of Hindu-Muslim relations but these failed as politics in the national as well as provincial level was gaining increasingly communal character by the end of 1920s. The British promulgated the India Act of 1935 with a view of giving autonomy to the provinces which were to be ruled by elected representatives of the people. By then University Dhaka (established in 1921) and other educational institutions had created a core of educated Muslims of younger generation who helped disseminate political consciousness among the people. As a result, the Muslims who were the majority in Bengal, returned enough of their representatives in the provincial election of 1937 and they formed the government. In the conference of All India Muslim League in Lahore (1940), a resolution which called for two separate states in the Muslim dominated north-western and north-eastern parts of India, was unanimously accepted.<sup>58</sup> In a series of events which followed, suspicion between the Hindus and the Muslims rose. As a consequence of the Second World War, the famine of 1943 left over two million people dead. In a series of communal violence in Calcutta, Noakhali, Tripura and also Bihar (1946) thousands of people were killed.<sup>59</sup> Instead of two sovereign states in the Muslim majority areas, one (i.e., Pakistan) was created and Bengal and Punjab were partitioned. The newly created state came to be on 14th August, 1947 and was comprised of Sindh, Baluchistan, North-west Frontier Province and west Punjab as its western wing and the eastern and central parts of Bengal as well as the district of Sylhet to form the eastern wing, both separated by over a thousand miles of Indian territory in between.

The first decade of existence of Pakistan was fraught with political instability, undemocratic practice, incompetence of leadership and suspicion leading to hegemonic domination of the West over the East. Resentment was on the rise among the Bengalis and soon crisis

precipitated over the question of state language. As events further developed, the language movement proved to be the corner-stone of Bengali nationalism around which evolved the politics of the eastern wing of Pakistan.

In order to contain the agitation, Martial Law was imposed in 1958 by General Ayub Khan. Blatantly anti-democratic political manoeuvres of the General, added to attempted Islamization of Bengali culture and economic exploitation of the eastern wing by the west led to formulation of the Six-point programme by Awami League headed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in 1966. The programme sought to redress the grievances of the people of East Pakistan by demanding regional autonomy. Soon it gathered momentum with popular support and turned into a nationalist movement, which the government failed to suppress. The situation worsened in 1969 when students' agitation in support of the movement turned into popular uprising. Martial Law was imposed again but the General had to promise general election in the next year (1970). In the election, Awami League returned with 167 out of 313 seats in the National Assembly and 288 out of 300 seats in the Provincial Assembly. Clearly, it was a victory of the language-based nationalist movement against religion-based nationalism. But the Martial Law authority and the leaders of the western wing apprehended that Awami League's victory would lead to disintegration of Pakistan. So they struck on the night of 25th March, 1971, killing thousands of innocent civilians in Dhaka city. For the next nine months, Pakistan Army carried out systematic massacre, rape and arson all over the country but were resisted by the people. Thousands of young men joined the Liberation Army and waged war against Pakistan. Finally, India joined the Liberation Army and Pakistan was forced to surrender on 16th December, 1971. Thus emerged Bangladesh as a sovereign and independent state.

The Awami League led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman took office soon after liberation and governed the country till 1975. In a series of events beginning in 1975, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated and military rule was imposed more than once before democracy was re-established in 1991. What remains to be seen, as of 1996, is how the political parties, if at all, can succeed in building democratic institutions and how they resolve the cultural conflict between language-based nationalism and religion-based nationalism.

#### **1.4 Religions and Cults of Bengal**

In terms of religious faith, the current population of Bangladesh is comprised of over 85% Muslims, about 10% Hindus, less than 1% Buddhists and 0.3% Christians. Of these, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism and their offshoots Nātha cult and Dharma cult are important for

this study as they have significantly contributed to the evolution and development of indigenous theatre of Bangladesh.

#### 1.4.1 *Hinduism*

Complexity and magnitude which is incorporated under the term Hinduism makes it difficult to be defined precisely. As Richard H. Davis shows, unlike other 'world religions' such as Buddhism, Islam and Christianity, in Hinduism, there is no founding figure nor a single text which can be considered to be the core of its doctrine. Nevertheless, it is one of the oldest religions with continuous tradition, for its source can be traced back to the *R̥g Veda*, which is believed to have attained its final shape by 1200 BC.<sup>60</sup>

The term Hinduism is derived from "sindhu", an Indo-Aryan word denoting "sea", and also, by extension, river Indus. The Persians modified "sindhu" to "hind" and used the term to denote the land of Indus valley. The Persian term "hind" was further transformed into "india" in Greek and Latin languages, where it denoted all territories beyond river Indus. It was the Muslims who put in circulation the term "hindu" to denote all non-Muslims of South Asia. In 19th century, the colonial British coined the word 'Hinduism' in order to classify the beliefs and practices of Indians who did not belong to Islam, Jainism or Christianity. The term was taken up by the Indians (Hindus) who, fired with European world-view, were eager to create for themselves a system of unified identity parallel to Christianity. 'Hinduism' has been in use since then as an useful term to categorise "the various schools of thoughts and practices that grew up within a shared Indian society and employed a common religious vocabulary". Prior to this period of time, the followers of each formation within the fold considered themselves to be adherents of faith distinct from each other and therefore did not consider themselves to belong to a unified system of religion.<sup>61</sup>

The system, the centre and the essence of Hinduism is broadly defined under two contrasting views. These have been termed as the "centralist" and the "pluralist". The centralists, according to Davis, view Hinduism as "a single, pan-Indian, more or less hegemonic, orthodox tradition, transmitted primarily in Sanskrit language, chiefly by members of Brahminic class"; it is built around the Vedas, Vedānta, Mīmāṃsā and Dharmasāstra corpus of texts and teachings. Although there have been rebellions against the orthodox tradition, it has held its sway through artful mechanism of assimilation and repressive tolerance. On the other hand, the pluralist view envisages Hinduism as an umbrella or a sponge or even a jungle which incorporates decentralised and independent

bodies of beliefs and practices, where the Vedic tradition figures as just one of many others.<sup>62</sup> J.A.B. van Buitenen, sums up the essence of the pluralist view:

In principle, Hinduism incorporates all forms of belief and worship without necessitating the selection or elimination of any. The Hindu is inclined to revere the divinity in every manifestation, whatever it may be, and is doctrinally tolerant .... Hinduism is, then, both a civilization and a conglomeration of religions, with neither a beginning, a founder, nor a central authority, hierarchy or organization.<sup>63</sup>

For the purpose of this study, the pluralist view has generally been followed. Three bodies of beliefs and practices which have exerted considerable influence in Bengal are Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Śaktism.

(i) Vaiṣṇavism:

Vaiṣṇavism, or the worship of Viṣṇu the second god of Hindu triad (the other two being Brahma and Śiva), acknowledges the god (Viṣṇu) to be the supreme being from whom all things emanate and who is the preserving and restoring power of the Universe. He is also believed to have made himself manifest to the world as *avatāras* (incarnations) for counteracting great evils and restoring righteousness (*dharma*) in the world. Ten major *avatāras* of Viṣṇu are recognised, of which the seventh and the eighth are Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. Others are in zoomorphic forms (fish, tortoise, boar and man-lion) and anthropomorphic forms (Vāmana the dwarf, Paraśurāma and the Buddha). As the Kalki (White Horse), he is supposed to appear at the end of Kali-kāla (Iron Age) for the final destruction of the wicked.<sup>64</sup>

R.N. Dandekar traces the origin of Vaiṣṇavism to the cults of Vāsudeva of the Vṛṣṇi community, Kṛṣṇa of the Yādava community and Gopāla-Kṛṣṇa of the nomadic cowherd community of Ābhīra. Pre-Vedic in origin, all these cults gathered force with the decline of Vedism from after 6th century BC. Of the three, the cult of Vāsudeva appears to be the earliest. It was centered on *bhakti* in the sense of exclusive devotion to a personal divinity. Kṛṣṇa of the Yādavas appear to have developed the doctrine that human life is a kind of sacrifice; the doctrine was later incorporated in *Bhagavad-gītā*. The cult of Gopāla-Kṛṣṇa, on the other hand, seems to have promoted "religious sublimation of sensuous love (as represented by Kṛṣṇa's relationship with the *gopīs*)". Sometime in 4th century BC, the cult of Vāsudeva merged with that of Kṛṣṇa to give rise to the all powerful supreme god Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa. Still later, Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa merged with Gopāla-Kṛṣṇa to evolve into Greater Kṛṣṇaism. It now sought to affiliate itself with Vedism, with the objective of becoming acceptable to the orthodox section of the people. Thus Viṣṇu, who was already elevated from the subordinate position he held in *Ṛg Veda* to that of supreme god-head in

*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, came to be assimilated into Kṛṣṇaism and accordingly, Kṛṣṇa came to be regarded as one of the incarnations of Viṣṇu. The Gupta sovereigns were devout Vaiṣṇavites and it was during their reign (4th-7th century AD) that most of the Vaiṣṇavite liturgical texts assumed their final shape. Vaiṣṇavism was fragmented into sects and sub-sects during the millennium which followed Gupta rule (i.e., 700-1700 AD). One of the earliest of these was the *bhakti* movement of the Ālvārs (6th to 9th century AD) of south India, who denounced all social distinctions and voiced a deeply emotional and intensely personal devotion for Viṣṇu.<sup>65</sup> The reaction of the Ālvārs and many others to follow was against the emphasis laid by the Brahminical order on proper ritual performance as a means to religious attainment.

The term *bhakti* has also been used to refer to a series of regional movements in medieval India which emphasised intense personal devotion to a god or goddess and which draw mostly on Rāmānuja's (1017-1137) theological discourse as their foundation. From 13th to 17th centuries AD, a sizeable number of Vaiṣṇavite *bhakti* movements developed in central and northern India, which had two main currents: one related to Rāma and the other to Kṛṣṇa. The latter was further divided into two sub-stream: one centred on Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī and the other on Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā. It was the latter which was popularized in Bengal by poet Jayadeva in his *Gītagovinda* (c. 1200 AD) and Caitanya (1486-1533 AD), an outstanding saint who spearheaded Gauḍīya (i.e., Bengal) Viṣṇavism.<sup>66</sup> As G.R. Welbon shows, the theology of Caitanya as explained by his inner circle of disciples the six *gosvāmins*, is summed up as *acintyabhedābheda*: "Kṛṣṇa, the absolute, and the individual *jīvas* (souls) are inconceivably discrete (yet) not different".<sup>67</sup>

The literature of Vaiṣṇavism which require to be touched on for the purpose of this study are the epics *Mahābhārata* (100,000 verses), *Rāmāyaṇa* (25,000 verses), an "appendix" to *Mahābhārata* known as *Harivaṁśa* (16,000 verses) and one of the eighteen *Purāṇas* (literally, 'ancient traditions', another huge corpus of texts) known as *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Viṣṇu, in his incarnation as Kṛṣṇa (the king of Dwārkā and a close ally of the Pāṇḍava hero Arjuna), plays a significant role in the *Mahābhārata* as the prime, yet subtle, manipulator of events and the vanquisher of *adharmā*.<sup>68</sup> Although the *Rāmāyaṇa* is not strictly sectarian in character, yet Viṣṇu appears in the epic as well, this time as Rāma the prince of Ayodhyā, whose primary mission, as Richard H. Davis shows, is to eradicate from the mortal world the evil embodied in Rāvaṇa and other demons.<sup>69</sup> In the *Harivaṁśa*, it is also Viṣṇu in the guise of Kṛṣṇa, whose mission it is to reinstate righteousness by vanquishing Kaṁsa the tyrannical king of Mathurā. Born of royal pedigree and brought up among cowherds, Kṛṣṇa fulfills his mission upon attaining manhood. Among the eighteen



major *Purāṇas*, six are regarded as scriptures of Vaiṣṇavism, of which *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is accepted as the most authoritative.<sup>70</sup> Composed in 18,000 verses, the most popular part of this *Purāṇa* is the tenth book which gives a detailed account of Kṛṣṇa.<sup>71</sup>

## (ii) Śaivism

Śaivism, or the cult of Śiva the third god of Hindu triad, includes a wide variety of movements, some of which are philosophic (such as the Śaiva-siddhanta), others social (such as the Lingāyat) and still others ascetic (the Daśanāmī Saṅnyāsīns).<sup>72</sup> There are also countless popular (folk) variants. Scholars such as Dandekar contend that the origin of Śaivism can be traced back to pre-Vedic non-Aryan cult of the *muni-yati* with its characteristic features such as *yoga*, *tāpas* (austerity) and *saṅnyās* (asceticism).<sup>73</sup> Although the above view is contended by others, it is generally held that Vedic Rudra (the "Howler") evolved through the ages into the powerful god Śiva (the "Auspicious One"). In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Śiva holds a special status but is not the supreme divinity. On the whole, the *Mahābhārata* accords greatest honour to Viṣṇu (or Kṛṣṇa) but in certain sections, Śiva holds sway over Viṣṇu. It is in the *Purāṇas* venerating Śiva (*Matsya*, *Kūrma*, *Līṅga*, *Śiva*, *Skanda* and *Agni*) that the supremacy of the god is asserted and countless myths and legends are recounted for his glory.<sup>74</sup> As Richard H. Davis points out, two traits central to Śiva's personality which developed from the Vedic to later times are (i) that of the outsider (in sharp contrast to sociable Viṣṇu), who resides in the Himalayas and is concerned with leading souls to *mokṣa* (liberation) and (ii) that of duality which conjoins antithetical attributes such as benevolence and malevolence, asceticism and eroticism, and which personify him as a hermit and a family man, an immobile meditator and an unruly dancer.<sup>75</sup> These contradictory characteristics of Śiva which manifest themselves most clearly in the Puranic literature are possibly the result of attempts made to reconcile the Vedic and the non-Vedic distinctions of the god. The three basic principles common to all Śaivite schools which are based on the tradition of *Purāṇas* mentioned above are:

*Pati*, Śiva, the Lord; *paśu*, the individual soul; and *pāśa*, the bond that confines the soul to earthly existence. The goal set for the soul is to get rid of the bond and gain *śivatva* ("the nature of Śiva"). The paths leading to this goal are *caryā* (external acts of worship), *kriyā* (acts of intimate service to God), *yoga* (meditation) and *jñāna* (knowledge).<sup>76</sup>

Purāṇic literature was one of the sources through which the cult of Śiva is believed to have disseminated in ancient Bengal. At the same time, there also spread the cult of popular (folk) Śiva who is depicted as an indolent farmer, completely lacking in any kind of initiative or interest regarding cultivation. As a result, his family is forever in pecuniary

distress. Instead of taking up farming seriously, he subsists on begging and is also addicted to hemp.<sup>77</sup> Although it is difficult to draw definite conclusion on the origin of popular Śaiva cult, it is possible, as Asutosh Bhattacharyya shows, that prior to Aryan contact there existed in Bengal a fertility cult among the Coah, an Indo-Mongoloid tribe who inhabited in the north. It was among these agrarian people that Purāṇic Śiva was first established in Bengal as a deity.<sup>78</sup> Benoy Kumar Sarkar shows that "the influence exercised by the Brahmana ministers of the Pāla kings helped Śaivism in the displacement of Buddhism, which gradually became merged in the former" by the end of Pāla reign.<sup>79</sup> Thus, non-Aryan cult practice, Buddhism and Purāṇic Śaivism, possibly with a generous dose to the Nātha cult and the Dharma cult, all amalgamated to give shape to a distinct form of Śaiva cult practice (i.e., Popular Śaivism), predominantly among non-caste Hindus and aboriginals of northern Bengal.<sup>80</sup>

Another cult practice within the fold of Śaivism, that of Tantric influence, was also prevalent in medieval Bengal and has been discussed later in this chapter.

### (iii) Śaktism

Śaktism or the worship of the Hindu goddess Śakti (from Sanskrit, denoting "power" or "energy") identifies her as the fundamental energy of the Universe. To her devotees, she is the divine will and the divine mother who demands unconditional surrender. The goddess is envisaged either as Devī (the supreme Goddess) or the spouse of a god, usually Śiva. In popular parlance, she is also known as Umā, Pārvatī and Ambikā (in her beneficent manifestations), Kālī and Caṇḍī (in her fierce manifestations), Durgā (as the demon-destroying force), Śitalā (as the goddess of small-pox) and Manasā (as the goddess of serpents).<sup>81</sup>

Śaktism is inseparably linked to Tantric Hinduism. As a term, 'tantrism' is a nineteenth century European coinage, derived from the Sanskrit word 'tantra' which denotes "wrap" or "loom" and extended to signify "texts as things spun out and threaded together, both physically (since palm-leaf manuscripts require string) and verbally".<sup>82</sup> A few nineteenth century European scholars began to use the term to denote a body of texts and a set of practices which still puzzle all scientific enquiry.

As Richard H. Davis explains, historians of Indian religion have often employed the word 'tantra' "to identify a whole series of rituals and yogic practices not found in the Vedic lineage of texts", which are more a shared repertory of techniques than any religious system.<sup>83</sup> Beside Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism also made use of these techniques, giving rise to Tantric Hinduism, Tantric Buddhism and Tantric Jainism. The main division

of sects within Tantric Hinduism are Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva and Śākta (although the distinction between the last two are hardly clear). Kashmir (Swat) and Bengal-Assam, along with regions such as Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa are considered to be major centres of Tantrism.<sup>84</sup>

Tantric Hinduism is a system of esoteric practices which are employed for

attainment of spiritual experience and fulfilment of worldly desires. *Tantra* designates a particular group of post-Vedic Sanskrit treatises, heterogeneous in content, that deal with secret practices aiming at the purification of the body and the control of physiological and psychological processes. By such purification and control, it is believed, the body and the mind may be made perfect media for realization of the highest truth, and also of all that concerns the worship of gods and goddesses, rites and rituals, and black magic.<sup>85</sup>

Theologically, Tantric Hinduism maintains that the Supreme Reality is non-dual but has two aspects, the male and the female: the male aspect is pure consciousness and transcendent passivity whereas the female aspect is immanent energy and activity. The above truth is to be realized within the human body,

which is believed to be a microsm or epitome of universe. The spinal cord represents the fabulous Mount Meru; and the three main nerve connections (*iḍā*, *piṅgalā* and *sushumnā*) running along the left, the right and the middle of the spine represent the three sacred rivers Ganges, Yamuna and Saraswatī; the breathing process represents the course of time.<sup>86</sup>

*Kuṇḍalinī*, or the female force, lies dormant coiled like a serpent at the trip of the spine (the lowest psychic centre). It has to be awakened and made to move up through five successive centres along the spinal cord to unite with the male force which lies at the top of the head (*sahasrāra cakra*).

The union brings about the transcendently blissful realization of supreme non-duality. Tantrism, in an attempt to reach a supra-mental and depersonalized ecstasy, advocates the methodical use of sexual union without pleasurable completion of the sex act, as a yogic process; this, it is believed, creates a state of heightened suspense leading to the complete arrest of all mental processes, in a mystic sense of oneness with the basic reality of the universe.<sup>87</sup>

Ideally, caste or gender distinctions are non-existent in Tantrism. Every woman is held to be a manifestation of the female aspect and every man that of the male aspect of the Supreme Reality. *Yantras* (ritual mystic diagrams) and *mantras* (mystic syllables or formulas) play significant role in Tantrism.<sup>88</sup>

As Richard H. Davis points out, "medieval Śaiva theologians often bifurcated the godhead into male and female. They postulated an active but transcendent Śiva who carries out all

his worldly activities through an immanent energetic female Śakti".<sup>89</sup> This emphasis on Śiva as the main deity can be taken to be the prime characteristic of Tantric Śaivism. On the other hand Śaktism subverts the position of Śiva and places Śakti (or any of her manifestations as deities) at the apex of divine hierarchy as the source of all energy. This can be taken to be the essential distinction of Śaktism from Tantric Śaivism. Śaktism, or Śākta cult, began to play a dominant role in the religious life of medieval Bengal from 14th century onwards.

#### 1.4.2 *Buddhism*

With twenty-five centuries of history, Buddhism is a religion which, at its height, had spread to most of Asia, from Afganistan in the west to Japan in the east and Sri Lanka and Indonesia in the south to Mongolia in the north. But precisely because of its dissemination to a vast geographical area and subsequent adaptation to local culture, the religion has vexed scholars in their attempt to arrive at a consensus about its definition. Nevertheless, Zurcher suggests the following identity of Buddhism as its very essence:

a doctrine of salvation, aimed at the acquisition of liberating insight and at the complete extinction of attachment, and consequently, of continued rebirth in the world of suffering. In most cases, the way to achieve that goal is indissolubably connected with the monastic life (.....); the Buddhist order of monks, or *saṅgha*, has remained the very heart of religious life and the most important unifying element throughout the Buddhist world.<sup>90</sup>

#### Early Buddhism

Śākyamuni (or Siddhārtha Gautama, the Buddha), the founder of Buddhism, is believed to have been a historical personality who was born in c. 563 BC in a small aristocratic republic in the foot-hills of the Himalayas, renounced worldly life in his youth, delivered his first sermon when he was thirty-five and finally breathed his last in c. 483 BC.<sup>91</sup> Unfortunately there is scant information about early history of Buddhism because textual sources date from about five centuries after the founder's death. Nevertheless scholars believe that Buddhism, at its nascent stage, was rooted in the movement of the wandering ascetics (*śramaṇa*) which had gained substantial strength in the Indian sub-continent of 6th c. BC. It was a time of social upheavals and political instability. Scholars believe that "the sramanic movement presented some of the groups displaced by the economic and political changes of the day, and by the expansion of Brahmanic power."<sup>92</sup> The *śramaṇas* challenged existing values of life in general and the caste system in particular; it was movement designed to lead to religious realization which possibly also voiced social protest. The religious values of the movement included "the concept of the cycle and bondage of

rebirth (*saṃsāra*) and the belief in the possibility of liberation (*mokṣa*) from the cycle through ascetic discipline, world renunciation, and a moral or ritual code that gave prominent place to abstaining from doing harm to living beings (*ahiṃsā*).<sup>93</sup> All the above mentioned traits were present in Buddhism at its early stage but each of them were moulded in a unique manner. Keeping intact the concept of rebirth and its evils, it universalized suffering: "all human conditions lead to suffering, suffering has a cause, and that cause is craving or 'thirst' (*trṣṇā*)."<sup>94</sup> These, along with the path to liberation, are generally known as the Four Noble Truths. The liberation from the cycle of rebirth, as prescribed by Buddhism, lay in the following Eightfold Path: (i) Right Vision, (ii) Right Resolve, (iii) Right Speech, (iv) Right Conduct, (v) Right Livelihood, (vi) Right Effort, (vii) Right Mindfulness and (viii) Right Concentration.<sup>95</sup> It was expected that the followers of Buddhism would renounce worldly life and become a wandering ascetic like the Buddha himself. On the other hand, provisions were also made for those who accepted the religion but did not renounce material life. They would take refuge by making a confession of faith in the Buddha, his teachings, and his monastic order, and by adopting five fundamental moral precepts (*pañcaśīla*): not to deprive a living thing of life, not to take what is not given to them, not to engage in illicit sexual conduct, not to lie, and not to take intoxicating drinks. Thereby they could hope that they would be able to renounce material world in a future birth.

In order to further understand Buddhism as a religion in the early stage, one has to focus on the religious communities it encompassed and also the "Three Treasures" which was its object of veneration. "The early community was represented primarily by the gathering of mendicants or monks called *saṃgha*., held together by ascetic or monastic codes (*prātimokṣa*) attributed to the Buddha himself, and by the objects of worship represented by (1) the founder himself as the "Awakened One" (*buddha*); (2) his exemplary and holy life, his teachings and his experience (*dharma*); and (3) the community (*saṃgha*) itself, sustained by the memory of his personality and teaching."<sup>96</sup> Doctrinally as well as ritually, the trust of the believer in the "Three Treasures" is expressed as "Three Refuges" (i.e., to rely on the Buddha, the Dharma and the Saṃgha). Even today the above formula serves to indicate the meaning of monastic ordination and lay confession in faith.<sup>97</sup>

For several centuries since its inception, the theme of impermanence and causation was the focus of Buddhist philosophical speculation. At the same time the question of non-self began to acquire greater importance. In the beginning the doctrine of no-self (nothing is "I" or "mine") was seen as the meaning of awakening and liberation. But soon difficulties were perceived. First, how could moral responsibility be possible if there was no continuous self,

and second, what was the meaning of liberation in the absence of self? Furthermore, what was the nature and status of a liberated being who had attained *nirvāṇa* (liberation)? These were essentially the questions which were at least partly responsible for the great schism in Buddhism which led to the emergence of the Mahāyāna movement.<sup>98</sup>

### Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna Buddhism

The schism began about a hundred years after the death of the Buddha when the Sthaviras ("those who speak as the elders" or "those who teach the doctrine of the old ones") and the Mahāsāṃghikas ("those of the larger community") parted ways. The separation possibly took place because the Mahāsāṃghikas held that certain *arhats* (liberated humans), although they had attained *nirvāṇa* in this world, could be subject to imperfections while the Sthaviras insisted that they were completely free of such imperfections.<sup>99</sup> The divisions of the Sthaviras and the Mahāsāṃghikas are the prototypes of what was later to be known as Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Literally, the term "Hīnayāna" denotes "small vehicle". It (Hīnayāna) was applied to the early form of Buddhism by those belonging to the reform movement known as Mahāyāna Buddhism which claimed for itself the greater means to liberation (hence "Mahāyāna", lit., "large vehicle").<sup>100</sup> The adherents of Hīnayāna Buddhism prefer the term "Theravāda" ("the Doctrine of the Elders", originally the name of a school), because "Lesser Vehicle" contains pejorative implication.<sup>101</sup> Some scholars feel that "it would be more correct to give the name 'early Buddhism' to what is called Hīnayāna, for the term denotes a whole collection of the most ancient forms of Buddhism: those earlier than the rise of Mahāyāna and those that share the same inspiration as these and have the same ideal, namely the *arhat*."<sup>102</sup> But it is also important to remember that although Hīnayāna Buddhism has directly descended from early Buddhism which was preached by the Buddha himself, the latter (early Buddhism) was continually reformulated by its exponents as they probed deeper in order to perfect the interpretation of the ancient teaching.<sup>103</sup> Some of the major characteristics of Hīnayāna Buddhism are,

an extreme emphasis on monastic life, (...) the ideal of becoming an *arhat*, who has reached individual saintliness and is assured of his total extinction at the end of his life, and the conception of the Buddha as a sublime yet mortal teacher who, after having reached his final *nirvāṇa*, has ceased to be at whatever level of existence.<sup>104</sup>

It is uncertain as to when exactly Mahāyāna Buddhism originated. Its followers claim great antiquity by asserting that the Buddha himself revealed the Mahāyāna but only to select heavenly beings who kept the text hidden for centuries. According to a legend, the

philosopher Nāgārjuna (fl. 150-250 AD) descended to the underworld to retrieve the Mahāyāna texts known as *Prajñāpāramitā* ("Perfection of Wisdom"). Some place the date of origin to about 1st c. AD while others place it to 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. But it is more possible, as Luis O. Gomez believes, that the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism was a gradual process. According to him, the distinctive feature of Mahāyāna Buddhism are: "a tilt toward world affirmation, a laicized conception of the human ideal, a new ritual of devotion, and new definitions of the metaphysical and contemplative ideals".<sup>105</sup>

### Major Scriptures

The scripture of Hinayana Buddhism is known as *Tripitaka* (lit., "Three Baskets"). The Pali corpus of the Theravadins is comprised of *Sūtra Piṭaka* ("Basket of Sermons"), *Vinaya Piṭaka* ("Basket of Discipline") and *Abhidharma Piṭaka* ("Basket of Higher Teaching"). The *Sūtra Piṭaka* is composed of sermons of the Buddha, legends of his former "births" (*Jātaka*), legends related to the great disciples (*Avadāna*), didactic passages (*Gāthās*) attributed to the disciples, a collection of instructional stanzas and other varied works. The *Vinaya Piṭaka* consists of rules of discipline to be observed by the monks (*bhikṣus*) and nuns (*bhikṣunīs*), their use of objects, ceremonies, punishment for offenders and other matters related to monastic life. The *Abhidharma Piṭaka* is comprised of scholastic treatises.<sup>106</sup>

The most important Mahāyāna scriptures are those classed as *Prajñāpāramitā*. The earliest of these is believed to be *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, which consists of eight thousand *ślokas*. Its earliest portions were possibly composed in 1st c. BC. Some other texts of the same class are composed of twenty-five thousand, ten thousand and seven thousand *ślokas*.

The central theme of these texts is that the "perfection of wisdom" - recognition of the truth of human existence - can be attained only through the realization that nothing exists in and of itself, that all things are like dreams or are the creations of magical power (*māyā*). The ultimate truth of existence is comprehended by the term "emptiness" (*sūnyatā*).

Reinterpreting traditional concepts of *nirvāṇa* and transmigration, *Prajñāpāramitā* texts contend that the objective of salvation is not *nirvāṇa* but comprehension of the reality of transmigration as emptiness.<sup>107</sup>

### Tantric Buddhism

The origin of Tantric Buddhism is uncertain. The only certain date that the scholars agree upon is 7th century when it reached China. It is therefore assumed that by that time Tantric

Buddhism must have been a flourishing activity in India. At its initial stage, centuries before it surfaced, the movement is believed to have been an esoteric practice which was possibly frowned upon by the Buddhist establishment. It is probable that as a marginal phenomenon it began to critique and challenge existing Buddhist order and assert its superiority of techniques of ritual and meditation which echoed Aryan and non-Aryan traditions.<sup>108</sup> Accepting the basic approach and goal of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the followers of Tantric Buddhism believed that individual realization of the goal is possible to achieve in one's lifetime with the help of their techniques.<sup>109</sup> Some of the Tantric exponents, known as wandering saints called *siddhās* (possessed of *siddhi*, i.e., realization of magical power), went so far as to adopt the deportment of mad men and renounce the rules of monastic code. Later it gained enough momentum to surface as an exoteric movement and to be accepted as part of established religious institutions.<sup>110</sup> Tantric Buddhism was strongly entrenched in eastern India (including Bengal) from after 8th century to around 11th century. It also advanced to Nepal and Tibet. It flourished for a time in China, attained stature of great importance in Japan and established a great school in Indonesia. Of all the places mentioned above, Tibet became a renowned centre for Tantric Buddhism and storehouse of Tantric literature.<sup>111</sup>

Tantric Buddhism is also known as the third *yāna* (vehicle) - Tantrayāna. Although complex and fragmented, it is useful to classify the movement into three main types: Vajrayāna, Sahajayāna and Kālacakrayāna. Some traditions also classify a relatively primitive branch known as Mantrayāna which could have originated in 4th c. AD.<sup>112</sup>

#### *Vajrayāna*

Believed to have originated sometime after 7th c. AD, Vajrayāna is "the early documentary manifestation of Tantric practice" which "established the symbolic terminology and the liturgy that would characterize all forms of the tradition".<sup>113</sup> Central to Vajrayāna is the symbolic concept of Vajra which denotes both "diamond" and "cudgel", and metaphorically implies hardness and destructiveness. According to *Advaya-vajra-saṅgraha*, a Vajrayāna text, "*sūnyatā*, which is firm, substantial, indivisible, impenetrable, incapable of being burnt and imperishable, is called Vajra."<sup>114</sup> But there are other aspects of it as well.

Spiritually, it represents the eternal, innate state of Buddhahood possessed by all beings, as well as the cutting edge of wisdom. The personification of this condition and power is *Vajrasattva*, a deity and an abstract principle.<sup>115</sup>

*Vajrasattva* represents the non-dual experience which transcends emptiness and pure mind. The concept was extended into the theory of Pañcatathāgatas or the five Tathāgatas, also



known as five Dhyānī Buddhas (Vairocana, Akṣobhya, Ratna-sambhava, Amitābha, and Amogha-siddhi). The Pañcatathāgatas "are but the modes and manifestations of the Dharma-kāyā (primordial element underlying all that exists) of the *Vajrasattva*." They can be regarded as the five presiding deities over the five gross elements (viz., earth, water, fire, air and ether) and the five senses (viz., senses of vision, taste, hearing, smell and touch).<sup>116</sup>

The aspect which characterises all forms of Tantric Buddhism most potently is its use of sexual symbolism.

The "thought of awakening" is identified with semen, dormant wisdom with a woman waiting to be inseminated. Therefore wisdom (*prajñā*) is conceived as a female deity. She is a mother (*jananī*), as in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature; she is the female yogi (*yoginī*); but she is also a low-caste whore (*ḍombī caṇḍālī*). Skillful means (*upāya*) are visualized as her male consort. The perfect union of these two (*prajñopāya-yuganaddha*) is the union of the nondual.<sup>117</sup>

In the above use of symbolism scholars see a clear indication of non-Aryan substratum, specially the cults of fertility and mother goddess. But there is also a clear radicalism: the Tantric exponents, in their use of sexual symbols, are also iconoclasts who were out to wreck havoc on monkish prudishness and shake the established order out of its self-righteous complacency. But it is also important to remember that most forms of Tantric Buddhism were antinomian only in principle. Therefore, Vajrayāna had its vows and rules which were traditional monastic in nature, the *bodhisattva* vows and special Tantric rules. Exoteric practices were reserved only for those who were accomplished in the elementary practice.<sup>118</sup>

*Sahajayāna:*

Supposedly initiated by the Kashmiri yogin Lūi-pā (c. 750-800), Sahajayāna

was dominated by long-haired, wandering *siddhās*, who openly challenged and ridiculed the Buddhist establishment. They referred to the object of their religious experience as "the whore", both as a reference to the sexual symbolism of ritual Tantra and as a challenge to monastic conceptions of spiritual purity, but also as a metaphor for the universal accessibility of enlightenment.<sup>119</sup>

Extant Sahaja literature, such as *Dohakośā* and *Caryā Gīti* were composed in Apabhraṁśa and early Bangla languages respectively. Although there exists uncertainty about their date of composition, scholars agree that they are possibly from 8th to 10th c. AD. Based on the fact that these and other works of early Sahaja masters and commentaries on them exist in Tibetan and Sanskrit languages, it is also believed that they were highly influential in Buddhist establishment.<sup>120</sup>

The doctrinal position of the movement is basically identical with that of Vajrayāna: "*sahaja* is the innate principle of enlightenment, the *bodhicitta*, to be realized in the union of wisdom and skillful means."<sup>121</sup> But it is in the life-style of the practitioners that the difference between the two are clearly distinguishable. Whereas Vajrayāna soon adapted to and was accepted by the establishment (both academic institutions and monasteries and therefore also indirectly by their sponsor, i.e., the state), the Sahaja saints were rebels who "sought spontaneity and saw monastic life as an obstacle to true realization."<sup>122</sup> They were part of "a movement that represented a clear challenge to Buddhist establishment: the ideal person was a homeless mad man wandering about with his female consort, or a householder-sorcerer - either of which would claim to practice union with his consort as the actualization of what the high tradition practiced only in symbolic or mystical form."<sup>123</sup>

#### *Kālacakrayāna:*

Dated not earlier than 10th c. AD (possibly in the latter half), Kālacakrayāna is farthest removed from earlier Buddhist tradition for its strong influence of the substratum. The tradition of Kālacakra "incorporates concepts of messianism and astrology not attested elsewhere in Buddhist literature."<sup>124</sup> The concept of "Ādibuddha" (the primordial Buddha) is also to be met in Kālacakra text.<sup>125</sup>

The primary doctrinal stance of Kālacakrayāna

is that all phenomena, including the rituals of Tantra, are contained within the initiate's body, and all aspects of time are also contained in this body. The concept of time (*kāla*) is introduced and discussed and its symbolism explained as a means to give the devotee control over time and therefore over the impermanent world.<sup>126</sup>

#### *Tantric Literature :*

Sacred texts composed for the practice of Tantric Buddhism are known as *tantras*. The most profound of these were produced before 8th c AD Some of these texts are the *Mahāvairocana*, the *Guhyasamāja*, the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* (earlier parts) and the *Hevajra*.<sup>127</sup>

#### *Worship, ritual and meditation :*

The esoteric rituals of Tantric Buddhism have been derived by fusing elements drawn from the substratum into the Buddhist doctrinal base. On the other hand, the exoteric liturgies of

Tantric high tradition are built on Mahayāna rituals but at the same time are influenced by Brahminical rituals. Tantric rituals include magic formulas, gestures and mystical diagrams (*maṇḍalas*) which are complex symbols.

The practice of Tantric visualization (*sādhana*) are set in purely ritual frame and draws on pre-Mahāyāna and Mahāyāna liturgical and contemplative processes. It usually begins with a gradual process of purification, followed by visualization of mystic syllables corresponding to the deity chosen. The syllables are then transformed into images which leads to the visualization of the deity. At this point, the adept becomes one with the deity.

But this oneness was interpreted as the realization of the nondual; therefore, the deity became the adept as much as the adept was turned into the deity. Thus, the transcendent could be actualized in the adept's life beyond meditation in the fulfilment of the *bodhisattva* vows.<sup>128</sup>

#### *Tantric Doctrine :*

The distinctive features of Tantric Buddhism are not only its rituals and symbolism. Rather, immanence of Buddhahood is more significant if one desires to capture its essence. Tantric Buddhism places Buddhahood within the corporeal body of human beings as its (human body's) innate quality. This quality is manifested only when one realizes the Three Mysteries: the body, the mind and the speech of the Buddha. Tantric Buddhism maintains,

It is not enough to be free from the illusion of the world; one becomes free by living *in* illusion in such a way that illusion become the manifestation of Buddhahood. Tantra seeks to construct an alternative reality, such that a mentally constructed world reveals the fundamental illusion of the world and manifests the mysterious power of the Buddha through illusion.<sup>129</sup>

In rituals, Tantric Buddhists attempt to realize the Three Mysteries, and thereby actualize Buddhahood, by performing the *mudrās* (prostrations and ritual gestures), uttering the *mantras* and visualizing the Buddha. It is believed that the ritual transforms the human person into a Buddha. "Then this person's mind is the mind of an awakened being, it knows all things; the body assumes the appearance appropriate to save any living being; the voice is able to speak in the language of any living being needing to be saved."<sup>130</sup>

#### 1.4.3 Nātha Cult

An esoteric religious movement which originated in eastern India with Bengal as its centre,<sup>131</sup> the Nātha cult has a history of well over a thousand years and at its height of popularity, it had large following all over India. The Cult is so called because those adept in its practice bear the title of 'Nātha', (lit., 'Master' or 'Lord'). According to one view, the term denotes 'timeless religion which is the cause of stability of the whole universe'.<sup>132</sup> In

modern times, it has been reduced to marginal status and has been assimilated in Śaivism. As Sukumar Sen points out, the Cult was originally independent of the latter. Śaivism is theistic but Nātha cult is atheistic. The ultimate aim of the former is liberation of the corporeal or unification with Śivahood; but for the latter, the ultimate aim is immortality and divinity. Furthermore, Śaivism accepts Śiva as God; but Nātha cult proclaims that all those who have attained *siddhi* (lit., 'spiritual salvation', here, 'perfection') are gods (*nāthas*); Siva is but one of the 'perfect ones'.<sup>133</sup>

Traditionally, the Nātha cult recognises nine masters (*nāthas*) but texts expounding the practice of the Cult do not agree on the list of nine. According to tradition current in the literature of Nātha cult in Bengal, the following names are available: (i) Mīnanātha or Matsyendranātha, (ii) Gorakhnātha (or Gorakṣanātha or Gorkānātha), (iii) Hāḍipā (or Jālandharīpā), (iv) Kānhapā (or Kānapā), (v) Chaurāṅginātha (or Gābhur Siddhā), (vi) Bindunātha and (vii) Karpaṭinātha.<sup>134</sup> Tradition also ascribes Gorakṣanātha to have been a disciple of Mīnanātha and Kānhapā of Hāḍipā; Karpaṭinātha and Bindunātha were born of Gorakṣanātha and Mīnanātha respectively.<sup>135</sup> Literature of the Cult also features Queen Maināmatī (a *dākinī*, i.e., a woman with mystic power) who was the disciple of Gorakṣanātha and her son King Gopīcandra (or Govinda-candra) who was the disciple of Hāḍipā.<sup>136</sup> But it is not clear if Maināmatī and Gopīcandra were regarded as *nāthas*. All the Nātha *siddhās* (those who have attained *siddhi*) are believed to reside as demi-gods who live in the Himalayan region,<sup>137</sup> having successfully attained indestructible spiritual entities through the discipline of *yoga*. It is important to note that "the nine *nāthas* are in many respects similar to the '84 great perfect ones', the *mahāsiddhās*, common to both Tantric Buddhism and Hinduism and their names occur on both lists."<sup>138</sup> It is also important to note that quite a few of the Nātha *siddhās* are also mentioned in the literature of Dharma cult. They are believed to descend on earth along with other gods on the occasion of ceremonies held in honour of Dharma Ṭhākur. The liturgical text of the Cult titled *Dharma-pūjā-vidhāna* also specifies worship of some of the Nātha *siddhās*.<sup>139</sup>

The general religious nature of Nātha cult, Shashibhushan Das Gupta points out, "is characterised by a wide-spread belief of occult power attained through the practice of *yoga*."<sup>140</sup> All the literary texts associated with the Cult is permeated thoroughly with magic and sorcery. But beneath this popular association, there exists a philosophy which sets for its practitioners the final aim of *jīvanmukti* or 'liberation while living'.<sup>141</sup> It rejects the concept of liberation after death as an unprovable hypothesis and believes that liberation is immortality and can be attained by the adept in this very existence. All the legends, traditions and stories related to the Cult are essentially based on the quest for immortality:

"what differentiates the *siddhās* from ordinary men is their power of control over death and decay."<sup>142</sup> According to Nātha cult doctrine, the state of liberation is obtained when the adept attains the state of *sahaja*. As described in *Akulavīratāntra* attributed to Matsyendranātha, the state of *sahaja* is

a state of perfect equilibrium, which transcends all our perceptual knowledge with positive and negative attributes. In that state of perfect quietude the yogin becomes one with the whole universe and realises a non-dual existence. In such a state "He himself is the goddess, himself the god, himself the disciple, himself the preceptor, he is at once the meditation, the meditator and the divinity (meditated upon)."<sup>143</sup>

The means for attaining the state of *sahaja* is primarily Haṭha-yoga, which lays emphasis mainly on "the physical or physiological practices which remove disease, decay and death."<sup>144</sup> Haṭha-yoga attempts to create a *pakva* (ripe) body (i.e., that disciplined by yoga) by "the purification of and control over the muscles, sinews, nerves, ducts and nerve-centres through the process."<sup>145</sup> Closely associated with the above is the question of gaining control over mind. According to Das Gupta,

it is held that the vital wind is the vehicle of the mind, and the control of the vital wind through the process of Prāṇāyāma leads to the control of the mind. With the arrest of the vital wind the mind becomes arrested (...).<sup>146</sup>

The followers of the Nātha cult call their custom of austere practice 'Kāyā-sādhanā' (culture of the body). It implies, "on the whole, a slow and gradual process of continual purification, rejuvenation and transubstantiation of the body through various yogic processes."<sup>147</sup> As a concept, Kāyā-sādhanā of the Nātha cult has been described as 'Uṭā-sādhanā' (the 'regressive process'), which is based on the theory of the sun and the moon as postulated in *Siddhāsiddhānta-paddhati* ascribed to Gorakṣanātha. In it, the human body is shown to emerge from

the collection of five factors, viz., *Karma* (activity), *Kāma* (desire), *Candra* (the moon), *Sūrya* (the sun) and *Agni* (fire). Of these, the first two are rather the conditions of the visible body (*piṇḍa*), while the other three are the primary elements of which the body is made.<sup>148</sup>

Since the sun and the fire are held to be the same, the compositional elements of the body are reduced to two, i.e., the sun and the moon.

The moon represents the element of *Rasa* or *Soma*, (i.e., the quintessence in the form of juice) and the sun is the element of fire, and therefore, the body is called the product of *Agni* and *Soma*. *Rasa* as *Soma* is the food (*upabhogya*) while fire as the consumer is the eater (*bhoktā*) and through the well-proportioned combination of the consumer and the consumed the whole creation is sustained.<sup>149</sup>

Yogic texts in general identify the elements of the moon and the sun as those of creation-preservation and change-destruction, respectively. As the principle of creation-preservation, the moon resides in the region of body above naval. It is situated in the cerebrum region, immediately below the Sahasrāra or 'the lotus of thousand petals' and it faces downwards. On the other hand, the sun, as the principle of change-destruction, resides in the region of body below the naval. It is situated in the lowest nervous plexus, on the lowest extremity of the spinal chord and it faces upwards. It is also believed that the moon is the store-house of *amṛta* (ambrosia, the quintessence of the body) which gives immortality to the body whereas the sun is the fire of destruction (*kālagṇi*). The moon also contains semen (*śukra*, also known as *bindu*) and the sun contains ovum (*mahā-rajās*). It is important to note that the concept of the moon and the sun is the same as that of Śīva and Śakti as found in Hindu Tantra and that of Caṇḍāli and Bodhi-citta in Buddhist Tantra.<sup>150</sup>

Conservation of *amṛta* is central to the yogic practice of the Nātha cult. But the practitioners also aim at commingling the sun (the principle of destruction) and the moon (the principle of creation), which signifies the transformation of the material body of change to an immutable body of perfection. "It can be effected by a perfect control over the destructive force of the sun and then rejuvenating the whole body with the nectar oozing from the moon."<sup>151</sup> As an extension of the theory of the sun and the moon, the practitioners of the Nātha cult maintain that in order to save the moon from the sun, men must abstain from sexual pleasure. Women, in the literature of the Cult, have been often depicted as tigresses.

It is essential that the above practice is carried on under the guidance of an accomplished *guru*. The relationship of the *guru* (master) and the *śiṣya* (disciple) is central to the tradition of the Nātha cult and it is through direct teachings of those adept in the Cult practice that much of it has lived and continued.

It is possible that the original form of Nātha cult evolved in Bengal sometime during 9th century. With the gradual decay of Buddhism and resurgence of Brahminism from 10th to 12th centuries, the Cult grew to be one of the leading forms of religious practice and spread all over India. But, during the medieval period, it was gradually assimilated into the folds of Brahminism and finally, by 19th century, the Cult ceased to exist in Bengal as a distinct faith. In Bangladesh today, isolated communities who follow remnants of the faith can still be seen in some distant localities of greater Bogra, Rajshahi, Dinajpur and Rangpur districts.<sup>152</sup>

Although scholars are divided in their opinion, Muhammad Shahidullah, Niharrajan Roy, Asutosh Bhattacharyya and others agree that the Cult was significantly influenced by Tantric Buddhism.<sup>153</sup> According to Srikalayani Mallik, "there is an unusual blending of Hindu Tantrism and Buddhist Sahajjā (Sahajayāna) mysticism in the Nātha practice."<sup>154</sup> Apart from the proximity in basic doctrinal positions and practices of Tantric Buddhism (especially Sahajayāna) and Nātha cult, as well as the acceptance of major Nātha *siddhās* in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition of the 84 *siddhās*, quite a few of the Buddhist mystic (*caryā*) songs by Sarahapā and Kanhapā also appear to indicate yogic practice of Nātha cult, all of which add to confirm the views of above mentioned scholars.

#### 1.4.4 Dharma Cult

Reduced to the state of a regional "folk" religion prevalent among the Ḍoma and other "low" castes of Rāḍha region in West Bengal today, the Dharma cult has a history stretched back to antiquity. The Cult conceives of its supreme deity Dharma Ṭhākur as formless but practices institutional worship of a natural piece of rock often round or oval in shape or in the shape of a tortoise. Most scholars who have worked on the Cult have been engrossed by the question of its origin. As a result, there exists little information on the Cult's doctrinal concepts. The salient features about its rituals have been discussed in Chapter 2.11. The following are some of the notable characteristics of the Cult. Dharma Ṭhākur is propitiated specially by the childless desiring children and those inflicted by diseases of sight desiring to be healed. He is a malignant god who punishes those who have no faith in him by inflicting them with leprosy. Annual worship of the god is accompanied by elaborate rituals spread over twelve days (the figure being auspicious to him), in which ritualised bathing of the god occupies an important position. His ritualised worship includes sacrifice of animals and birds but he is also pleased when offerings of terra-cotta horses are made.<sup>155</sup> At one time the cult of Dharma Ṭhākur was prevalent all over Bengal and even beyond.<sup>156</sup>

A hundred years ago, Hara Prasāda Śāstrī drew the attention of scholars by declaring that the "Dharma-pūja prevalent in Western Bengal is Buddhism, though unconscious."<sup>157</sup> The subject has been a matter of intense scholarly discussion since then, resulting in controversy yet to be fully resolved. According to Muhammad Shahidullah, unlike the Nātha cult, the Dharma cult is not directly related to (Tantric) Buddhism, but is an amalgamation of Buddhism and Hinduism along with some influence of the Nātha cult.<sup>158</sup> B.K. Sarkar believes that "the religious ideals set forth (in the *Śūnya Purāṇ* of Rāmāi) may be said to be a slightly modified form of that which Dīpaṅkara (Atīś Dīpaṅkar) had

professed and inculcated" (i.e., Tantric Buddhism).<sup>159</sup> According to Benoy Ghosh, it is not possible to deny that Dharma cult has been particularly influenced by Tantric Buddhism of Bengal. There also exists a deep-rooted connection between Vajrayāna, Dharma cult and (Hindu) Tantrism as revealed by the history and culture of Maynāpur, the fabled capital of the most important hero of the Cult, Lāusen.<sup>160</sup> But Sukumar Sen and Panchanan Mandal have striven hard to disprove Buddhist connection. They contend that the Cult originated from ancient Vedic rituals which was later influenced by Brahminism, Buddhism and Islam and the form in which it exists today contains substantial elements of Brahminical culture.<sup>161</sup> On the other hand, Asutosh Bhattacharyya attempts to show that Dharma cult was originally a ritualistic practice of the (non-Aryan) proto-Australoids, which was later influenced by Buddhism, Brahminism and Islam.<sup>162</sup>

There are a number of strands in Dharma cult which lead to Buddhism. Some of the examples are, the epithet of Dharma-rājā (lit., "King Dharma") in the Jātaka stories refers to the Buddha, Dharma-rājā is also a synonym for the Buddha as mentioned in the Sanskrit dictionary *Amarakoṣa* and the observance of two important Buddhist festivals, Buddha-pūrṇimā and Āṣāḍh-pūrṇimā, by the followers of Dharma cult.<sup>163</sup> Scholars such as Hara Prasāda Śāstrī were attracted to the obvious similarity of 'Dharma' of the Three Jewels of Buddhism (i.e., Buddha, Dharma, Saṅgha) and the deity Dharma Ṭhākur of Dharma cult. These scholars believed that "the second jewel, viz., Dharma, became identified with the Buddhist Stupa, which was worshipped as something like a symbol of Dharma, and the Stupa became the Dharma Ṭhākur of the Dharma cult in the form of a tortoise."<sup>164</sup>

The Buddhist connection of Dharma Ṭhākur can also be seen in the *Dharma-koṣa-saṅgraha*, a liturgical text on Nepalese Buddhism composed in 1826. In it, Ādi-buddha is called Nirañjana "because there is no stain (*añjana* = collyrium) in him, he being the nature and form of the void like the sky." He is also Dharma-rājā "because he is the lord of all the entities (..), or because he shines in the world in his justice (..), or because all the entities, or all justice shine from him."<sup>165</sup> Both the terms Nirañjana and Dharma-rājā are also used to denote Dharma Ṭhākur in the liturgical texts of Dharma cult.

But the most important influence of Buddhism (Mahāyāna and Tantric) on Dharma cult is the concept of *śūnyatā* as the quintessence of Dharma Ṭhākur which has been elaborately dealt with in the liturgical texts of the Cult. Even 'Nirañjana', another name of Dharma Ṭhākur, echoes the above concept of vacuity: "it is very frequently and aptly used as an epithet of the reality, which in its ultimate void-nature is stainless like the sky above."<sup>166</sup> Liturgical texts of the Cult also offer salutation to all kinds of void, such as great-void



(*mahā-śūnya*), supreme-void (*parama-śūnya*) etc. An excerpt from *Dharma-pūjā-vidhāna* (a liturgical text of the Cult), depicts Dharma Ṭhākur thus:

He is the Nirañjana, who is neither space (*sthāna*), nor fame, who has neither lotus-like feet, nor any form, nor any primary colour; (...) he is stainless, of the form of the syllable "Om", the supreme abode, the unqualified, spotless, unchanging and all-void.<sup>167</sup>

As Das Gupta points out, descriptions such as the one mentioned above are almost similar to meditation and salutation passages of Tantric Buddhist texts. Furthermore, the emphasis on 'negative' characteristics are clearly influenced by Buddhism which emphasises the negative aspect of reality as well.<sup>168</sup>

Another concept where Dharma cult appears to have been influenced by Tantric Buddhism is that of the five priests (*pañḍitas*), the five guards (*koṭālas*) and the five female attendants (*āminīs*). The five priests of Dharma Ṭhākur who are believed to have appeared in the past or will appear in the future are Setāi, Nilāi, Kāsāi, Rāmāi and Ğosāi. During ritualised worship, the five priests are installed in the five gates of the temple of Dharma Ṭhākur which face five quarters (west, south, east, north and void). They have five guards: Hanumāna, Ulluka, Gaēuḍa (the mythical bird), the Moon and the Sun. The five female attendants are Basuyā or Bijayā, Caritrā, Gaṅgā, Durgā and Abhayā. As Das Gupta points out, the "theory of Pañḍitas, Koṭālas, Āminīs etc. is nothing but a popular adaptation of the later Buddhist theory of the Pañcatathāgatas, also known as the five Dhyānī Buddhas.<sup>169</sup>

According to Das Gupta, the elements of Hinduism which are conspicuous in Dharma cult are Upaniṣadic Brahman, Tantric (Hindu) Śiva, Vaiṣṇavite Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa and Rāma and Purāṇic Yama. "Of all these (...) Yama, the king of death and justice, is most widely known by the name of Dharma or Dharma-rājā." In *Mahābhārata*, a popular story recounts how Yudhiṣṭhira was put to test by his father Dharma in disguise, which the former passed successfully.<sup>170</sup> Das Gupta also reminds us that "the idea of Dharma as the godhead has fairly old history in the Hindu texts."<sup>171</sup> Śiva also occupies a prominent position in the liturgical texts of Dharma cult. On the other hand, eulogies of Dharma Ṭhākur (generally known as *Dharma-maṅgala* texts which are narratives in rhymed metrical verse and of later origin) he (Dharma Ṭhākur) is mostly identified with Viṣṇu in general and Kṛṣṇa and Rāma in particular.<sup>172</sup> Most interesting in this regard is the presence of Hanumāna as one of the *koṭālas*. He is seen to perform the role of Dharma Ṭhākur's chief agent or executor in *Dharma-maṅgala* texts. Hanumāna's role in these texts is often as great as that seen in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Das Gupta believes, this is because some of the most renowned composers were possibly devotees of Rāma.

Das Gupta observes, "there seems to be palpable influence of the Muslims in the description of Dharma of later days."<sup>173</sup> He points to a few customs in Dharma cult which, according to him, are essentially Islamic in origin. These are (i) the custom of sacrificing goats, ducks or pigeons in a manner which is a peculiarity of the Muslims, (ii) the importance of western direction (which for the Muslims of Bengal is the direction of the Ka'ba) as seen in a few rituals and (iii) importance attached to Friday as the auspicious day similar to the custom prevalent among the Muslims. The two liturgical texts of Dharma cult, *Śūrya Purāṇ* and *Dharma-pūjā-vidhāna*, contains a passage recounting the wrath of Nirāñjana (titled *Nirāñjaner Ruśmā*) which treats the Muslim conquest of Bengal and subsequent persecution of the Hindus as a gracious device of the Lord to save the followers of the Cult. Furthermore, the same passage identifies the God of the Muslims as Dharma, the Prophet as Brahma, Adam as Śiva, Eve as Caṇḍikā and more.<sup>174</sup> Das Gupta believes that the above attitude arose possibly because "the followers of Dharma suffered much for their religious beliefs and practices from the caste Hindus (...)"<sup>175</sup> According to Muhammad Shahidullah, the Islamic influence on the Dharma cult is of later date.<sup>176</sup>

Finally, exponents of the theory that the origin of Dharma cult lies in proto-Australoid cult worship, believe that rituals and concepts associated with Dharma Thākur point to the original practice of sun worship. In order to substantiate their theory, they point to the ritual of *caḍaka* (or swinging ceremony) and claim that it is actually a piece of magic to help the sun move. They also hold that the concept of *śūryatā* refers to the shape of a zero which symbolically denotes the sun.<sup>177</sup>

The opinions of various scholars along with salient characteristics of the cult clearly show that Dharma cult was considerably influenced by Mahāyāna and Tantric Buddhism. Similarity in the cosmogony of both Dharma and Nātha cults also point to a close relationship between the two. Again, similarity in some parts of the literature produced by the two cults (such as the "Jāmti" episode) also supports the above view. Whatever be the actual origin, it seems very probable that Rāmāi Paṇḍit, the earliest known propagator of the faith who existed sometime prior to Sena rule according to Bhattacharyya<sup>178</sup> or during the Sena rule according to Shahidullah,<sup>179</sup> had reformed the original proto-Australoid cult practice with elements heavily drawn from Mahayānā and Tantric Buddhist theology and rituals either during the Pāla or the Sena rule. On the other hand, Benoy Kumar Sarkar places Rāmāi Paṇḍit sometime in 12th or 13th century.<sup>180</sup> Bhattacharyya and Sarkar have both studied liturgical and literary texts of the Cult to arrive at their views. Therefore we can firmly accept that Dharma cult, as propagated by Rāmāi Paṇḍit, originated sometime around 12th century. That the Cult was an active force in 13th and 14th centuries should

be evident from the account given in the passage titled *Nirañjaner Ruśmā*. Elements of Śaivism and Śaktism crept in possibly from after that time as the Cult gradually lost ground and was finally assimilated into Śaivism during 17th and 18th centuries. The icon of Dharma at Bahaḍu, a five to six feet high seated male image with large eyes, curled mustache and a hooded snake on top of the head, whose rituals are performed by priests from the *Yugī* community, offers fascinating testimony of Śaivite assimilation of Dharma cult.

#### 1.4.5 *Islam*

Founded by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in 610 AD in Mecca, the religion of Islam has been identified as one with the following fundamental attitude: "to maintain wholeness and proper order, as the opposite of disintegration, by accepting God's (Allah's) law". Etymologically, the word "Islam" has been derived from the root *slm* which denotes "to be in peace, to be an integral whole". Therefore, Islam denotes "to surrender to God's law and thus to be an integral whole" and a Muslim is a person who has surrendered himself accordingly.<sup>181</sup>

The framework of Islamic legal and theological thought rests on two fundamental sources. These are: the *Qur'an* (literally 'Reading' or 'Recitation') and the Sunnah (literally, 'Tradition'). The *Qur'an*, considered to be the primary source of Islamic teaching, is regarded as the revelations of Allah delivered to the Prophet through the angel Jibrael (Gabriel). The five basic constituents of faith (*iman*) as stated in the *Qur'an* are (i) belief in Allah, (ii) belief in angels, (iii) belief in the revealed books (which include the *Qur'an*, the *Old Testament* and the *New Testament*), (iv) belief in Allah's messengers (including the Prophet, Jesus, Moses and Abraham) and (v) belief in the Day of Judgement. Corresponding to the five items of belief mentioned above, the following "Five Pillars" or five-fold practical doctrine was formulated.

(i) *Shahadah*, or publicly bearing witness at least once in a lifetime that "There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His prophet".

(ii) *Salat*, or five daily prayers performed prior to sunrise, early afternoon, late afternoon, immediately after sunset and before retiring.

(iii) *Zakat*, or paying tax by the affluent members of the community which is to be spent on social and state life.

(iv) *Sawm*, or fasting from sunrise to sunset without eating, drinking, smoking or sexual intercourse, for a whole month (i.e., Ramadan, the 9th month of Islamic lunar calendar).

(v) *Hajj*, or annual pilgrimage to Mecca, on the last month of Islamic calendar, to be performed at least once in a lifetime by those who can economically afford the journey.<sup>182</sup>

The Sunnah consists of words, deeds and approval of the Prophet compiled as the *Hadith* ('a report', i.e., a saying of the Prophet). During the early decades following the rise of Islam, the concept of Sunnah was flexible and was not based on any written codification. It used to denote "the normative behaviour of the Muslim community, putatively derived from the Prophet's teaching and conduct, and from the exemplary teaching of his immediate followers, since the latter was seen as an index of the former."<sup>183</sup> Because of political, legal and theological disputes which developed as the initial Islamic community of the Prophet's time dramatically expanded, there arose the need to validate various positions and opinions. This was fulfilled by projecting the opinions of the first three generations or so back upon the Prophet. In the 2nd and 3rd centuries of Islamic calendar (8th and 9th c. AD), the process of codification of the Sunnah was carried on in earnest. Sayings were accepted solely on the basis of reliable authority. Thus, there arose the convention whereby each *Hadith* had a chain of guarantors and it usually took the following form: "I, A, heard it from B, who heard it from C, who said that he heard the Prophet say so-and-so or do such-and-such". Even so, specialists divide *Hadith* into categories according to their "genuineness" and "reliability".<sup>184</sup>

Islamic jurisprudence includes all of human behaviour, including intentions and no line is drawn between law and morality. Therefore much of it is only enforceable at the bar of conscience.<sup>185</sup> It should also be mentioned that Islamic law "in its first intention, is a system of 'ought' and 'ought-nots' rather than a specific legal code." For this reason, each book on Islamic law opens with a discussion on religious duties. "That is also why actions are ethically classified into five categories: (1) obligatory (2) recommended (3) permissible or indifferent (4) reprehensible and (5) forbidden."<sup>186</sup> Agent's faith, intention and will are important considerations. The frame-work of Islamic law was initially based on the two above mentioned sources (i.e., the *Qur'an* and the Sunnah) and also recognised the process of *Ijtihad* ("original thinking"). The latter was to be an individual's endeavour to seek the meaning of *Qur'an* and Sunnah in meeting day-to-day problems of life. By early 8th century AD, the vast Islamic empire extended from Spain in the west to Sindh (in modern Pakistan) in the east. As can be expected, conflicting opinions of different individuals of the same or different regions led to confusion regarding interpretation of the *Qur'an* and the Sunnah. During 8th century AD, individual interpretation and original thinking (*Ijtihad*) was replaced by *Qiyas* (reasoning by strict analogy based on the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*) and *Ijma* (consensus opinion of scholars), with the objective of achieving a standard legal

theory and practice. But it had its adverse effects. It closed further questioning on issues on which consensus of opinion had once been reached. And by 11th century, total rigidity transformed what was intended to be an open process of questioning and reinterpretation (*Ijtihad*) into a conservative mechanism.<sup>186a</sup>

The Muslim community has undergone a number of major theological and political schisms. The earliest of these erupted on the question of definition of a true Muslim and was spearheaded by the Kharijis in 7th c. AD. Exemplars of piety, utterly egalitarian but also fanatics, the Kharijis held that

a Muslim ceases to be a Muslim by commission of a single serious sin such as theft or adultery, no matter how many times that person may recite the profession of faith "There is no god but God and Muhammad is his prophet", unless he or she repents sincerely.<sup>187</sup>

From the milieu of the Kharijis developed the Mu'tazilah, a full-fledged theological school, in 8th and 9th c. AD. They held that while grave sinners do not cease to be Muslims, neither can they claim to be Muslims. Building their central thesis on "God's justice and unity", they contended "God's justice demands that human beings have a free and efficacious will; only then can they be the locus of moral responsibility and deserve praise and blame here and reward and punishment in the hereafter."<sup>188</sup> Carrying the above contention to its logical conclusion they held that "just as God, in his justice, cannot punish one who does good, neither can he forgive one who does evil, for otherwise the difference between good and evil would disappear."<sup>189</sup>

Sunnism, which means 'the majority of the community', rose as a sophisticated form of popular reaction against the Kharijis and the Mu'tazilah.

In doctrinal form, this reaction can be described as Murji'ism (from *irja*, "postponement"), the belief that once adults have openly professed that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet, if there is no reason to suspect that they are lying, mad, or under constraint, then such people are Muslims, irrespective of whether their deeds are good or whether their beliefs quite conform to orthodoxy, and that final judgement on their status must be "postponed" until the Last Day and left to God.<sup>190</sup>

Opposing the stringent demands on the part of the believer as voiced by the Kharijis and the Mu'tazilah, the Murji'ah made minimal demands on the believer's knowledge of Islam and Islamic conduct. As for 'free will', the Murji'ah were bent toward predestinarianism. Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari (d. 935), the chief formulator of Sunni creed, maintained that all actions are produced by God. Man and nature merely serve as agents for divine action; they "appropriate" and "acquire" divine action and thus the responsibility of act falls on

them.<sup>191</sup> Today, the Sunnis form the largest sect within Muslim community the world over as well as in Bangladesh.

Although the sect of Shi'ah (literally, "the partisans", here "the partisans of Ali") is a minority among the Muslims in Bangladesh today, nevertheless it played an important role in contributing to the theatrical development in the country. It grew out of a schism in early Islamic history and its members believe that after the Prophet, the rightful and legitimate heir of the Islamic caliphate is Ali (the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law) and his descendants. After three successive caliphs Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman, Ali finally became the fourth caliph but was assassinated. Thereafter, Mu'awiyah (the founder of Umayyad dynasty) contested Hasan's (Ali's son's) claim to the caliphate. Hasan abdicated in favour of Mu'awiyah but reserved the right to succession (after Mu'awiyah's death) for himself. However, Hasan was poisoned through Mu'awiyah's son Yazid's conspiracy in 669 AD. After his brother's death Hosain persisted in his efforts to claim the caliphate. Offered support by the people of Kufa (a city near Bagdad), Hosain set out with his family and a group of followers to the city, hoping to fight Yazid with their assistance. But before Hosain could arrive, the city was captured by Yazid's men. Vastly outnumbered, Hosain and his men lay in a state of siege on the plains of Karbala (north of Kufa), cut off from any source of water for ten days. A battle was fought on the 10th of Muharram (October 10, 680 AD), in which Hosain lost all his men and he too was killed.<sup>192</sup> Hosain's martyrdom at Karbala briefly described above began to be observed in public around mid-10th century when the Sunni caliph in Bagdad came under the sway of Shi'i Buyahid dynasty.<sup>193</sup>

Shi'ism originated as a conglomeration of socio-political dissidents who sought to voice their protest against injustice of the Ummayyad dynasty. Till about 9th century AD, its theology was based on a God who was believed to be a corporeal being seated on an actual throne and who created space by actual physical motion. "But, beginning in the latter half of the 9th century, Shi'i theology was radically transformed, inheriting and asserting with increasing force the Mu'tazili doctrine of human free will against the Sunnis."<sup>194</sup> In 13th century, Shi'i theology grew further with the work of philosopher, theologian and scientist Nasir al-Din Tusi (d. 1273) who described man as the "creator of his own action". Interestingly, while the Sunnis exorcised philosophy from theology since 13th c. onwards, the Shi'ah continued to accept many philosophical theses into their theology. As a result, while philosophy declined in the Sunni world, its practice reached glorious height in Shi'i Iran of 17th century.<sup>195</sup>

Scholars have described Shi'ah esotericism as its most characteristic doctrine. In practice it denotes "dissimulation of one's real belief in a generally hostile atmosphere".<sup>196</sup> Adopted in early times, this doctrine was the result of underground movement which Shi'ism was forced to adopt, faced with political failure.

But in its theoretical aspect esotericism is defined by the doctrine that religion, and particularly the *Qur'an* has, besides the apparent, 'external' meaning, hidden esoteric meanings that can only be known through spiritual contact with the Hidden Imam.<sup>197</sup>

### Sufism

A mystic tradition within the fold of Islam, Sufism "stresses the personal relationship between the believer and Allah",<sup>198</sup> and springs from "the desire to cultivate the inner life and to attain a deeper, personal understanding of Islam."<sup>199</sup> It is commonly held that the etymological root of the term 'Sufi' has been possibly derived from *suf* (Arabian word for wool) "since the early ascetics of Islam (Sufis) are said to have worn coarse woollen garments to symbolize their rejection of the world."<sup>200</sup> Although it contains tendencies which are mystical and renunciatory in nature, Sufism is very much a part of Islamic mainstream. In the medieval world of Islam, Sufism generated influential writings on theology, such as the corpus of Ibn al-'Arabi and poetry such as that of Jalal al-Din Rumi.<sup>201</sup>

Sufi teachings are grounded firmly on the Prophet and the *Qur'an*. But their difference from the conservative Muslims lie in the fact that the Sufis emphasize different sections of the *Qur'an* than the conservatives. "Whereas conservative Muslims focus on passages emphasizing Allah's almighty, awesome and ineffable character, Sufi interpreters stress the sections that speak of Allah's pervasive presence in the world and in the hearts of the believers."<sup>202</sup> It is important to note that the Sufis stress on the '*jihad* of the heart' as a struggle of greater significance than the '*jihad* of the sword' of the conservatives.<sup>203</sup>

Among the Sufis, the most fundamental relationship is that of the master and the disciple. "The master, known as a *shaykh* or *pīr*, is first and foremost a teacher, instructing his or her followers in proper ethical and spiritual conducts."<sup>204</sup> The disciple often submits in total obedience to the master's will "to be like dead bodies in the hands of body-washer." Upon initiation, a disciple is often bestowed a patched frock (*khirqah*).<sup>205</sup> Sometimes a renowned master is regarded as a saint who is believed to possess extraordinary powers to perform miracles (such as levitation, mind reading and physical transformation). Their followers also believe that the saints can act as intermediaries between them and God and earn special favour for them (the followers). Frequently, the tombs of Sufi saints become

centres for pilgrimage which also serve as centres for diffusion of Sufi teachings and practices.<sup>206</sup>

The Prophet is held in particular veneration and devotion in Sufism. This element is so strong that puritans often raise strong objection to it as idolatry. Indo-Muslim Sufi poets have even borrowed conventions from Hindu *bhakti* poetry and have portrayed themselves as young maidens tormented by separation from their beloved, i.e., the Prophet.<sup>207</sup>

Till 12th c. AD, Sufism was restricted to circles of spiritual elite with divergent spiritual techniques and ideologies. But from 12th c. onwards, there developed networks of orders which involved the lay populace on a large scale. Stretching from Morocco to South-east Asia, there grew systems of Sufi hospices (known as *khanagah* in India) where resided the Sufi *shaykh* and guided his clientele. In most cases, orthodox education (such as theology and law) was imparted in the *madrasahs* (colleges) and Sufi works were taught in the hospices.<sup>208</sup>

Among the Sufi orders, some are global while others are more regional. The Qadiri order, named after Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (d. 1166), is the most global and is centred in Bagdad. The Naqshbandi order is more regional. Having originated in Central Asia in 13th century, it played active political role in Turkey. Another important order is the Suhrawardi, which is also more regionalised.<sup>209</sup> It was established by Shihab al-Din Abu Hafis Umar al-Suhrawardi (d. 1234). The order made significant inroads into Indian sub-continent.<sup>210</sup>

Most Sufi orders undertake ritual practices known as *dhikr* (remembrance) and *sama* (audition). Derived from Qur'anic verses enjoining the believers to remember God often, the Sufis developed a complex exercise of *dhikr* undertaken both by individuals as well as groups. Although there are variations among orders, most of these exercises involve rhythmic repetition of a Qur'anic phrase containing one of ninety nine names of God. At a higher level of sophistication, *dhikr* involves breath control, body movement and other complex techniques which aim at control over the five senses, the psyche and imagination. "The goal is to move from vocal *dhikr* to silent *dhikr*, with each stage representing a more intense level of union with the beloved until, at the final stage, *dhikr* moves to the innermost recess of one's being and one can no longer distinguish between the one remembering and the Remembered."<sup>211</sup>

On the other hand, *sama* involves listening to music, accompanied by Qur'anic chants and/or singing mystical poetry. Usually undertaken as a group exercise, it is intended to generate mystical experience among the listeners. At some stage the experience is so intense for some of the listeners that they rise up to dance to the music, which is sometimes



"a marvel of esthetic movement or the frantic writhings of the seemingly possessed".<sup>212</sup> But the exercise of *sama* is controversial among Sufis because it is felt that music has the power to seduce disciples into immoral behaviour. As a result, it is insisted upon that only the accomplished and not the novices are to be permitted to participate in *sama* exercises.<sup>213</sup>

What is most important to note about Sufism in Indian sub-continent is that the Sufi masters, more than the conservative scholars, effectively reached the masses with the message of Islam and firmly entrenched the religion. In effect Sufism assimilated much of Indian ethos to convert the religion of Arabic origin into an indigenous Indian religion.<sup>214</sup>

End-notes : Chapter One

1. Niharranjan Roy, *Bāngālīr Itihās: Ādiparba* (Calcutta: 1400 BS), 70.
2. Abdul Karim, *Banglar Itihash: Sultani Amal* (Dhaka: 1987), 3.
3. Roy, *Bāngālīr Itihās*, 87.
4. *Ibid.*, 31-35.
5. Sayed Sajjad Husain and the editors, "Bangladesh", *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (15th edition), vol. 14, 711.
6. All information given above have been drawn from *Bangladesh Economic Survey 1992-93* (Ministry of Finance, Government of Bangladesh), Bangladesh Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Planning, Government of Bangladesh and *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (15th edition), vol. 14, p. 711.
7. Subhash Mukhopadhyaya, *Bāngālīr Itihās* (Calcutta: 1983), 35.
8. P.J. Marshall, *East India Fortunes: The British in Bengal in the 18th Century* (London: 1976), 34-35.
9. Roy, *Bāngālīr Itihās*, 350-56; Subhash Mukhopadhyaya, *Bāngālīr Itihās*, 77.
10. Subhash Mukhopadhyaya, *Bāngālīr Itihās*, 77-78.
11. *Ibid.*, 78-79.
12. *Ibid.*, 79-81; Roy, *Bāngālīr Itihās*, 17.
13. Satindramohan Chattopadhyaya, *Bānglār Sāmājīk Itihāser Bhūmikā 1100-1900*, (Calcutta: 1974), 12.
14. *Ibid.*, 17.
15. Subhash Mukhopadhyaya, *Bāngālīr Itihās*, 83; Dines Chandra Sirkar, *Pal-Sen Yuger Vamsanucharit* (Calcutta: 1982), 73, 83, 85.
16. Benoy Kumar Sirkar, *The Folk Element in Hindu Culture* (New Delhi: 1972), 170-71.
17. Dines Chandra Sirkar, *Pal-Sen*, 108-109.
18. Subhash Mukhopadhyaya, *Bāngālīr Itihās*, 90; Dines Chandra Sirkar, *Pal-Sen*, 137-40.
19. Subhash Mukhopadhyaya, *Bāngālīr Itihās*, 93-95.
20. *Ibid.*, 98.
21. Abdul Karim, *Banglar Itihash*, 72-84.
22. Jadu-Nath Sirkar, *The History of Bengal: Volume II: Muslim Period* (Dhaka: 1948), 14.
23. Abdul Karim, *Banglar Itihash*, 107.
24. *Ibid.*, 140, 141, 148, 151.
25. *Ibid.*, 158.
26. *Ibid.*, 190-91.
27. *Ibid.*, 248.
28. *Ibid.*, 328-29.
29. Dines Chandra Sirkar, *Pal-Sen*, 135-36, 141-45.

30. Muhammad Abdur Rahim (M.A. Rahim), *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*, vol.1 (Karachi: 1963), 79-81; Muhammad Enamul Hoque, "Muslim Bāṅglā-sāhitya", *Muhammad Enamul Hoque Rachanavali* (vol.1), ed. Monsur Musa (Dhaka: 1991), 217.
31. Gopal Haldar, *Bāṅglā Sāhityer Rūpa-rekhā: Vol. 1: Prācin O Madhyayug* (Calcutta: 1400 BS), 43-44; Satindramohan Chattopadhyaya, *Bāṅglār Sāmājīk Itihāser Bhūmikā*, 142, 144.
32. Ahmad Sharif, "Bāṅglār Samāje Sāhitye O Saṁskṛite Muslim Abadān", *Madhyayuge Bāṅglār Samāj O Saṁskṛiti* ed. Aniruddha Ray and Ratnavali Chattopadhyaya (Calcutta: 1992), 198.
33. Abdul Karim, *Banglar Itihash*, 378-82.
34. Ramesh Chandra Majumdar (R.C. Majumdar), *Bangladesher Itihās*, vol. 2 (Calcutta: 1385 BS), 156.
35. *Ibid.*, 171-72.
36. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*, vol. II (Karachi: 1967), 3-4.
37. *Ibid.*, 9.
38. *Ibid.*, 10.
39. *Ibid.*, 3-4.
40. Enamul Hoque, "Muslim Bāṅglā-sāhitya", *Rachanavali* I, 288.
41. M.A.Rahim, *Social and Cultural History* II, 8; Gopal Halder, *Rūpa-rekhā*, 75, 76, 145.
42. M.A. Rahim, *Social and Cultural History* II, 6.
43. Enamul Hoque, "Muslim Bāṅglā-sāhitya", *Rachanavali* I, 286.
44. M.A. Rahim, *Social and Cultural History* II, 10.
45. *Ibid.*, 11.
46. *Ibid.*, 7.
47. *Ibid.*, 8.
48. K.M. Raisuddin Khan, *Bangladesher Itihās Parikramā* (Dhaka: 1986), 581-91.
49. K.M. R. Khan, *Parikramā*, 580; Kamruddin Ahmad, *The Social History of East Pakistan* (Dhaka: 1967) xli.
50. P.J. Marshall, *East India*, 34-35.
51. Kamruddin Ahmad, *East Pakistan*, xliii.
52. Zaheda Ahmad, "State and Education", *History of Bangladesh: 1704-1971*, vol. 3, ed. Sirajul Islam (Dhaka: 1992), 120.
53. *Ibid.*, 120.
54. Kamruddin Ahmad, *East Pakistan*, xliv.
55. Muin-ud-Din Ahmad Khan, "Religious Reform Movements of the Muslims", *History of Bangladesh: 1704-1971*, vol. 3, ed. Sirajul Islam (Dhaka: 1992), 298.
56. Priti Kumar Mitra, "Religious Reform Movements of the Hindus", *History of Bangladesh: 1704-1971*, vol. 3, ed. Sirajul Islam (Dhaka: 1992), 316.
57. *Ibid.*, 325.
58. Kamruddin Ahmad, *East Pakistan*, Appendix A.
59. *Ibid.*, 77, 80.

60. Richard H. Davis, "A Brief History of Religions in India", *Religions of India in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton: 1994), 5.
61. *Ibid.*, 5-6.
62. *Ibid.*, 6-7.
63. Quoted by Davis, *ibid.*, 6-7.
64. John Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology* (New Delhi: 1973), 38, 360-61.
65. R.N. Dandekar, "Vaiṣṇavism", *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (vol. 15), ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: 1987), 169-70.
66. *Ibid.*, 170-71.
67. G.R. Welbon, "Vaiṣṇavism", *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (vol. 15), 177.
68. Richard H. Davis, "A Brief History", *Religions of India*, 22-23.
69. *Ibid.*, 23-24.
70. R.N. Dandekar, "Vaiṣṇavism", *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (vol. 15), 171.
71. John Dowson, *Hindu Mythology*, 44-45.
72. "Śaivism", *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (15th edition), vol. 10, 341.
73. R.N. Dandekar, "Vaiṣṇavism", *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (vol. 15), 168.
74. John Dowson, *Hindu Mythology*, 297, 246.
75. Richard H. Davis, "A Brief History", *Religions of India*, 26
76. "Śaivism", *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (15th edition), vol. 10, 341.
77. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vangala-Mangal Kavyer Itihas* (Calcutta: 1989), 184-85.
78. *Ibid.*, 185-86.
79. B.K. Sarkar, *Folk Element*, 169.
80. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vangala-Mangal Kavyer Itihas*, 189.
81. "Shaktism", *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 10, 691.
82. Richard H. Davis, "A Brief History", *Religions of India*, 41.
83. *Ibid.*
84. Andre Padoux, "Hindu Tantrism", *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 14, 276.
85. "Tantra" and "Tantric Hinduism", *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 11, 547-48.
86. *Ibid.*
87. *Ibid.*
88. *Ibid.*
89. Richard H. Davis, "A Brief History", *Religions of India*, 42.
90. Eric Zurcher, "Buddhism, Schools of : An Overview", *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 2, 440.
91. Luis O. Gomez, "Buddhism: Buddhism in India", *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 2, 351, 354. A few scholars place the Buddha's life-span a century later.
92. *Ibid.*, 352.
93. *Ibid.*
94. *Ibid.*, 354.
95. Promodbandhu Sengupta, *Bharatiya Darshan Part I* (Calcutta: 1986), 124-30.
96. Luis O. Gomez, "Buddhism in India", *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2, 354.
97. *Ibid.*, 354.
98. *Ibid.*, 358.

99. Andre Bareau, "Buddhism, Schools of : Hīnayāna Buddhism", *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 2, 448.
100. *Ibid.*, 444.
101. Eric Zurcher, "Buddhism", *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 2, 440.
102. Andre Bareau, "Hīnayāna Buddhism", *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2, 444.
103. *Ibid.*
104. Eric Zurcher, "Buddhism", *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2, 440.
105. Luis O. Gomez, "Buddhism in India", *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2, 365.
106. Luis O. Gomez, "Buddhism in India", *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2, 360; Andre Bareau, "Hīnayāna Buddhism", *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2, 450-51.
107. Nakamura Hajime, "Buddhism, Schools of : Mahāyāna Buddhism", *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2, 462.
108. Luis O. Gomez, "Buddhism in India", *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2, 375.
109. Frank E. Reynolds and Charles Hallisey, "Buddhism: An Overview", *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2, 336.
110. Luis O. Gomez, "Buddhism in India", *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2, 375-76.
111. Alex Wayman, "Esoteric Buddhism", *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2, 473-74.
112. Luis O. Gomez, "Buddhism in India", *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2, 376.
113. *Ibid.*
114. Shashibhushan Das Gupta, *Obscure Religious Cults* (Calcutta: 1976), 26.
115. Luis O. Gomez, "Buddhism in India", *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2, 376.
116. Gupta, *Obscure*, 303-305.
117. Luis O. Gomez, "Buddhism in India", *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2, 377.
118. *Ibid.*
119. *Ibid.*, 376.
120. *Ibid.*, 377.
121. *Ibid.*
122. *Ibid.*
123. *Ibid.*
124. *Ibid.*, 376.
125. *Ibid.*, 378.
126. *Ibid.*
127. *Ibid.*
128. *Ibid.*, 379.
129. *Ibid.*
130. *Ibid.*
131. Sukumar Sen, "Nāth-panther Sāhityik Aitijhya", *Gorkha-vijay*, ed. Panchanan Mandal (Calcutta: 1356 BS), lxxv.
132. Panchanan Mandal, Introduction, *Gorkha-vijay*, ed. Panchanan Mandal (Calcutta: 1356 BS), xxvi.
133. Panchanan Mandal, Introduction, *Gorkha-vijay*, xxxvii; Sukumar Sen, "Nāth-panther", *Gorkha-vijay*, lxxvi.
134. Sukumar Sen, "Nāth-panther", *Gorkha-vijay*, lxxix.
135. Sukumar Sen, "Nāth-panther", *Gorkha-vijay*, lxxxix; Gupta, *Obscure*, 209.
136. Gupta, *Obscure*, 209.

137. *Ibid.*, 207.
138. "Natha", *Encyclopaedia Britannica*(15th edition), vol. 8, 528.
139. Gupta, *Obscure*, 209.
140. Gupta, *Obscure*, 211.
141. *Ibid.*, 219.
142. *Ibid.*, 221.
143. *Ibid.*, 196.
144. *Ibid.*, 218.
145. *Ibid.*, 234.
146. *Ibid.*
147. *Ibid.*
148. *Ibid.*, 235.
149. *Ibid.*, 235-36.
150. *Ibid.*, 235-38.
151. *Ibid.*, 239.
152. Muhammad Mosharraf Hossain, "Baṅgladesher Nāthayogī Darśana O Pratnatatva", *Baṅgladesh Asiatic Society Patrikā* (June & December, 1993), 25.
153. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Gopīcandrer Gān* (Calcutta: 1959), xix; Muhammad Shahidullah, *Bāṅglā Sāhityer Kathā*, vol.1 (Dhaka: 1968), 17; Roy, *Bāṅgālir Itihās*, 531-32.
154. Srikalyani Mallik, *Natha Sampradayer Itihasa, Darshan O Sadhan Pranali* (Calcutta: 1950), 188.
155. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vaṅgala-Maṅgal Kavyer Itihās*, 678.
156. Sukumar Sen, *Bāṅgālā Sāhityer Itihāsa*, vol. II, (Calcutta: 1398 BS), 110.
157. H.P. Śāstrī, "Śrī-dharma-maṅgala : A distant echo of Lalitavistāra", *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (vol. 64, 1895), 65; also in "Buddhism in Bengal since the Muhammadan Conquest", *ibid.*, 56-64.
158. Muhammad Shahidullah, *Bāṅglā Sāhityer Kathā* I, 107.
159. B.K. Sarkar, *Folk Element*, 192, 190.
160. Benoy Ghosh, *Paschim Banger Sanskriti* (Calcutta: 1957), 104, 395.
161. Sukumar Sen, *Bāṅgālā Sāhityer Itihāsa* II, 110; Sukumar Sen and Panchanan Mandal, Preface, *Dharma-maṅgala* by Rūpaṛama, ed. Sukumar Sen and Panchanan Mandal (Burdwan: 1351 BS), xiv.
162. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vaṅgala-Maṅgal Kavyer Itihās*, 693-94.
163. The full-moon of Baiśākh when the Buddha is believed to have been born and the full-moon of Aṣāḍh when he is believed to have renounced worldly life and also preached the four Noble Truths for the first time.
164. Gupta, *Obscure*, 275.
165. *Ibid.*, 283.
166. *Ibid.*, 287.
167. *Ibid.*, 288.
168. *Ibid.*, 289.
169. *Ibid.*, 302-303.
170. *Ibid.*, 269.
171. *Ibid.*, 268.

172. *Ibid.*, 293.
173. *Ibid.*, 265.
174. Muhammad Shahidullah, *Bānglā Sāhityer Kathā* I, 110.
175. Gupta, *Obscure*, 265.
176. Muhammad Shahidullah, *Bānglā Sāhityer Kathā* I, 110.
177. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Mangal Kayyer Itihas*, 684, 694; Gupta, *Obscure*, 291.
178. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vangala-Mangal Kayyer Itihas*, 723.
179. Muhammad Shahidullah, *Bānglā Sāhityer Kathā* I, 129.
180. B.K. Sarkar, *Folk Element*, 189.
181. Fazlur Rahman, "Islam: An Overview", *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 7, 303.
182. *Ibid.*, 309.
183. *Ibid.*
184. *Ibid.*, 309-310.
185. *Ibid.*, 311.
186. Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (London: 1966), 83-84.
- 186a. *Ibid.*
187. Fazlur Rahman, "Islam: An Overview", *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 7, 311.
188. *Ibid.*, 312.
189. *Ibid.*
190. *Ibid.*
191. *Ibid.*, 313.
192. M.H. Farahnakianpoor, "A Survey of Dramatic Activity of Iran from 1850 to 1950" (PhD dissertation, Brigham Young University, USA, 1977), 50-53.
193. Fazlur Rahman, "Islam: An Overview", *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 7, 317.
194. *Ibid.*, 316.
195. *Ibid.*
196. *Ibid.*, 317.
197. *Ibid.*
198. Richard H. Davis, "A Brief History", *Religions of India*, 35.
199. Fazlur Rahman, "Islam: An Overview", *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 7, 313.
200. Peter J. Awn "Sufism", *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 14, 104.
201. Richard H. Davis, "A Brief History", *Religions of India*, 35.
202. *Ibid.*
203. *Ibid.*
204. *Ibid.*, 36.
205. Peter J. Awn, "Sufism", *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 14, 118.
206. Richard H. Davis, "A Brief History", *Religions of India*, 36.
207. *Ibid.*
208. Fazlur Rahman, "Islam: An Overview". *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 7, 315.
209. *Ibid.*, 316.
210. Peter J. Awn, "Sufism", *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 14, 120.
211. *Ibid.*, 119.
212. *Ibid.*
213. *Ibid.*
214. Richard H. Davis, "A Brief History", *Religions of India*, 37.

## Chapter Two : Indigenous Theatre in Neighbouring Regions

### 2.1 Classical Sanskrit Theatre

Although the origin of theatre in India is veiled in uncertainty derived from lack of definite information, reference to performance and performers in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, the *Mahābhārata*, the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, the *Kāmasūtra* (by Vātsāyana), the *Mahābhāṣya* (by Patañjali) and the *Arthaśāstra* (by Kāutilya) clearly indicate that theatre was in existence in India in the 1st millennium BC. Furthermore, reference to *naṭasūtras* of Śīlālin and Kṛśāsva in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* by Pāṇini also bear evidence that theatre was developed enough by 400 BC to necessitate formulation of aphorisms and axioms (*sūtras*) for the performers (*naṭas*)<sup>1</sup>. But the strongest evidence of existence of a powerful tradition of theatre in ancient India is the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, aptly described as a "compendium for the performance makers", dealing "extensively with the art of evoking aesthetic response."<sup>2</sup> Ranging from aesthetic theory, origin of theatre to the minutest details of movement and construction of theatre buildings, the compendium has been a unique source for traditional theatre practice. It is ascribed to sage Bharata, but is believed to be a collection of various sources over a long period of history. The original compilation is variously placed between 5th century BC and 2nd century AD.<sup>3</sup>

In the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, 'theatre' has been cited as '*nāṭya*' and defined as "a mimicry of actions and conducts of people, which is rich in various emotions, and which depicts different situations", "in which meet all the departments of knowledge, different arts and various actions", and it "gives diversion to kings, and firmness (of mind) to persons afflicted with sorrow, and (hints of acquiring) money to those who are earning it, and it brings composure to persons agitated in mind" and "give(s) relief to unlucky persons who are afflicted with sorrow and grief or (over) -work, and (is) conducive to observance of duty as well as to fame, long life, intellect and general good, (and) educate(s) people" (NS, I, 110-117).<sup>4</sup>

That by the end of 1st millennium AD theatre in India was widely performed and highly developed is evident from the fact that a large number of critical texts have been composed by aestheticians and commentators from that period onward. Of them, the following are notable.<sup>5</sup>

1. Abhinavagupta (950-1020 AD) : *Abhinavabhāratī*
2. Bhaṭṭanāyaka (end 9th century-beginning 10th century): *Hṛdayadarpaṇa*
3. Nandikeśvara : *Abhinayadarpaṇa*
4. Dhanañjaya (10th century) : *Daśarūpa*
5. Dhvanika (2nd half of 10th century-early 11th century) : *Daśarūpāvaloka*



- |   |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|
| 6. Śāradātanaya (c. early 12th century) : | <i>Bhāvaprakāśana</i>         |
| 7. Sāgaranandin (10th or 11th century) :  | <i>Nāṭakalakṣaṇaratnakōṣa</i> |
| 8. Viśvanātha (14th century) :            | <i>Sāhityadarpaṇa</i>         |
| 9. Rāmacandra and Guṇacandra :            | <i>Naṭyadarpaṇa</i>           |
| 10. Bhoja :                               | <i>Sṅgāraprakāśa</i>          |

The earliest extant play-text from ancient India is *Sāriputra-prakarāṇa* by Aśvaghōṣa (variously placed between 1st century BC and 2nd century AD). There followed a host of other plays in the following centuries, of which those given below are some of extant texts.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Bhāsa (2nd century AD?)                           | : <i>Svapna-vāsavadattā</i><br><i>Urubhanga</i><br><i>Pratijñā-yaugandharāyaṇa</i><br><i>Pañcarātra</i><br><i>Madhyama-vyayoga</i> |
| 2. Śūdraka (King, after Bhasa?)                      | : <i>Mṛcchakatika</i>  |
| 3. Kālidāsa (5th century AD)                         | : <i>Abhijñāna-śakuntala</i><br><i>Malavikāgnimitra</i><br><i>Vikramorvaśī</i>   |
| 4. Harṣavardhana (King, reigned 607-647 AD)          | : <i>Nāgānanda</i><br><i>Ratnāvalī</i><br><i>Priyadarśikā</i>  |
| 5. Mahendra-vikramavarman (7th century AD)           | : <i>Bhāgavadajjukīa</i><br><i>Mattavilāsa</i>   |
| 6. Bhavabhūti (early 8th century)                    | : <i>Mālañīmādhava</i><br><i>Uttararāmacarita</i>  |
| 7. Murāri (end of 9th century)                       | : <i>Anargharāghava</i>  |
| 8. Rājāśekhara (between 8th to 10th centuries)       | : <i>Balarāmāyaṇa</i><br><i>Karpuramāñjarī</i>   |
| 9. Bhaṭṭanārāyaṇa (before first half of 9th century) | : <i>Venīśamhāra</i>   |
| 10. Viśākhadatta (contemporary of Bhattanarayana)    | : <i>Mudrārākṣasa</i>  |
| 11. Kṛṣṇamiśra (second half of 11th century)         | : <i>Prabodhacandrodaya</i>  |
| 12. Kṣemīśvara (10th century ?)                      | : <i>Caṇḍakauśik</i>   |

All these plays are composed in Sanskrit and Prakrit languages and were all produced under royal patronage. The period from the 2nd century AD to 10th century AD, when the above

mentioned play-texts and most works of literary criticism were created, is generally referred to as that of classical Sanskrit theatre. Although it is customary to include Aśvaghōṣa and Harṣavardhana along with the other playwrights from ancient India, we shall exclude them from this section and discuss about them in the section on Buddhist theatre in India.

### 2.1.1 *The Plot (Itivṛtta)*

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* identifies three principles which go into the shaping of the plot (*itivṛtta*): the *avasthā*, the *arthaprakṛti* and the *sandhi*. The three-fold analysis of *itivṛtta* has been the source of much confusion, producing contradictory explanations from scholars. Following Christopher Byrski's explanation,<sup>6</sup> the *avasthās* can be understood as five stages of development of any action, treated in its abstraction. He rightly points out that such a concept is the course of action "delineated with reference to a hero and not a heroine".<sup>7</sup>

The five stages of *avasthā* are (i) *ārambha*, (ii) *prayatna*, (iii) *prāptisambhava*, (iv) *niyata phalaprāpti* and (v) *phalāgama*. The first stage, *ārambha*, is 'the beginning', where eagerness or desire is the most characteristic feature. The second stage is *prayatna* or 'the effort', in which the desire of the first stage is transformed into concrete physical acts or effort. The third stage is *prāptisambhava* or 'the possibility of attainment', where the success appears near at hand and seems possible, in spite of slight apprehension. The fourth stage is *niyata phalaprāpti*. Byrski disputes the translation of the key-word *niyata* as given in Manomohan Ghosh (*NS*, XXI, 12) and Gaekwad Oriental Series (*NS*, XIX, 12) and shows that correct translation should read 'suppressed' instead of 'sure' or 'certain' as given in the translation.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the fourth stage is that of 'suppression of success'. The possibility of attainment of the desired object, which seemed so near at hand in the earlier stage, now slowly sinks away into an abyss of despair, and success seems nowhere in sight. The last stage is *phalāgama* or *phalavoga*, i.e., the acquisition of the desired objective or obtaining of the fruit, and the end of action.

Whereas the *avasthās* are the five stages denoting action as an abstract theoretical concept, the *arthaprakṛtis* are the five-fold nature of the same action. The five *arthaprakṛtis* are as follows : (i) *bīja*, (ii) *bindu*, (iii) *patākā*, (iv) *prakarī* and (v) *kārya*. Whereas the *avasthās* can be seen as the five vertical sections of a horizontal vector, the *arthaprakṛtis* can be seen as the breadth of that vector of action divided into five horizontal sections. Whereas the *avasthās* emphasise motion or progress, *arthaprakṛtis* emphasise "the quality of that progress or movement."<sup>9</sup>

*Nāṭyaśāstra* defines the most important of the *arthaprakṛtis*, *bīja*, 'germ' or 'seed' as "that which scattered in small measure, expands itself in various ways and ends in fruition" (*NS*,

XXI, 22). *Bīja* is the seed of desire which is born in the heart of the central characters, grows through the five stages of *avasthās*, and bears fruit as the central character finally succeeds in attaining his objective. *Nāṭyaśāstra* defines the second *arthaprakṛti*, *bindu*, as the 'drop' that has been compared to the continuous dripping of water which circulates in the plant and which regenerates its life whenever threatened. Thus, *bindu* keeps alive the hope of fulfillment of desire. Two other *arthaprakṛtis*, the *pātakā* and the *prakarī*, are two types of subsidiary plots. Manomohan Ghosh translates the first as 'episode' and the second as 'episodical incident'. The subsidiary plot of *pātakā* ('episode') remains subservient to the principal plot but has a distinct action and achieves its own aim or fruit. At the same time, it does not last beyond the *niyata phalaprāpti* stage. On the other hand, the subsidiary plot of *prakarī* ('episodical incident') also remains subservient to the principal plot but has no distinct action nor does it achieve its own fruit. *Pātakā* has been compared to the image of a creeper entwining the trunk and the main branches of a tree but leaving free the fruit-yielding branches (the *niyata phalaprāpti* stage). On the other hand, *prakarī* has been compared to numerous trees surrounding the principal tree of action. Sometimes the branches of the other trees obstruct the growth of the main tree and sometimes they offers support and protection to it. *Kārya*, the fifth *arthaprakṛti*, has been defined in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* as "the efforts made for the purpose of the Principle Plot" (NS, XXI, 26). Underlying the four later stages of action (*avasthās*) is the spirit of enterprise which fails in the fourth stage but otherwise is active till the end. Whenever threatened (as in the fourth stage), *bindu* comes to the aid of *kārya* to keep alive the hope. *Kārya* has been compared to the "turgor in each cell of a plant - that internal pressure which makes a plant expand".<sup>10</sup>

*Sandhi* (segments or juncture), the third principle of *itivṛtta*, is to be seen as the application of the *arthaprakṛtis* in each of the *avasthās* as deemed fit by the playwright. Thus, five-fold division of *sandhi* is arrived at. These are :

- (i) Opening (*mukha*), which is the "part of a play, in which the creation of the Seed (*bīja*) as the source of many objects and Sentiments take place" (NS, XXI, 38);
- (ii) Progression ( *pratimukha*), in which the "uncovering of the Seed placed at the Opening" occurs, "after it has sometimes been perceptible and sometimes been lost" (NS, XXI, 39);
- (iii) Development (*garbha*), in which occurs "the sprouting of the Seed, its attainment or non-attainment and search for it" (NS, XXI, 40);
- (iv) Pause (*vimarśa*), which is "one's pause over the Seed (*bīja*) that has sprouted in the Development (*garbha*) on account of some temptation, anger or distress" (NS, XXI, 41) takes place.

(v) Conclusion (*nirvāhana*), in which occurs the "bringing together the objects (of the Segments) such as the Opening (*mukha*) etc. along with the Seed (*bīja*), when they have attained fruition" (*NS*, XXI. 42). Through each of the five-fold stages of action (*avasthā*) passes the desire of the central character (*bīja*). It is entwined with enterprise (*kārya*) from the second stage (*prayatna*) onward till the end but the latter fails briefly in the fourth stage (*niyata phalaprāpti*). Entwined with *kārya*, *bīja* interacts with subsidiary plots (*patākā* and *prakārī*) and is assisted in its progress by favourable forces arising out of them. Whenever *bīja*, entwined with *kārya*, faces extinction (as in the fourth stage), or is threatened by inhospitable forces arising out of subsidiary plots (*patākā* and *prakārī*) or the principal plot (in any of the other stages), *bindu* comes to the aid to keep alive the hope of attainment of desired objective. The 'opening juncture' (*mukha sandhi*) is the exposition of the play where *bīja* is created and corresponds to the stage of *ārambha*. Eagerness in the central character is an important characteristic feature of the opening juncture. The second juncture of 'progression' (*pratimukha sandhi*) sees the uncovering of the *bīja*, partly seen, sometimes obscured, in delicate and fragile existence. It corresponds to the second stage of *prayatna*. The most important feature of this juncture is the commencement of enterprise (*kārya*) undertaken by the central character. In the third juncture of 'development' (*garbha sandhi*) the seed sprouts and develops further into a plant but the development is constantly hindered and obstructed amid anxiety. But because of the continuation of effort in the form of *kārya* and the aid of *bindu*, there appears a possibility of success. The juncture corresponds to the stage of *prāptisambhava*. The fourth juncture of 'pause' (*vimarśa sandhi*) sees the suspension of further development and the plant faces danger of destruction arising out of some calamity (temptation, curse, anger etc.). As a result, the enterprise (*kārya*) of the central character appears to have failed and the attainment of the desired object seems negated. The juncture corresponds to the stage of *niyata phalaprāpti*. In the fifth juncture, that of 'conclusion' (*nirvāhana sandhi*), the *kārya* of the central character is activated again with the help of *bindu* and as a result the plant yields fruit. The juncture corresponds to the stage of *phalāgama*.

### 2.1.2 Theory of Aesthetic Experience (*Rasa-tatva*)

*Rasa-tatva*, or the theory of aesthetic experience in classical Indian theatre, is an explanation of the process through which aesthetic appeal is generated in an artistic creation by highly skilled artists, and is communicated to equally knowledgeable recipients (spectators). It is equally applicable to any of the art forms. *Nāṭyaśāstra* categorises all human emotions (original Sanskrit '*bhāva*', also translated as 'psychological states' or 'mode') into eight

permanent types (*sthāyī bhāvas*). These are: love (*rati*), mirth (*hāsa*), sorrow (*śoka*), anger (*krodha*), energy (*utsāha*), terror (*bhaya*), disgust (*jugupsa*) and astonishment (*vismaya*) (NS, VI, 17). It also lists a series of 33 'transitory states of emotions' or 'complementary psychological states' (*vyābhicarī bhāva* or *sañcāri bhāva*). Some of these are apprehension, envy, intoxication, depression, anxiety, distraction and recollection (NS, VI, 17-21). The *sthāyī bhāvas* manifest themselves in combination with the *vyābhicarī bhāvas*. Therefore, one may exhibit apprehension, envy, intoxication or depression and so forth, all arising out of love. The characteristic feature of *vyābhicarī bhāva* is transience.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* further lists eight *sāttvika* states (sometimes translated as 'involuntary states'), which Manomohan Ghosh rightly finds unclear and "nothing but *anubhāvas* or consequents"<sup>11</sup> (discussed later). According to the Surendra Nath Shastri, "they are called *sāttvikas* because the actor while representing assumes the same *sattva* or bearing as the original character did".<sup>12</sup> The *sāttvika bhāvas* are as follows: paralysis, perspiration, horripilation, change of voice, change of colour, weeping, trembling and fainting (NS, VI, 22).

The *sthāyī bhāvas* are seen to arise out of the *vibhāvas* or the 'causes'. According to the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, "it is synonymous with *kāraṇa*, *nimitta* and *hetu*" (NS, VI, 3). There are two kinds of *vibhāvas*: (i) circumstantial or direct (*uddipana vibhāvas*) and (ii) personal or indirect (*ālambana vibhāvas*). The first are the circumstances or incidents which give rise to a particular feeling or emotion. Shastri explains, "they excite and hence are rightly named as the *uddipana vibhāvas*".<sup>13</sup> The second are the persons "by reference to whom a particular feeling arises in the mind of another". It "is the factor upon which the *bhāva* as though hangs".<sup>14</sup>

The effects or natural consequences of emotions are known as *anubhāvas*. Hari Rama Mishra explains, "the word *anubhāva* itself means either that which is produced afterwards (*anu pascād bhāvo yasya sah*) or that which makes the reader or the spectator apprehend particular emotion (*anu bhāvayanti iti*".<sup>15</sup> It should be noted here that each of the *sthāyī bhāvas* and *vyābhicarī bhāvas* have their own *anubhāvas* and *vibhāvas* (NS, VII, 8-92). The inter-relationship of *sthāyī bhāva*, *vyābhicarī bhāva*, *vibhāva* and *anubhāva* is succinctly explained by Sushil Kumar De : In the case of love as the permanent mode (*sthāyī bhāva*), the stock example given of *vibhāva* are women and season; of *anubhāva*, glance and embrace; of *vyābhicarī bhāva*, the transient subordinate feelings of joy and anxiety.<sup>16</sup>

*Nāṭyaśāstra* explains that *rāsa* "is produced from a combination of *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas* and *vyābhicarī bhāvas*" (NS, VI, 31). The "pleasure and satisfaction" derived by the

"cultured people" while witnessing a performance is the *rasa*. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* recognises eight *rasas*: Erotic (*Śṛṅgāra*), Comic (*Hāsyā*), Pathetic (*Karuṇā*), Furious (*Raudra*), Heroic (*Vīra*), Terrible (*Bhayaṇaka*), Odious (*Bibhatsa*), and Marvellous (*Adbhuta*) (NS, VI, 15). Each *rasa* is said to arise out of corresponding *bhāva*: the Erotic from love, the Comic from mirth, the Pathetic from sorrow, the Furious from anger, the Heroic from energy, the Terrible from terror, the Odious from disgust and the Marvellous from astonishment. During performance, *mukha sandhi* may give rise to a number of *rasas*, which may continue through the following three *sandhis* in any order. In the *nirvāhana sandhi*, only the *Adbhuta rasa* is introduced (NS, XXI, 38 and XX, 46).

There are about four principal views among various commentators and scholars on the *Nāṭyaśāstra* as to how *rasa* is generated during performance. The popular view is that the *ālambana* and the *uddipana vibhāvas*, along with the performers' *anubhāvas* expressed with the help of words, gestures and the representation of the *sattvas*, add up to creating the *vyābhicārī bhāvas* in the performers and all of the above serve to rouse *sthāyī bhāvas* in the heart of the spectators. The *sthāyī bhāvas*, in their turn arouse the *rasas*, the transcendental aesthetic experience. Another view, held by Lollaṭa, shows that the *rasa*, "in the primary sense, belongs to the hero, Rāma etc.; it is the actor, who throws himself completely into a particular role, who then transfers it to the spectators." According to a third view held by Saṅkuka, "the *rasa* is not transferred from the actor to the spectator, but is inferred by the audience on account of the illusion produced by the actor in cleverly imitating the original action".<sup>16</sup> A fourth view, originated by Bhaṭṭanāyaka and elaborated by Abhinavagupta, differs on the grounds that the *sthāyī bhāvas* are generated on stage by the performers, which in their turn cause corresponding *rasa* to rise in the spectators through the process of generalisation (*sādhāranīkaraṇa*). The view is based on the assumption that theatre can make a spectator "rise momentarily above time, space and causality and, therefore, above the stream of his practical life".<sup>18</sup> The spectator is distanced from the particularity of the daily life with the help of rituals held prior to performance, music, dance, the style and conventions of performance, all of which are totally non-naturalistic. The performance, therefore, is no longer the experience of a particular individual in a particular place at a particular time. The spectator does not identify himself with the character portrayed by the actor; nor does he merely appreciate the performer's skill with non-involved intellectual perception. It is, as it were, 'betwixt and between'. The performance space is transformed neither to the time of the play performed, nor does it remain contemporaneous to that of the spectator, but again is situated 'betwixt and between'. The Indian aestheticians term this particular engrossed state of involvement as *tanmayī bhāva*: a non-particular emotional

response arising from a supra-temporal and supra-spatial atmosphere. The state which follows the *tanmayī-bhāva* is explained by Abhinavagupta with example of experiencing the Terrible *rāsa* :

As a result (of being engrossed in *tanmayī-bhāva*), what there appears is simply and solely Fear - Fear in itself, uncircumscribed by time, space etc. This perception of Fear is of different order from the ordinary perceptions ('I am afraid, he is my enemy, my friend, anybody - is afraid'); for these are necessarily affected by the appearance of fresh mental movement (of shunning etc.), consisting of pleasure, pain etc., and just for this reason are full of obstacles (*vighna*). The sensation of the Fear above mentioned, on the contrary, is the matter of cognition by a perception devoid of obstacles (*nirvighna*), and may be said to enter directly (*nivīś*) into our hearts, to dance before (*viparivṛt*) our eyes; this is the Terrible Rasa. In such Fear one's own self is found to be in a state neither of complete occultation (*tiraskṛ*) nor of particular emergence (*ullikh*) and the same thing happens to other Selves.<sup>19</sup>

The spectator's state of being under such circumstances is termed by Abhinavagupta as *camatkāra*: "an uninterrupted (*achinna*) state of immersion (*āveśa*) in an Enjoyment, characterised by the presence of sensation of inner fullness (*tr̥pti*)."<sup>20</sup> The enjoyment of the experience therein is the *rāsa* - "the quintessence of beatitude".<sup>21</sup> Such an evoked state of transcendental bliss experienced by the spectators is above the level of ordinary emotional experience, because, as Abhinava says, "all *rasas* are dominated by pleasure".<sup>22</sup>

The performance culminates in the Marvellous (*Adbhuta*) *rāsa*, where, as Byrski says,<sup>23</sup> the spectators attain a plenum of marvellous harmony by becoming aware of the ultimate course of all human action: of desire, translation of the desire into pursuit of fulfilment, pursuit hindered by obstacle, transcendence of obstacle and fulfilment of desire: that which is the same as the scheme of action seen in all Sanskrit play-texts. Thus the daily existence in a small closed chamber bursts open as if by a "sudden flash of light lighting" and one is faced with the eternal sky. The blunted senses suddenly acquire acute sensitivity: what did not matter begins to matter with an unknown flood of exuberance for life and living. This is the experience of *Adbhuta rāsa*. As Coomaraswami says, "the level of pure aesthetic experience is indeed that of the pure angelic understanding, proper to the Motionless Heaven, Brahmāloka ....."<sup>24</sup>

### 2.1.3 Types of Plays (*Rūpaka* and *Uparūpaka*)

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* uses the term '*rūpaka*' to denote 'play'. It "describe(s) the division of plays into ten classes". These are : Nāṭaka, Prakaraṇa, Aṅka (*Utsṛṣṭāṅka*), Vyāyoga, Bhāṇa, Samavakāra, Vīthī, Prahāsana, Dīpa and Īhāmṛga. (*NS*, XX, 1-2). The salient features of each of the above mentioned *rūpakas* are as follows :

1. Nāṭaka : the subject matter rests on a well known legend (from the *Purāṇas*, the Epics and other celebrated work); its hero is a celebrated person of self-controlled and exalted nature (*dhīrodāṭṭa*); the plot contains all the five *sandhis*; either the Heroic or the Erotic is the principle *rasa* (all others being subordinates); it has five to ten acts and also a number of introductory scenes. Examples : *Abhijñāna-śakuntala*, *Uttarāramacarita*, *Venīśamhāra* etc.
2. Prakaraṇa : A comedy of manners with characters of rank below royalty; the plot is original and has all the five *sandhis*; its hero is a merchant, a Brahmin, a minister, a priest or a leader of a caravan and is of self-controlled and calm nature (*dhīra-prasānta*); the *rasas* are the same as that of Nāṭaka; there are no divine elements; it has five to ten acts as well as a number of introductory scenes. Examples: *Mṛochakatika*, *Mālatīmādhava*, etc.
3. Samavakāra : Its subject matters are the exploits of gods and demons; the hero is well-known and exalted; consists of three acts; number of *dramatis personae* is twelve; the plot is composed of four *sandhis* (*vimarṣa* is omitted); appears to be a type of loosely-knit dramatic spectacle of ancient origin which lost importance in the 1st millennium AD. No example from the classical period or earlier time is extant. Saccidananda Mukhopadhyay mentions *Samudramanthanam* by Vasta-rāja (12th century AD) as an example.<sup>25</sup>
4. Īhāmṛga : "It has as its *dramatis personae* divine males who are implicated in fights about divine females;" (*NS*, XX, 78) the plot is well-constructed and convincing; abounds in vehement (*uddhata*) heroes; it has three acts; the plot is composed of three *sandhis* (*vimarṣa* and *garbha* are omitted). No text is available.
5. Dīpa : The subject-matter is well-known; the hero is well-known and of exalted (*udāṭṭa*) type; it contains all the *rasas* save the Erotic and the Comic; the plot is in four acts and is composed of four *sandhis* (*vimarṣa* is omitted); total number of characters is sixteen who may be gods, *nāgas*, demons, *yakṣas* and goblins. No example from classical period or earlier is available. S. Mukhopadhyay mentions the name of *Tripuradāha* by Vatsa-rāja (12th century AD) as an example of this type.<sup>26</sup>
6. Vyāyoga : It has royal sage as the hero; also includes a small number of female characters; the events related are of a day's duration; the plot incorporates battles, personal combat, challenge and angry conflict and is composed of three *sandhis* (*garbha* and *vimarṣa* are omitted); it consists of one act only. Example: *Madhyama-vyāyoga* by Bhāsa.
7. Añka : The plot is usually well-known but may also be otherwise; two *sandhis* (*mukha* and *nirvāhana*) constitute the plot; the male characters are not divine; the Pathetic *rasa* predominates; it treats downfall of a character and lamentations and despondent utterances of women after violent battles; consists of one act only. Example: *Urubhanga* by Bhāsa.<sup>27</sup>



8. Prahāsana : The plot is constructed on popular topics and incidents of hypocrisy from daily life; two *sandhis* (*mukha* and *nirvāhana*) constitute the plot; the Comic *rasa* predominates; improper conduct of various sectarian teachers, courtesans rogues are featured. Examples: *Bhāgavadajjukīā* and *Mattavilāsa* by Mahendra-vikramavarman.

9. Bhāṇa : Performed by a single character; consists of one act; two *sandhis* (*mukha* and *nirvāhana*) constitute the plot; "it is of two kinds: that (of) recounting of one's own feelings, and that (of) describing someone else's acts. (The Bhāṇa which is to include) somebody 'else's words addressed to oneself, should be acted by means of replies in course of conversations with an imaginary person (a *ākāśa-bhāṣita*) along with the (suitable) movement of the limb" (NS, XX, 107-109). It includes characters such as *vīṭa* (parasite) and *dhūrta* (knave). Example : *Caturbhāṇī*, a collection of four Bhāṇas ascribed to Vararuci, Śūdrak, Īśvardatta and Śyāmilaka.

10. Vīṭhī : It is enacted by one or two performers; consists of one act; two *sandhis* constitute the plot (*mukha* and *nirvāhana*); it may contain any of the *rasas*. No example survives.

The Indian aestheticians further recognise a secondary classification of plays, called *uparūpakas*, in which the elements of music and dance are predominant. These are believed to have been means of popular entertainment.<sup>28</sup> According to Adya Rangacharya, the *uparūpakas* are mostly *nṛtya-nāṭyas* (dance-dramas); most of the characters featured in these are from the 'lower' class and the comedy is of 'low' taste. Some of the *uparūpakas* are based on love stories and most of these have been composed in dialects. He further states that it would not be illogical to believe that the *uparūpakas* are the most ancient forms of Indian theatre.<sup>29</sup> The *Nāṭyaśāstra* ignores the *uparūpakas* but mentions the name of Kohala as the author of *Uttaratantra* (NS, XXXVIII, 18) whom the scholars believe to have been the first to describe the *uparūpakas*. Later aestheticians, such as Śāradātanaya, Sāgaranandin, Visvanātha, Abhinavagupta, Dhvanika, Hemacandra and Bhoja have discussed various *uparūpakas*. Visvanātha lists the following eighteen.<sup>30</sup>

1. Nāṭikā : Composed in four acts, Erotic *rasa* dominates, exhibits features of both Nāṭaka and Prakaraṇa except that it is shorter in length, abounds in song and dance.
2. Troṭaka : Composed in five to nine acts, Erotic *rasa* dominates, exhibits features of Nāṭaka.
3. Saṭṭaka : Composed in four acts, Marvellous *rasa* dominates, predominantly in Prakrit, the rest of the features are similar to Nāṭikā.

4. Goṣṭhī : Composed in one act, Erotic *rasa* dominates, *garbha* and *vimarṣa sandhis* are absent, characters include nine or ten ordinary men and five or six women. (According to Bhoja, the subject matter is Kṛṣṇa's sports in Gokula, including the killing of demons.)
5. Rāsaka : Composed in one act with five characters, the hero is foolish and the heroine is well known, song and dance predominate.
6. Nāṭya-rāsaka : Composed in one act, the hero is exalted, structured with two *sandhis* (*mukha* and *nirvāhana*), Erotic and Comic *rasas* as well as song and dance predominate (possibly with greater use of speech than seen in Rāsaka).
7. Prasthāna : Composed in two acts, the hero and the heroine are servants or slaves, song and dance predominate. (Possibly so named because the lover departs on a journey.)
8. Ullāpya : Composed in one act, the hero is exalted, four heroines, Erotic, Comic and Pathetic *rasas* predominate.
9. Kāvya : Composed in one act, both the hero and the heroine are exalted, Comic *rasa* is dominant, *garva* and *vimarṣa sandhis* are absent, song and verse predominate.
10. Preṁkhaṇ (or Preṁkṣaṇa) : Composed in one act, *garbha* and *vimarṣa sandhis* are absent, the hero is from inferior background, *sūtradhāra* is absent.
11. Saṁlāpaka : Composed in three to four acts, the hero is a heretic, all *rasas* save Erotic and Pathetic are present, depicts severe struggle.
12. Śṅgadita : Composed in one act, the hero is renowned and the heroine is high born, *garbha* and *vimarṣa sandhis* are absent, the subject-matter is well known, entirely in dance and music. (According to Bhoja, the subject-matter is goddess Śrī (Lakṣmī) describing the qualities of her Lord Nārāyaṇa to her friend.)
13. Śilpaka: Composed in four acts, Comic and Peaceful *rasas* are absent (the latter discussed in chapter 2.3), the hero is a Brahmin, set in locales such as the cremation ground and other awe-inspiring places, dance predominates.
14. Vilāsikā (also known as Vināyikā and Lāsikā) : Composed in one act, Erotic *rasa* predominates, hero is from inferior background, *garbha* and *vimarṣa sandhis* are absent.
15. Durmallikā : Composed in four acts, Erotic *rasa* predominates, *garbha sandhi* is absent, all characters are town-bred, secret enjoyment described by female messenger in vulgar manner.
16. Prakaraṇi(kā) : Composed in four acts, hero and heroine are of the affluent class.

17. Hallīsaka : Composed in one act, seven to ten female and one male characters, only *mukha* and *nirvāhana sandhis* are present, songs predominate, also characterised by circular dance of women with a man in the centre.

18. Bhāṅikā : Composed in one act, low-born hero and high-born heroine, only *mukha* and *nirvāhana sandhis* are present, dance predominates, rich and colourful costume and make-up are used.

Beside the above, some aestheticians have also discussed a few other *uparūpakas*, of which the following may prove to be of interest for this study. *Ḍombī* (mentioned by Abhinava and Śāradātanaya) abounds in music and dance. *Ḍombikā* (mentioned by Abhinava and Dhvanika) is also of the same type. On the other hand, "whatever is performed in street, assembly, squares or temples by many characters is called *Prekṣainaka*".<sup>31</sup>

The *uprūpakas* with predominance in song and dance have been termed as *nṛtyātmaka* by Śāradātanaya, *nṛttātmaka-prabandha* by Abhinava and *nṛtyabheda* by Dhvanika. Abhinava classifies another group as *rāga-kāvya*, in which the story is rendered in lyrical form according to particular *rāga*. A composition with several *rāgas* may be called *citra-rāga-kāvya*. Although music predominates in this group of *uparūpakas*, there is also the presence of movement and gestures. On the other hand, Hemacandra classifies the *uparūpakas* into two types : *geya-rūpakas*, in which "songs and the tempo etc. with bodily movement" predominate and the *pāṭhya-rūpaka*, in which the above elements are subordinate.<sup>32</sup> Thus, it is clear that the Sanskrit theatre of the later centuries (possibly 8th century onward) developed a number of minor varieties, in some of which song used to predominate (*rāga-kāvya*), in others, song as well as dance used to predominate (*nṛttātmaka-prabandha*) and in the rest, song and dance were subordinate to prose speech (*pāṭhya-rūpaka*). Some twentieth century scholars like Sukumar Sen and Bijit Kumar Dutta have used the term *saṅgīt-nāṭak* for *rāga-kāvya*s and *nṛttātmaka-prabandha*s but characteristics of all these are same.<sup>33</sup> Another twentieth century scholar, G.H. Tarlekar rightly points out that the "*uparūpakas* appear to be the link between the ancient classical theatre and later popular theatre traditions."<sup>34</sup>

#### 2.1.4 Performance Space

Scholars are of the opinion that theatre in ancient India was performed in the popular level by itinerant bands of performers who would erect temporary performance space on public grounds. Permanent theatre structures were also attached to royal palaces and temples.<sup>35</sup> Because brick and timber were the usual construction materials before 5th c. AD,<sup>36</sup> most of the theatres built prior to this time have perished. But archaeologists have located three sites

which are believed to have been theatres. These are: (1) the Sitabengara rock-cut cave in the Ramgarh Hills (3rd century BC), (ii) the Rani Gumpa Jain Cave in the Udaygiri Hills near Bhuvaneshwar, Orissa (c.150 BC) and (iii) Nāgārjuanakoṇḍa amphitheatre situated at the foot of a Buddhist temple in the Nallamalai range, Andhra (3rd century AD).<sup>37</sup> Quite a few treatises on architecture, literature and theatre have also discussed a few types of theatre. Of these, Śāradātanaya draws particular attention for he mentions three types which were attached to palaces. These are square, circular and triangular in shape.<sup>38</sup> But it is the *Nāṭyaśāstra* which discusses theatre buildings in detail - although there exists a maze of confusing and contradictory views among scholars. The following observation is based on the views of G.K. Bhatt and Subba Rao.<sup>39</sup>

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* (II, 8-11) specifies three shapes (rectangle, square and triangle) and three sizes (the large, the middling and the small) for theatre buildings based on the measurements for three types of spectators. Rao illustrates :

<u>Shape</u>	<u>Size</u>	<u>Dimension</u>	<u>Allocation</u>
Rectangle	Large	108 <i>hasta</i> (162 feet)	Gods
Square	Medium	64 <i>hasta</i> (96 feet)	Kings
Triangle	Small	32 <i>hasta</i> (48 feet)	Mortals

Some scholars believe that the above formulation raises the possibility of nine combinations, three of each shape in the three sizes. But Rao believes that only three are reasonable and practical: (i) the Medium Rectangle (64 *hasta* x 32 *hasta*), (ii) the Small Square (32 *hasta*) and (iii) the Small Triangle (32 *hasta* each side). He also believes that the Medium Rectangle type was the most generally used. A brief description of the type of theatre is given below:

The total floor area of 64h. x 32h. (96'x48') is divided into two halves, each of which is 32h. (48') square. One of these is the auditorium, where the spectators were presumably expected to sit cross-legged on rising tiers, each 9" higher than the preceding and 18" wide. The tiered gallery, 16h. (24') wide, was situated between two rows of pillars of the auditorium. A doorway at the far end of the auditorium provided for the entrance of the spectators. On the opposite end, facing the gallery, lay the stage, which was 32h. x 16h. (48'x24') in area and 1.5h. (27") in height. Two doorways situated on two sides of the rear wall of the stage led to the green room and the dressing room area (32hx16h. i.e., 48'x24') behind the stage. The performers entered and exited into and from the stage through the door-ways. The interior of the theatre appears to have been highly decorated with mouldings, ornamental decorations and paintings (*NS*, II, 75-80, 83-85). Bhatt also shows that the building contained doves, sky lights, ventilators and latticed windows. (Please see figure no. 5.)

Most of the scholars have shown that the internal arrangement of the square-shaped theatre closely follows the rectangular theatre (please see figure no. 6).<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, Adya Rangacharya has proposed a different but logical view. He argues that if the internal arrangement of both the square-shaped and the rectangle-shaped theatres were identical, there would be no need to produce two different shapes. Therefore, he concludes, it is more logical to believe that, in the square-shaped theatre, the spectators would be seated on all four sides, with the performance space in the shape of an elevated square, situated in the centre. Regarding the oft-quoted passage from *Nāṭyaśāstra* describing the construction of square-shaped theatre (*NS*, II, 86-100), Rangacharya rightly notes lack of clarity and insists that there is no direction given similar to the rectangle-shaped theatre.<sup>41</sup> Following Rangacharya is possible to hypothesise that in the small square-shaped theatre with external dimension of 32h. (48'), the spectators would be seated all around a central square with dimension of 8h. (12') a side. Rangacharya's view appears to gain support from the *nāt-maṇḍapas* still to be seen in at least four temples in Orissa, all of which were built during Hindu rule (discussed in chapter 2.4).

Triangular shaped constructions by themselves belong to a curious brand of architecture as very few extant examples serve to exemplify these structures. There is possibly one site only in Bangladesh which points to the existence of triangular building constructions in the country. It is the base of a ruined temple of Caṇḍa-Bhairava, situated near Jaśareśwari Temple at Iswaripur, Satkhira. Triangle-shaped theatres have perplexed scholars even more than the square-shaped theatres. Rao shows the internal arrangement (please see figure no. 7)<sup>42</sup> which represents one of the major views. But Rangacharya believes that the spectators in it would be seated on three sides.<sup>43</sup>

The circular theatre has remained completely unexplained and mostly ignored by scholars. As already mentioned, only Śāradātanaya (c. 12th century) observes the existence of such theatres, built in front of temple sanctums. It appears to have been used for "conducting a musical performance of or for the king", to have been "attended by experts and special invitees, and the king's subjects from towns and villages."<sup>44</sup> Gita Sengupta believes that the *nāt-maṇḍapa* of a temple in ancient Bengal (that of Kārtikeya in Mahāsthān) was built in circular shape.<sup>45</sup> Since the ruined temple is yet to be excavated, Sengupta's view still lacks concrete proof. But is interesting to note the existence of *maṇḍapas* (pavilions) attached to sanctums in the ruins of temples, known as the Khājuraḥa group, situated about a hundred miles south-east of Jhansi. These *maṇḍapas* are square-shaped externally, but the internal arrangement of pillars is circular.<sup>46</sup> This possibly indicates that the circular theatres cited by Śāradātanaya were similarly built.

### 2.1.5 Performers and Performance Conventions

A performance troupe in India during the 1st millennium AD is believed to have been constituted of musicians, actors and actresses. Although the *Nāṭyaśāstra* attempts to elevate the status of theatre by claiming its position as the fifth *Veda*, Chapter XXXVI clearly indicates their position in the lower social order. Occasionally a few royal patrons have held performers in high esteem but the fact that they were also known as *jāyājīva* (i.e., one who earns livelihood through his wife) indicates loose morals and loss of respect. Scholars have drawn evidence from the *Manusmṛti*, the *Arthaśāstra* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* in support of the above mentioned view. It is very much possible, as Tarlekar believes, that actresses were often courtesans.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, the performers were highly skilled in music, dance, and acting. The following terms commonly used in theatre parlance, indicate their roles in performance.

1. *Sūtradhāra* : In modern times, the *sūtradhāra* has been variously interpreted as the manager, the director, the stage-manager etc. Literally translated, the term denotes 'string-holder'. At some stage, the role could have implied a 'narrator', 'he who holds the thread of the story together'. During the classical period, the role of the *sūtradhāra* in performance appears to have been limited to the prologue (*prastāvana*) and a few other preliminaries. Tarlekar believes, he would also perform the main or subordinate roles of the play.<sup>48</sup>
2. *Kuśīlava* and *taurika* : Musicians.
3. *Naṭa* : Actor.
4. *Naṭī* : Actress.
5. *Nāyaka* : The central character (hero).
6. *Vidūṣaka* : Jester.

It is also important to note that *deva-dāsīs* (lit., 'servant of the gods') were maintained by temple authorities. They were highly skilled danseuse who performed for the public during religious festivals.

As Manomohan Ghosh notes, theatre in ancient India, "unlike its modern counterparts did possibly never become an ordinary amusement of everyday life".<sup>49</sup> Performances were given during religious festivals, seasonal festivals (such as the festival of spring) and special occasions (such as marriage, birth of a prince etc.). The performances given during religious festivals were mostly performed in temples and were sponsored by temple authorities. Public performances given during season festivals and those at royal courts were sponsored by the kings. The play-texts from the classical period noted earlier were all produced by kings and temple authorities.<sup>50</sup> But it is also possible, as Adya Rangacharya points out, that there

existed oral texts which were performed for popular entertainment in an idiom which was less sophisticated and codified than those given in the temples and the courts.<sup>51</sup>

Four styles of play production (*vṛtti*) are recognised by *Nāṭyaśāstra* (XXII). These are, (i) the Verbal (*Bhāratī*), (ii) the Grand (*Sāttvatī*), (iii) the Energetic (*Ārabhaṭī*) and (iv) the Graceful (*Kaiśikī*). The Verbal style is characterised by predominant use of speech. The Pathetic and the Marvellous *rasas* are said to be well evoked by this style. Performance in the Energetic style incorporates vigorous action characterised by greater degree of physical activities, conflict and fast rhythm. The Terrible, the Odious and the Furious *rasas* are well aroused through such a style. The Grand style is characterised by various physical gestures and speech which display calm and majestic strength producing the effect of elevation of spirit. Such a style is said to evoke well the Heroic, the Marvellous and the Furious *rasas*. The Graceful style is lyrical, delicate and tender. Scenes of love are well depicted in such a style. It is usually employed to arouse the Erotic and the Comic *rasas*. It should be noted here that other than the Graceful style, the remaining three are not mutually exclusive of each other. Therefore, in practical application, it is only a matter of predominance where the Grand, the Verbal and the Energetic are concerned.

Beside the above mentioned styles of production, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (XIV, 62-65) makes a further distinction in the nature of representation: the *Lokadharmī* and the *Nāṭyadharmī*. These two can be seen as the two ends of a scale of gradation, where the former (*Lokadharmī*) tends towards the actuality and the latter (*Nāṭyadharmī*) tends towards extreme stylization.

Manomohan Ghosh sums up the essence of performer's technique succinctly when he reminds us that representation in ancient Indian theatre "avoided stark realism and gave utmost scope to imagination and fancy".<sup>52</sup> *Nāṭyaśāstra* (VI, 23) classifies performer's technique under four heads : *āṅgika abhinaya* (physical representation), *vācika abhinaya* (vocal representation), *āhārya abhinaya* (representation with costume and make-up) and *sāttvika abhinaya* (representation of the *sattva*). The *Nāṭyaśāstra*, in chapters VIII to XII describes various aspects of physical representation which consists of various gestures, movements or gaits of head, hands, breast, sides, waist, feet, eyes, eyebrows, nose, lower lip and chin. The chapter on *vācika abhinaya* (XV) discusses the use of musical notes (*svara*), voice registers (*sthāna*), pitch vowels (*varṇa*), intonation (*kāku*) and speech-tempo (*laya*) etc. Costume and make-up, discussed in chapter XXIII, includes the use of symbolic colour, various properties, different types of costume, mask etc. Representation of the *sattva*, discussed briefly in verses 100-106 in chapter VII, has been shown as various physical changes.

A performance, as described in the *Natyasastra*, can be seen to be composed of three parts: (i) *pūrva-raṅga* (preliminaries), (ii) the main body of performance and (iii) *bharata-vākya* (verse of benedictory nature). The *pūrva-raṅga*, comprised of nineteen elements, is to begin with arrangement of musical instruments, taking of seats by the singers and musicians, vocal exercises, adjustment of instruments and other rehearsals, all of which are to be performed behind a curtain held in front of the performers. In short, these elements can be termed as a musical overture. At the end of the above, the curtain is to be removed and there is to follow the *nāndī* (song of benediction), ritualised worship and dance in Erotic and Furious *rasas*. The *pūrva-raṅga* is to be ended with *vidūṣaka*, *sūtradhāra* and his assistant performing a humorous scene, followed by an address to the spectators by the *sūtradhāra* in which the play is to be introduced (*prastāvanā*) (*Nāṭyaśāstra* V). Tarlekar believes that the *pūrva-raṅga* passed through evolution and towards the end of 1st millennium AD, it was much curtailed. By this time, the *pūrva-raṅga* was basically comprised of some form of musical overture, *nāndī* and *prastāvanā*. Of these, the *nāndī* was reduced to being rendered by the *sūtradhāra* alone and the *prastāvanā* usually by the *sūtradhāra* and a *naṭī*.<sup>53</sup>

The main body of performance was totally non-illusory and was controlled by a number of accepted conventions. On a stage totally devoid of scenery, it was always the performers who established a locale with the help of *āṅgika* and *vācika abhinaya*. Climbing a stair-case, riding a chariot, flying down from the heaven and similar activities were shown with the help of codified gestures and movements. Scenes of combat were presented with controlled and graceful movements, closer to dance than realistic make-believe spectacle.<sup>54</sup> Concepts of the so-called unities were totally absent. Locales were changed with fluid ease as and when the action of the play demanded.<sup>55</sup>

The changed scene usually began with the description of the locale by one of the characters. Again, those entering a scene earlier were taken to be inside a house and those entering later, were taken as being outside.<sup>56</sup> There was no act curtain and the end of an act was marked by exit of all characters and the next act continued without break. Some of the entries were made behind a moving curtain (*yavanikā*), held by two stage-hands. The character entered concealed (except for the legs), assumed the position required and then the curtain was removed. (Such practice is still common in South-Indian indigenous theatre forms, where the *yavanikā* is known as *raṅgpatti*). Soliloquies and asides (the latter indicated by a codified hand gesture named *tripatāka*) were common practices. Another interesting convention was the *ākāśa-bhāṣita*, with the help of which a conversation was carried on by on-stage character with another, who was not seen or heard. The on-stage character, asked a question to the other and the supposed answer received from the absent character would be repeated



by the on-stage character, prefaced by the words '*kim braviṣi*', 'what do you say?'.<sup>57</sup> Long passages of description were accompanied by various movements, gestures and mime to make alive the whole narration.

## 2.2 Theatre in Mithilā

The medieval kingdom of Mithilā, situated on the south of Nepal and north-west of Bengal, was annexed from Hindu monarch Hari Siṁha Deva (or Harihara Siṁha Deva) by Sultan Ghyasuddin of Delhi in 1323-24. According to Sylvain Levi, the vanquished monarch moved to Nepal with his courtiers and scholars (many of whom were Bengalis) and there founded a dynasty. After the fall of Hari Siṁha, Kāmeswar, the nephew of his prime minister, obtained royal decree from Sultan Ghyasuddin to rule Mithilā as a tributary king.<sup>58</sup> Towards the beginning of 15th century, Mithilā came under the Sharqis, the Muslim sultanate of Jaunpur. The overlords changed again towards the end of 15th century as the kingdom came under the Muslim sultanate of Gauḍa (Bengal) and thus a close connection between the two regions was established. All through these periods, Hindu tributary kings continued to rule Mithilā. Sukumar Sen has pointed out that in 15th century, there existed two major centres of cultural activities in the entire region of eastern India: one at the court of the sultans of Gauḍa (Bengal) and the other at the court of the tributary kings of Mithilā.<sup>59</sup> The latter is particularly important for our study for two of its illustrious court-poets: Umāpati Upādhyāya and Vidyāpati.

Umāpati Upādhyāya, a minister of King Hari Siṁha, composed a play-text titled *Pārijāta-haraṇa* sometime in the first quarter of 14th century.<sup>60</sup> Scholars have identified the text as a *saṁgīt-nāṭak*, which the poet himself has termed *maṅgala-abhinaya*.<sup>61</sup> There is remarkable influence of classical Sanskrit dramaturgy in the text, as it can be evinced from the presence of elements such as *nāṇḍī* (song of benediction), *prastāvanā* (the introductory section) and *bharata-vākya* but there is no act division. There are twenty-one songs in *Pārijāta-haraṇa*, all in Maithili language. The rest of the play is in Sanskrit and Prakrit languages.<sup>62</sup>

Vidyāpati, whose life span is believed to have had extended over most of 14th century and early 15th century, composed *Gorakṣa-vijay* (1403?) for his patron-king Śīva Siṁha. The text is also a *saṁgīt-nāṭak*.<sup>63</sup> It is composed in four languages: Sanskrit, Prakrit, Maithili and Bāṅglā. There are a number of songs in the text, all in Maithili and Bāṅglā. It is possible that Vidyāpati composed another play-text titled *Manimañjarī Nāṭaka*.

By 18th century, there evolved in Mithilā a genre of performance known as *Kīrtaniyā Nāṭaka*. Mostly based on mythological tales of Kṛṣṇa, *Kīrtaniyā Nāṭaka* texts were written

in quite a large number during 18th and 19th centuries. All these texts are composed in verse and lyric and there is hardly any prose dialogue. The language is mostly Maithili but the directions are given in Sanskrit and Prakrit. The texts also display influence of Sanskrit dramaturgy which is evident in the use of structural elements such as *nāndī* and characters such as *sūtradhāra*.<sup>64</sup>

### 2.3 Theatre in Nepalese Kingdoms :

The mountainous kingdom of Nepal, situated to the north-east of Bangladesh, has a history of maintaining virtual independence from Muslim rule and domestic autonomy from British rule. In late 14th century, King Jaya Sthiti Malla (1380-1394) introduced legal and social codes which were largely in accordance with contemporary Brahminic Hindu principles. Thus, from his time onwards the Nepalese culture began fusing Brahminic Hindu elements with that of Buddhism and allied cults from earlier times. Towards the end of 15th century, the region was divided into three independent kingdoms, Bhātgaon, Pātan (Lalitāpur) and Kathmandu, besides a number of other minor principalities. In 1769, all these kingdoms and principalities were united to create the modern state of Nepal. From late 14th century to the late 18th century, almost all the Nepalese kings proved to be great patrons of art and literature. In their courts, numerous poets and scholars from Bengal and Mithilā enjoyed royal patronage to continue theatre practice derived from classical Sanskrit dramaturgy. Although prevalent language of these kingdoms were Nepalese, the court poets composed play-texts in Sanskrit, Vrajabuli, Maithili and Bāṅglā. These texts, produced under royal patronage mostly during religious festivals, were intended for the aristocracy.<sup>65</sup> Bijit Kumar Dutta has shown that the court-theatre of Nepalese kingdoms developed in three distinct phases in its life-span of nearly four centuries. These are : (i) Predominantly Sanskrit (14th-15th centuries), (ii) Mixed Bāṅglā-Maithili-Vrajabuli (17th century) and (iii) Operatic (18th century).<sup>66</sup>

#### 2.3.1 *Sanskrit texts :*

The earliest extant Sanskrit text composed in the Nepalese court is *Rāmaṅka* (1360) by Dharma-gupta. The same playwright has another text, titled *Rāmāyaṇa Nāṭaka* to his credit. Examples of a few other texts are *Bhairavananda Nāṭaka* (1385-1392) and *Abhinabharāghabananda Nāṭakam* (1390) by Maṅik, composed during the reign of King Jaya Sthiti Malla. All these were composed in Sanskrit language, along with a little of Prakrit.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, all these texts belong to the form of *saṅgīt-nāṭak* and conform to the principle of Sanskrit dramaturgy.<sup>68</sup>

### 2.3.2 Mixed Bāṅglā-Maithili-Vrajabuli texts :

Play-texts of this group are mostly in Bāṅglā, Vrajabuli and Maithili languages, along with notable use of Sanskrit. The directions are given in Sanskrit and Nepalese. Reputed examples of texts from this group are : *Mudita-kuvalayāśva Nāṭaka* (1628), *Kuñja-vihārī Nāṭaka*, *Hara-Gaurī Vivāha Nāṭaka*, *Gīta-digamvara Nāṭaka*, all composed by Varṣamaṇi Ojhā during the reign of Jagajjyotir Malla (1617-1633) of Bhātgaon; *Gopīcandra Nāṭaka* and *Hariścandra-nṛtya* by Dvija Rāmabhadra composed during the reign of Siddhi Narsimha Malla (1620-1661) of Pātan (Lalitāpur) and *Lalita-kuvalayāśva Nāṭaka* (1665), also by Dvija Rāmabhadra, composed during the reign of Srinivāsa Malla (1661-1684) of Pātan (Lalitāpur).

Very little is known about the performance space in which the play-texts belonging to mixed Bāṅglā-Maithili-Vrajabuli group (as well as other Nepalese court-theatre play-texts) were given. It is generally held that all these were performed in the open-air (public grounds) as well as indoor theatres (part of palaces known as *nāsal-cok*). No scenic back-drops were used. Masks were used for characters such as demons and ogres. The costume were, in all probability, colourful and decorative.<sup>69</sup>

As indicated in the text of *Mudita-kuvalayāśva Nāṭaka*,<sup>70</sup> ritualised worship of the performance space was a pre-requisite of performance. It was followed by the entry of choral singers and musicians, accompanied by music played by them. Having occupied their position, they rendered a *vandanā* (salutation song) in honour of the deities. There followed the entry of the *sūtradhāra* with a *yavanikā* held in front of him by two stage hands.<sup>71</sup> He recited the *nāndī* in Sanskrit, from behind the curtain by holding it with his right hand in a particular *mudrā* (hand gesture), thus revealing only a part of his hand displaying the *mudrā*. The curtain was removed after the recitation of *nāndī* and then the *sūtradhāra* sang another *vandanā* in honour of Gaṇeśa and recited a verse in Sanskrit in honour of goddess Bhagavatī. Then he cast off a garland and danced to another song in praise of Gaṇeśa. There followed the classical Sanskrit convention of *prastāvanā* in which the *sūtradhāra* and a *naṭī* conversed among themselves with the objective of praising spectators assembled for the performance and introducing the text to be performed. The *prastāvanā* of *Mudita-kuvalayāśva* contains a passage of genealogy of the patron-king Jagajjyotir Malla. With the exit of the *naṭī* and the *sūtradhāra*, the main body of performance began. It would be composed of the following elements:

1. *Narrative performance in lyric* : Every principal character would announce his/her identity with a passage of lyric immediately after his/her first entry. On rare occasions, action

would also be described by the choral singers with the help of lyrical passages. All these passages would be accompanied by dance of the characters concerned and music played by the orchestra.

2. *Dialogic performance in lyric* : A major part of the text would be rendered in lyrical dialogue by the characters. All these passages would be accompanied by dance executed by the characters and music played by the orchestra. In *Mudita-kavalayāśva*, there are 119 songs, excluding the refrains.<sup>72</sup>

3. *Narrative performance in prose* : All the songs of introduction would be preceded and followed by brief passages of introduction in prose.

4. *Dialogic performance in prose* : Substantial part of the text is composed in prose dialogue which would be rendered by the characters. These passages usually include description of an event by one character to another, delivering news etc. It is believed that the extant written texts are usually "prompt copies" and therefore, these do not include a substantial amount of prose dialogue which were possibly improvised during performance by the performers themselves.<sup>73</sup>

Performance of *Madita-kavalayāśva Nāṭaka* would end with an epilogue containing a number of songs on the *Peaceful rasa* and salutation sung in honour of parents and deities and also recitation of Sanskrit verses which would briefly recapitulate the substance of the text and declare the end of performance.<sup>74</sup>

All the texts included in the mixed Bāṅglā-Maithili-Vrajabuli group exhibit characteristics noted in *Mudita-kavalayāśva Nāṭaka*, although details of the *prastāvanā* and the epilogue vary. All the texts of this group are divided into acts, the number of which varies from three to as many as twenty-three.<sup>75</sup> The acts are further divided into a number of scenes. Acts are either termed as *aṅkas* or *divasas* (days) and the scenes, *sammandhyas* or *lūs*. Some scholars believe that each act was performed in separate days and the performance of the complete text was spread over a number of consecutive days.<sup>76</sup> The device of self-introduction by the characters is another feature of the mixed group of texts. It is also interesting to note that the festivals in honour of deities in which these texts were performed also included *deva-yātras* or processions (in honour of the deities).<sup>77</sup>

### 2.3.3 *Operatic texts* :

About seventy years ago four play-texts were discovered from the Nepalese court, all of which are composed in Bāṅglā but written in Newari script. Nanigopāl Bandopādhyāya has shown that these were composed by Bengali poets residing at the court of Bhātgaon. The plays and the playwrights are as follows : *Vidyā-vilāp* by Kaśīnāth and *Mahābhārata* by

Kṛṣṇadeva, composed during the reign of King Bhupatindra Malla (1695-1722) of Bhāṭgāon; *Rāma-carita* by Gaṇeśa and *Madhabānal-kāmakandala* by Dhanapati composed during the reign of King Raṇajit Malla (1722-1770), also of Bhāṭgāon. All the texts contain *nāndī* in Sanskrit, *prastāvanā* with *sūtradhāra* and *naṭī* and brief benedictory epilogue. But the most striking feature is the absence of prose dialogue as all the texts are composed in lyrical dialogue.<sup>78</sup>

#### 2.3.4 *Yātrā* :

Even in early 20th century Nepal, there used to exist some festivals among the people, such as *Bhairava Yātrā*, *Bāḍhā Yātrā*, *Indra Yātrā*, *Gāi Yātrā*, *Matsyendranātha Yātrā* and *Netā Devī Yātrā*, which, according to Nagendranāth Basu, bore strong evidence of ancient practice. *Bāḍhā Yātrā* were held in honour of Buddhist *ācāryas* (preceptors). In *Bhairava Yātrā*, processions used to be taken out with two *rathas* (chariots) in front, in which were placed images of deities Bhairava and Bhairavī. The processions terminated in front of the temple of Bhairava opposite the royal palace, where ritualised worship accompanied by animal sacrifice would take place. In the festivals known as *Netā Devī Yātrā* and *Devī Yātrā* held on the 14th of the bright fortnight of Baisākh, masked performances were given at night in temple courtyard. Dressed in rich apparel and ornaments, the masked performers impersonated as deities such as Bhairava, Kālī and others and their performance included song and dance. It would end at daybreak. In the *Devī Yātrā* held in Nayākoṭ, the festival would run for five days and nights. Ritualised worship was held during the daytime, while at night masked performance in honour of Bhairava and Bhairavī were given. Both the Hindus as well as the Buddhists revered the masked performers as incarnations of deities. The *Ratha Yātrā* festival, not as ancient as others, was introduced sometime between 1740-50, during the reign of King Jaya Prakāś Malla. By early 20th century, performance given in *Ratha Yātrā* evolved to a form similar to the *Yātrā* of Bengal. Nagendranāth Basu is of the opinion that the Nepalese *Yātrās* clearly demonstrate how ancient processions in honour of deities gradually evolved to what today is known as *Yātrā*.<sup>79</sup>

#### 2.4 Theatre in Orissa

The kingdom of Orissa, which lay to the south-west of Bengal, maintained its sovereignty under Hindu monarchs till 1668,<sup>80</sup> when Solaiman Karrani of Bengal conquered the kingdom. Orissa deserves attention in this study because it was an important centre for Vaiṣṇavism and *nṛttātmaka-prabandha uparūpaka* type of temple-based performances. It is possible that these performances have been given in the *nāṭ-mandirs* attached to temples since 1200 AD.<sup>81</sup> The temples of Orissa which have *nāṭ-mandirs* attached to them are (i)

Liṅgarājā Temple, Bhuvanewara (c. 1000 AD), (ii) Ananta Vāsudeva Temple, Bhuvanewara (c. 1200), (iii) Jagannāth Temple, Puri (c. 1100) and (iv) Surya Temple, Konarak (c.1250). Scholars believe that the *nāṭ-mandirs* of these temple were constructed about one or two centuries after the construction dates shown above.<sup>82</sup>

Orissa is also important for this study because one of its monarchs Pratāparudra had extended patrony to Caitanya, as a result of which Puri became one of the major centres of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism during the latter's life-time. One of his close associates, Rāy Rāmananda, composed a play-text in Sanskrit and Prakrit languages, titled *Jagannāthavallabha* (early 16th c.). The play closely follows *saṁgīt-nāṭak* characteristics discussed earlier.<sup>83</sup> Another play, titled *Caitanya Candrodāya*, was composed by Paramānanda Dāsa (Kavi Karṇapūra) under the patrony of King Pratāparudra. A noted devotee of Caitanya from Bengal, Kavi Karṇapūra composed the above play, described as a Sanskrit *nāṭaka*.<sup>84</sup>

### 2.5 Theatre in Assam Valley

The region of greater Assam (including the state of Meghalaya), situated in the north of Bangladesh, is important for our study because, till mid-17th century, there was hardly any serious difference between Bāṅglā and Assamese languages<sup>85</sup> and because its western and south-western parts have intermittently been annexed by the Muslim rulers (of Sultanate well as Mughal periods) while the eastern and south-eastern parts have always maintained independence from alien forces till these parts were annexed by the British Raj in early 19th century. The region was known as Prāg-jyotiṣpura in the ancient times and a loose conglomeration of various independent kingdoms such as Coach-bihār, Kāmṭā, Kamrup (later Ahom) etc.

Prior to 16th century, there evolved in Assam a genre of performance known as *Ojā Pālī*. The genre, extant in the region, is succinctly described by B.K. Barua in the following passage:

The *Ojā Pālī* party generally consists of more than three persons and is divided into two groups, each singing in chorus. The leader is known as *Ojā* (the master) and his associates are called *Pālīs*. The *Ojā* extemporises or recites the song, which is accompanied by the *Pālīs* playing on the cymbals. The *Ojā* not only narrates but also explains the theme to the audience by rhythmic movements of his body. The party generally adopt their themes from Paurāṇic legends and folk-tales. The story of Behulā-Lakhindar (Lakṣmīndar) and the legends connected to goddess Manasā are popular subjects of recitation in *Ojā Pālī*.<sup>86</sup>

The most popular text on Manasā performed by the *Ojā Pālī* troupes is the *Padmā-purāṇ* by Nārāyaṇ Dev (known as Hukānanni in Assamese).<sup>87</sup> As we shall see later, Nārāyaṇ Dev's *Padmā-purāṇ* is also performed in the northern parts of Bangladesh.

Scholars credit Śaṅkara Deva (c. 1461-1568), the famous Vaiṣṇavite preacher of the Assamese region, for evolving a genre of performance known as *Aṅkiyā Nāṭ*, the Assamese version of *saṅgīt-nāṭak*.<sup>88</sup> Śaṅkara Deva was a senior contemporary of Caitanya Deva (1486-1533) who preached Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal and caused cultural upheaval in early 16th century. Although both used performance as a vehicle for religious propagation, the philosophy of Śaṅkara Deva is distinct from that of Caitanya: the former lays emphasis on knowledge and ritualised devotional practice as the way to salvation while the latter emphasises spontaneous devotional fervour for similar goal.

*Aṅkiyā Nāṭ*, as all other *saṅgīt-nāṭak* texts, are composed in lyrical as well as prose dialogue and thus bear remarkable similarity with the Nepalese texts in dialect. Śaṅkara Deva composed six *Aṅkiyā Nāṭ* texts. These are : *Kālīya-daman*, *Patni-dāsa*, *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa*, *Rasa-kriḍā* (or *Keli-gopāla*), *Parijāta-haraṇa* and *Rāma-vijaya* (or *Sītā-svayamvarā Nāṭaka*).<sup>89</sup> All these are on Kṛṣṇa save the last which is on Rāmacandra. In terms of structure, all the texts are composed in one act.

*Aṅkiyā Nāṭ*, still produced in Assam, is performed in large halls known as *bhāonāghar* or *rabhā*, built close to temple sanctums in Vaiṣṇavite monasteries. These halls, about 180' x 60' in dimension, are permanent constructions with two layers of roofing (one of corrugated iron sheet and the other of thatch) resting on large wooden pillars. The ceiling is covered with cloth and the ground is plastered with mud. The orchestra-cum-chorus is seated at one of the (shorter) ends of the hall and a text of *Śrīmad-bhāgavat* is placed on a pedestal at the other end; the spectators sit on remaining two (opposite) sides. The performance is given in the space between the orchestra-cum-chorus, the sacred text and the spectators. It is about 120' x 18' in dimension and non-elevated. All entrances are made from the side of the orchestra-cum-chorus. The green-room (*chā-ghar*) is located at the rear, in the main building of the monastery, not far from the *bhāonāghar*. The main action takes place at the centre of the performance space and it is indicated by a small canopy hung from the ceiling. A number of small and low-plinth pavilions (of wooden platforms and canopies) represent various locales where the characters often sit. These serve as subsidiary performance space, in a manner similar to the 'booths' employed in Easter plays which were performed in the church premises of medieval Europe.<sup>90</sup>

The following is a reconstruction of *Parijāta-haraṇa* as it was possibly performed during the life time of Śaṅkara Deva, based on report of *Aṅkiyā Nāṭ* performance,<sup>91</sup> indications in the text<sup>92</sup> and opinions of scholars.<sup>93</sup> After a musical overture rendered in *khol* and *kartāl*, the

*sūtradhāra* enters the central performance area to sing a song of benediction (*nāndī*) in Sanskrit, possibly with choral and musical accompaniment. It is possible that he also danced (as he dances in *Añkīyā Nāṭ* performances today). There follows the recitation of a verse passage of salutation (*bhāṭimā*) in Vrajabuli, which is rendered in honour of Kṛṣṇa, by the *sūtradhāra*. Thereupon the *sūtradhāra* announces to the spectators in colloquial prose (a mixture of Maithili and Assamese) the substance of the performance to be given and requests them to witness it with attention. He transits to the main body of performance with an interesting convention (which echoes similar practice in Sanskrit theatre). He asks his assistant, the *saṅgī*, the cause of music being played. The latter replies, it is the music of the gods. Immediately, the *sūtradhāra* renders a couplet in Sanskrit, announcing the entry of Kṛṣṇa with Rukmiṇī, Satyabhāmā and other wives. Then he cautions the spectators, in colloquial prose, to witness the performance with attention. There follows a song in Vrajabuli, rendered by the choral singers, to which Kṛṣṇa and his wives enter dancing. They continue dancing to the song, at the end of which Rukmiṇī and Kṛṣṇa retire to a pavilion and Satyabhāmā to another, concurrently as the *sūtradhāra* narrates their action. Thereupon the latter announces the arrival of Nārada, Indra and Śacī, first in Sanskrit verse and then in colloquial prose. He also indicates the substance of action to follow. The *sūtradhāra*'s announcement is followed by the entry of the three characters. They enter dancing, accompanied by a lyrical passage describing their action. Indra and Śacī retire to a pavilion; Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī enter the central performance space to salute Nārada. The performance thus continues until it ends with a recital praying for the peace and happiness for everybody (*mukti maṅgala bhāṭimā*), followed by orchestral music. <sup>94</sup>

Briefly, *Añkīyā Nāṭ* performances in Śaṅkara Deva's time, would be composed of the following elements :

1. *Dialogic performance in prose*, as rendered by all characters in colloquial dialect.
2. *Dialogic performance in verse*, as rendered by a few characters, both in Sanskrit and Vrajabuli.
3. *Dialogic performance in lyric*, as rendered by a few characters, mostly in Vrajabuli, concurrently with dance.
4. *Mimetic performance*, as rendered by the *sūtradhāra* in passages in which he would describe action of the characters directly to the spectators as the characters would perform silently. He also would deliver the substance of the action to follow and urge the spectators to speak the name of Hari with devotional fervour. The description of action by the *sūtradhāra* could be in prose (colloquial dialect), verse (Sanskrit and Vrajabuli) and/or lyric



(mostly in Vrajabuli). The lyrical passages would be accompanied by choral singers and musicians.

The role of the *sūtradhāra* occupies the central position in *Añkiyā Nāṭ* performance. It is also possible that masks and elaborate props (such as chariots) were used during the period of Śaṅkara Deva. Furthermore, young lads performed in female roles. Śaṅkara Deva himself, as well as his leading disciples (such as Mādhava Deva) enacted various roles in *Añkiyā Nāṭ* performances. It is interesting to note that Śaṅkara Deva named his performance "Yātrā" and "Līla Yātrā". Later disciples of Śaṅkara Deva, such as Mādhava Deva and Gopāla Deva, also composed *Añkiyā Nāṭ* texts. In these, the use of Sanskrit gradually, decreased.<sup>95</sup>

## 2.6 Buddhist Theatre in Ancient India :

Since its inception in 6th century BC till around the beginning of the Christian era, the austerity of Buddhism rejected theatre for it spoke of worldly desire and sensuous pleasure. There exist few references to theatre in Buddhist liturgical texts. In the *Vinaya* texts, Gautama Buddha admonishes a few monks for having witnessed a performance in a festival at Rājagṛha :

You are not, O Bhikkhus, to go see dancing, singing and music. Whoever does so, shall be guilty of *dukkata*. (Cullavagga, Khandaka V, 1.6).<sup>96</sup>

Also, the *Majjhimaśīlā*, an ancient Buddhist liturgic tract, preserved in the *Brahmājalasutta* and the *Tevijjasutta* of the *Dīghanikāya*, forbids the Buddhist monks to take part in various public performances including dancing, singing, recitation and animal fights.<sup>97</sup>

It was only with the growth of Mahāyāna Buddhism that various artistic media, including painting and performance, began to be accepted as legitimate means of propagating religious views.

### 2.6.1 Performance Texts :

One of the pioneers of the Mahāyāna faith who pressed theatre into the service of religious indoctrination, and who, incidentally is also the earliest known Sanskrit playwright, is Aśvaghōṣa, variously placed between 1st century BC to 2nd century AD. Originally a Brahmin and a renowned singer of his age, Aśvaghōṣa is said to have converted five hundred princes into Buddhism in the city of Pāṭaliputra at the end of his self-composed mournful piece of music on the theme of emptiness of life.<sup>98</sup>

Aśvaghōṣa's *Sutrālaṅkāra* contains a piece relating to Māra (translated by Windisch as *Mara und Buddha*) in which Māra appears before the holy Upagata in the costume of the Buddha and represents the latter very much true to life. M. Winternitz finds the poem uncommonly dramatic and believes that "it is a evidently a recapitulation of a drama".<sup>99</sup> But more important for our study is the fact that Aśvaghōṣa composed *Sāriputra-prakarana*, a play-text based on the legend of Sāriputra and Maudgalyāyana related in the Mahavagga of the *Vinayapiṭaka*. The objective of all Aśvaghōṣa's literary work, including the above mentioned text, is "to teach salvation (which involves abandonment of all enjoyment) under the cloak of a (pleasant) *kāvya* (poetic work)".<sup>100</sup>

H. Luders discovered fragments of two more play-texts at a monastery in Turfan, Central Asia, whose authors are unknown but who, according to the discoverer, could belong to a circle closely associated with Aśvaghōṣa.<sup>101</sup> One of the fragments presents three allegorical characters, *Buddhi* (Knowledge), *Dhṛti* (Firmness) and *Kīrti* (Fame), very much as in the *Prabodhacandrodaya* by Kṛṣṇamiśra, and the Buddha surrounded by a halo. The other fragment presents *vidūṣaka*, courtesan, rogue etc., in a manner similar to the *Mṛcchakaṭika*. Both the texts are divided into acts, contains preludes and mix verse and prose. According to Winternitz, "the technique of the scenic art is so developed that we cannot regard them as the beginning of dramatic composition, but must assume a preceding course of tolerably long evolution."<sup>102</sup>

Sten Konow believes that "besides Aśvaghōṣa there existed in earlier times also other dramatists, who applied their art in the service of Buddhism".<sup>103</sup> Names of at least two such playwrights, Subandhu and Haṁsabhadda (around 2nd century BC), is known through passing references in other texts. Of them, Haṁsabhadda is believed to have composed two allegorical texts on Buddhist doctrine in Pali.<sup>104</sup>

Aśvaghōṣa's tradition of play writing continued long after his time, a fact that is verified by the existence of *Nāgananda*, a play credited to Harṣavardhana (7th c. AD). The following excerpt from the *Record* of I-Tsing during his visit to India from 671 to 695 AD briefly hints at the production style of the play and also verifies that it was highly popular.

King Śīlāditya versified the story of the Bodhisattva Gimūtavāhana ('Cloud-borne'), who surrendered himself in place of a Nāga. This version was set to music (lit, string and pipe). He had it performed by a band accompanied by dancing and acting, thus popularised it in his time.<sup>105</sup>

It should be noted that a common feature of all the plays mentioned above is that they are based on either the Jātaka tales or Buddhist legends.

Beside the above mentioned play-texts, there also exist quite a few Buddhist poetic works which call for special attention. As Winternitz points out,<sup>106</sup> in the Jātaka as well as in the Sāgathavagga of the Samyuttanikāya, in the *Suttanipāta* and in the *Thera* and *Therīgāthās*, there are quite a few ballads which have been composed in the form of dialogue and prose narrative. Most remarkable of these are the *Padhānasutta* and the *Pabajjasutta* in the *Suttanipāta*, the *Chaddanta Jātaka* (514), the *Visvantara Jātaka* (547), the *Ummadantī Jātaka* (527), the *Mahājanaka Jātaka* (539), the *Candakinnara Jātaka* (485), the ballads of the robber chieftain Aṅgulimāla in the *Theragāthā* and *Majjhimanikāya*, the ballads of the nun Sundarī in the *Therīgāthā* etc., all of which are "uncommonly dramatic" in Winternitz's view. Moreover, Leon Feer finds the *Chaddanta Jātaka* "a veritable drama" and Winternitz views the *Ummadantī Jātaka* as "a small drama".<sup>107</sup> According to Winternitz, "it is quite possible, perhaps probable, that these varieties were sung to the accompaniment of a string instrument, but that they were executed as real dramas and that in their dramatic performance action and imitation were brought into play, - for this we have no evidence in the entire Buddhist tradition."<sup>108</sup>

Christopher Byrski, in his *Concept of Ancient Indian Theatre*, shows that Mahāyāna Buddhism had developed a concept of theatre which accepted the practice stated in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* with an important addition: that of the ninth *rasa* of *Śānta* (lit., "Peaceful"). Buddhist drama thus reconciled the propagation of worldly desire of the Sanskrit (non-Buddhist) theatre to the Buddhist concept of renunciation, thereby claiming for its central character the *Śānta rasa* at the end of the play. This treatment, apart from Aśvaghōṣa is also evident in *Nāgananda* as well as the ballads and poetic texts mentioned above. These and possibly other lesser known and lost Buddhist (instructive) plays portray heroes modelled after the life of the Buddha, a hero not of fulfilled material desire as shown in the Sanskrit (non-Buddhist) plays, but a peaceful hero of renunciation. Thus the plays begin with the hero in a mental stage in which it appears to him that worldly desire merely conceal the ultimate truth and in reality it is the cause of misery and despair in life. In course of action of the play the central character acquires the ultimate truth and at the end he renounces the pleasures of life and accepts the teachings of the Buddha. Byrski also suggests that "the Buddhist *nāṭya* (theatre) beginning with Aśvaghōṣa, who might have already had in front of him a Buddhistic work on poetry, down to Harṣa including that mysterious Rāhula who wrote a treatise on *nāṭya*, must have been well-developed theoretically and quite popular among the people."<sup>109</sup> It should be noted in passing that Abhinavagupta mentions Rāhula as "Śakyācārya" and quotes him in the *Abhinavabhāratī* (vol. 3). Scholars believe that the

preceding Abhinavagupta. *Valiyāta* appears to have been a performance based on the Buddha's life and some of the Jātaka tales which consisted of song, dance and gesture along with sporadic use of prose dialogue. *Veddaṅga* was possibly a later development, from around the 4th century AD, and consisted of improvised performances based on the lives of Buddhist saints. Since performances related to Hindu deities were also given in the *Veddaṅga*, scholars believe that the original performance was possibly adapted by the Brahminical ruling class which was in ascendance from late 4th century AD. *Ḍommāra* was originally songs rendered in praise of the Buddha. Later it developed into an operatic form which depicted various incidents from the Buddha's life. It was performed by the *Ḍommārīs*, a nomadic people, who were once staunch Buddhists. Today these people still perform, but it is Brahminical mythology and they have been absorbed into the folds of Hinduism. Incidentally, there exist references to *Ḍombī* in the Buddhist literary texts of ancient Bengal<sup>116</sup> and there still exist the *Ḍomas*, a class of "untouchables" in the Hindu community of West Bengal and Bangladesh. It should also be noted that the classical Sanskrit theatre recognises the *Ḍombī* as an *uparūpaka* variety of performance in which a dancer performs amorous songs in the royal palaces.<sup>117</sup>

Other than the forms of performances mentioned above, H.V. Sharma believes that the semi-classical theatre of *Kuḍiyāṭṭam* from Kerala, India, is "a fine blend of the folk, the Buddhist and the classical Sanskrit features".<sup>118</sup> The common characteristics of all the theatre forms mentioned above are mime, dance, music, narration and dialogue. The narrator also plays an important role because he often introduces the characters, interprets the action and links the scenes.

#### 2.6.4 The Performance Space :

There are quite a few references to performance space in the Jātaka, which, although not Buddhist, are nevertheless important for they shed light on the nature of performance space in use during 3rd century or earlier. One of these is the *maṇḍapa* (pavilion) mentioned in the *Bhadraghaṭa Jātaka*. The *maṇḍapa* was temporarily constructed with awning on top, as hinted in the *Uddālak Jātaka*. Such a *maṇḍapa* is to be seen in an Ajantā fresco (cave no. 1) depicting the *Mahājanak Jātaka* tale, where the king along with his court jester (the *vidūṣaka*) is shown watching a dance performance given in a colourful pavilion with awning on top. On the other hand, the *Guttīl Jātaka* speaks of temporary open-air performance space, circular in shape in which the spectators would sit on circular tiers placed one above the other, leaving a circular space in the middle (*raṅga-maṇḍala*) for the performing musicians. Similar tiered arrangement is also mentioned in the *Ghata Jātaka* and the

*Ayoghar Jātaka*. The *Mahāpanāda Jātaka* mentions spectators seating on tiers which were circle upon circle ("cakkaticakke mancatimance bundhimsu").<sup>119</sup>

The discovery, in 1926, of the amphitheatre at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa in the state of Andhra, built sometime in 2nd or 3rd century AD, brings clearly to light the nature of performance space used by the Buddhists. The theatre was originally situated in a valley at the foot of the Nallamalai Hills (overlooking the river Kṛṣṇa), which was once known as Vijayapuri, a renowned centre of Buddhist learning as well as the seat of the Ikṣvaku dynasty. The original site at present lies deep under Kṛṣṇa waters but the theatre has been reconstructed on the east bank of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa reservoir.

The theatre (fig. 8) is a quadrangular (almost square) performance arena measuring 55'x46', with galleries rising on all four sides. The performance space is separated from the lowest tier by a wall 3'-6" high. The tiers are 9" high which possibly indicates that the spectators either sat on their knees and heels or cross-legged. It is built of bricks, paved with stone and had a short limestone lamp-stand in the centre of the arena. Of tremendous acoustic quality, the theatre is roofless, but would possibly be covered with some form of temporary awning during performance. A flight of steps cuts across the middle of one of the arms of the gallery and leads to three separate levels above the galleries, of which the lower two had built on them two rectangular chambers and on the third at the hill-top was built the shrine of Haritī, the guardian deity of Buddhist buildings. The temple, built in 4th or 5th century AD, is possibly a later addition. Any one of the architectural structures on the three upper levels above the galleries could have been used by the performers for make-up and costume changes.<sup>120</sup>

Archaeologists have also identified a *raṅga maṇḍapa*, a hall with 36 pillars, at a site (no. 80) in Nāgārjunakoṇḍa. There was a raised platform, possibly a stage with a back-stage space behind it. A memorial pillar in honour of King Camtamula has engraved on it the name of one Kusumalatā, believed to be court-dancer of the king.<sup>121</sup>

Thus it is clear that the Buddhist theatre in India appears to have developed, (i) open-air performance space, quadrangular (nearly square) in shape with galleries on all four sides as seen in Nāgārjunakoṇḍa and (ii) indoor performance space in Buddhist temples as in the monastery at Salonpura, in which *deva-dāsīs* were sometimes attached. The Jātaka tales testify that both the types of performance space, permanent as well as temporary (and also a type that appears to have been circular in shape), were also in use among the elite as well as general populace in 3rd century or earlier.

Our survey of the Buddhist theatre in India has also revealed that possibly the Buddhists had developed a form of theatre expounded by Rāhula, among others, which had much in common with the practice laid down by the *Nāṭyaśāstra* but also distinct with its concept of the *Śānta rasa* and theme of renunciation of material world which enables the central character to attain freedom from the bondage of desire. Characteristically, these plays often portrayed the life of the Buddha or a Bodhisattva, drawn from the Jātaka and other liturgical narratives. Sometimes these plays were also allegorical and it is possible that they were known as *Buddha nāṭaka*. An important example of this tradition is Aśvaghōṣa and there existed other playwrights whose work is now lost. It is also important to note that a few of the religious texts, such as the Jātaka, were composed in the form of narrative and dialogue and these, scholars believe, were sung to the accompaniment of string instrument. Although Buddhist theatre as such is extinct in India today, traces still remain in a few indigenous genres where song, dance and dialogic and/or narrative performances feature as salient characteristics.

## **2.7 Buddhist Theatre in Sri Lanka :**

Buddhism reached Sri Lanka around 250 BC when Emperor Aśoka sent his son Mahinda to preach the new faith. Although the orthodox Hīnayāna (Theravāda) school of Buddhism is prevalent in the country today, theatrical performance has clearly made its way into religious ceremonies which also has strongly influenced the indigenous theatre.

### **2.7.1 Religious Ceremonies :**

Apart from the preaching ceremony *bana*, which includes partly narrated and partly enacted story of *Alavaka Damanaya* showing the subjugation and conversion of the demon Alavaka by the Buddha himself,<sup>122</sup> another interesting religious ceremony is the *paraheera* (procession) taken out during the annual display of Buddha's tooth in August, which has been described as the most grand festival of the country. Trains of elephants with *howdahs* and rows of Buddhist monks in saffron robes with palanquins and umbrellas displaying objects of religious merit from the temple, as well as drummers and dancers proceed through the streets before crowds of people gathered to witness the annual *paraheera*. The dancers perform the famous Kandyan dance, pausing enroute to display fragments of their performance before the crowd.<sup>123</sup>

Faubion Bowers points out that the Kandyan dance was originally a court performance of the royalty. Sometime around the 16th century, it gradually found its way into the Buddhist religious ceremonies and by the 19th century when the royalty had declined, the Buddhist

temples took over the task of extending patronry to the dancers, providing temple courtyard for them to perform during holy days and occasions of religious celebrations, thus adding attractions to counterbalance the austerity of Hinayana Buddhist theology.<sup>124</sup>

### 2.7.2 *Indigenous Theatre :*

Traces of Buddhist influence can be clearly discerned in the indigenous theatre performances of Sri Lanka, such as the *Sokari*, the *Kolam* and the *Nadagam*. The *Sokari* performances, to be seen in the hills specially in Kandy and Badulla areas, are based on variations of a single legend in which a man named Guru Hami (who often is a beggar), along with his beautiful wife Sokari and a rascally servant Paraya (or Paccanira) embark upon a journey from south India to Sri Lanka with the objective of settling there and raising a family. During their journey, the trio pass through a number of experiences, mostly comical in vein, including one in which the wife is seduced by a doctor and elopes with him. Eventually she returns, is reconciled with her husband and finally the couple beget a son after supplications made at a temple of Kārtikeya, a Hindu deity but at one time considered subordinate to the Buddha. The *Sokari* has no written text and is improvised on a broad story-line, the details of which are varied and topical references are also added.

The *Sokari* is performed in any open space, which often is the threshing ground of rural homesteads. The spectators sit on all four sides, describing a square, a circle or even an oval performance space within. A large earthen vessel containing oil lit in the centre, smaller oil lamps placed at the sides and burning torches carried by the performers are the usual sources of illumination. The performance begins with a prelude where the leader-cum-narrator, accompanied by a chorus and drummers, entertain the spectators as the latter begin to gather and settle down shortly after evening meal. The characters are then introduced by the narrator and the performance commences. As the characters move around the performance space, the story is narrated in verse and at certain important junctures, they stop to enact a scene mostly through mime, dance and highly inventive physical action but sometime also with the help of dialogue in verse. Often the leader-narrator enters into improvised dialogue with the characters to illuminate the mimed action. The performance ends at day-break with a simple ritual.<sup>125</sup>

Scholars believe that the *Sokari* is based on an ancient fertility rite which the Buddhists adapted by incorporating legends pertaining to their religious view but was subsequently altered to suit popular taste. Sharma also points out that both in Nepal and Tibet there exist performances based on legends which are but slight variations of the *Sokari*. In these variations, a merchant is often substituted for the beggar. Even so, the couple sometimes

accompanied by a servant, seek the blessing of the Buddha, a Bodhisattva or Buddhist deities and eventually their wish is fulfilled.<sup>126</sup>

*Kolam* (a derivative of a Tamil word denoting "costume", "guise" or "representation") is also a secular theatre form, but traces of Buddhist influence are clearly discernible. It has a repertory of five or six story outlines based on which improvised performances are given. Of these, the *Sandakinduru* and the *Maname Katava* are both based on Jātaka tales but later adapted to popular taste. The performance of the *Kolam* are still to be seen in the village of Ambalangoda, some sixty miles from Colombo.

The *Kolam* is performed on a flat arena, believed originally to have been square in shape, in the courtyard of rural homesteads. Today quadrangular (nearly square) shaped performance space survive at a few places as a relic of the ancient tradition (see fig. 9).<sup>127</sup> The *Kolam* is a night long performance beginning late in the evening with the performers entertaining the gathering spectators with songs, dance and other amusement. The performance proper begins with invocatory songs in praise of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Saṅgha. Then two masked performers in the role of the King and the Queen arrive, are introduced to the spectators and they occupy a raised platform at one end of the performance space. Then follows a large number of masked characters, usually stock stereotypes, who are introduced by the narrator, one after the other as they dance around the arena. The narrator along with the musicians sings out the story which is often enacted by a group of characters and is highly theatrical, exuberant and satirical. At the end of the introductory presentation, the performance proper commences, the theme of which is usually drawn from the life of the Buddha or his disciples. The most famous of these portrays the story of two *kinnaras* living happily in a forest with their song, dance and music. One day, the King of Benares, while hunting, catches sight of the female *kinnara*, falls in love, kills her mate and woos her promising all that she desires. But failing to move her, the King attempts to kill her. At that moment, the Buddha appears to save her and restore life to her mate. In the main body of the play, the performers are not masked, the tone is more subdued than that of the introductory section. The performance ends with a benedictory ritual invoking the blessing of the Buddha and subordinate Hindu deities.<sup>128</sup>

Of special interest for our study are the *Kolam* masks which are made of wood and extremely delicately carved out. These range from those used by the commoners, small in size, to those used by the royal couple, huge hollowed-out tree trunks. There are also a few used by the demons and malevolent deities which are terrifying, large and brilliantly painted. The most awe-inspiring mask appears to be that of Maru Rakassa, "from whose bloody fangs hangs the carved, limp body of child". Bowers also points out, that "because *Kolam*



masks are unsuited for talking through, and it is extremely difficult to hear the actors when they speak, the drama originally must have been entirely pantomime."<sup>129</sup>

*Nadagam* (derivative of Sanskrit term for dance-drama) is believed to be an early 19th century theatre form, now extinct. Essentially a performance of the *Nadagam* consisted of a series of songs linked by a faint thread of stories based on the Buddha's life, Christian legends or even European fairy tales.<sup>130</sup>

Sri Lanka is also famous for devil-dancing, an indigenous exorcistic ritual, which is performed by professional dancers to alleviate sickness, insanity or any state of misfortune believed to be caused by malevolent demons. Performed in front of the house of the person afflicted (in the courtyard, the garden or the street), the most impressive part of the dance is the fire-play of the dancers with burning torches. Late at night the dancers, all males, dress as women to lure the devils to possess them. Once possessed, the feminine attire and attachments are cast off and awe inspiring masks of the devils (representing snake-heads, ghastly beings with corpses hanging from the fangs etc.) are donned. The devil which is believed to be the cause of ailment is then cajoled, bribed or even threatened (that the Buddha's aid would be sought if it did not comply) till it leaves, restoring the patient to good health. The ceremony is accompanied by drumming and choral singing rendered from one end of the performance arena.<sup>131</sup> Not going into further detail of the dance, it is important for us to note that the ritual of the devil dance is clearly pre-Buddhist in origin, but, as has been characteristic of Buddhism all over Asia, it adapted the indigenous devil dance for the purpose of propagation of its superiority by placing the devils in a position of subordination to the Buddha, as it also has been the case with the *bana* and other religious ceremonies.

Finally, we should also take note of the fact that in Anuradhapura, there exists a theatre similar to that of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa but without any flight of steps or any shrine in the vicinity.<sup>132</sup>

To conclude our survey of Buddhist theatre and its influence in Sri Lanka, it is important to remind ourselves of the following salient features: (i) the use of song, dance and music; (ii) the use of masks, some of which are designed to be awe inspiring; (iii) the use of quadrangular (nearly square) performance space; (iv) the use of narration accompanied by mimetic enactment by masked characters as well as character portrayal in the first person; (v) the recurrent use of the Jātaka tales; (vi) the adoption of non-Buddhist modes of performance into Buddhist religious ceremonies.

## 2.8 Buddhist Theatre In Myanmar (Burma) :

Because of scant information available on theatre in Myanmar (Burma), it is difficult to draw a detailed picture. Nevertheless, so much is clear that for centuries Myanmarian indigenous theatre has performed the Jātaka tales.<sup>133</sup> Of these, the *Visvantara Jātaka* has been a favourite both in the monastic circle as well as with the lay populace. Winternitz notes that during initiation ceremony of a novice into monkhood, the *Visvantara Jātaka* is performed as a "theatrical piece".<sup>134</sup> Captain Forbes, possibly writing sometime in the second half of the 19th century, notes an interesting performance of the same Jātaka by a group of village children (fourteen and under) who were trained by an old man acting as a stage manager and prompter. Not only was the piece held in high esteem by the villagers but also by Forbes who found it "one of the most affecting and beautifully written composition in Burma (and that the) little company used to perform the piece capitally".<sup>135</sup> There also appears to be a form of Buddhist religious drama in the Ārākān region, which, among others, portrays the necromantic power of the monks.<sup>136</sup>

The most important of the indigenous theatre of Myanmar is the *Zat Pwe*. Since the term "Zat" is a derivative of "Jātaka" and "Pwe" denotes "that which is shown", it is obvious that this particular form of theatre performance grew out of enactment of the Jātaka tales. Today *Zat Pwe* implies "classical" theatre, i.e., theatre of ancient origin presenting events based on the classical period of Myanmarian history. Structured on formal set of rules, stylized portrayal of characters by performers in gorgeous costume, long dance sequences, intermittent songs and a constant accompaniment of music by a large orchestra, a performance of the *Zat Pwe* is a night-long affair, beginning at about nine in the evening and ending at about four in the morning. Invariably the plot, alternating between comedy and pathos, is built on schemes and betrayals of courtiers against ruling monarch, leading to flight to the forest of the monarch and a period of concealed identity, but finally ending with restoration of power and happy marriage.<sup>137</sup> Thus the overall pattern is a circular movement from happiness and contentment of the central characters to loss and hardship but eventually ending in a state wherefrom it began, now obviously wiser because of the period of trial. Therefore, thematically, truth and justice is shown to prevail.

On the other hand *Yein Pwe*, another form of Myanmarian theatre important for our study, is essentially a pageant involving both dance and drama (allegorical in character), based on religious themes and performed only on important religious festivals. Some of the large cast required to give this elaborate and lengthy spectacle are amateurs.<sup>138</sup>

Also of interest for our study is the *Nat Pwe* ("nat" denoting "spirit"), a form of exorcistic ritual, organised on the Myanmarian New Year celebration held on April full-moon, the roots of which are definitely pre-Buddhist. During the ritual, a group of old men and women perform trance-dance and when possessed by any of the thirty-seven spirits, often act as a medium of divination. Dressed in gay and gaudy coloured costume, the dancers don specific headdresses and costume (which varies from total change of apparel to insignificant additions or changes) as any of the spirits possess any of the performers. A performance of the *Nat Pwe* also entails an enactment of a dramatic piece titled *Ton Byon*, which is based on the martyrdom of two young boys and is considered sacrosanct by the Myanmarian.<sup>139</sup>

To sum up our brief review of Buddhist theatre and its derivatives in Myanmar, it is important to note the following :

- (i) There exists a long tradition of performance based on the Jātaka tales, of which the *Visvantara Jātaka* is most popular. But, as Bowers points out, the portrayal of the Buddha is usually limited to his youth and any form of representation of him after his enlightenment is considered utterly sacrilegious by the Hīnayāna Buddhists of Myanmar.<sup>140</sup>
- (ii) Song, dance, music as well as character portrayal in the first person is a common feature.
- (iii) Ritualistic trance-dance is given on the April full-moon, which also features dramatic enactment.
- (iv) Pageants based on religious themes featuring dance and drama (allegorical in character) are given on important religious festivals.
- (v) Non-Buddhist spirit cult has been assimilated into Buddhist festivals celebrated by the lay populace.

### 2.9 Buddhist Theatre in Tibet (China) :

The earliest Buddhist (Mahāyāna) contact with Tibet appears to have been established with the conversion of King Sron Tsan Gampo sometime between 641 and 650 AD. In 747 the great Buddhist (Tantric) scholar Padmasambhava arrived in Tibet at the invitation of the Tibetan King Chisongdezan (742-797 AD), through whose efforts Buddhism was firmly established in place of the earlier religion of Bon. Finally, in the famous Council of Samye (792-94), in which Indian (Tantric) Buddhist and Chinese (Ch'an) Buddhist scholars debated over their respective schools of thought, it was decided that the Tantric school was to be the standard form for Tibet.

A general survey of the Tibetan performing arts reveals that pre-Buddhist Bon ritual dance was adapted by the Buddhists for didactic purpose. In 779, on the occasion of the

completion of Samye Monastery, Padmasambhava created a ritualistic 'sorcerer's dance' to propitiate the gods. It was a pantomimic performance based on the Jātaka tales and it incorporated ritualistic dance elements of the Bon religion. Later in the 15th century, a Buddhist monk named Thangton Gyalpo (1385- ?) is believed to have created a religiously instructive performance to raise fund to build a bridge by interlacing earlier ritualistic performances with Jātaka and folk tales. It is believed that the popular (folk) theatre of Tibet, specially the *Ālchi Lhāmo*, originated from the early theatrical enterprise of Gyalpo. Recently, scholars have also discovered twenty volumes of a treatise on performing arts from Bhutan, composed sometime after the last quarter of the 14th century, by Thangton Gyalpo who claims to have been inspired for the project by the Buddhist (Tantric) goddess Tārā. Detailed study of the treatise should lead to hitherto unknown aspects of the traditional Buddhist theatre, specially of the Himalayan belt. Furthermore, historical evidence from the 15th century Tibetan court record quasi-secular performances given on the New Year's Day which were based on Jātaka tales, lives of saints, Tibetan legendary heroes and emperors, as well as a few Hindu mythologies, such as the *Amṛta Manthana*, the well known contest between the gods (*devas*) and the demons (*asuras*). It appears that Tibetan religious theatre, although originally an organic part of Buddhist monastic practice, had gained an independent character by the 17th century to be divorced from the religious services, for the fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682) is known to have issued a decree to that effect.

It is because of the Buddhists that the Tibetan performing arts bear strong influence of the Indian sub-continental theatre, so much that the scholars consider the whole of the Himalayan region (including Sikkim, Bhutan and Nepal) as a bridge between the sub-continent and China. Sharma believes that in terms of technique there is a great deal of agreement between the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and the Tibetan convention of play-making and performance. There exists a Tibetan treatise on music, dance and drama, titled *Romoe Tenchoe*, which was possibly inspired by the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. It is also interesting to note that the Tibetan Buddhist music reflects Tantric philosophy of the sub-continent and is considered by the monks to be a basic means for attaining spiritual goals, a view also shared by the Bāuls and the Sahajiyās of Bengal.<sup>141</sup>

All Tibetan theatre performances contain varied degree or religious characteristics. Nevertheless, five broad types can be identified, based on degree of religious influence. These are (i) the ritualistic, (ii) the religious (also known as the mystery play), (iii) the non-religious or 'sacred', (iv) the popular (folk) and (v) religious processions.

### 2.9.1 *The Ritualistic :*

There are a few Tantric rituals, extremely esoteric, which are practiced by some of the Tibetan Buddhist monks in temples, monasteries and localities not frequented by people (such as cremation ground and desolate snow covered mountains). An example of such a ritual is the *Chöd* (*Gchöd*) which has been described as "a mystic drama, performed by a single human actor, assisted by numerous spiritual beings, visualized or imagined, as being present in response to his magic invocation".<sup>142</sup> In brief, the ritual consists of a set of dance steps, incantation of symbolic texts considered highly sacred, beating of the *damaru* (a small drum) and the *kangling* (a trumpet made of human thigh bone) and also involving the use of other supplementary objects. It aims at, as the literal translation of *Chöd* implies, 'cutting off' of egoism "as represented by the human fleshy form together with all its passions and *karmically* - inherited predispositions constituting the personality",<sup>143</sup> thereby advancing towards the attainment of *nirvāṇa*.

Although the *Chöd* is not strictly a theatre performance, there are other rituals in which chosen monks and nuns, after rigorous training, perform a series of rituals in seclusion over a number of days, dress in a prescribed manner, don awe-inspiring masks and perform ritualistic dance in the courtyard of monastery. It is believed that during the trance state various deities (known as the protectors of religion) and village gods 'incarnate' themselves on the monks and nuns which enables the latter, as oracles, to foretell the events of the year to come. The performance usually consists of chanting, closely interpreted by highly symbolic gestures and movement.<sup>144</sup>

### 2.9.2 *The Religious :*

A form of religious dance commonly known as the '*Cham*, performed solely by the monks in the courtyards of monasteries on Buddhist festivals, is common to all Buddhist cultures of Central Asia. A particular form of the '*Cham* performed in Tibet is the *Drag-dmar* or "the Dance of the Red Fierce Ones". Originally it was a pre-Buddhist (Bon) devil dance (Dance of the Red Tiger Devil) which was performed on the last two or three days of the year as a part of the annual festival designed to expel the evils of the year and usher in good-luck in the year to come by propitiating the spirits with human sacrifice. According to tradition, Padmasambhava transformed the performance by substituting human sacrifice with anthropomorphic effigy of dough and by changing the plot to represent the triumph of Buddhism over pre-Buddhist paganism, but at the same time retaining the original objective of expelling the evils of the old year and welcoming the new. Waddell also points out that

"the voracious man-eating devils of Tibet were mostly assimilated to the Śaivaite type of fiend in mediaeval Buddhism, to which they had so much in common".<sup>145</sup> At present, the *Drag-dmar* is performed during a festival held from the 28th to the 30th of the 12th month of the old year by many of the unreformed sects and on the end of the new calendar by the reformed sects.<sup>146</sup>

Since the old (unreformed) school is closer to earlier practice, an abbreviated description of their performance of the *Drag-dmar*, as narrated by Waddell, is given below.<sup>147</sup> The performance is given over a period of two days : the first part of day one depicts the victory of Padmasambhava over primitive Shamanism of the Bon faith and the rest of the performance is aimed at expelling the evils of the year passed. The performance begins with shrill call on trumpet (made of human thigh bone) following which a wailing music and low chant commences. A troop of black mitred priests, representing the priests of the Bon faith, issue forth from the temple (the offstage area) and after a stately dance to slow music, attended by various gesture, they retire. Then follows a troupe of man-eating malignant demons (regarded as forms of Durgā, Śīva and Yama), represented by awe-inspiring masks and one or more skulls worked out on their costume, and as they dance solemnly, holy men offer libation and seek to placate them. The music changes to fast and furious rhythm whence group after group of demoniacal beings issue forth, dancing and howling with savage fury. A crowd of pale and sickly looking figures rush in next, the unfortunate and lost souls of dead men, who supplicate and wail miserably, and are taunted and terrorized by the demons. Thus is represented the endless oppression faced by helpless Man, engineered against him by the evil forces. The holy men attempt to repel the demons by various exorcistic rituals, forcing the latter to disappear, only to be replaced by others. Thus, as the conflict against evil gets hopeless, there appears Padmasambhava (sometimes the Buddha himself) accompanied by his six assistants in a stately procession, all wearing masks representing benign and peaceful faces and the loud music is replaced by solemn chanting and low music. They are instantly treated with utmost respect and the demons including their king submit to Padmasambhava who confer on them the role of protectors of the new religion. The solemn air is briefly dispelled by the clowning of a few Indian monks. In the following section, four cemetery ghouls enter carrying a human effigy of a young lad, representing the enemy of Tibet and Lamaism. The effigy, fashioned in a life-like manner and made out of dough, is laid in the centre of the courtyard, around which monks draw a magic triangle. There is rush of ghosts, death-demons and other fiends represented by masks of human skulls and skeletons painted on their black robes who attempt to attack the effigy but are deterred by magic. A more powerful demon enters and appears to be on the verge of

overcoming the deterrent power of the magic when a holy being, representing the incarnation of the Buddha appears, subjugates the demons and the latter grovel in submission. Thus ends the performance of the first day.

The performance on the second day begins with adoration paid to Padmasambhava, accompanied by chanting and dance movement. Then four ghouls carry in a prone effigy of a man and is followed by the entry of various demons and fiendesses (including Durgā) all of who dance around the effigy. This is followed by successive groups of other super-natural beings, including the Demon King, and after their dance, the effigy is finally stabbed, chopped and slit. It is then thrown about frantically by the demons into the crowd who scramble to collect pieces to eat or treasure as talisman. There follows a service performed by the monk personifying Padmasambhava which is aimed at exorcising the invisible evil beings. In the following scene the Demon King performs a ritual in which a paper image of a man is held on a cauldron of boiling oil and burnt, thus consuming all evils. Then a procession of monks and maskers with a large three-headed image made of dough, attended by loud music, is brought out. The image is abandoned for the crowd to tear it into bits and preserve as charms and the monks retire into the temple. Black-hat devil dancers appear again and dance to the accompaniment of drums. At the end of the performance, the Chinese priest Hwashang (who had been expelled by Padmasambhava) appears with his two boys, all represented by masks shaped as fatuous grinning faces with large mouths, and they perform unorthodox form of worship which is ridiculed by the spectators.

The performers (monks) are attired in colourfully decorated and oversized costume. The properties used during the performance are handled with meticulous precision. The performance is given in the rectangular courtyard of Buddhist monasteries or temples (*gompa*), the length and breadth of which follow certain architectural convention and proportion. The spectators occupy three sides of the courtyard, the fourth side being the wall of *gompa* (monastery) building. In some of the premises, the building is double-storied and the spectators occupy the upper storey as well as the roof. Villagers begin to gather days in advance and on the day scheduled for the performance they gather early to secure vantage points. Only the high officials, visitors and the gentry are provided with seats while the grandees are provided with boxes. The entire auditorium space is decorated with floral designs and murals while the performance space is decorated with flags hoisted on high poles. (See figs. 10-13.)<sup>148</sup> The huge and awe-inspiring masks are made of papier-mâché and cloth, sometimes also of gilt copper, painted fantastically and are also provided with yak-tail wig of various colour.

### 2.9.3 *The Sacred :*

Whereas the performances discussed above are purely of religious propagation in intent, there are others which are performed by itinerant bands of professional troupes of actors and actresses who are not connected to religious establishments. These troupes travel all over Tibet, specially during the winter months, and perform the Jātaka tales and the lives of Buddhist saints. Of the Jātaka tales, the ten sacred Mahā-jātakas, i.e., the *Visvantara Jātaka*, the *Sudhana Jātaka*, the *Mahapāṇḍana Jātaka* and others are performed (although variations of the original Pali text are innumerable). Of these the *Visvantara Jātaka* is most popular. To the Tibetans, these performances are popularly known as the 'Sacred Drama'.

There exists no text of the Sacred Drama. Instead, the performances are based on story outlines segmented into episodes, pre-composed narrations both in prose and lyric as well as improvised dialogue. According to Waddell, "The plot is presented in the form of a chanted narrative, comparable to the chorus of the Greek plays, in the course of which several leading characters, dressed in suitable costume, come forth and speak for themselves. It is thus somewhat like the narration of a novel with conversational parts acted out."<sup>149</sup>

A performance of the Sacred Drama begins with a comic prelude by buffoons (who also enact interludes between the acts) as the spectators gather and begin to settle down. Then a narrator enters and introduces the characters as they move around the performance space individually. Then the entire troupe offers a prayer to the Buddha and the central character of the play. During the performance choral singers, accompanied by musicians, narrate the story which the actors enact physically, often with a code of hand gestures (fig. 14). As mentioned above, the characters also enter into dialogue. The performance ends with a brief epilogue in a manner similar to the Jātaka tales. It is given on the ground with the spectators all around and usually at night by the light of lantern. Musical instruments used during the performance are two long brass pipes shaped like the *sehnāi*, a pair of large gongs, a pair of cymbals, two drums and a large metal plate with a wooden striker. These instruments are mostly used in various intricate combinations to signify the entry of different characters. The costume used by the performers are rich in colour, made of silk and are of symbolic significance. At the same time, various types of hand properties, some drawn from daily life, are also employed.<sup>150</sup>

### 2.9.4 *The Popular (Folk) :*

The popular theatre, albeit within the sphere of Buddhist influence, is the least religious in character. Instead of the ten sacred Mahā-jātaka tales, these performances feature the minor



Jātakas, freely mixed with Tibetan folk-lore. The technique used are relatively crude and are closer to popular taste. Some of the performances reflect a great deal of influence of Indian theatre tradition. Today it has evolved into an operatic form, quite distinct from the Sacred Drama, known as the *Ālchi-lhāmo*, librettos of which are available as written texts. These are also performed by professional troupes. The most renowned of the popular plays is the *Nan-sa* (or "the Brilliant Light"), composed in three acts, involving life, rebirth and the nether world.

The popular theatre performances are given on a flat open-air ground, with the spectators standing or sitting on three sides, enclosing a nearly-square performance space in their midst. An awning is set up on the middle of the fourth side, where the image of Thangton Gyalpo is installed. The performance comprises of three parts: the prologue (*doin*), the main body (*xong*) and the epilogue (*zhaxi*). The prologue consists of a ritual dance performed by a few masked characters (sometimes fishermen), a formal consecration of the performance space by two non-masked characters (known as the 'princes') and a choral song in praise of Thangton Gyalpo rendered by a group of girls attired beautifully and impersonating as the *dākinīs* (Tantric Buddhist nuns who possess miraculous power). The preliminary rituals over, the main body of the opera commences with an introduction by the narrator, where he explains the plot, the characters and a few other relevant elements. The performers stand as a group in a circle. At appropriate junctures, characters leave the circle to sing their lines and then return to the circle to join group dance or acrobatics performed by the rest. Beside the songs, the characters also enter into improvised prose dialogue, some of which are digressions from the main story-line. These are often comic in vein and drawn from the topical events of the locality. Thus continues the performance, the duration of which may vary from three hours to three days. At the end the epilogue is presented, which consists of benedictory songs, joyous dance and presentation of ceremonial silken scarves to the spectators.

The performance is accompanied by music played by two instrumentalists on a drum and a pair of cymbals. The characters are elaborately costumed and appropriately made-up; masks are usually not employed. It is mostly given in public squares, street-corners and the like, mostly during winter and also in some festivals. It is sponsored by the affluent in the urban areas and by 'passing the hat' and accepting whatever the spectators offer in the rural areas.<sup>151</sup>

### 2.9.5 *Religious Festivals and Processions :*

F. Spencer Chapman, describing his travels in Tibet, notes that "the Tibetans (...) are very fond of ceremonial processions and observation of festivals and saints' days".<sup>152</sup> Such a procession, brought out on the 15th day of the 10th Tibetan month (end of November) in honour of goddess Palden Lhamo (the guardian of all Tibet), would commence from a monastery in Lhasa, pass through the streets crowded with spectators and finally return to the monastery. Several hundred monks dressed in gorgeous cloaks would participate in the procession, some of whom would play drums and trumpets, others wearing various masks representing animals would dance and the goddess, grotesque and ugly, would move like a huge puppet operated by a monk from inside the costume. Describing the procession Spencer says, "the goddess appeared to be tripping along with mincing tread, moping and mowing as she went", while "the masked monks performed various dances in front of the goddess". After she would return to the open space in front of the monastery, "an image of coloured butter and *tsamba* (...) would be broken into small pieces and thrown to be crowd" who would preserve them as amulets.<sup>153</sup> The monks who participated in the dance were trained by the monastery from an early stage of their monkhood. As Chapman notes, should a young monk prove to be particularly skillful in painting, wood-carving, calligraphy or dance, he was specially trained according to his talent for the benefit of the monastery.<sup>154</sup>

Another interesting custom, important for our study, is that of lighting countless butter-lamps and placing them along window sills as well as parapets surrounding flat roofs of all monasteries, state buildings and private residences during the Festival of Lights held in memory of Tsong-kapa ten days after the procession described above.<sup>155</sup>

To conclude our study of Tibetan theatre, the following relevant points should be noted :

1. Esoteric rituals as well as ritualistic theatre are performed by the Buddhist monks for the purpose of attaining spiritual freedom.
2. Didactic religious performances which involves masked dance are given by the monks on religious festivals.
3. Pre-Buddhist rituals have been adopted by the Buddhists into their performances with the objective of showing superior spiritual power of the latter.
4. Performances of the Jātaka tales, of which the *Visvantara Jātaka* is the most popular, are given by professional itinerant troupes.
5. Indigenous tales, heavily influenced by Buddhist philosophy, are also performed by professional itinerant troupes.
6. Narrative and dialogic form of performances exist where song, dance and music (as well as the use of masks in most cases) feature as important characteristic elements. The influence of Indian theatre practice is also great.

7. Performances are given in rectangular courtyards of monasteries by the religious establishment during important Buddhist festivals and on flat rectangular open-air space by the professional troupes, with the spectators usually on three sides.
8. Masked performances are given by the monks in processions brought out during important Buddhist festivals.
9. The monks are trained by the monasteries in dance and other arts.
10. Lamps are offered by the clergy, the officials as well as the lay followers of the faith during the Festival of Light.

#### 2.10 Buddhist Theatre in Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal and Adjoining Himalayan Region :

As both Sharma and Waddell note, performances such as the Tibetan religious theatre (*Drag-dmar*) also exist in Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal and the adjoining Himalayan regions like Ladakh.<sup>156</sup> In Sikkim, it is a mystic dance, held annually in honour of the spirit of the five-peaked mountain Kinchinjunga. Given over two days in December, it is essentially a religious rite of purification performed by the Buddhist monks and is popularly known as the Snowy-Range Dance. The first day of the performance features the piercing and dismembering of an effigy, preceded by dance including that of the skeleton figures and the second day presents the burning of a paper effigy symbolizing the complete annihilation of all forms of evil. The performance also entails symbolic offering of food made to the deities.<sup>157</sup> The masks used for the performances in Sikkim and Bhutan are carved out of durable wood, painted in fantastic colours and are frequently provided with wigs made of yak-tail.<sup>158</sup>

Forms of popular performances, given by the *menkhas* or itinerant story-tellers, and by musicians and dancers is also known to be prevalent in the Himalayan region. Two interesting sketches by the Head Lama Lobzang Tsulthim (1865-1926) of the Risang Monastery, Ladakh, show an actual performance given by three male musicians, a female dancer and two actors (fig. 15) and another by itinerant story-tellers (fig. 16) at Ladakh festival.<sup>159</sup>

Thus it is clear that religious mask dances, performed by the monks, feature prominently in Buddhist theatre practice. At the same time, popular performances by itinerant band of professionals, appears to be a parallel practice.

#### 2.11 Theatre of Dharma Cult and Śaiva Cult in West Bengal (India) :

The Indian state of West Bengal, situated on and beyond the western frontier of Bangladesh, is important for this study because of performances related to Dharma cult and Śaiva cult. At present Dharma cult is prevalent only in the southern part of West Bengal, in the districts of

Bankura, Burdwan, Birbhum, Hugli and parts of Purulia and Twenty-four Parganas. On the other hand, Śaiva cult is prevalent in scattered parts of Bangladesh as well as West Bengal, particularly in the district of Malda. The following section examines relevant parts of literature, festival and performance associated with both the cults.

### 2.11.1 *The Literature of Dhrama Cult :*

The literary texts associated with Dharma cult are based on two broad areas, viz., (i) theology and rituals (usually compiled in texts variously titled as *Śūnya Śāstra*, *Śūnya Purāṇ*, *Anil Purāṇ* etc.) and (ii) narratives (usually titled *Dharma-maṅgala*) eulogising Dharma Ṭhākur, expounded through the adventures of mythical hero Lāu Sen.<sup>160</sup> Not going into details, it will suffice our purpose to note that common to both the groups of texts is cosmogony, that the manuals of ritual as well as the theology are believed to have been originally shaped by Rāmāi Paṇḍit and that innumerable narrative texts by medieval poets were composed between 17th and 18th century.

The *Dharma-maṅgala* narratives are each a collection of popular tales which recount the birth of Lāu Sen to King Kaṛṇa Sen (a childless tributary ruler under the Emperor of Gauḍa) and his Queen Rañjāvātī, having appeased Dharma Ṭhākur and the subsequent adventures of Lāu Sen through which he propagates the faith of the Cult. The narrative is (ideally) structured in 24 parts and the composition follows the medieval literary genre of the *Maṅgala-kāvya* (i.e., a poetic composition eulogising a particular deity, Dharma Ṭhākur in the case of *Dharma-maṅgala*). All the *Dharma-maṅgala* texts composed by various poets contain an episode titled Hariścandr Pālā (lit., the episode on Hariścandra), alternatively known as Lui Candrer Pāla (i.e., the episode on Lui Candra, the son of Hariścandra). The account of Hariścandra-Madanā is also to be encountered in the texts of the Dharma cult dealing with rituals and theology (usually titled *Śūnya Purāṇ*, *Śūnya Śāstra* etc.), but in these the central characters are Sadā Doma and his wife, a childless couple of the common stock instead of royal pedigree.

It has already been noted that there exists a play-text from the Nepalese court, titled *Hariścandra-nṛtya* (lit., Dance of Hariścandra), composed by Rāmabhadrā in Sanskrit, Maithilī, Vrajabulī and Bāṅglā languages. Apparently the play has nothing to do with Dharma cult but the influence of Tantric Buddhism and the Nātha cult in medieval Nepal and the similarity of the story-line with the literature of Dharma cult raises a special point of interest regarding *Hariścandra-nṛtya*.

At this point it needs to be pointed out that Dharma Ṭhākur is usually propitiated by the childless for children and that the theme of childless parents who beget children through

Dharma Ṭhākura's blessing is common to all the three couples appearing in the narratives, i.e., Karṇa Sen and Rañjāvati, Hariścandra and Madanā and Sadā Doma and his wife. The above mentioned theme is of pivotal importance to all *Dharma-maṅgala* texts. It also needs to be added that Hariścandra-Madanā alias Sadā Doma-Wife account is believed to be the original narrative which was possibly an oral composition performed by the Cult priests during religious celebrations, to which the adventures of Lau Sen were added later.<sup>161</sup>

Both Bhattacharyya and Shahidullah<sup>162</sup> have pointed out that the Hariścandra tale does not exist in the original *Mahābhārata* in Sanskrit or in the Bāṅglā version by Kāśīrām Dās. In Brahminical texts composed in Bāṅglā it is encountered for the first time in a narrative composed by Dvija Kabicandra in 1677, who appears to have transmuted Dharma, Hariścandra and Madanā into Kṛṣṇa, Karṇa and Padmāvati whence the popular tale of "Dātā Karṇa" (Charitable Karṇa) in the Brahminical culture of Bengal. Sukumar Sen, who aspires to prove Vedic origin of all Bāṅglā literature, points to Hariścandra-Rohitāśya-Śunahśepa tale recounted in *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (composed in c. 8th c. BC) as the source of Hariścandra account in the literature of the Dharma cult.<sup>163</sup> On the other hand Muhammad Shahidullah agrees with Basanta Kumar Chatterjee who believes that the account of Hariścandra in Dharma cult has been drawn from Brahminical mythological sources (such as, the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna*).

But it should be immediately clear as Ishan Chandra Ghosh<sup>164</sup> points out that the story-line of *Hariścandra-nṛtya* bears striking resemblance with the *Visvantara Jātaka* not only thematically but also in terms of elements of the plot: Hariścandra, like Visvantara, gives up all his wealth, including his wife and child, as alms given in charity to a Brahmin, but the family is reunited at the end as it is revealed that all was a test of the hero's piety. The Hariścandra episode of *Dharma-maṅgala* can be seen as an amalgamation of two themes: (i) a childless couple blessed with a child and (2) the truly pious, capable of renouncing his/her most coveted objects in life, attains endless merit. It may be noted that the former is a theme common to performances of Buddhist origin in Sri Lanka, Nepal and Tibet while the latter has been a popular theme in the Sacred Drama of Tibet, in the performances based on the *Visvantara Jātaka*. (There is even a reference of King Hariścandra giving away the jewel *pañcaratnamani* to a mendicant in a *Dharma-maṅgala* text titled *Hariścandra Pālā*, composed by Rājārāma Dās in 1700.) For our purpose it is immaterial to question if *Visvantara Jātaka* was influenced by the Vedic legend. What matters is that prior to the account of Charitable Karṇa, there exist no Vedic/Puranic references to Hariścandra in Bengal. It should also be noted that scholars have placed *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna* (the Puranic source of Brahminical origin of Hariścandra legend) anywhere between 8th to 10th centuries

AD,<sup>165</sup> which makes it possible that the original Vedic seed of the story was expanded in the Jātaka and was later altered in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna*. That the sage Mārkaṇḍeya was a familiar name for the followers of the Dharma cult is apparent as Bhattacharyya<sup>166</sup> points out that the sage had formulated Supantha Hatha-yoga distinct from that formulated by Gorakṣanātha for which reason the former found disfavour among the followers of the Dharma cult, hence criticism was levelled against him in the theological and ritual texts of the Cult. It is very much probable therefore that the original oral narrative of the Dharma cult was an adaptation of the Buddhist Jātaka legend of Visvantara, which found its way into the Cult either through the Nātha tradition, as much of its literature was indeed influenced, or through the sage Mārkaṇḍeya who had altered the elaboration effected in the same Jātaka legend. In both the cases it only serves to point that Visvantara/Hariścandra legend was indeed popular in ancient Bengal.

### 2.11.2. Festivals and Performances of Dharma Cult :

The religious festivals related to Dharma cult is popularly known as *Dharmer Gājan*, or the Gājan (Festival) of Dharma Ṭhākur. The presiding deity of these festivities is Dharma Ṭhākur or Dharma Nirāñjana. According to Benoy Kumar Sarkar, "he is the Ādi (Primitive) Buddha, who is not infrequently to be found identified with some Vedic and Purānic gods and goddesses".<sup>167</sup> But Asutosh Bhattacharyya shows that the connection to Buddhism is a later development.<sup>168</sup> B.K.Sarkar also notes that goddess Ādyā receives worship with Dharma Nirāñjana in *Dharmer Gājan*.<sup>169</sup> As a festival of the "low" caste Hindus (the Ḍoma, the Hāḍi, the Bāuri etc.), the inclusion of Brahmins as officiating priests of *Dharmer Gājan* is a recent phenomenon, prior to which priests from the Ḍoma community would usually officiate.<sup>170</sup>

*Dharmer Gājan* exists in two forms: the annual (*vārṣika*) and the *āvāla* (the latter also known as *ghar-bharā* or *grha-bharana*).<sup>171</sup> In both the festivals, processions accompanied by music (mostly of the drums) is a recurring feature, specially in the rituals held away from temple precinct. Furthermore, narrative performances are also to be witnessed in the *Āvāla Gājan* festival.

#### The Annual (Vārṣika) Gājan :

The annual *Gājan* usually commences on the third day of the month of Biaśākh and culminates on the day of the full-moon. In some localities it is also held in the month of Caitra, Jaiṣṭhya or Āsāḍh and the total period of celebration is much less in length, but the culminating day is always that of the full-moon. The following are a few elements of the festival which are relevant for this study.

*Bhakta-kāman* (Shaving of the head of votaries) : The day on which the festival commences, a number of followers of the Cult volunteer to assume the role of *bhaktas* (votaries) for the period of the festival. Their initiation is marked by shaving of the head. Any person from any caste other than the Brahmins can assume the role. During the period of the festival, caste distinction of the votaries is eliminated and each votary partakes of only *haviṣya* (i.e., food consisting of boiled rice and butter oil).

*Lāpḍā-bhāṅgā* : The dance of the votaries to deafening drum-beat, in which each assault the other with thorny branches held in their hands. Later they roll over a heap of similar branches. The dance is held in temple courtyard.

*Ḍhekī Maṅgalā* : On this occasion, the votaries carry a *ḍhekī* (husking pedal) made of a large block of wood, decorated with turmeric paste and vermilion, amidst ululation and joyous shouts of Cult devotees. The ceremony marks the arrival of Nārada on a *ḍhekī* as recounted in the *Śūnya Purāṇ*.

*Śiber Cāṣ* (Cultivation by Śiva) : Votaries perform the event of Śiva's cultivation as described in the *Śūnya Purāṇ*, in which ploughing, sowing, reaping etc. are illustrated.

*The Bathing Ceremony* : The bathing of the stone image of Dharma Ṭhākur in a river or a natural pond to which it is carried on a palanquin accompanied by music (mostly of the drums). Barren women believe that the first drops of water to roll off from the image are capable of inducing pregnancy.

*Phul-khelā* : The dance of the votaries to the accompaniment of deafening drum-beat where each tosses burning charcoals on the palms producing spectacular display of sparks issuing from the charcoals.

*Phul-cāpān* : The placing of a white lotus on top of the stone image of Dharma Ṭhākur, offered individually by the villagers, which, if falls off (which it inevitably does) is taken as a sign that the wish of the person offering the lotus will be fulfilled.

*Caḍak* : The ceremony of swinging in circular motion in the air by the *bhaktas* after performing initial rites. Due to high risk involved the ceremony has been banned of late.

*Bolān* : Dialogic riddles in rhymed couplets performed as question and answer between the chief priest (*pāṭi-bhakta*) and his assistants (*dhāmāt-karaṇi*).

*Offering of Lamps* : Burning lamps offered from each family is placed in the temple of Dharma Ṭhākur on the full-moon night when the culminating rituals take place.

*The Concluding Bath* : The bathing ceremony of the image of Dharma Ṭhākur on the day after the culminating rituals and ceremonies of worship. During the bathing, votaries perform

the ceremonies of piercing parts of body and tongue with sharp hooks (*vāṇa-foḍā* and *jihvā-foḍā*).<sup>172</sup>

*Processions* : As mentioned earlier, processions are organically related to *Dharmer Gājan*. For all ceremonies involving movement to and from the temple precinct, the followers of the Cult take out processions accompanied by music, mostly of the drums. Even during the Fifties, it was a common feature of the processions also to be accompanied by *saṅg* (masquers) and puppets. These are still seen at a few places in Birbhum, West Bengal, sometimes placed on ox-carts and depicting scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata*, the *Purāṇas*, or even caricatures of contemporary social problems. According to Benoy Ghosh, the *saṅg* is a characteristic feature of the *Dharmer Gājan*.<sup>173</sup>

**The Āvāla Gājan (Ghar-bharā/Gṛha-bharāṇa) :**

Also held in the last twelve days of the lighter half in either of the months of Phālgun, Caitra, Baiśākh or Jaisthya and culminating on the day of the full-moon, the *Āvāla Gājan* is sponsored by an individual with the view to propitiating Dharma Ṭhākur for his/her success or as a fulfilment of his/her vow. Twelve stone images of Dharma Ṭhākur are placed inside a temporary pavilion (*maṇḍapa*) constructed in the temple precinct for performing the rites connected with the festival and all rituals are accompanied by music, specially that of large drums. A few elements of the festival, important in our context are ceremonially fetching pitcher full of water from a natural reservoir and installation of the same in the pavilion, walking over burning charcoal and swinging head down suspended from a pole over resin incense, all accompanied by rituals and music.<sup>174</sup>

An important elements of the *Āvāla Gājan* is performance of *Dharma-maṅgala Gān*. The performance is based on various texts of *Dharma-maṅgala* composed in rhymed metrical verse. Ideally, the performance commences in the evening of day one when the opening episode of *Dharma-maṅgala* is rendered. On each of the following eleven days, two episodes of the same text is rendered, one in the day time and another in the evening. The last episode is given in a night-long performance held on the culminating night of full-moon. But in practice, as Asutosh Bhattacharyya points out, the first episode is performed on the evening of day one and the last episode on the full-moon night; all other episodes are eliminated. *Dharma-maṅgala Gān* is performed in the open courtyard of the temple of Dharma Ṭhākur, sometimes with an awning over it. The lead-narrator, with a *cāmar* (yak-tail whisk) in one hand and wearing ankle-bells, renders the text in lyric, accompanied by dance. A few musicians and choral signers provide music and sing choral refrain.<sup>175</sup>



### 2.11.3 References to Performance in Dharma-maṅgala Texts :

There are quite a few references to performance in various *Dharma-maṅgala* texts such as the curse on the dancer in the heavenly court of Indra who was later born as Rañjāvati in the text composed by Ghanarāma Cakravartī<sup>176</sup> and the *gīt-nāṭ* (same as *nāṭ-gīt*?) performance given by Hīrāvati for the Emperor of Guada in the text by Rāmadāsa Ādak,<sup>177</sup> all of which are perhaps late medieval romantic glorification of ancient court theatre based on contemporary experience and not of Dharma cult practice in particular.

Mention should also be made of a curious reference to *nāṭ-gīt* in a *Dharma-maṅgala* text by Rūparāma (1649-59):

খেলারাম গাএন করিল বহু হিত  
হাতে যন্ত্র দিয়া শিখাইল নাটগীত॥<sup>178</sup>

Khelārāma sang (performed) quite a few (songs of) well-being (i.e., *Maṅgala-kāvya*)  
Introducing (musical) instrument he taught the *nāṭ-gīt*.

Does this imply that the narrative texts of Dharma cult were performed in the *nāṭ-gīt* (song-and-dance) style prior to mid-17th century ? The above reference is from the earliest extant text of *Dharma-maṅgala* narratives and none by Khelārāma has yet been ascertained with certainty. So a curious question must remain unresolved.

But there are other references in the text of *Dharma-maṅgala* from which one can infer that the processions were always an important element in the celebration of the cult of Dharma. Consider for example the following excerpt from the text by Ghanarāma Cakravartī:

উৎসপুৰে সুখদন্ত বারুই নন্দন ।  
করিছে ধর্মের পূজা মজাইয়া মন॥  
গাজন লইয়া এল ময়না মন্ডলে ।  
শীরে ধর্ম পাদুকা সোনার চতুর্দলে॥  
কত পদ্য বাদ্য বাজে আদ্যের গাজনে । (.....)  
আনন্দ আবেশ সবে বলে ধর্মজয়॥<sup>179</sup>

Sukadatta, son of a betel planter of Utsapur,  
Is engaged in the worship of Dharma with heart and soul.  
Brought (he) the *Gājan* to the circle of Maynā,  
By placing the sandals of Dharma on a golden palanquin.  
Innumerable recitations and music are played in the  
Gājan of Ādyā (Dharma) (.....)

In excited merriment, all cry out, All glory to Dharma!

Similar references are also to be seen in the texts by Rāmadāsa Ādak and Rūparāma.<sup>180</sup>

Likewise, references to song, dance, music and masked performance also abound in the *Dharma-maṅgala* texts.

On your way see and hear the dance

and music in the *gājan* of Dharma.

(Chapter 4, *Dharma-maṅgala*, Ghanarāma)

They danced and sang with up-lifted arms.

(Chapter 5, *Dharma-maṅgala*, Ghanarāma)

Singers and musicians are the principal items of *Gājan*.

Hari and Hara be pleased to come and listen to the

flourish of music in honour of Ādyā.

(*Dharma-pūjā* by Gauḍeśwar )

Music is struck up with *dhākas* and *dholas* (long drums),

*sānāi* (pipe), and *kānsi* (an instrument of bell-metal),

conch-shells and bells, lyres and flutes, *kādā* and *poṭā*,

*turis* (bugle) and *veris* (kettle-drum).

(*Dharma-maṅgala* by Mānikrāma Gānguli)<sup>181</sup>

A few dance the *Kālikā-pātā* as incarnations (of the goddess).

(*Dharma-maṅgala* by Rūprāma)<sup>182</sup>

The reference to the *Kālikā-pātā* dance is extremely interesting for *Kālikā* is an incarnation of Tantric goddess Caṇḍī and *pātā* dance is *pātra-nṛtya* (i.e., dance in character), which, following Sukumar Sen,<sup>183</sup> could have been a dance enactment in a particular character visually represented with the help of costume and mask.

Although all the extant texts of *Dharma-maṅgala* were composed as late as 17th century, it is quite evident that all the poets are following earlier oral tradition going back to the period of Rāmāi Paṇḍit who could have existed around 12th century. And since the elements of performance and procession are integrally linked with all the texts, it is very much possible that these point to the practice followed by Rāmāi Paṇḍit.

#### 2.11.4. *Literature of Śaiva Cult :*

Scholars believe that till around mid-16th century there existed a strong tradition of oral literature eulogising Śiva and glorifying his exploits which was possible known as *Śiver Gīt*.<sup>184</sup> Besides popular maxims (ধান ভানতে শিবের গীত) still current in Bangla, references in the 16th century literature also bear testimony to this tradition. Consider for example the following excerpts:

একদিন আসি এক শিবের গায়েন ।

ডম্বর বাজায় গায় শিবের কথন।

আইল করিতে ভিক্ষা প্রভুর মন্দিরে ।

গাহয়ে গীত বেড়ি নৃত্য করে।

One day arrived a minstrel who performed the Ballad of Śīva,  
(And) played the *ḍamaru* (drum and) narrated the tale of Śīva.  
He came to beg alms at the abode of the Lord,  
By singing the Ballad and Śīva accompanied by the circular dance.

(*Caitanya Bhāgavat*, II, 8)<sup>185</sup>

আর দিন শিবভক্ত শিবগুণ গায় ।  
প্রভুর অঙ্গনে নাচে ডমরু বাজায়॥

Another day, a devotee of Śīva sings his eulogy,  
(And) dances in the courtyard of the Lord (while) playing the *ḍamaru* (drum).

(*Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, I, 17)<sup>186</sup>

Both the excerpts refer to narratives eulogising Śīva and performed in the narrative style.

The earliest extant Bangla text celebrating and eulogising the exploits of Śīva dates from around mid-17th century. Titled *Śivāyana* and written by Rāmakṛṣṇa Rāy, the voluminous work is composed of 26 episodes which recount various exploits of Śīva drawn mostly from the Purāṇic sources as well as the *Mahābhārata* with only one episode devoted to non-Purāṇic (popular) source. On the other hand, *Śīva-maṅgala*, composed by Śaṅkar Kavicaṇḍra (c. 1680) succeeded in creating popular appeal by incorporating non-Purāṇic elements such as the episodes of Fishing and Donning of Saṅkha Bangles, thus setting a trend for the later poets. The most popular of this class of texts is Rāmeswar Bhattācārya's *Śivāyana* or *Śīva-saṅkīrtana* composed sometime earlier than 1763, which also contains a sizeable number of popular tales in its 16 episodes. A large number of later texts followed the trends set by Śaṅkar Kavicaṇḍra and Rāmeswar Bhattācārya which amply show predominance of non-Purāṇic elements, thereby prove a strong bias toward non-Purāṇic character of Śīva as seen in *Śīver Gājan* and *Gambhīrā* festivals. It also needs to be mentioned that the salutation songs (*bandanā*) and the texts of the performances related to Śīva as seen in the two festivals are drawn from the literature of Śaiva cult mentioned above.

Of particular interest for our study are the salutation songs performed during the *Gambhīrā* festivals of Malda. Consider, for example, the following excerpts :

There was neither land nor water nor the region of gods; (only) Dharma managed somehow to abide as Void. (.....) Thus do I narrate before the assembly the history of world's creation. ....<sup>187</sup>

On a white bedstead is a white seat and on that white seat a white throne. Dharma Nirañjana (...) has seated himself on the white bedstead. The Lord is white both when he assumes a form and when he becomes formless; .....<sup>188</sup>

Lord Dharma himself meditated on the globe (universe) and in doing this he brought into existence the head of Dharma.<sup>189</sup>

The excerpts cited above bear strong similarity to the cosmogony expounded in the *Śūnya Purāṇ* of the Dharma cult. Also striking is the use of white images in the second excerpt which is a recurrent element in the Dharma cult, as seen in the *Dharma-maṅgala* of Mānikrāma Gāṅgulī. It should also be noted that the *Gambhīrā* pavilions of Malda are profusely decorated with the white lotus, very much like the practice followed in the temple of Ādyā, the primal female deity of Dharma cult.

#### Chandranath, Adinath and Mṛgalubdha Texts :

Chittagong, the south-eastern part of Bangladesh, has been the last refuge of Buddhism in the Indian sub-continent. Two renowned centres of the religion in this part have been Chandranath (which was famous for its temple of Tārānāth, a Buddhist god) and Adinath (named after the temple of a Buddhist god Ādināth). But Buddhism in the eastern parts of Chittagong had to succumb to Brahminical assimilation as well, and the above mentioned Buddhist temples were converted into Śaivite centres for pilgrimage. Even today, Buddhist pilgrims from distant places also gather to these centres.<sup>190</sup>

After Chandranath and Adinath had been converted into Śaivite centres, a type of *Śiva-maṅgala* text named *Mṛgalubdha* have been composed in Chittagong. Of those extant, earliest is believed to have been composed by Rāma-rājā, who, according to a hypothesis, was of Buddhist origin and a native of Chittagong.<sup>191</sup> It is important to note that all the texts of *Mṛgalubdha* contain traces of Buddhist influence. Consider, for example the episode of the hart and the deer, in which the former is captured by a hunter. It is remarkably similar to the end of Act I, *Nan-sa*, where the central character (Nan-sa) is shown as a deer in one of her previous births.

#### 2.11.5. Festivals and Performances in Saiva Cult :

Religious festivities related to Śaiva cult are generally known as *Śiver Gājan* and *Gambhīrā*. Held during the last four (or more) days of Caitra, *Śiver Gājan* is still to be seen in parts of West Bengal and Bangladesh. It is held in honour of Śiva. His wife, Pārvatī, also receives worship along with him. Similar festivals are known as *Gambhīrā* in Malda, West Bengal and Rajshahi and Dinajpur regions of Bangladesh, *Nīler Gājan* and *Dēl Pūjā* in some parts of West Bengal and Bangladesh and *Sāhi Yātrā* in parts of Orissa. Prodyot Ghosh notes that the festival of *Gambhīrā* is also prevalent among the Coach community of northern parts of West Bengal and Bangladesh.<sup>192</sup> Today *Śiver Gājan* is fast losing its popular appeal, specially in Bangladesh, but the *Gambhīrā* of Malda thrives and is well-reputed because of *Gambhīrā Gān*, a socially conscious and satirical performance given during the festival.

### The Rituals of Śīver Gājan :

Benoy Kumar Sarkar records the following rituals of Śīver Gājan as seen during early 20th century which are of interest for our study.<sup>193</sup>

*Sanmyāsī-dharā* : On the first day of the festival, the chief ascetic arrives at the festival centre accompanied by clamorous drumming to formally assume his role, receives other volunteers who are to assume the roles of attendant ascetics for the festival, shaves his head and bathes with his attendants in a nearby tank or river, again accompanied by drumming. The ceremony ends with vegetarian supper, partaken by all the ascetics.

*Nijhād-kāmān* : On the next day, the chief ascetic and his aspiring attendants partake of food comprising boiled rice and butter-oil and dust the temple floor. The heads of the aspirants are shaven, again accompanied by clamorous drum-beating.

*Ghaṭ-sthāpana* and *Utrī-parā* : The chief ascetic along with the aspirant attendants bathe in a nearby tank or river, install a pitcher filled with water (which symbolizes the in-filling power of Śīva) in the festival compound and don garlands of thread-balls, all accompanied by beating of drums. The donning of the garland (*uttarīya*, abbreviated as *utrī*) signifies the temporary recognition accorded to the attendants as ascetics for the period of the festival.

*Phul-cāpān* : A ritual held on each of the festival days is the *Phul-cāpān* in which a marmelos leaf drenched in the water of the Ganges is placed on the head of Śīva's image, falling off of which is taken as a sign of approval of the deity.

*Offering of Lamps* : In some places the temple of Śīva is lit up at dusk with lamps offered by women. The act is considered to be highly meritorious for the offerers.

*Ātā-jhāp* : Ascetics fasten thorny branches on their chests and jump from a raised platform onto a piece of canvas held aloft in front of the platform. In a few places they are also known to roll over the ground with the thorny branches held over their chest and the ritual is known as *Phul-bhāṅgā*.

*Vāṇa-fodā* : A ritual, held variously in the day time as well as at night, in which the ascetics pierce parts of their bodies (including tongue, arms and chest) with darts and dance in the course of a procession accompanied by deafening drum-beats.

*Bāti-jhāp* : Ascetics jump down from high platform made of bamboo, on to another platform made of banana plants upon which *Bātis* (Indian fish-knives) are placed. Immediately after they fall, the ascetics are covered by a piece of cloth and then carried to the image of Śīva where they are blessed by the priest.

*Agni-dolā* : With their feet tied to a horizontal pole, the ascetics swing over fire.

*Maśān-kriḍā* : Wild dance of ascetics with dead bodies and severed heads.

*Caḍak* : On the culminating day of the festival (last day of Caitra), *Caḍak Pūjā* is held. Apart from the ceremony of swinging in the air in circular motion as in *Dharmar Gājan*, the celebration also includes ritualised worship. At certain places, the marriage ceremony of Śiva is also performed.

Apart from the rituals mentioned above, quite a few performances are also given in *Śiver Gājan*. These include rendition of songs on Śiva's merits and demerits, Śiva's cultivation of land, Pārvatī's donning of conch-shell bracelets etc. and other episodes drawn from the *Śivāyana*. In some places, contestual performance between two rival parties, similar to the *Kavi Gān* discussed in Chapter 3, is also held. In it, the parties debate on a particular issue by rendering extempore lyrical passages. Also important for this study are two processions brought out on two separate days of the festival. Two days before the *Caḍak*, in the afternoon, the ascetics take out a procession attended by drum-beats, in which they bear on their shoulders a palanquin with a deified piece of log or stone signifying Śiva. They also sing various songs in honour of the god and dance to the music. At a few places, the ascetics also perform Śiva's cultivation of the land (known as *Śiver Cāś*) in which ploughing of the land, sowing and transplantation of paddy and the harvesting are also shown. At the end of the performance, the chief ascetic inquires from Śiva as to how much paddy he has produced. The answer, it is believed, points to the harvest which can be expected in the following year. The procession ends at the primary festival site of the locality, where the ascetics spend the whole night in merry-making. For the second procession, taken out on the day before the *Caḍak*, the ascetics dress and paint themselves as Śiva, Gaurī (his wife), ghosts, spirits, animals and mendicants. Before the procession is taken out, they dance to the rhythm of drum in the temple courtyard. Later, the procession visits various households of the locality to collect alms and donations.<sup>194</sup>

#### Gambhira Festival :

B.K. Sarkar's account of *Gambhīrā* festival as it used to be held in Malda in early 20th century is extremely valuable for this study.<sup>195</sup> According to him, the festival used to culminate on the last day of Caitra and begin four days before. A *maṇḍapa* (pavilion) would be constructed immediately in front of the *Gambhīrā* temple housing Śiva (and other Śaivite deities). The pavilion would be elaborately decorated with paper lotuses of various colour. It would be lit with the help of oil-lamps of earthen cups, placed on top of bamboo posts, and also torches made of oil-drenched rags fastened to sticks. All the rituals and theatrical

performances would be held in these pavilions. The festivals used to be comprised of the following parts :

*Day One, Ghaṭ-bharā* : In the evening, a Brahmin priest went to a nearby tank or river and filled up an earthen jar with water. He was accompanied by a procession of devotees and *dhāk* players who produced deafening rhythm on their drums. The priest returned to the *maṇḍapa* and installed the jar after elaborate rituals. The jar represented infilling power of the deity who was to be worshipped. In some places the ritual of *Ghaṭ-bharā* used to take place a week, nine or three days before the culminating day.

*Day Two, Choṭa Tāmāsā* : Ritualised worship was offered to Śiva and Pārvaī and the votaries (*bhaktas*), mostly boys, were initiated on this day.

*Day Three, Baḍa Tāmāsā* : The ceremonies of the day used to begin with ritualised worship held in honour of Śiva and Pārvaī and in the afternoon, procession of the *bhaktas* were taken out from each *maṇḍapa*. In the evening, *Hanumāna-mukhā* (a masked dance of Hanumāna) used to be performed, in which the monkey-god with a burning tail jumped over a piece of cloth representing the sea. Thereafter, the ritual of *Phul-bhāṅgā* used to be performed in which each *bhakta* danced with and rolled over a bundle of twigs. At around nine in the evening commenced masked dances, followed by songs rendered in honour of Śiva and also songs of social criticism. Before day-break, *Maśān Nāc* (Dance of the Crematorium) used to be performed by the *bhaktas*. Thereafter, the dancers visited neighbouring *maṇḍapas* to perform the same dance. It was concluded by nine in the morning.

*Day Four, Āhārā Pūjā* : After ritualised worship of Śiva and Pārvaī, there would follow the feast of Brahmins and virgins. An important ritual of the day used to be the *Āhārā Pūjā*, in which an unripe bamboo or its branch, adorned with mango and banana blossom, was implanted on one side of the *maṇḍapa* and duly worshipped. There followed the performance of *Śiver Cāṣ* (Cultivation of Śiva). In the evening, the ritual of *Sāmsol Chāḍā* (Letting-off of Sāmsol Fish) used to be performed. In it, *bhaktas* jumped over a water-filled hole with a fish in it. There followed the ritual of *Agni-jhāp* in which the feet of the *bhaktas* were tied to a horizontal bamboo pole and they swung seven times over a heap of burning twigs, inhaling resin smoke rising from the fire. At night, *Volvāhi* songs were performed. Another ritual which used to be performed on this day was the *Ḍheki Cumāna*. Similar to the *Ḍheki-maṅgala* of *Dharmer Gājan*, the ritual of *Ḍheki Cumāna* was performed with one of the *bhaktas* dressed as Nārada sitting on a *ḍheki* (husking pedal) adorned with turmeric paste and vermilion. The *ḍheki* with Nārada was carried around Gambhīrā temple

amidst ululation from female spectators and was finally placed in the *maṇḍapa* where it was duly worshipped.

*Day Five, Caḍak* : Similar to the *Caḍak* of *Śiver Gājan*.

Prodyot Ghosh observes, some of the rituals mentioned above are still performed in the *Gambhīrā* festival of Malda.<sup>196</sup>

#### Performances in *Gambhīrā* Festival :

1. Narrative performance in lyric : Various types of songs, rendered in the *Gambhīrā* festival can be classified as of narrative type. These are (i) songs in honour of Śiva in which his merits and demerits are recounted, (ii) those aimed at exposing social malpractice committed by various quarters in the year coming to an end, and (iii) those of lighter vein. These are all rendered either individually or in chorus, by performers (all males) dressed in various male and female costumes. Another type of songs, known as *Volvāhi*, were rendered in chorus by two or more persons. Each of these songs featured an important event, local or national, of the year coming to an end. The composers were known as *khalifās*. Sometimes they composed impromptu songs on request of the spectators as well.<sup>197</sup>

2. Dialogic performance in lyric : Some of the *Volvāhi* songs were composed on nuptial quarrels and other themes on man-woman relationship. These were rendered by male performers dressed as male and female characters.<sup>198</sup>

3. Dialogic performance in prose : *Śiver Cāṣ*, or the Cultivation of Śiva, performed in *Gambhīrā* festival is based on a part of the *Śūnya Purāṇ* and is similar to the performance of same title to be seen in *Dharmer Gājan* and *Śiver Gājan*.

4. Procession : The *bhaktas*, dressed as male and female ghosts and goblins, makers of fire-works and their wives, devotees of Rāma, bagpipe players, Santhals (aboriginals) etc. proceeded from *maṇḍapa* to *maṇḍapa* of the locality, dancing to the rhythm of *dhāk* and *kāsi*. Some of them would also have small trident-shaped arrows pierced to their chests with the rear end burning in fire.<sup>199</sup> These impersonators were generally known as *saṅg*. Prodyot Ghosh notes that they are hardly seen at present. An interesting procession with *saṅg* which is still seen in Engrej-bazar (Malda) today is taken out with the impersonators along with dancers, musicians and singers all on a boat carried by four men on their shoulders.<sup>200</sup>

5. Masked dance : Dancers dressed as and wearing the masks of ghosts and goblins, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, Śiva and Durgā, Old Man and his wife, horses, fairies, Kārtika (god of war) used to dance to the accompaniment of music played on *dhāks* and *kāsis*. The dancers would also travel from *maṇḍapa* to *maṇḍapa* of the locality giving their performance.<sup>201</sup>



Prodyot Ghosh reports that the above and others such as Kālī, Nārasimhī, Cāmuṇḍā, Tārakāsur, Hiranyakaśipu, Sāvitrī and Satyavān and other mythical characters and deities are also represented in the masked dance of *Gambhīrā* in Malda today. Some of these, such as the dance of the stork, Nārasimhī, Kālī etc. are performed singly and contain no story. Others such as the dances of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, Śiva and Durgā, the Old Man and his wife etc. are performed as duets. Still others such as the Slaying of Tārakāsur, the Slaying of Hiranyakaśipu, Sāvitrī-Satyavān etc., incorporate stories and each features four to five characters.<sup>202</sup> In the dance of Kālī, the dancer ties his own hands behind his back and attaches four wooden arms to his two sides. In the dance of Cāmuṇḍā, the performer dances with a pigeon in one hand and the upper part of human skull in the other.<sup>203</sup> Non-masked contemporary social characters, such as the Memsahib, the drunkard, the Santhal aboriginal, the farmer and his wife etc. are also introduced in masked-dance performances.<sup>204</sup> Traditionally, the masks are made of wood of the Nim (*azadirachta indica*) and Fig trees but currently those made of clay and sponge-wood (*solā*) are also widely used.<sup>205</sup> Ghosh points out the striking similarity between the *Gambhīrā* and the Tibetan masks and believes that the latter could have been influenced by the former through Tantrism.<sup>206</sup>

Of particular interest for his study in the *Maśān Nāc* (lit., the Dance of Crematorium). One of the male votaries dresses as the goddess of destruction with disheveled hair in a manner as to inspire awe and terror in the heart of spectators. Dance of other goddesses, such as Vaśulī, Cāmuṇḍā and Kālī, are also performed with similar effect. The goddesses dance wildly to the rhythm of drums and is finally appeased with incense of powdered resin which the dancers inhale in large quantities and roll over the floor.<sup>207</sup>

### **Gambhīrā Gān :**

The *Gambhīrā* festival of Malda has given rise to a genre of performance which today is commonly known as *Gambhīrā Gān*. Widely reputed for its socially conscious and satirical content, *Gambhīrā Gān* is often divorced from the rituals of the *Gambhīrā* festival and is performed independently of the latter.

A performance of *Gambhīrā Gān* begins with the *mukha-pāda*, in which the characters introduce themselves with songs. It is followed by the *bandanā*, in which four characters representing the oppressed (and dressed in tattered clothes) report their condition of misery to Śiva (dressed in tiger-skin, with matted hair and carrying a *triśūl* in one hand and *ḍamaru* drum in the other). The two parties exchange dialogue in lyric. Finally Śiva assures redressive measure and all depart. There follows four to six episodes. Of these, the episodes performed by two characters (a male and a female) are known as "duets" and those by four,

as *cāryārīs*. A third type of episode with more than four characters is known as *pālā-bandī gān*. In all the episodes, dialogue is rendered in lyric as well as prose. Each episode highlights a social or political issue of interest for the community, drawn from local, national or inter-national arena. Finally, the performance ends with what is known as "report". Rendered by two characters, it features current affairs of interest from the locality. Sharp and witty criticism coated in humour is characteristic of all the episodes. The total duration of performance is two-and-half to three hours.

The performance space of *Gambhīrā Gān* is circular in shape (12 to 16 feet in diameter) and non-elevated. To one side sit the orchestra (comprised of a harmonium, two or three *judi*, one *ḅāyā-tablā* and a flute) and two to seven choral singers. The spectators sit and stand all around the performance space. The entire area, of the spectators as well as the performers, is often covered with some form of roofing. When performed during *Gambhīrā* festivals, it is given in the *maṇḍapa*. At other places and on other occasions, the performance space is temporarily created in the manner described above.<sup>208</sup>

Ghosh believes that *Gambhīrā Gān*, as described above, evolved in early 20th century, sometimes after World War I. He also shows that the genre has been substantially influenced by another genre of performance known as *Ālkāp Gān* (discussed in Chapter 3).<sup>209</sup>

#### 2.11.6 *The Sāhi Yātrā of Orissa :*

The *Sāhi Yātrā* is a three-day long festival culminating on the full-moon night of April, observed all over Orissa. The presiding deity of the festival varies from locality to locality with either Śiva, or one of the many forms of Śakti or even Dharma (represented in the form of a pitcher filled with water) being the honoured deity as various local tradition will have it. Music, song, dance (of the Horse) and the use of mask (of the he - and the she - sparrow, the old man his wife, Rāvaṇa, Hanumāna, Kālī etc.) are important features of the festival. Based on B.K. Sarkar's observation, it can be clearly seen that there exist strong similarity between *Śiver Gājan*, *Dharmer Gājan* and *Sāhi Yātrā*.<sup>210</sup>

#### 2.11.7 *Gambhīrā, Śiver Gājan and Dharmer Gājan :*

Textual evidence proves that the word "Gambhīrā", denoting a temple, was very much in use during Caitanya's life time (1486-1533), as can be seen from the following excerpt from *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* :

I will not sleep at night in the Gambhīrā  
For it results in the interior of the mouth and the  
head being ulcerated or scarred.

(Part II, Chapter 2)<sup>211</sup>

Jñānendramohan Dās points out that during the reigns of Dharma Pāla Deva II and Govinda Candra Deva of Gauḍa, there existed temples in the shape of Caṇḍī-maṇḍapa which were widely known as Gambhīrā.<sup>212</sup>

*Dharmer Gājan*, according to *Dharma-pūjā-paddhati* (the manual of rituals of the Dharma cult), is the ritualised worship of Ādi Buddha, i.e., Dharma.<sup>213</sup> Sarkar shows that prior to the rise of Śaivism in Bengal, Dharma was worshipped in the Gambhīrā (temple), where Ādyā was the presiding deity with Śiva and other gods merely her attendants.

(Ādyā) sitting on the *ghata* (a jar of water symbolizing the infilling power of God in nature) with Shiva, Kārtikeya and Vināyaka (Ganesha) witnessed the dance and listened to the music with eternal happiness.

(*Dharma Maṅgala*, Manikrāma Gaṅgūlī)<sup>214</sup>

But, by a gradual assimilation, the cult of Dharma lost ground to that of Śiva and we find Ādyā as a consort of Śiva receiving the worship of *Gājan* votaries, possibly sometime after 12th century. Finally, when the assimilation was complete, Ādyā moved out of the temple but the vestige of the ancient tradition still lingers in the ritual of *Ghat-sthāpana* which still exists in *Śiver Gājan*. Judging by the fact that Śiva is also called "Gambhīra" in *Śiva-Saṁhita*, it could be claimed with fair amount of certainty, as B.K. Sarkar states, that "in course of time the festivities of Śiva held in the Gambhīrā came to be regarded, after the name of place, as Gambhīrā worship", in Malda region.<sup>215</sup> At other places, *Dharmer Gājan* was transformed into *Śiver Gājan* as Śaivism assimilated Dharma cult. Evidence of this transformation is amply supported by textual references (cosmogony and salutation songs), *maṇḍapa* (pavilion) decoration as well as rituals performed during the festival of *Śiver Gājan* examined earlier, all of which bear obvious imprint of *Dharmer Gājan*. Thus we can safely conclude that *Śiver Gājan* and *Gambhīrā* were considerably influenced by Dharma cult before being assimilated into Śaivism.

Further evidence of assimilation of Dharma cult by Śaivism is the *Gājan* held in honour of Buḍo-rājā of Jamalpur (Burdwan, West Bengal) which culminates on the full-moon night of Baisākh, very much like *Dharmer Gājan* but unlike *Śiver Gājan*. The deity Buḍo-rājā is clearly a conjunction of Śiva (Buḍo-Śiva) and Dharma (Dharma-rājā) and represents a curious amalgamation of both the cults. As Benoy Ghosh states, the greatest god of Hindu community, Śiva, has gradually assimilated Dharma Ṭhākur. Buḍo-rājā is one of its historical witness.<sup>216</sup> In the same way *Śiver Gājan* of Kudmun (Burdwan, West Bengal) is another living testimony of transformation of what was once *Dharmer Gājan*, says Benoy Ghosh. The festival, at least two and half centuries old, is held on the last four days of Caitra and features dance with painted faces which was earlier masked dance.<sup>217</sup> On the other hand, Chandranath, Adinath and the texts of *Mṛgalubdha* clearly indicate that the Śaivite culture is also indebted to Buddhism.

End Notes : Chapter Two

1. G.H. Tarlekar, *Studies in the Nāṭyaśāstra* (Delhi : 1975), 5-8; Christopher M. Byrski, *Concept of Ancient Indian Theatre* (New Delhi : 1974), 19-21.
2. Byrski, *Concept*, 156.
3. Manomohan Ghosh, introduction to the *Nāṭyaśāstra (NS)* by Bharata-muni (Calcutta : 1967), lix-lx.
4. Bharata-muni, *Nāṭyaśāstra*, translated by Manomohan Ghosh (Calcutta : 1967), chapter I, verses 110-117. All further quotations from the text, unless otherwise mentioned, are from the above translation.
5. Opinion on the dates vary considerably among scholars.
6. Byrski, *Concept*, 103-114.
7. *Ibid.*, 106.
8. *Ibid.*, 104-108.
9. *Ibid.*, 117-118.
10. Byrski, *Concept*, 132.
11. M. Ghosh, comments on Bharata-muni's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, XXXIX.
12. Surendra Nath Shastri, *The Laws and Practice of Sanskrit Drama* vol. 1 (Varanasi: 1961), 245.
13. *Ibid.*, 257.
14. *Ibid.*, 257.
15. Hari Ram Mishra, *Theory of Rasa in Sanskrit Drama* (Bhopal : 1964), 433.
16. Sushil Kumar De, *Studies in the History of Sanskrit Poetics* (London : 1925), 28.
17. R.K. Yajnik, *The Indian Theatre: Its Origin And Its Later Developments Under European Influence* (New York : 1970), 31.
18. R. Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta* (Rome: 1956), xxi, quoted by Byrski, *Concept*, 153.
19. *Ibid.*, 67-68, quoted by Byrski, *Concept*, 154.
20. Byrski, *Concept*, 155.
21. Abhinavagupta, cited by Byrski, *Concept*, 155.
22. Quoted by Byrski, *Concept*, 156.
23. *Ibid.*, 181.
24. *Ibid.*, 161.
25. Saccidananda Mukhopādhyay, *Bhāratīya Nāṭyaveda O Bāṅglā Nāṭaka* (Calcutta: 1974), 181.

26. *Ibid.*, 181.
27. S.N. Dasgupta and S.K. De believe that this is a detached intermediate act of some other drama. *A History of Sanskrit Literature, I* (Calcutta : 1962), 717.
28. Tarlekar, *Studies*, 40.
29. Adya Rangacharya, *Bhāratīya Theatre* (New Delhi : 1975), 4 and 5.
30. Saccidananda Mukhopadhyay, *Bhāratīya Nāṭyaveda*, 171-183; Tarlekar, *Studies*, 40-43.
31. Tarlekar, *Studies*, 40-43.
32. *Ibid.*, 40-43.
33. The above can be inferred from Sukumar Sen and Bijit Kumar Datta's discussion on Nepalese play-texts. For details, please see Sukumar Sen, *Naṭ Nāṭya Nāṭak*, 76-77 and Bijit Kumar Datta, *Prācin Bāṅgālā-Maithilī Nāṭaka* (Burdwan: 1980), lix-lx.
34. Tarlekar, *Studies*, 43.
35. G.K. Bhatt, *Theatric Aspects of Sanskrit Drama* (Poona: 1983), 77; Adya Rangacharya, *The Indian Theatre* (New Delhi: 1971), 42-46.
36. Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture: Buddhist and Hindu Period* (Bombay: 1976), 40.
37. M.L. Varadpande, *Traditions of Indian Theatre* (New Delhi: 1979), 61.
38. Gita Sengupta, *Viswarangalaya O Natak* (Calcutta : 1975), 180-181.
39. Subba Rao, "A Critical Survey of the Ancient Indian Theatre in Accordance with the Second Chapter of the Bharata Nāṭyaśāstra", *Nāṭyaśāstra* by Bharatmuni, ed. M. Ramakrishna Kavi (Baroda: 1956), 423-54; G.K.Bhatt, *Sanskrit Drama*, 36-65.
40. Subba Rao, "Critical Survey", *Nāṭyaśāstra*, 434, 439.
41. Adya Rangacharya, *Indian Theatre*, 20.
42. Subba Rao, "Critical Survey", *Nāṭyaśāstra*, 452-54.
43. Adya Rangacharya, *Indian Theatre*, 20.
44. G.K. Bhatt, *Sanskrit Drama*, 71.
45. Gita Sengupta, *Viswarangalaya*, 180-181.
46. Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture*, plate 108, figure. 2.
47. Tarlekar, *Studies*, 212-213.
48. *Ibid.*, 226.
49. Manomohan Ghosh, introduction to Bharata-muni's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, xlix.
50. Manomohan Ghosh, introduction to Bharata-muni's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, xlix, Tarlekar, *Studies*, 216.

51. Adya Rangacharya, *Bhāratīya Theatre*, 88-91.
52. Manomohan Ghosh, introduction to Bharata-muni's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, lii-liii.
53. Tarlekar, *Studies*, 223-226.
54. G.K. Bhatt, *Sanskrit Drama*, 103-104.
55. Adya Rangacharya elaborates : If the change was from one outdoor scene to another, the character would make a circular movement and the locale changed. If, however, the change was from one outdoor scene to another outdoor scene, then the latter was shown on the back (up) stage. Adya Rangacharya, *Indian Theatre*, 46.
56. Manomohan Ghosh, introduction to Bharata-muni's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, xxxi.
57. G.K. Bhatt, *Sanskrit Drama*, 11.
58. Sukumar Sen, *Bāṅgālā Sāhityer Itihāsa* vol. I (Calcutta : 1991), 101; Bijit Kumar Dutta, *Bāṅgālā-Maithilī Nāṭaka*, xxx.
59. *Ibid.*, 92.
60. *Ibid.*, 86.
61. Bijit Kumar Dutta, *Bāṅgālā-Maithilī Nāṭaka*, lvii.
62. *Ibid.*, lvii-lix.
63. *Ibid.*, lx.
64. *Ibid.*, lxv-lxvi.
65. Bijit Kumar Dutta *Bāṅgālā-Maithilī Nāṭaka*, xx.
66. *Ibid.*, xxx-xxxvi.
67. *Ibid.*, xxxi-xxxii.
68. *Ibid.*, xxv; Sukumar Sen, *Naṭ Nāṭya Nāṭak* (Calcutta : 1372 BS), 76-70.
69. Bijit Kumar Dutta, *Bāṅgālā-Maithilī Nāṭaka*, cxxxiv-cxxxv.
70. *Mudita-kavalayāśva* in *Bāṅgālā-Maithilī Nāṭaka*, 103-225, 233-34 and explanations by Bijit Kumar Dutta, *ibid.*, cx-cxxxiv.
71. Scholars such as Sukumar Sen (in *Naṭ Nāṭya Nāṭak*, 94) and Bijit Kumar Dutta (in *Prācin Bāṅgālā-Maithilī Nāṭaka*, cxxii, cxvi, cxvii, cxxii) appear to be confused about the use of *yavanikā*. They believe that the *sūtradhāra* would enter with the curtain wrapped around his body or it would be somehow hoisted in front of him. But it is possible that the Nepalese court-theatre followed the convention of entry with *yavanikā* as seen in *Yakṣagāna* and other south Indian indigenous theatre performances and as believed to have been the practice in classical Indian theatre by scholars such as G.H. Tarlekar (*Studies in the Nāṭyaśāstra*, 227). In all these cases, the *yavanikā* is held in front of the performers by two attendants. *Sūtradhāra* and all other characters who are indicated in a text as already in a locale, enter behind the *yavanikā* and begin to perform immediately after the curtain is removed.

72. Bijit Kumar Dutta, *Bāṅgālā-Maithilī Nāṭaka*, cxxxi.
73. *Ibid.*, xiii.
74. *Ibid.*, cxxii.
75. *Ibid.*, cxxix.
76. *Ibid.*, cix.
77. *Ibid.*, cxxxii.
78. Nanīgopāl Bandopādhyāya (ed.), *Nepālē Bāṅgālā Nāṭak* (Calcutta : 1324 BS), introduction.
79. Nagendranāth Basu, "Yātrā: Utsa O Kramavikās", *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana* (vol. 5, no.4), 46-48. The piece was written in early 20th century. No information is available about current practice in Nepal.
80. Subhadra Adhikari, *Bharatīya Nṛtyakalā* (Calcutta: year of publication not mentioned), 54.
81. Percy Brown. *Indian Architecture*, 104-105.
82. For details, please see Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture: Buddhist and Hindu Period*, 104-105, plates 58, 71, 75, 76 and 88.
83. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa I*, 337.
84. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa I*, 259-61; Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, *Bangala Sahityer Itivritta*, vol. 4 (Calcutta: 1985), 418.
85. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa I*, 219.
86. B.K. Barua (ed.) *Aṅkivā Nāṭ*, 3, quoted by Bijit Kumar Dutta in *Bāṅgālā-Maithilī Nāṭaka*, lxxii.
87. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vangala-Mangal Kavyer Itihās*, 323.
88. Bijit Kumar Dutta, *Bāṅgālā-Maithilī Nāṭaka*, lxvi, lxvii.
89. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa I*, 227.
90. J.C. Mathur, *Drama in Rural India* (Bombay: 1964), 11, 14, 16-17, 26.
91. *Ibid.*, 60-63.
92. Hemchandra Goswami (ed.), *Asamiya Sahityar Chanakā*, vol. II, part I (Calcutta: 1924), 182-198.
93. Bijit Kumar Dutta, *Bāṅgālā-Maithilī Nāṭaka*, 182-198.
94. *Ibid.*, lxvii-lxxiii.
95. *Ibid.*, xlvi-lxix.
96. Quoted from H.V. Sharma, *The Theatre of the Buddhists* (Delhi : 1987), 36.
97. M. Winternitz, "Buddhist Drama", J.K. Nariman, *Literary History of Sanskrit Buddhism* (Delhi : 1923), 219.
98. Christopher Byrski, *Concept*, 171-172.

99. Winternitz, "Buddhist Drama", *Literary History*, 221.
100. K. Chattopadhyaya, "The Date of Kālidāsa", *Allahabad University Studies*, vol. II, 1926. 82, quoted by Byrski, *Concept*, 172.
101. Winternitz, "Buddhist Drama", *Literary History*, 223.
102. *Ibid.*
103. Sten Konow, *The Indian Drama*, tr., S.N. Ghoshal (1969), 79-80, quoted by Arun Sanyal, *Bangali Sanskriti O Lebedeff* (Calcutta : 1379 BS), 27.
104. Sharma, *The Theatre*, 33-34.
105. I-Tsing, *Record of the Buddhist Religion*, tr. J. Takakusu (New Delhi : 1982), 163-164.
106. Winternitz, "Buddhist Drama", *Literary History*, 219-220.
107. *Ibid.*
108. *Ibid.*, 220.
109. Byrski, *Concept*, 177-187.
110. Siddheswar Chattopadhyaya's commentary on Sāgaranandin, *Nāṭakalakṣaṇa-ratnakōṣa* (Calcutta : 1385 BS), 326.
111. Sharma, *The Theatre*, 32.
112. Winternitz, "Buddhist Drama", *Literary History*, 220; Sanyal, *Bangali Sanskriti*, 26.
113. Sten Konow, 79-80, quoted by Sanyal, *Bangali Sanskriti*, 27.
114. Varadpande, *Traditions*, 64-65.
115. Sharma, *The Theatre*, 56-57.
116. Texts no. 10 and 18, *Caryā Gītikā*, ed. Muhammad Abdul Hai and Anwar Pasha (Dhaka : 1989). According to Shahidullah, the *Ḍombīs* (i.e., the *Ḍoma* women) were professional singers and dancers as well as prostitutes in ancient Bengal. They were also regarded as "untouchables". For details, please see Muhammad Shahidullah, *Bāṅglā Sāhityer Kathā* I, 80.
117. G.H. Tarlekar, *Studies*, 42.
118. Sharma, *The Theatre*, 64.
119. Varadpande, *Traditions*, 18-19; Sharma, *The Theatre*, 30.
120. Sharma, *The Theatre*, 45-55; Varadpande, *Traditions*, 61-67.
121. Varadpande, *Traditions*, 66.
122. Sharma, *The Theatre*, 73.
123. Faubion Bowers, *Theatre in the East: A Survey of Asian Drama* (New York : 1956), 93.
124. *Ibid.*, 93-94.



125. A.J. Gunawardana, *Theatre In Sri Lanka* (Colombo : 1976), 12-14; Sharma, *The Theatre*, 76-77.
126. Sharma, *The Theatre*, 77.
127. *Ibid.*, 78-80.
128. Gunawardana, *Theatre In Sri Lanka*, 14-17; Bowers, *Theatre In the East*, 101-104; Sharma, *The Theatre*, 78-79.
129. Bowers, *Theatre in the East*, 103.
130. *Ibid.*, 105.
131. *Ibid.*, 84-85.
132. Sharma, *The Theatre*, 77.
133. Faubion Bowers, *Theatre in the East*, 93.
134. M. Winternitz, "Buddhist Drama", *Literary History*, 221.
135. Captain Forbes, *British Burma and its People*, quoted by Austine Waddell, *Buddhism and Lamaism in Tibet* (New Delhi : 1979), 541.
136. Harvey, *East Monachism*, 236, quoted by Waddell, *Buddhism and Lamaism*, 525 & 527.
137. Bowers, *Theatre in the East*, 112-114.
138. *Ibid.*, 119-120.
139. *Ibid.*, 120-123.
140. *Ibid.*, 113.
141. Information given in the three paragraphs above have been drawn from the following sources: Hu Jin'an, "Tibetan Opera", *China's Minority Nationalities I*, (Beijing: 1984), 53-55; Sharma, *The Theatre*, 97-98, 113; Giuseppe Tucci, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 3, 387-88.
142. W.Y. Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* (London : 1958), 282.
143. *Ibid.*, 277.
144. Sharma, *The Theatre*, 87, 111, 112.
145. Waddell, *Buddhism and Lamaism*, 519.
146. Information given in this paragraph has been drawn from Waddell, *Buddhism and Lamaism*, 515-521, supplemented by Turrell v. Wylie, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 3, 1128-29.
147. Waddell, *Buddhism and Lamaism*, 521-534.
148. Sharma, *The Theatre*, 87-91; Waddell, *Buddhism and Lamaism*, 521. Waddell has also produced some interesting illustrations of costume in pages 223, 525 and of performance in page 528.
149. Waddell, *Buddhism and Lamaism*, 540, Sharma, *The Theatre*, 94.

150. Waddell, *Buddhism and Lamaism*, 539-540; Sharma, *The Theatre*, 94-95.
151. Hu Jin'an, "Tibetan Opera", *China's Minority*, 55-59; Sharma, *The Theatre*, 99-100.
152. F. Spencer Chapman, *Lhasa the Holy City* (London: 1938), 216.
153. *Ibid.*, 225-27.
154. *Ibid.*, 208.
155. *Ibid.*, 225-228.
156. Sharma, *The Theatre*, 90; Waddell, *Buddhism and Lamaism*, 521.
157. Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Yoga*, 294-95.
158. Waddell, *Buddhism and Lamaism*, 535-36.
159. Madanjcet Singh, *Himalayan Art* (Greenwich, Conn.: 1968), 74 and 156
160. Rūparāma, *Dharma-maṅgala*, ed. Sukumar Sen and Panchanan Mandal (Burdwan : 1351 BS), xiv.
161. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vangala-Mangal Kavyer Itihas*, 682-83, 722-23.
162. Muhammad Shahidullah, *Bāṅglā Sāhityer Kathā II*, 131-32; Ashutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vangala-Mangal Kavyer Itihas*, 717.
163. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa II*, 127.
- 163a. Muhammad Shahidullah, *Bāṅglā Sāhityer Kathā II*, 134.
164. Īṣaṅ Candra Ghoṣ (tr. and ed.), *Jātaka* vol. 6 (Calcutta : 1381 BS), 334.
165. John Dowson, *Hindu Mythology*, 104.
166. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vangala-Mangal Kavyer Itihas*, 725.
167. Benoy Kumar Sarkar, *Folk Element*, 93-94.
168. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vangala-Mangal Kavyer Itihas*, 694.
169. B.K. Sarkar, *Folk Element*, 95.
170. Benoy Ghosh, *Paschim Banger Sanskriti* (Calcutta : 1957), 188.
171. B.K. Sarkar, *Folk Element*, 96-102. A point which needs to be reminded is that there exists quite a few variety in celebration, depending on the degree of assimilation of the Cult by Śaivism and other socio-political forces.
172. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vangala-Mangal Kavyer Itihas*, 635-649; Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa II*, 119; B.K. Sarkar, *Folk Element*, 57.
173. Benoy Ghosh, *Sanskriti*, 183-85, 188.
174. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vangala-Mangal Kavyer Itihas*, 653; Basanta Kumar Chattopadhyaya in Mayūrbhatta's *Dharma-purāṇa* (Calcutta : 1930), appendix, 1-16.
175. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vangala-Mangal Kavyer Itihas*, 653; Basanta Kumar Chattopadhyaya, *Dharma-purāṇa*, appendix, 4.

176. Ghanarāma Cakravartī, *Dharma-maṅgala* (Calcutta : 1911). 9-12.
177. Rāmadāsa Ādak, *Anādi-maṅgala* (Calcutta : 1938), 158.
178. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa II*, 130.
179. Ghanarāma Cakravartī, *Dharma-maṅgala*, Chapter 3, "The Marriage of Rañjavaṭī", 29.
180. Rāmadāsa Ādak, *Anādi-maṅgala*, Chapter 4, 32; Rūparāma, *Dharma-maṅgala*, Chapter 4, "The Marriage of Rañja", 70.
181. B.K. Sarkar, *Folk Element*, 126.
182. Rūparāma, *Dharma-maṅgala*, 70.
183. Sukumar Sen, *Naṭ Nāṭya Nāṭak*, 54.
184. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vaṅgala-Maṅgal Kavyer Itihas*, 196.
185. Vṛndāvana Dāsa, *Caitanya Bhāgavat* (Calcutta : 440 Gaurabda, corresponding to 1926).
186. Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, ed. Harekrishna Mukhopadhyaya and Subodh Chandra Majumdar (Calcutta : 1974), 28.
187. Quoted from a manuscript by B.K. Sarkar, *Folk Element*, 27.
188. Quoted from a manuscript by B.K. Sarkar, *Folk Element*, 33.
189. Salutation hymn, quoted by B.K. Sarkar, *Folk Element*, 40.
190. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vaṅgala-Maṅgal Kavyer Itihas*, 239.
191. *Ibid.*, 242.
192. Prodyot Ghosh, *Loka Samskrit: Gambhira* (Calcutta : 1982), 2-3.
193. B.K. Sarkar, *Folk Element*, 75-87; Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vaṅgala-Maṅgal Kavyer Itihas*, 194-196.
194. B.K. Sarkar, *Folk Element*, 78-87; Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vaṅgala-Maṅgal Kavyer Itihas*, 195.
195. B.K. Sarkar, *Folk Element*, 51-61.
196. Prodyot Ghosh, *Gambhira*, 14-24.
197. B.K. Sarkar, *Folk Element*, 53, 57.
198. *Ibid.*, 58.
199. *Ibid.*, 35.
200. Prodyot Ghosh, *Gambhira*, 92.
201. B.K. Sarkar, *Folk Element*, 55-56.
202. Prodyot Ghosh, *Gambhira*, 45-50.
203. B.K. Sarkar, *Folk Element*, 111.
204. Prodyot Ghosh, *Gambhira*, 33-40.

205. *Ibid.*, 45.
206. *Ibid.*, 40.
207. B.K. Sarkar, *Folk Element*, 55-56.
208. Prodyot Ghosh, *Gambhira*, 56-57.
209. *Ibid.*, 68, 71-72.
210. B.K. Sarkar, *Folk Element*, 91-92.
211. Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, 147, tr. by B.K. Sarkar, *Folk Element*, 70.
212. Jñānendramohan Dās, *Bāṅgālā Bhāṣār Abhidhān* I (Calcutta: 1937), 655.
213. B.K. Sarkar, *Folk Element*, 225.
214. *Ibid.*, 69, 200.
215. *Ibid.*, 71.
216. Benoy Ghosh, *Sanskriti*, 239.
217. *Ibid.*, 707-709.

## Chapter Three: Indigenous Theatrical Performances of Bangladesh

### 3.1 Tales Related to Manasā

#### 3.1.1 *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* (Rangpur)

*Padmā-purāṇ Gān* (lit., the Lay of *Padmā-purāṇ*) is a genre of performance from greater Rangpur and is based on the *Padmā-purāṇ* (a narrative in rhymed metrical verse eulogising the snake goddess Manasā). It may be sponsored throughout the year, usually by the Hindus of rural areas, with the belief that the snake goddess is propitiated by the performance and as a result her blessing is obtained in fulfilling specific desire (such as marriage, child-birth etc.). It is also performed on the occasion of Manasā Pūjā held on the last day of the month of Śrāvaṇa and Nāgarāj Pūjā held in the first week of Āṣāḍh.

A troupe of *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* from Phul-khan Chakla village under Rajarhat police station in Kurigram district is comprised of fourteen performers, all of whom are Hindus by faith and farmers by profession. One of them is also a professional *ojhā* (one claiming to possess supernatural power of healing, in this case, snake-bite). The lead narrator (*gīdāl*) of the troupe, Haripada Rāy (aged 47 and belonging to Kṣatriya caste) traces the genre back to at least four generations: his preceptor was Indramohan Barman from Dudh-kumar village under Rajarhat police station, the latter's preceptor was Nabīn Candra Barman from the same village, who in turn was the disciple of Jānakī Nāth, a renowned performer from Hatura village under the police station and district of Lalmanirhat.

*Padmā-purāṇ Gān* is performed in the outer courtyard of a homestead. The performance space (*āsar*) is a temporary construction, square in shape (some twelve feet a side) and non-elevated, on the eastern or northern side of which is placed the image of Manasā. On four corners of the performance space stand four bamboo posts to support a canopy on top. During rainy season, roofing of corrugated iron sheet is used at the top. "Pertromax" (kerosine) lanterns or electric lamps are suspended from the corner posts to serve as lighting. Mats are laid on the earthen floor of the performance space and in its centre sit the *pāil* (choral singers), the *yāntrik* (musicians) and the *chokrās* (female impersonators), all in a circle. The spectators sit on hay-strewn ground on all four sides of the performance space. Most of the performance is given in the intervening space between the spectators and the central circle. Bounded by ropes tied to the corner posts, the performance space is connected to the green-room (*sāj ghar*) located beyond the area of the spectators, with a narrow passage-way. The green-room is usually a conveniently located hut. (Please see fig. 17.)

The *gīdāl* of *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* is dressed in a white *dhoti*, a *pāñjābi* (usually white) and a *nāmābali cādar*. He also carries a whisk (*cāmar*) in his hand. During performance, he

renders the narrative in lyric, verse and prose and also enacts a few roles. The *gīdāl* is assisted by the *dohār* who is dressed in a white *dhoti*, a white vest and has a *gāmchā* tied around his waist. He sings, recites in verse and renders the narrative in prose with the *gīdāl*; he also enacts the comic roles. The *chokrās*, four in number, are dressed in colourful *saris* and wear head-bands of (artificial) flowers and ankle-bells. The *yāntrik* play two *khol*s, two *kupā bāsīs* and two *mandiras*, and are dressed in white *dhotis* and *pāñjābis* or shirts of indefinite colour. The *pāil*, two in number, are dressed in the same manner as the *yāntrik*.

The text of *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* is based on the *Padmā-purāṇ* by Nārāyaṇ Dev, composed in rhymed metrical verse in the first half of 16th century. In performance, parts of the text of the *Padmā-purāṇ* is rendered in lyric and recited in verse and other parts are adapted and expanded into dialogic scenes. Besides, the performers also expand some references into comic scenes (structured in the form of prose dialogue) and add explanatory comments (in prose). The dialogic scenes and explanatory comments are orally composed but they leave ample room for improvisation during performance. Each troupe inherits its structure of performance text, composition of dialogic scenes and the tune of songs from the preceptor of the *gīdāl*, to which it adds its own creations; but the basic material as well as the rhymed metrical verse recited and sung during performance is always from Nārāyaṇ Dev's *Padmā-purāṇ*. The Phul-khan Chakla troupe performs the entire narrative of *Padmā-purāṇ* in 11 episodes which require 11 sessions spread over seven days and nights. The first episode is performed in the evening of the first day; two episodes, one in day-time and one in the evening, are performed on the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 6th days; and one each, in day time, on the 5th and 7th days. The day-time sessions begin around seven in the morning and end around four in the afternoon; the evening sessions commence at about seven and end around two-thirty in the morning. It is customary for the performers to suspend performance after Lakṣmīndar's death which is given at the end of day-time session of the 5th day. It is also customary for all the spectators to stay awake that night and also keep all their domestic animals awake. The performance resumes again on the following day.

The episodes performed by the Phul-khan Chakla troupe are as follows:

- |                             |                                |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Sr̥ṣṭi Pattan</i>     | 7. <i>Lankār Bāñijya</i>       |
| 2. <i>Maṇḍap Jāgaran</i>    | 8. <i>Lakṣmīndarer Bibāha</i>  |
| 3. <i>Śiber Bibāha</i>      | 9. <i>Bhāsān</i>               |
| 4. <i>Dhanantari Badh</i>   | 10. <i>Debpurī</i>             |
| 5. <i>Mahājñān Haraṇ</i>    | 11. <i>Punarbāsan (Phirān)</i> |
| 6. <i>Mahāsāgar Bāñijya</i> |                                |

The story line essentially follows Nārāyaṇ Dev's text.<sup>1</sup>

Prior to a performance of *Padmā-purāṇ Gān*, goddess Padmā (Manasā) is accorded ritualised worship in a ceremony officiated by a Brahmin, which is followed by separate ceremony of the performers. It is obligatory for the *gīdāl* to fast on the day the ritualised worship is held, from the morning till the completion of the first episode. The ceremonial worship over, the *gīdāl* buries medicinal herbs near the four corner posts of the performance space in order to protect it from snakes. The performance of Phul-khan Chakla troupe begins with a musical overture played by the *yāntric*. Then, in order to render the *bandanā*, the *chokrās* stand in a line facing west, the *khol* and the *kupā ḅāśi* players in a line after them (the two *khol* players at the sides and the *kupā ḅāśi* in the centre), followed by the two *mandirā* players at the sides and the *pāil* in the centre of the next line and finally the *gīdāl* and the *dohār* standing in the rear. The *bandanā* is sung as the whole group moves in a circle (anti-clockwise direction) : the *gīdāl* and *dohār* leading the song, the *chokrās* dancing and singing choral refrain, the *yāntric* playing music and the *pāil* singing choral refrain with some of the *yāntric* (photograph 2). There are five elaborate *bandanās* in honour of (i) Padmā, (ii) Nārāyaṇa, (iii) Saraswatī, (iv) Gaṇeśa and (v) the preceptor of the *gīdāl*. Any one of these may be sung at the beginning of each session.<sup>2</sup> The above is followed by brief salutation offered to Nīrañjan, Brahma, Viṣṇu, Lakṣmī, Saraswatī, Śīva, Bhagavatī, Kārtika, Gaṇapati, Indra, Rāma, Lakṣmana, Vasukī and a few other deities. The *bandanā* ends with salutation paid to the four directions.<sup>3</sup> The above section is also recited in verse by the *gīdāl* and the *dohār* (first half of each line by the former and the second half by the latter) as they move all around the performance space; it entails no dance, music or choral accompaniment as the *chokrās*, the *yāntrik* and the *pāil* sit in a circle at the centre. When the *bandanā* is over, the *gīdāl* introduces the episode to be performed in a particular session. For example, the 8th session on the 5th day is introduced with the following lines :

সুকবি নারায়ন দেবের সুরধ পঁচালী ।

লক্ষিস্তর বিবাহ গান বলিব নাচারী।

The main body of performance comes next and it is composed of the following elements :

1. *Narrative performance in lyric* : The lyrical passages are taken directly from the text by Nārāyaṇ Dev. These are rendered by the *gīdāl* and the *dohār* singing alternate lines, accompanied by the *yāntrik* playing music, and the *pāil*, the *chokrās* as well as a few members of the *yāntrik* singing choral refrain. As a rule, the lyrical passages which are joyous in mood are also accompanied by dance and movement of all characters; those which evoke sorrow or pity are accompanied by the movement of only the *gīdāl* and the *dohār* as rest of the performers sit in a circle at the centre of the performance space.

The *gīdāl* sings the *tān* in order to set his voice to the correct scale and tune, and then the *diśā* (choral refrain) to remind the refrain to the choral singers. Thereafter he sings the first line of each couplet, followed by the *dohār* singing the second line. The choral singers pick up the refrain after each couplet. Sometimes the *dohār* intentionally alters a few words of his lines which the *gīdāl* corrects, thus producing comic effect. The composition of dance and movement is similar to that performed with the *bandanā*. The dance, rendered only by the *chokrās*, is extremely graceful and contains no sensuous element. Where a song evokes pathetic sentiment, it is rendered only by the *dohār* and the *gīdāl* moving around the central circle. The lyrical passages contain both description of events as well speech of characters. The *gīdāl* renders all these passages in a set of about five tunes. Haripada Rōy believes, it is the goddess Saraswatī herself who dictates the choice tune of each lyrical passage. Again, as a rule, all verse composed in *tripadī* (rhymed triplets) are sung; but the verses composed in *payār* (rhymed couplets) may be sung as well as recited, depending on reaction of spectators.

2. *Narrative performance in prose and verse* : Parts of the narrative is rendered in verse taken directly from the text by Nārāyaṇ Dev, which contain descriptions of events as well as speech of characters. The first half of each line is recited by the *gīdāl* and the second half by the *dohār*, as both move around the central circle where the *chokrās*, the *pāil* and the *yāntrik* sit. As a rule, only the *payār* verses are recited. Quite often the *dohār* asks for explanation of the verses and the *gīdāl* complies, rendering his words in improvised prose. Sometimes the pair also slips into dialogue in improvised prose. Thus, complex imagery of the verse is made comprehensible to all the spectators.

3. *Dialogic performance in prose and lyric* : The dialogic scenes (photographs 1,3 and 4) are adapted and expanded from events described in the text by Nārāyaṇ Dev. Often, brief references may also be expanded into comic scenes. All these scenes are either orally composed by the troupe or have been handed down by the preceptor. In both cases, there is ample room for minor on-the-spot improvisation. Often scene may also contain "play-within-play". For example, when Cānd rejects the maid with rabbit-teeth, Terā (his companion) tries to convince him about the qualities of such women by relating an incident about his wife who also has rabbit-teeth. Instead of narrating, Tera enacts the scene with the *chokrās*. In all dialogic scenes, the *chokrās* play most of the female roles, the *gīdāl* plays some of the lead male roles (such as Cānd Saodāgar), the *dohār* plays the other lead male roles (such as Bāco Banik) and all comic roles (such as Terā, Saṅkai etc.) and also aged female roles (such as the aged Brahmin woman). If additional characters are required, they



are played by the *pāil*. The performers not required to play any roles sit in central circle. Dialogic scenes also contain songs.

Finally, the *gīdāl* announces the end of a session with the following lines :-

আজকের মত বিয়ে পালা সমাপ্ত হইল  
বদন ডরি উজ্জ্বল হরি হরি বল ।

The following are some of the salient features of *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* performance :

1. Entries and exits : Most of the entries and exits are carried out from and to the central circle. For example, Sanekā, Bipulā (Behulā) and her friends, the aged Brahmin woman, the blacksmith and his wife all rise from the central circle to denote their entry and rejoin the same to denote exit. A few entries and exits, such as that of the masons Sañkāi, Pañkāi and Durgābar and also that of the drummers who are called to join the bridegroom's party, are made from and to the green-room.

2. Costume change : Costume changes are minor and most of these are carried out inside the performance space, in full view of the spectators. For example, the *gīdāl* rearranges his *cādar* when acting the role of Cānd Saodaṅgar, the *dohār* unties an end of his *dhoti* and uses it as an end of a *sari* to cover his head when acting the role of the aged Brahmin woman etc. Other changes (such as the *dohār* and two *pāil* members in the role of the masons) are made in the green-room.

3. Scenic devices : There is no use of any scenery or set prop except a miniaturized representation of the iron chamber made with the core of banana plants, which is placed at the centre of the performance space after the masons enact the construction of it. In the scene where Terā relates the qualities of women with rabbit-teeth, ploughing of a field is shown with two *chokrās* portraying a pair of cows, to whom two *gāmchās* are tied to create the plough and a flute is used as the plough-man's stick.

5. *Collection of donation and ululation*: There is no collection of donation from the spectators. Female spectators ululate in unison on auspicious moments such as the birth of Lakṣmīndar and Bipulā.<sup>4</sup>

### 3.1.2 *Rayānī Gān* :

Popular in the rural areas of greater Barisal and Khulna districts is a genre of performance known as *Rayānī Gān*. (Please see photographs 5-7.) Based on the *Padmā-purāṇ* by Vijay Gupta, *Rayānī Gān* is performed throughout the year, more often during the months of Phālgun, Caitra and Baiśākh and throughout the month of Śrāvaṇa. The Śrāvaṇa performances are given on the occasion of Manasā Pūjā held on the last day of the month.

The rest of performances are usually sponsored by Hindus who pledge to offer it when specific desires (such as child-birth, overcoming calamities or deliverance from ailment) are fulfilled.

A *Rayānī* troupe from Bishkhali village under Kachua police station in Bagerhat district comprises seven performers, three of whom are females and four males. The *sarkār* (who prompts the verses to the *gāyens*, i.e., the singers and also explains the same to the spectators in improvised prose speech) is a Vaiśya; the "master" (i.e., conductor of music) is a Śudra; the *khol bādāk* (*khol* player) is a Vaiśya; the *judi bādāk* (*judi* player) is a Śudra and the three female *gāyens* (singers) are Śudras. The troupe is led by Uṣā Rānī (age 35 years) who is also one of the *gāyens*. The male performers are engaged in farming and the female performers in house-keeping when they are not performing. The preceptors of the performers were Bhadrakanta Dākuā (a *sarkār*) and Binodīnī (a *gāyen*) from Shan Pukuria village under Kachua police station, who in turn were disciples of Dhanañjaya Mṛdhā, a famous *Rayānī sarkār* of the region. Thus the Bishkhali troupe traces its heritage to at least a hundred years.

In Bagerhat, *Rayānī Gān* is generally given in temporary performance space (fig. 18) constructed in the outer courtyards of rural homesteads or in front of temples dedicated to Manasā. It is square in shape (some ten feet a side) and non-elevated. On its four corners stand four posts (often trunks of betel-nut trees) to support a canopy on top. "Petromax" (kerosine) lanterns or electric lamps are suspended from the corner posts to serve as lighting. Spectators sit on all four sides, women separately from men. Inexpensive mats are laid on the floor of the performance space as well as the spectators' area. An earthen pitcher (*ghaṭ*), symbolising the presence of the goddess Manasā, covered with five (or seven) mango (or marmelos) leaves, a green coconut and flowers, is placed beside the temple, or opposite eastern (or northern) arm of performance space where temples do not exist. Besides the earthen pitcher is placed a brass plate containing *bātāsā* (sweet drops of sugar) and a winnowing tray containing 1.25 kg of rice, 5 betel nuts, 5 betel leaves, taka 5.65 (or more), a brown coconut and a *gāmchā*. Along the edge of three arms of the performance space sit the performers: opposite the *ghaṭ* sit the three *gāyens*, to their right sit the *judi* and the *khol* players (and other percussion instrumentalists, if available), and to their left sit the "master" with a harmonium, a choral singer, the *sarkār* (and other wind or string instrumentalists, if available). *Rayānī Gān* is also performed in the centre of *nāṭ-maṇḍapas* (permanent performance space constructed in front of temple sanctums), specially during the rainy season. In such cases, the arrangement is similar to that described above. In Jhalakathi

(greater Barisal). *Rayānī Gān* is also performed in the verandahs of temples and on elevated square platforms similar to those used in the *Yātrā*.

In Bagerhat, the costume of all the male performers save the *sarkār* is white *dhoti* and white *pāñjābi* (or white vest). The *sarkār* is dressed in a yellow *dhoti*, a white *kamar-bandh* (a length of cloth tied around the waist), a white vest and a yellow *uttariya* (stole). The *gayens* wear cotton *saris* (printed floral pattern on white ground), blouses, yellow *uttariyas* (wound around the neck and slung over the chest) and ankle-bells. According to Uṣā Rānī, the colour of the *uttariyas* vary: other troupes wear green, blue, violet or white, i.e., any colour other than black. The make-up of the *gāyens* is interesting: white floral patterns painted across the forehead down to the cheeks and the nose, made more colourful by one (or two) vermilion dots in the centre of the forehead and a streak of vermilion across the hair-parting.

The text of *Rayānī Gān* is based on the *Padmā-purāṇ* by Vijay Gupta, composed in 1494.<sup>5</sup> During performance, the Bishkhali troupe renders the text of the *Padmā-purāṇ* in abridged and slightly altered version. The mode of rendition is mostly lyrical: the rhymed metrical verses are sung by the *gāyens*. Besides, the performers also render three sections in lyrical and prose dialogue: (i) Rati the midwife picking spinach for Soṇā Rānī (Cānd Saodāgar's wife) prior to Lakṣmīndar's birth, (ii) Behulā accosted by Godā, (iii) and by Dhanā and Manā during her journey on the raft. In these the verses of the text are sung and a few improvised lines in prose are added. In addition, the *sarkār* provides explanatory comments in improvised prose in between passages of lyrical rendition.

The Bishkhali troupe performs the narrative of Vijay Gupta in 7, 5, 3 or 1 day/s. The three-days' performance, which is more common, is given in four sessions in a manner described below.

*Day one, session one:* 5 pm to 11 pm. The sponsor, i.e., the person who has pledged the performance, receives the *Rayānī* troupe in the performance space by offering a winnowing tray containing a *dhoti* or a *gāmchā* and other ritual accessories and formally informs them that s/he had pledged a performance of the *Rayānī Gān* in honour of Manasā, that s/he is placing the responsibility on the performers, thereby requests them to free him/her of his/her obligation. Thereupon begins *ghaṭ-sthāpana* (ritualised installation of the earthen pitcher symbolising Manasā's presence) by a Brahmin priest. The ceremony is followed by the performance from the beginning of Vijay Gupta's text to the marriage of Manasā. Concurrently with the performance of ritualised worship offered by Bocā's mother for the revival of her son (as described in Vijay Gupta's text), a Brahmin priest also offers ritualised

worship to Manasā in the temple. Performers as well as the person who has pledged the performance fast throughout the day, partaking food only after the end of performance.

*Day two, session two:* 5 pm to 1 am. It begins with a *bandanā* addressed to Manasā and is followed by performance from the episode on the exile of Manasā to that of the birth of Lakṣmīndar. Concurrently with the performance, ritualised worship of Manasā by a Brahmin priest is also performed at the temple during the episodes titled *Rākhāyāl Bāḍir Pūjā* and *Jhāl Bāḍir Pūjā* (where the goddess is offered worship by the cow-herds and Jhālu-Mālu respectively). When Cānd Saodāgar's wife Sonā Rānī is blessed with a child, it is customary for the person who has pledged the performance to make an offering of 1.25 kg rice, 5 betel-nuts, 5 betel leaves, a brown coconut and taka 5 to the performers. The betel nuts and betel leaves are returned to the same person. It is believed that partaking of the nuts and leaves by him/her and his/her spouse results in conceiving a child. The performers as well as the sponsor who has pledged the performance fast through the day and most of performance time, partaking food only after the ritualised worship at the temple.

*Day three session three :* 8 am to 2 pm. It begins with a *bandanā* addressed to Manasā and is followed by performance from the union of Cānd and his son after the disastrous voyage to the marriage of Lakṣmīndar. It is customary for the person who has pledged the performance to make an offering of a *dhoti*, a *sari*, a *gāmchā* and various items of cosmetics placed on a winnowing tray to the performers when Behulā and Lakṣmīndar are married. The performers as well as the sponsor fast through the length of performance.

*Day three, session four :* 5 pm to 2 am. It begins with a *bandanā* addressed to Manasā and continues with the performance from the death of Lakṣmīndar at the bridal chamber to the end. It is customary for the person who has pledged the performance to offer the performers a gift of 21 betel leaves, 21 betel nuts, a brown coconut, a *gāmchā*, 1.25 kg of rice and taka 5 after Lakṣmīndar is revived to life. Concurrently with Cānd Saodāgar offering his ritualised worship to Manasā in the performance, a Brahmin priest also offers ritualised worship to the goddess at the temple. At the end of the performance, two dolls representing Behulā and Lakṣmīndar are brought by the performers to the house of the sponsor. Thereby, it is believed, the blessing of the goddess is bestowed on the homestead. The performers as well as the person who has pledged the performance partake food after ritualised worship at the temple.

The performance of *Rayānī Gān* begins, after the initial rituals are over, with the episode titled *Ādyer Gān* which invokes the goddess to the performance space. It is rendered by all three *gāyens* who stand facing the *ghaṭ*, as the rest sing choral refrain and play music sitting

in their positions. It is followed by a description of the poet's dream in which the goddess (Padmā) appeared to command him to compose a poetic text eulogising her deeds, beginning with her birth and ending with Cānd Saodāgar's ascent to heaven with his family. After these introductory episodes, the poet commences his narrative and continues till the birth of Padma.<sup>6</sup> The *bandanā* of Padmā and other deities and the preceptors follows next, with salutations offered to Jaratakāru Muni, Aṣṭik Muni, Indra, Śacī, Mahāmāyā, Ganges, Bhagavatī, Gaṇapati, Śiva, Viṣṇu, Lakṣmī, Saraswatī, Pavan, Dibākar, the preceptors and other gods, goddesses and holy sites. The *bandanā* is rendered by a *gāyen* accompanied by the *khol* player, both of whom perform standing; the rest of the performers sing choral refrain and play music sitting in their positions (photograph 7). The main body of performance follows next<sup>7</sup> and it is composed of the elements given below:

1. *Narrative performance in lyric* : *Gāyen*'s, singly or in pair, render/s verses of the text in lyric and at the same time dance/s with *cāmar* (whisk) in her/their hand/s. The *sarkār* stands immediately behind (or between) the *gāyen*'s and prompts the first few words of each line. The rest of the performers sing choral refrain and play music while sitting in their positions. (Photograph 6.)

2. *Narrative performance in prose* : If requested by the spectators, the *sarkār* narrates the substance of each section of lyrical rendition after the *gāyen*'s end/s the section. Thus, the narrative is made comprehensible to all the spectators. The *sarkār* renders his narration standing, in improvised prose speech.

3. *Dialogic performance in verse and prose* : As mentioned earlier, only three sections of the *Padmā-purāṇ* is performed by the Bishkhali troupe in dialogic form. In the first section with Rati the mid-wife, two *gāyens* sing the passage describing her action and the third enters the performance space from a secluded spot beyond the spectators, dressed in a white *sari* and supporting herself on a stick (photograph 5). She dances to the rhythm, swinging her hips and enacts a brief comic scene in improvised prose speech with the *sarkār* (who remains seated). The above is the only piece in the entire performance of Bishkhali troupe where costume change is made. In the two other sections of dialogic enactment, one of the *gāyens* sing the lines of Behulā while the lines of Godā, Dhanā and Manā are sung by the "master" and another choral singer. Although the lines are sung in character and with necessary gestures, there is no attempt to show the raft and there is no costume change.

Salient features of *Rayānī Gān* performance :

1. Exuberance of pathos in scenes of death : In the sections where Sonā Rāni loses all her six sons and Lakṣmīndar dies in the bridal chamber, the *gāyens* as well as the spectators are

moved to tears. Unable to control their grief, the *gāyens* clasp some of the female spectators and wail aloud.

2. The revival of Lakṣmīndar to life by Manasā : It features as an important ritual in the performance. As the *gāyens* narrate the act of revival of Lakṣmīndar, seated in their positions, a *cāmar* (whisk) covered with a red piece of cloth (symbolic of Lakṣmīndar's dead body) is positioned in front of them. They place their right hands on the "body" and one of them sprinkle water from the *ghaṭ* with the mango (or marmelos) leaves; simultaneously they sing "জাগো জাগো লক্ষ্মীন্দর সুন্দর" (lit. "Arise, arise O handsome Lakṣmīndar"). The moment Lakṣmīndar is revived to life, the *cāmar* is uncovered, to be sprinkled with water again.

3. Prompting by the *sarkār* : It is possible that originally the *sarkār* was the composer of the performance text who adapted Vijay Gupta's work by adding a few of his own verse.<sup>8</sup> The assumption is well supported by the fact that there exists quite a few versions of texts in print ascribed to Vijay Gupta and that the *sarkār* prompts the *gāyens* throughout the performance. Similar prompting is also noticed in the case of *Bhāsān Gān* as performed by Kaṇikā Rānī Sarkār and her troupe from Paikagacha, Khulna (discussed later).

4. Esoteric magical formulas : The Bishkhali troupe recites no esoteric magical formulas before a performance commences; but on suspension of each session magical formulas are recited so as to ensure that the goddess invoked in the initial session does not depart.

5. Donation : Donations are collected from the spectators on a number of occasions, of which the following are a few examples: (i) the marriage of Manasā, (ii) the ritualised worship of Manasā at Jhālu-Mālu's home, and (iii) blessing of Lakṣmīndar after his marriage.

6. Presence of female performers: According to the performers, the role of the *gāyens* have always been performed by women and is not a recent phenomenon.

7. Costume change : As noted earlier, there is only one section which involves costume change. According to the performers, it is a recent innovation.<sup>9</sup>

### 3.1.3 *Manasār Pācālī* :

In the district of Narail and adjoining areas in the west, north and east, there exists a genre of performance know as *Manasār Pācālī*, which is based on the *Padmā-purāṇ* by Nārāyaṇ Dev and Jānakī Nāth. It is performed only by members of Hindu community and also sponsored by the same community but Muslims are known to witness it as spectators. A *Manasār Pācālī* troupe from Lohagara, Narail, led by Bāṭul Candra Karmakār, is comprised of "low" caste Hindus (Śūdras) who are labourers, carpenters and tube-well mechanics.

Bāṭul Candra Karmakār's preceptor was Sudhir Kumār Karmakār, also a Śūdra, who died two or three years back at the age of sixty-five. He hailed from the same locality as his disciple and began his career as a performer at the age of twenty. Bāṭul Candra Karmakār and his troupe perform *Manasār Pācālī* mostly in the month of Śrāvaṇa, during Manasā Pūjā and in Bhādra during Viśvakarmā Pūjā. Occasionally the troupe is also sponsored to perform on other periods of the year by Hindus who pledge to offer the performance upon fulfilment of specific desires (such as child-birth and deliverance from snake-bite and other ailments) by Manasā. *Manasār Pācālī* is not performed in fairs (*melā*) or during the ceremonial worship (*pūjā*) of any other goddess.

The performance space of *Manasār Pācālī* (fig. 19) is temporarily arranged in the courtyards of rural homesteads. It is square in shape (some twelve feet each arm) and non-elevated. At the centre stands a pole to hold up an awning, extending beyond the performance space and its corners are tied to adjoining trees and huts. Mats and bed-spreads are laid on the floor of the performance space and the spectators sit on its all four sides, on hay-strewn ground. In the centre of the northern (or western) arm of the performance space stands a low stool (*āsan*), on which is placed an idol of Manasā. In front of it, flowers, marmelos leaves, *bātāsā* (sweet drops of sugar) and money are placed on a brass plate. The harmonium player (the music conductor or "master") and about three *dohārs* (choral singers) sit in a row on the arm opposite to the *āsan*; the *dhol* and the *cākī* (*kartāl*) players sit on their two sides. The *sarkār* (lead-narrator) performs in between the *āsan* and the choral singers and musicians. He is dressed in white *dhoti*, a white *pāñjābi* and a *nāmābalī* or white *cādar*. He also dons ankle-bells. The rest of the performers, all males, are dressed in *dhotis* (white) and *pāñjābis* or shirts (any colour).

The performance text of *Manasār Pācālī*, as mentioned earlier, is based on the *Padmā-purāṇ* by Nārāyaṇ Dev and Jānakī Nāth, composed in rhymed metrical verse. The performers render excerpts of the above text in lyric, alternated with renditions in extempore prose. Sometimes the lyrical passages are slightly altered by the performers; the passages in prose are also based on the same text but are much abridged. The troupe of Bāṭul Candra Karmakār performs the *Padmā-purāṇ* in seven episodes. These are :

1. *Sāgar Manthana* (Churning of the ocean)
2. *Manasār Janma* (Birth of Manasā)
3. *Manasār Bibāha* (The marriage of Manasā)
4. *Candradharer Bibād* (Dispute with Candradhar)
5. *Lakṣmīndarer Janma* (The birth of Lakṣmīndar)
6. *Bhāsān* (Bipulā's journey on a raft)

7. *Candradharer Pūjā* (Ritualised worship by Candradhar).

Bāpūl Candra Karmakār's troupe performs the seven episodes mentioned above in seven consecutive sessions, each of which begins around three or four in the afternoon and ends around midnight. Prior to the commencement of the first session, Manasā's idol is ritually installed on the *āsan* and is worshipped by the person who pledges the performance and the *sarkār*. The performers occupy the performance space at the end of preliminary rituals. Then the *sarkār* recites inaudibly a few secret formulas to protect himself, the members of his troupe and the performance space from all forms of evil attack. There follows a brief musical overture ("concert") played by the musicians, at the end of which the *sarkār* rises to sing the *bandanā*, with choral and musical accompaniment. The main body of performance is given next and is composed of the following elements:

1. *Narrative performance in lyric* : The *sarkār* renders excerpts drawn from the *Padmā-purāṇ* in lyric, accompanied by the *dohārs* who sing choral refrain and the musicians who play their instruments. Simultaneously the *sarkār* also dances, with the help of which he portrays the action of the lyric.

2. *Narrative performance in prose*: Each lyrical passage is alternated with a narration in prose, rendered singly by the *sarkār*. These narrations are mostly composed extempore but the plot of the *Padmā-purāṇ* is followed in a highly condensed form.

Other salient features of the performance :

Donation from the spectators : Donations (*firti*) are collected from the spectators at certain points within the narrative, such as the occasion of marriage between Bipulā and Lakṣmīndar, the ceremonial worship of Manasā by Jhālu and Mālu, etc.<sup>9a</sup>

3.1.4 *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* (Natore) :

In the rural areas of Natore district, Hindus and Muslims alike sponsor performances of *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* as a promised offering to goddess Manasā upon recovery of snake-bitten victims. Based on a version of the *Padmā-purāṇ*, it is performed after ritualised worship. It is also performed at the end of Manasā Pūjā held on the last day of the month of Śrāvaṇa. It is obligatory for the lead narrator of *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* to fast on the day ritualised worship of Manasā is held.

A troupe of *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* from Dighapatia, Natore, is comprised of five Muslims and four Hindus, engaged in professions such as fishing, farm labour and small-scale trading. Some of them are also professional *ojhās*. The lead narrator (*gāyen*) of the troupe, Manahar Hāldār (aged 45), traces the genre back to at least four generations: his preceptor was



Biṣṇupada Maṇḍal, the latter's preceptor was Chāmed Gāyen, who in turn was the disciple of Kācher Gāyen, all from Dighapatia.

The performance space (*āsar*) of *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* is constructed temporarily in the courtyard of rural homesteads (fig. 20). Square in shape (some twelve feet a side) and without elevation, it is shaded with branches of coconut leaves laid on a frame, the latter standing on four bamboo posts implanted in four corners. The spectators sit on hay-strewn ground all around the performance space. The image of Manasā is placed on the northern side of the *āsar*. All the performers are males and are dressed in white *pāñjābī* and white *dhottis*. The *gāyen* also wears ankle-bells and carries a *cāmar* (whisk). He sings and recites the narrative and also enacts some of the characters. The rest of the performers (*pāil*) sing choral refrain and dance; in addition, some of them also enact a few characters and play musical instruments (a *khol*, a pair of *kartāl* and two pairs of *juḍī*).

The text of *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* is an oral composition, comprised of rhymed metrical verse (which is sung during performance) and prose dialogue (enacted during the same). This particular text omits the voyage of Cānd Saodāgar and the loss of all his fourteen ships as well as six sons. Manahar Hāldār says, this is the text he received from his preceptor.

Performances of *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* may be given in the day time as well as at night. The Dighapatia troupe usually begins in one afternoon and continues till midnight, commences again the following afternoon and ends slightly after midnight. Prior to a performance (soon after the troupe occupies the performance space), the *gāyen* recites a few lines of magical formulas in order to protect himself, all other members and the instruments from all forms of evil attack. The performance commences as the *gāyen* stands with the *pāil* in the centre and sings the *bandanā* with the latter providing choral refrain and musical accompaniment (photograph 8). The main body of performance immediately follows the *bandanā* and it is comprised of the elements given below :

1. *Narrative performance in lyric* : The narrator moves all around the performance space rendering rhymed metrical verse in lyric, accompanied by the members of the *pāil* playing music and singing choral refrain. The songs often begin and end with a prolonged call of exclamation by the *gāyen* ("h-e-e-i-a"). The lyrical passages recount events as well as dialogue between characters. All songs are accompanied by dance. The drummer remains stationary in the centre, the rest of the *pāil* members move in a circle around him, in anti-clockwise direction and the *gāyen* in a larger circle around the *pāil*, also in anti-clockwise direction. The dance of the *pāil*, which includes swinging of the arms and jumping, is quite vigorous (photograph 9).

2. *Dialogic performance in prose and verse* : Important events are enacted in prose dialogue which is partly improvised. The dialogue is usually between two to three characters, one of whom is played by the *gāyen*. There is no change of costume. As the scene progresses, rest of the *pāil* members stand near the arms of the performance space. (photographs 10, 11). The roles played in these scenes include Padmā, Durgā, Behulā, Sanekā, Cān, Lakṣmīndar and others. It is interesting to note that the dialogic scene also contain a few lines in rhymed metrical verse and end with a brief narrative statement addressed to the spectators.

Finally, the performance ends with a song on ascension of Behulā and Lakṣmīndar to heaven on a chariot, as all the female (Hindu) spectators ululate in unison.

The following are some of the salient conventions of the performance :

1. All performers remain standing throughout.
2. There is no attempt towards realistic impersonation of characters although noticeable degree of emotion is expressed.
3. No scenic devices are used.
4. Donation (*feri*) is collected from spectators. One such occasion is immediately prior to Behulā's return home from the heavenly abode of the gods. The *gāyen* blesses with his whisk those who give donations. It is also customary for female spectators to pour water on the feet of the *gāyen* when Behulā is received at home by Sanekā.<sup>10</sup>

### 3.1.5 *Bhāsān Gān* :

There exists at Radalī village under Paikgacha police station in Khuina district, a troupe which performs *Bhāsān Gān*. It is led by Kaṇikā Rānī Sarkār (aged about 55), a woman who was born blind (photograph 12). Her troupe is comprised of six other female performers, most of whom are widows and all of whom belong to the Namaśudra caste (of "low" social order in the Hindu community). For most of them, performance is the major source of livelihood. According to Kaṇikā Rānī Sarkār, goddess Manasā commanded her in a dream to create a narrative eulogising her glory. Thereupon, she herself composed the performance text and trained other members of her troupe to perform it.

*Bhāsān Gān* is mostly sponsored by Hindus, but occasionally by Muslims as well. It is usually performed during Durgā Pūjā, Kālī Pūjā, Jagad-dhātṛī Pūjā, Vāsantī Pūjā and Manasā Pūjā, at various fairs and also as offering pledged for the fulfilment of desires (such as child-birth) or deliverance from ailments and snake-bite. At times it is also given solely for the purpose of entertainment. Thus, it may be performed any time of the year, although the

peak period is from the month of Māgh to that of Jaiṣṭhya. It is witnessed by members of all communities.

*Bhāsān Gān* is usually performed in the courtyard of rural homesteads. The performance space (fig. 21) is circular in shape (some fifteen to eighteen feet in diameter) and non-elevated. At its centre stands a miniature bridal chamber (about 18" square, slightly over 36" in height and decorated with flowers and ritual symbols), made of chopped sections of the trunk of banana plants and also date-palm leaves. Besides it is placed a miniature raft, made of similar material and is decorated with flowers (photograph 13). A plastic doll representing Lakṣmīndar is placed on it. In front of the miniature raft is placed the *ghaṭ* (pitcher) of Manasā (symbolic of her presence) and a winnowing tray containing the ritual accessories (which include 2.25 kg of rice, two betel leaves, two betel nuts, tk 1.25, incense, sweet-meat, sixteen bananas, a new *gāmchā*, etc.). Kaṇikā Rānī, the *gāyen* (led-narrator) along with the *dohār* (the choral singers), sit along the southern perimeter of the performance space; the spectators sit all around the same, leaving a passage free in the south, which connects the performance space with the green-room (*sāj ghar*) located in a nearby hut. The space is shaded with an awning tied to nearby huts and trees. No musical instruments are used by the performers. They are all dressed in *saris* and wear ankle-bells. They change their costume for the male characters, for which they exit to the green-room. Some examples of costume of male characters are as follows:

Lakṣmīndar : White *dhoti*, white *pāñjābi*, a shawl slung across the neck and a *gāmchā* tied on the head.

Cānd Saodāgar : Similar except that the colour is different.

Viśvakarmā : A white *dhoti*, a shirt, a piece of red cloth across the shoulder and *gāmchā* tied on the head. He carries a small axe.

Ghaṭak (Matchmaker) : White *pāñjābi*, white *dhoti* and an umbrella.

Hanumāna : A pair of trousers, a shirt, a tail made of rope tied to the waist and a plastic mask of monkey.

The text of *Bhāsān Gān* is an oral composition by Kaṇikā Rānī Sarkār. It is mostly in rhymed metrical verse (rendered in lyric and verse during performance) and prose dialogue. After elaborate description of the birth of Manasā, her marriage and the beginning of her dispute with Cānd Saodāgar, the text moves on to the events dealing with Behulā and Lakṣmīndar : their wedding, Lakṣmīndar's death by snake-bite, Behulā's journey to heaven and her obtaining the boon that brings back Lakṣmīndar's life.

The performance of *Bhāsān Gān* is given in one session, beginning at around eight in the evening and ending at about eleven in the following morning during summer and from

around ten in the morning to around mid-night during winter. Prior to performance, the *ghaṭ* is ritually installed and worshipped by the performers. The ceremonial worship over, the *gāyēn* recites a few secret formulas (*mantras*) silently, to protect himself, the troupe and the performance space from all forms of evil attack. The performance begins with a dance of all the *dohārs* with plastic serpents. It is followed by the *bandanā* (salutation song) to Manasā and other gods and goddesses such as Śiva, Viṣṇu, Durgā, Saraswatī and also to Allah and the Prophet. The main body of performance follows next and it is comprised of the elements given below:

1. *Narrative performance in lyric* : The *gāyēn* renders parts of the narrative in lyric, accompanied by the *dohārs* who sing choral refrain. These lyrical passages include descriptions of events as well as characters' speech. There is no musical accompaniment. All narrative sections of lyric are accompanied either by dance-movement of the *dohārs* or by visualisation of the action described. In the scene where Cānd goes with his son to have him married to Behulā, two *dohārs* carry the performer playing Lakṣmīndar on their outstretched arms locked onto each other as the *gāyēn* and a few other *dohārs* describe the journey of the bride-groom's party in lyric.
2. *Narrative performance in verse* : At a few places the *gāyēn* also renders parts of the narrative in verse, all by herself (photograph 12).
3. *Dialogic performance in prose* : All the performers (including the *gāyēn*) enact various characters of the narrative, such as Cānd Saodāgar, Sanekā, Lakṣmīndar, Behulā, Viśvakarmā, the Matchmaker, Dhanā, Manā etc. (photographs 13-14). These characters render parts of their dialogue in prose, all through prompted by the *gāyēn*.

The following are some other salient features of the performance:

1. All female performers : *Bhāsān Gān* troupe of Radali is one of the very few indigenous theatre troupes of Bangladesh which is composed only of women. Moreover, it is perhaps the only performance based on the *Manasā Maṅgalā*, (*Padmā-purāṇ*) the text of which is composed by a living poet who claims to have been commanded by the goddess Manasā herself.
2. Prompting : The practice of prompting bears interesting parallel with *Rayānī Gān*.
3. Use of visual elements: Although there is no use of set props, quite a large number of hand props are used. Important among these are plastic snakes in various scenes including that of the bridal chamber.
4. Use of mask : Masks are used for Hanumāna, a tiger, a vulture and a jackal.

5. Film songs: At a few places tunes of Hindi film songs are used.<sup>11</sup>

### 3.1.6 *Bhāsān Pālā Gān*

In the district of Narail (greater Jessore) and adjoining areas in the west, north and east, there exists a genre of performance known as *Bhāsān Pālā Gān*, which is based on the so-called *Baiśkābi Pādmā-purāṇ* (a text reconstructed with fragments from *Manasā Maṅgala* texts of 22 poets). It is performed only by members of the Hindu community. Pareś Candra Sarkār (age 37), one of the lead narrators of a troupe of *Bhāsān Pālā Gān* who hails from Dakshin Narail village under Narail police station and district, has been performing it for the last 18 years. His preceptor was his father, Maṅgal Candra Sarkār, who died in 1987 at the age of eighty and was, in turn, the disciple of Akṣay Candra Sarkār from Faridpur. Pareś Candra Sarkār's troupe is comprised of performers who are mostly labourers by profession. Their performance is sponsored by Hindus as well as Muslims during *Manasā Pūjā* (held on the last day of Śrāvaṇa), *Viśvakarmā Pūjā* (held in the beginning of Bhādra) and also during fairs and ceremonial worship of other deities, either with the objective of appeasing *Manasā* or for general entertainment. Occasionally the troupe is also sponsored to perform on other periods of the year by those who pledge to offer the performance upon fulfilment of specific desires (such as deliverance from snake-bite).

The performance space of *Bhāsān Pālā Gān* (fig. 22) is temporarily constructed in rural homesteads and in fair-grounds. It is square in shape (some twelve feet each arm) and non-elevated. On its four corners stand four bamboo posts to support the awning on top. The spectators are seated on all four sides, on hay-strewn ground and mats are laid on the floor of the performance space. In the centre of its northern arm is placed a low stool (*āsān*) on which stands the *ghaṭ* (pitcher), the symbolical representation of the serpent goddess. On one of its sides, the ritual offerings and *cāmar* (whisk) are placed on a brass plate. The harmonium player ("master"), along with four *dohārs* sit in a row along the western arm, while the *dhol* and *juḍi* players sit opposite to them along the eastern arm. There are two *sarkārs* (lead narrators) in the troupe; while one performs, the other sits with *dhol* and *juḍi* players. All the performers are dressed in white *dhotis* and white *pāñjābis* and wear garlands of *tulsī* (basil).

The performance text of *Bhāsān Pālā Gān*, as mentioned earlier, is based on the *Padmā-purāṇ* by the 22 poets, included in whom are Nārāyaṇ Dev, Jānakī Nāth, Vijay Gupta and Ketakā Dās. The *sarkārs* render excerpts of the above text in lyric, alternated with prose renditions (composed by themselves) in which the story (drawn from the same text) is

narrated in abridged form. Pareś Candra Sarkār and his troupe perform the *Padmā-purāṇ* narrative in five episodes. These are:

1. *Manasār Janma* (Birth of Manasā)
2. *Mansār Bibāha* (Marriage of Manasā)
3. *Bāniā* (Trading voyage of Cānd Saodāgar)
4. *Bipulā-Lakṣmīndarer Janma* (Birth of Bipulā i.e., Behulā and Lakṣmīndar and their marriage)
5. *Bhāsān* (The journey of Bipulā on a raft, her return with Lakṣmīndar, Cānd's offering of worship to Manasā and ascent of Bipulā and Lakṣmīndar to heaven).

Pareś Candra Sarkār's troupe performs the five episodes mentioned above in five consecutive sessions, either at night or in afternoon and evening. The night-time sessions begin at around 10 p.m. and end at around 3 a.m.; the afternoon and evening sessions begin at around 3 p.m. and end around 10 p.m. Before the performance begins, Manasā's *ghaṭ* is ritually installed on the *āsan* and one of the *sarkārs* offer worship. When the rituals of worship are over, he inaudibly recites a few secret formulas (*mantras*) to protect himself, all the members of the troupe and the performance space from all forms of evil attack. There follows a brief musical overture, at the end of which *bandanā* is rendered by one of the *sarkārs*. It offers salutations to Hindu deities (including Manasā, Parvatī and Saraswatī), preceptors of the *sarkārs*, the spectators and the four directions. The main body of performance begins after the *bandanā*. In it, the two *sarkārs* pose questions to each other and render the narrative as answers to the questions. For example, one of the *sarkārs* asks the other as to how Manasā was born. Thereupon, the latter renders the section on Manasā's birth and at the end poses another question to the former as to who were among the first to offer worship to Manasā. Thereupon the former relates the section on offering of worship by Gopāla and Malatī. Thus continues the performance in chronological order of the narrative.

The main body of performance is composed of the following elements:

1. *Narrative performance in lyric*, in which the *sarkārs* render in lyric excerpts drawn from the *Padmā-purāṇ* and is accompanied by choral refrain sung by the *dohārs* and music played by the musicians.
2. *Narrative performance in prose*, in which the *sarkārs* render in extempore prose the narrative of the *Padmā-purāṇ* in abridged form. The narrative performance in prose is alternated with that in lyric. Performance of each session ends with utterance of the name of Lord Hari and orchestral music.

Some other salient features of *Bhāsān Pālā Gān* :

1. Donation, known as *bhikṣā*, is collected from the spectators.
2. Sweetmeats offered to the goddess during the ritualised worship is distributed to the spectators at the end of performance.<sup>12</sup>

### 3.1.7 *Biṣaharīr Gān* :

The narrative of *Manasā Maṅgala*, performed in an abridged version in the rural areas of Rangpur and Dinajpur, is known as *Biṣaharīr Gān*. It is interesting because it is performed mostly by Muslim peasantry for spectators who are also mostly Muslims. It may be performed throughout the year but not as a promised offering to Manasā or on the occasion of any ceremony or ritualised worship.

The narrative of *Biṣaharīr Gān* commences with the birth of Manasā and ends with the revival of Lakṣmīndar in heaven: the return of Behulā is rendered in a brief epilogue. The entire performance is given in a single night beginning at around nine in the evening and ending by day-break.

*Biṣaharīr Gān* is mostly performed in the outer courtyards of homesteads belonging to Muslim farmers. The performance space (fig. 23) is a temporary structure, square in shape (some nine feet a side) and non-elevated. Four corner posts support an awning on top. "Petromax" lanterns or electric lamps are suspended from the posts to serve as lighting. The spectators sit on all four sides of the performance space and in its centre stands a table. The performers are comprised of a lead narrator (*gīdāl*), his assistant (*dohār*), two choral singers (*pāil*) and two female impersonators (*chokrās*). Other than the ankle-bells worn by the *chokrās*, the only musical instrument used is a *jhāp-tāl* carried by the *gīdāl*. The latter is dressed in white *pājāmā* or chequered *lungi* and a white *pāñjābi*, the *chokrās* in *saris* and have their heads tied with kerchiefs and the rest in daily life attire (*lungi* and *shirt*).

The performance begins with a brief *bandanā*, which is followed by the main body of performance composed of :

1. *Narrative performance in lyric*
2. *Narrative performance in verse*
3. *Narrative performance in prose*
4. *Dialogic performance in prose.*

The lyrical passages are rendered by the *gīdāl* and the *dohār* with choral accompaniment of the *pāil* and *chokrās*. The performers also dance around the central table as they sing. In the passages of dialogic performance, the *gīdāl* enacts the lead male roles, *dohār* the secondary male roles and *chokrās*, the female roles. During these passages, all the performers continue

moving around the central table. Similar movement also continues during the passages of verse recitation and prose renditions, both of which are led by the *gīdāl* and supported by the *dohār*.<sup>13</sup>

### 3.1.8 *Beilyā Nācārī* :

In parts of Tangail, there exists a magico-religious performance commonly known as *Beilyā Nācārī* (or *Beilyā Satīr Gān*) which is given during healing ceremony of the snake-bitten and for propitiating goddess Manasā. On these occasions, the performance is spread over a day and a night and it is believed that the act of reviving Lakṣmīndar to life (in the performance) works sympathetically on the snake-bitten to the effect that the latter is cured. *Beilyā Nācārī* may also be performed on any other occasion if a sponsor so desires. These performances begin around ten in the evening and end by sun-rise. The troupe is all-male; most of the performers are dependent on professions such as farming, masonry and service of office peons as their primary source of livelihood. Curiously, most of them are Muslims by faith.

The performance space of *Beilyā Nācārī* (fig. 24) is square in shape (some 18 feet a side) and non-elevated. on four corners and centre of which stand five bamboo poles to support a canopy on top. "Petromax" lanterns or electric lamps are suspended from these poles to serve as lighting. In the centre of the square, the musicians and the choral singers sit in a circle of about six feet in diameter. The narrator, the dancers and the actors perform in the remaining area. The spectators sit all around the performance space. The green-room (*sāy ghar*), located beyond the spectators in a nearby homestead or a specially constructed enclosure, is connected to the performance space with a narrow passage running from the centre of any of its sides.

The lead narrator (*gāyen*) is dressed in a white *pāñjābi* and a white *pājāmā* with a white shawl around his shoulder. He narrates the story in improvised prose, performs the role of Sāyman Saodāgar (Sāyebene), prompts other performers where necessary and also sings the first two lines of each song. The musicians (*bāyen*) are dressed in red *pāñjābi* and red *pājāmās* and they play harmonium, *tablā*, *juḍi* and *khaṭak-tāra* (*caṭi*). The choral singers who sit with the musicians are known as *pāch-dohār*. They are five in number and are also dressed in red *pāñjābis* and red *pājāmās*. The singers who dance around the central circle are known as *āg-dohār*. Two of them are female impersonators, dressed in *saris* with crowns and ankles-bells and are also called *chukrā* (variation of *chokrā*, i.e., a lad). One of them enacts the role of *Beilyā* (*Behulā*) and the other, her *dāsī* (maid servant). Two others of the *āg-dohār* are dressed in the costume of the royalty; one of them plays the role of



Lakṣmīndar and the other, his friend Sakṣmīndar. All these four performers also carry handkerchiefs in their hands. The fifth member of the *āg-dohār* plays the *khañjani*. The other performers enter from the *sāj ghar* to enact specific roles, at the end of which they go back to the same place. Some of the major roles they portray are Padmā (Manasā), Pavan (the wind god), Viśvakarmā (the divine architect) and his assistant, Śiva, Parvatī, Chidān Pāl (the potter) and his wife, Uttam Herāni (the sweeper) and his wife, etc. These characters are all dressed in appropriate costume. Also to enter from the *sāj ghar* is the "Side Player" who is dressed like the *gāyen* and enacts the role of Cāndu (Cānd) Saodāgar. He also manages the *sāj ghar* end as the *gāyen*'s assistant.

The text of *Beilyā Nācārī* is prosometric in form and is based on a version of the *Padmā-purāṇ*. Parts of the text, composed in rhymed metrical verse, are rendered as lyric during performance; the prose narrative and dialogical sections are improvised. Mohammad Saman Ali, a *gāyen* of *Beilyā Nācārī* from Sundar village in Gopalpur, Tangail, learnt his text from his preceptor Mohammad Sarkar from Khas Para, Madhupur, Tangail. It is performed in two episodes: the *Bāzār Pālā* (from the birth of Padmā to the marriage of Beilyā and Lakṣmīndar and the *Jīvan Pālā* (from the death of snake-bitten Lakṣmīndar to the return of Beilyā with him and his six brothers from the court of the gods, her subsequent test of chastity and her final ascent to heaven with him).

A performance of *Beilyā Nācārī* begins with a *bandanā* addressed to Padmā, Allah, the Prophet, Fatima, the Hīmalayas, Mecca, Khīr-nadīr Sāgar, Bhānu (the sun god), the stars in the sky, Vāsuki and the spectators. The main body of performance comes next and it is composed of the following elements :

1. *Narrative performance in lyric* : The *gāyen* sings the first two lines of each song and then passes the task of singing to the *āg-dohār* as he joins the central circle. The *āg-dohār* continues rest of the song and simultaneously dances around the central circle. The refrain of the song is sung only by the *pāch-dohār*, during which period the *āg-dohār* continues to dance silently around the central circle, creating visual splendour with their handkerchiefs (photograph 17).

2. *Narrative performance in prose* : The *gāyen* presents the narrative also in improvised prose of regional dialect. During these passages he continues moving all around the performance space and the *āg-dohār* rests in the central circle. Sometimes a choral member also delivers brief interjections. Rhymed couplets are frequently used by the *gāyen* for switching from one locale to another. He not only describes events in his narration but also renders the words of various characters.

3. *Dialogic performance in lyric* : Parts of the narrative is enacted by characters in lyrical dialogue. The *pāch-dohār* accompanies the characters with choral refrain and the orchestra with music. When required, Beilyā, her maid, Lakṣmīndar and Sakṣmīndar "enter" from and "exit" to the central circle; the rest of the characters appear from and exit to the *sāj ghar*. In all scenes of lyrical dialogue, save those which are pathetic, it is usual for the characters to dance with the song. In pathetic scenes, expressive gesture coupled with rhythmic movement are usually employed (photographs 15, 16).

4. *Dialogic performance in prose* : Parts of the narrative is also enacted by the characters concerned in improvised prose dialogue of regional dialect. Sometimes, they are prompted by the *gāyen*. During these sections, the characters enter and exit in the same manner as in the dialogic performance in lyric.

Some other relevant features of *Beilyā Nācārī* performance:

1. Scenic devices: The scene where Cāndu Saodāgar sails, his ship is represented by a contraption made of an oval frame of bamboo slip, the outside of which is draped with a *sari*. Inside the contraption Cāndu and his sailors hold the frame at waist length, thus concealing their bodies from the waist to the feet because of the *sari*. Two men carry out the movement of rowing with oars and the performers move around the central circle. The bridal chamber of iron is represented by a frame-work of a house made of bamboo slip with enough space inside for two characters, to sit. In the *Jīyan Pālā*, during Beilyā's journey on the raft with Lakṣmīndar's dead body, the performer playing Lakṣmīndar lies inert on the floor of performance space as the performer playing Beilyā sings and executes movement around the central circle.

2. Props : In the *Jīyan Pālā*, snakes sent by Padmā to bite Lakṣmīndar inside the iron chamber are represented by plastic toys. Performers in black dress appear from the *sāj ghar* moving these toys as they crawl on the floor.<sup>14</sup>

### 3.1.9 *Bhāsān Yātrā* :

A genre of dialogic performance based on the legend of Manasā and Behulā-Lakṣmīndar as recounted in the *Padmā-purāṇ*. *Bhāsān Yātrā* is known to have been extremely popular some fifty years ago all over north and south-west Bangladesh and also in parts of rest of the country. It used to be performed only by Hindus and at Hindu homesteads in the district of Thakurgaon (greater Dinajpur), mostly by Hindus along with a few Muslims at Hindu as well as Muslim homesteads in Natore (greater Rajshahi), mostly by Hindus along with a few Muslims at Hindu homesteads (when sponsored by the Hindus) and in the fields away from human habitation (when sponsored by the Muslims) in Banshgram, Narail (greater Jessore)

and by both Hindus and Muslims at the homesteads of Hindus only in greater Barisal. But today it is fast dying out and only three amateur troupes who still perform *Bhāsān Yātrā* could be located in all the regions mentioned above. One of these is led by Bonā Prāmāṇik, reported to be 105 years old, from the village of Nepal-dighi under Natore police station and district.

The *Bhāsān Yātrā* troupe led by Bonā Prāmāṇik is composed of about 25 performers (including 5 musicians), all of whom are males. Most of the performers, including Bonā Prāmāṇik himself, are Hindus. He is a well-off farmer, his son is in dairy farming and quite a number of the performers are employed by the latter. A few others are shop-keepers, traders and farmers. The troupe performs *Bhāsān Yātrā* throughout the year if and when sponsored - which is hardly over six or seven times a year. Performances are sponsored by well-off Hindus as well as a few Muslims, as pledged offerings to goddess Manasā on recovery of snake-bitten victims, as pastime entertainment and also on the occasion of Manasā Pūjā held on the last day of Śrāvaṇa. The performance is witnessed by Hindus as well as Muslims.

*Bhāsān Yātrā* is given in temporarily constructed performance space and also in *nāṭ-maṇḍapas*. The temporarily constructed space in which Nepal-dighi troupe usually performs (fig. 25), is square in shape (some twelve feet a side) and non-elevated. On each of its four sides stand three posts, equidistant from each other, to support canopy (of cloth, corrugated iron sheets or jute-sticks) on top. Ropes bound to the posts demarcate the performance space, leaving open half of one side, from where runs a passage about six feet wide to the green-room (*sāj ghar*) located in one of the huts adjoining the courtyard. The prompter sits at a corner of the side which connects the entry-passage. The musicians (most of whom also sing choral refrain) sit along the arm opposite the entry passage, outside the performance space. They play *dhol*, harmonium, flute, *judi* and *kartāl*. The spectators sit on hay-strewn ground on all four sides of the performance space, men separately from women. In *nāṭ-maṇḍapas*, the performance is given in the centre and a passage connects it with the green-room located outside the *maṇḍapa*. Troupes in Ruhia, Thakurgaon used to perform in a space with similar dimension as that of Nepal-dighi, but would usually have posts in the four corners and one in the centre to hold up the awning. Troupes in Banshgram, Narail performed on elevated square (some 18" high and 12' a side) with four corner posts to hold up the awning. A ramp ran down from one of the sides to join the connecting passage leading to the green-room (located in one of the huts near the courtyard or a temporary enclosure situated at a distance). The musicians sat on the ground on two sides perpendicular to the ramp-side: the percussionists (*dhol* and *judi*) along with a few choral singers (*dohārs*) on one side and the string and wind instrumentalists (harmonium, flute and violin) along with

a few other choral singers on the opposite side. Performance space similar to that of Narail is still in use in parts of greater Barisal, with the only exception that the 'canopy' is nearly always of corrugated iron sheets. In all cases the performance space is illuminated with electric lamps (where electricity is available) or with "petromax" (kerosine) lanterns, tied to the corner posts. There is no specific dress for musicians and choral singers. The following is an example of costuming as used by a troupe of *Bhāsān Yātrā* from Kalihati, Tangail.

Padmā : Colourful *ghāgrā*, blouse, black sleeve-less jacket with silver embroidered border and a crown with a length of cloth hanging over the back (photograph 25).

Lakṣmīndar: Colourful *dhoti*, *fatuā* (sleeve-less shirt), sleeveless jacket with golden embroidered border and a crown.

Behulā : Colourful *ghāgrā*, blouse, sleeve-less jacket with embroidery and a crown with a piece of cloth hanging over the back.

Cānd Saodāgar : *Pājāmā* and knee-long full-sleeved tunic.

Śiva : A piece of cloth wrapped around the waist, bare upper body, cape and a crown with a serpent (photograph 24).

Tiger : A tiger mask, a full-sleeved shirt and trousers with print which appears like Cheeta spots.

Texts of *Bhāsān Yātrā* are mostly written in dialogic form, composed in prose and verse (the latter rendered as lyric during performance). A few texts (such as that performed by the Nepal-dighi troupe) also contain a few passages of narration. Usually one episode is performed in *Bhāsān Yātrā*, which begins with the birth of Manasā and ends with Cānd Saodāgar offering ritualised worship to Manasā on Behulā's return from the heaven with all sons of Cānd and all his ships. Details of the narrative varies from text to text.

The Nepal-dighi troupe performs the entire text (from the birth of Padmā to Cānd offering worship to her) during performances given as pledged offering and during Manasā Pūjā. The former is given only on Thursdays and the latter on the last day of Śrāvaṇa. These performances begin around nine in the morning and end around midnight. The same troupe performs an abridged version of the text in two episodes (from the birth of Lakṣmīndar to Cānd offering worship to Padmā and Lakṣmīndar's hunting of birds leading to his meeting of Behulā at a bāzār) in performances given for past-time entertainment. These can be given on any day, from around nine in the evening to sun-rise (photographs 18-21). On the other hand, there were no specific day for the performance of the Banshgram troupe as their performances were not given as pledged offerings. These would begin around nine in the evening and end by one in the morning.

The performance of Banshgram troupe used to begin with a brief musical overture, followed by the national anthem and then the *bandanā* addressed to Bhagavatī (Durgā) and Kālī. On the other hand, the Nepal-dighi troupe renders the *bandanā* immediately after musical overture. It (the *bandanā*) is addressed to Kālī, Manasā and other gods and goddesses. The main body of performance is given next and it is composed of the following elements :

1. *Dialogic performance in prose* : Portions of the narrative is rendered in prose dialogue by the characters, often prompted by the prompter. Their performance is declamatory and akin to that of mythological *Yātrā*.

2. *Dialogic performance in lyric* : Interspersed between passages of prose dialogue, the characters also render some of their lines in lyric, with choral and musical accompaniment. There is no dance during these passages but the characters move in rhythm of the song as they execute their gestures and movements.

3. *Mimetic performance* : At some points in the performance of Nepal-dighi troupe, the choral singers render songs describing an act as the character/s silently perform the action. Such mimetic segments are used for illustrating the birth of Lakṣmīndar, his growing up, the match-maker's journey to Bācho Beniā's house, Behulā's cooking in the bridal chamber, Behulā and Lakṣmīndar playing a game of dice in the same place, the journey of Behulā on the raft, etc. Similar mimetic segments were absent in the performance of Banshgram troupe.

Some other important features of *Bhāsān Yātrā* performance are :

1. Donation : Donations are collected by the characters at suitable points of the performance.

2. Gender of performers : All performers are males.

3. Vivek : Vivek (personification of Conscience) used to be employed as a device for the delivery of divine messages in the performances of the Banshgram troupe. Similar device was also seen in the performance of the Kalihati (Tangail) troupe. The character, in both cases used to be and is costumed in white *dhoti*, white *pāñjābi*, a *gāmachā* (tied in the head) and a white shawl (photograph 22). But the character is absent in the performances of Nepal-dighi troupe.

4. Scenic elements : Only two chairs, positioned along one of the arms of performance space, are used for all purpose of sitting. Serpents (made of plastic or rope and cloth) are operated by the performers who hold them in their hands and move them on the floor as they (the performers) move on their knees. In the battle-scene between Padmā and Yama (as performed by the Nepal-dighi troupe), Nārada rides on a horse made of a thin and curve

branch of a tree which is held between his thighs by ropes attached to the branch and slung over his shoulders. In the scene of Behulā sailing on the raft (performed by the same troupe), Lakṣmīndar lies stationary at one side of performance space as Behulā moves around.

5. Make-up : The most striking use of make-up was seen in the performance of Kalihati (Tangail) troupe, in which a comic character (school-boy studying with Lakṣmīndar) wore make-up which was similar to those worn by the male performers of the *Sanḡ Yātrā* (discussed later) from the same region. The make-up of Behulā (photograph 23) was also interesting for it bore similarity with that of the *gāyens* of *Ravānī Gān*.

Clearly, the Banshgram performance is from post-1947 period, since from this time the convention of singing patriotic songs was introduced in the *Yātrā*. Moreover, shorter duration of performance, lesser degrees of intervention of the divinities and the presence of Vivek also support above deduction. On the other hand, the absence of Vivek, absence of patriotic songs, longer duration of performance and dominant role of the deities in the Nepal-dighi performance points to an earlier tradition which was possible current in 19th century.<sup>15</sup>

### 3.1.10 *Ĵhāpān Khelā* :

In the district of Narail (greater Jessore), there exists a genre of performance known as *Ĵhāpān Khelā*, in which two troupes compete against each other with live snakes and render episodes from the *Padmā-purāṇ* by Nārāyaṇ Dev and Jānakī Nāth. The performers are professional snake-charmers. *Ĵhāpān Khelā* may be performed at any time of the year, but mostly during the month of Śrāvaṇa, on the occasion of Manasā Pūjā. Usually sponsored by the Hindu community, and occasionally by Muslims as well, it is performed as a part of ritualised worship of Manasā and also for entertainment. According to Abdul Hafiz, the annual meeting of the *ojhās* on the occasion of Manasā Pūjā is also known as *Ĵhāpān*.<sup>16</sup>

The performance space of *Ĵhāpān Khelā* (fig. 26) is temporarily constructed in front of temple sanctum of Manasā. It is square in shape (some thirty feet a side), non-elevated and bounded by fencing of bamboo slip. The spectators stand on all four sides, but mostly on the two sides which run perpendicular to the side opposite the sanctum. The performance space as well as the spectators' area is covered with awning. Two troupes of performers who compete against each other stand along the sides which run perpendicular to that opposite to the sanctum. Each troupe is dressed in a particular colour, such as orange, yellow, red, white or any other than blue,. The dress for the men is usually comprised of two unstitched pieces, one for the lower part and another for the top. The women wear short-length *saris* (reaching

slightly lower than the knees), the tail end of which is tightly wrapped around the waist. Each troupe also includes musicians who play *ḍhol*, *ḍholak*, *kartāl*, *ḅāśi* and *bīn-ḅāśi*. It is usual for each troupe to have as many as thirty snakes in its possession.

After preliminary rituals, each troupe sends its snake/s to the opponents, upon which the latter attempts to protect themselves (from the snakes) with the help of secret formulas (*mantras*). As each troupe sends its snake/s, it also renders excerpts from the *Padmā-purāṇ*. The troupe which fails to capture or send the snake/s back and are stricken by it/them, accept defeat.

Performance of *Ḥhāpān Khelā* is given both at day-time as well as in the evenings. The evening performances are well-lit by "petromax" (kerosine) lanterns or electric lamps. The total length of performance varies from an hour to five hours.<sup>17</sup>

### 3.2 Tales Related to Kṛṣṇa and Caitanya

#### 3.2 1. *Līlā Kīrtan* :

Popular all over Bangladesh among the Hindus is *Līlā Kīrtan* (also known as *Padabali Kīrtan* and *Rasa Kīrtan*), a genre of performance entirely devotional in nature. It is performed specially during Vaiṣṇavite religious festivals associated with Kṛṣṇa (for example, the *Janmāṣṭamī*, i.e., the birth of Kṛṣṇa, the *Rās Yātrā*, i.e., the festival commemorating Kṛṣṇa's dance with Rādhā on the full-moon in the month of Kārtika, the *Dol Yātrā*, i.e., the spring festival commemorating Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's swinging on a rocking cradle on the full-moon in the month of Phālgun) and also those associated with Caitanya (for example on the occasion of his birth on the full-moon in the month of Phālgun). It is also performed during yearly *Hari-sabhā* (an assembly to discuss the glory of Lord Hari, i.e., Nārāyaṇa or Kṛṣṇa) usually held for three days of the dark fortnight of the month of Baiśākh. It may also be performed at any time of the year, mostly in rural homesteads, for the purpose of accruing religious merit. Hindus, specially the Vaiṣṇavites, believe *Līlā Kīrtan* is the physical representation of the *līlās* (sports) of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, and also of Caitanya. Performing or witnessing performance of *Līlā Kīrtan* leads to recollection and reflection of the *līlās* of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa at Vraja (Mathurā and Vṛndāvana) and also of Caitanya at Navadvīp. According to the scriptures of Gauḍīya (Bengal) Vaiṣṇavism, recollection and reflection of the *līlās* is an expedient to achieving devotion (*bhakti*). Therefore *Līlā Kīrtan*, in effect, leads to the attainment of devotion; its objective is to infuse devotional sentiment in the devotees.<sup>18</sup> *Līlā Kīrtan* performers are mostly Vaiṣṇavites, who may belong to any caste.

The profession of the more renowned performers is solely performance but for those less renowned, cultivation or trade is usually the primary source of income.

*Līlā Kīrtan* is generally performed in *nāṭ-maṇḍapas* (permanent performance space constructed in front of temple sanctums) or in temporary performance space constructed in the outer courtyards of rural homestead or in those temples where *nāṭ-maṇḍapas* are absent. A performance of *Līlā Kīrtan* witnessed at Patraīl (under Delduar police station in Tangail) was given at the Caṇḍī Śmaśān Ghāt Nāṭ-maṇḍapa (fig. 27). It is a nearly squared shaped construction (33 feet x 30 feet), open on all four sides and has a brick-built floor. Its roof is *āt-cālā* (i.e., in two tiers, the upper smaller than the lower, each tier constructed with four sloping sections of corrugated iron sheets). The roof stands on eighteen timber posts positioned along the perimeter. The performance was given at the centre, a nearly square-shaped area (15 feet x 12 feet), marked by four timber posts standing on each of its corners. The spectators sat on all four sides of the performance space. In the centre of the north arm (of the performance space) was placed a low stool (*āsan*, i.e., the seat) on which stood garlanded pictures of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and Caitanya. In a semi-circle opposite the *āsan* sat the performers : the *kola-bāḍak* (second *khol* player) near the centre of western arm, followed by the *juḍi* player, next to whom sat the *kola-dohār* (the second choral singer); near the centre of the eastern arm sat the *śir-bāḍak* (the chief *khol* player), followed by another *juḍi* player, then the flute player and the *śir-dohār* (the chief choral singer who also played the harmonium). The *juḍi* players also sang choral passages. They were all dressed in white *dhotis* and white *pāñjābis*. The lead narrator (*kīrtanīyā*) performed in the space in between the *āsan* and the choral singers and musicians. He was dressed in a white *dhoti*, a white vest and a white *uttariyā* hung across the shoulder. Similar arrangement and way of dressing was also followed at another performance of *Līlā Kīrtan* witnessed at Kālībaḍī Nāṭ-maṇḍapa in Gopalpur (Tangail district). Two other performances of *Līlā Kīrtan* witnessed at the Rādhā Govinda Jīu Temple and the Prabhu Jagadbandhu Mahāprakāś Temple at Wari and Hatkhola respectively in Dhaka city, were given in the courtyard in front of the temple sanctum. The choral singers and musicians sat in a line along the western arm (at the Rādhā Govinda Jīu Temple) and the eastern arm (at the Prabhu Jagadbandhu Mahāprakāś Temple), the *kīrtanīyā* in front of them and the spectators along the remaining three sides of the courtyard. While the performers at the Jagadbandhu Mahāprakāś Temple were dressed in the same manner as the Patraīl and the Gopalpur performers, some of those at the Rādhā Govinda Jīu Temple were dressed in orange *dhotis*, orange *pāñjābis* and orange *uttariyas*. *Līlā Kīrtan* is also performed in the outer courtyards of rural homesteads, where the performance space is constructed temporarily in front of the temple. Square in shape (some



12 feet each arm), it is shaded with a canopy which rests on four bamboo posts standing on its four corners. It may be elevated to a height of about 18 inches or, as is the case more often, be non-elevated. The rest of the arrangement is similar to those at the *nāt-maṇḍapas*. Although *Līlā Kīrtan* troupes are usually composed of only male performers, occasionally female *kīrtanīyās* and *śīr-dohārs* can be seen to perform, specially in southern Bangladesh.

Texts of *Līlā Kīrtan* are chronological arrangements of isolated *padas* (songs) on a particular *līlā* of Kṛṣṇa (or Caitanya), composed by various poets. Theoretically, the arrangement can be based on individual choice of each *kīrtanīyā*, but in practice, set arrangements handed down from preceptors to disciples are more common. Innumerable *padas* have been composed in Bangla and Vrajabuli (mixture of Abahatṭha and Maithili) languages by renowned poets such as Vidyapati and Caṇḍidāsa (prior to the birth of Caitanya in 1486), Dvija Caṇḍidāsa, Murāri Gupta, Narahari Sarkār, Basu Ghosh, Vaṁśīvadan Cātujjya, Nayānanda Miśra and others (contemporaries of Caitanya) and Govinda Dāsa, Balārama Dāsa (2nd), Jñāna Dāsa, Rāi Śekhara, Kavirañjana (jr.), Kavi Śekhara, Vasanta Rāy, Ananta Dāsa, Yadu Nandana and others (in the 2nd half of 16th and 17th centuries) and also by other poets in the following centuries. The most voluminous compilation of these *padas* has been made in the *Pada Kalpataru* by Vaiṣṇava Dāsa (Gokulānandana Sen) in which over three thousand *padas* composed by over one hundred and thirty poets have been collected. Another compilation made in the recent years by Harekrishna Mukhopadhyay, titled *Vaiṣṇava Padavali*, presents the work of over two hundred poets.

*Līlā Kīrtan* is presented in accordance with the theory of *rasa* expounded by the six *gosvāmins*, Sanātana, Rūpa, Raghunātha Bhatta, Raghunātha Dāsa, Gopāla Bhatta and Jīva, in 16th century at Vṛndāvana. Of all their work on the theory, Rūpa Gosvāmin's *Ujjvala-nīlamanī* is considered to be of primary importance. The theory defines *rasa* as the savouring of the ultimate truth, the objective of which is Kṛṣṇa. The *gosvāmins* have identified four principal *rasas*: *dāsyā* (servitude), *vātsalya* (parental love), *sakhya* (companionship) and *ujjala* (radiant) or *madhur* (pleasant). In *Līlā Kīrtan*, the savouring of ultimate truth is made possible because of exuberance of *rasa*, for which it is also known as *Rasa Kīrtan*. Of the four principal *rasas*, the *ujjala* is the most comprehensive because it also includes the other three. It is divided into two parts: *bipralambha* (unfulfilled desire for union of the lovers) and *sambhoga* (joy of union of the lovers). Both *bipralambha* and *sambhoga* have been further divided into four parts, each of which is again sub-divided into eight parts. Thus *ujjala* or *madhur rasa* is sub-divided into sixty-four *rasas*, the most important of which are *pūrvarāga*, *mān*, *prema-vaicitrya* and *pravāsa* (of the *bipralambha* category) and *goṣṭha*, *rās*, *dān-līla*, *naukā-vilās*, *jhulan*, *holi*, *abhisār*, *bipralabdha*,

*khaṇḍitā*, *kalahantaritā* and *māthur* (of the *sambhog* category).<sup>19</sup> Each of the *līlās* presented in *Līlā Kīrtan* places primary focus on any one of the above mentioned sixty-four sub-divisions. Some of the *līlās* popular in Bangladesh today are as follows: *Janma-līlā*, *Bāhya-līlā*, *Goṣṭha-līlā*, *Uttara Goṣṭha*, *Jala-kriḍā*, *Basan Haran*, *Vāsaka Sajjyā*, *Jhulan*, *Kuñja-bhanga*, *Pūrva-rāga*, *Abhisāra*, *Mān-bhañjan*, *Māthur*, *Vamśī-śikṣā*, *Khanditā*, *Kalahantaritā*, *Nandotsava*, *Holi*, *Vasanta*,<sup>20</sup> *Naukā-vilās* and *Rās*. It is evident from the above that some of the *rasas* are named according to some of the *līlās*. Narrative content of most of these *līlās* (such as *Mān-bhañjan*, *Māthur*, *Naukā-vilās* etc.) are the same as those of *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* (discussed later). It is important to note that the interest in all these *līlās* is not in horizontal movement of events but in delving the depth of a *rasa* in vertical movement. At the same time, a dexterous performer arranges the *padas*, delves deep and brings variation in the *rasas*, unfolds the narrative and develops the characters in a manner which holds the spectators spell-bound even though both the narrative as well as the characters are well-known.

Since its inception in 1576 (or a little later) at the great Vaiṣṇavite festival of Khetur,<sup>21</sup> *Līlā Kīrtan* has evolved into a number of styles, the distinction between which lie primarily on different modes of musical rendition. The following are some of the major styles:

1. *Garāṇhāṭī*, the earliest style evolved by Narottama Dāsa at the festival of Khetur, is characterised by slow measure and long metre. It has been compared to the *dhrupāda* of Indian classical music.
2. *Manoharśāhī*, evolved by Āuliā Manohar Dāsa and his disciple Vamśīvadan Ṭhākur, is characterised by comparatively shorter meter, faster measure and complex melodic patterns. It has been compared to the *kheyāl* of Indian classical music.
3. *Reṇeti*, evolved by Vipradāsa Ghoṣ, is characterised by fast measure and short meter. It has been compared to the *thumri* of Indian classical music.<sup>22</sup>
4. *Ḍhap Kīrtan*, evolved from the *Manoharśāhī* style sometime in 18th century, is characterised by comparatively lighter movement and a high degree of alliteration. The *padas* are mostly composed in Bāṅglā. It has been compared to the *ṭappā* of Indian classical music. Madhu Kān, considered to be the leading exponent of the style, gained immense popularity with *Ḍhap Kīrtan* towards the middle of 18th century. Female *kīrtanīyās* also gained popularity towards the end of the century by performing a lighter version of the *Ḍhap*. In Bangladesh today, a mixed style resulting out of the *Manoharśāhī* and the *Ḍhap* is generally performed. There also exist two other lesser known styles, which are called the *Mandāriṇī* and the *Jhāḍkhaṇḍī*.

*Līlā Kīrtan* performance session may vary from a single day's (24 hours) to three days' duration. A 24-hour performance, beginning at dawn and ending at the following dawn, is known as *Aṣṭakālīya Līlā Kīrtan*. It is composed of eight *līlās* given non-stop one after the other by eight *kīrtanīyās* and their troupes. (Often, for practical purposes, the eight *līlās* may be divided into four *kīrtanīyās*). The eight *līlās* are selected in accordance with the following eight periods in which the 24-hour duration is divided.

1. *Nisānta* (day-break). Duration : 6 *danḍas* (1 *danḍa* = 24 minutes). *Līlās* performed : those associated with the awakening of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa at their arbour after night-long dalliance, their parting, return to their homes and going to bed.
2. *Prātaḥ* (early morning). Duration : 6 *danḍas*. *Līlās* performed : those associated with rising from bed and attending to morning chores by Rādhā (bathing, cooking etc.) and Kṛṣṇa (washing, milking the cows etc.).
3. *Pūrbānha* (fore-noon). Duration : 6 *danḍas*. *Līlās* performed : those associated with taking the cows for grazing by Kṛṣṇa and other cow-herds and their sports at the grazing ground.
4. *Madhyānha* (noon). Duration : 12 *danḍas*. *Līlās* performed : Rādhā's meeting with Kṛṣṇa at the pasture, stealing of his flute and other sports and the sun-worship.
5. *Aparānha* (afternoon). Duration : 6 *danḍas*. *Līlās* performed : those associated with preparation of various food by Rādhā for Kṛṣṇa and returning home of Kṛṣṇa and other cow-herds with their cows.
6. *Sāyam* (evening). Duration : 6 *danḍas*. *Līlās* performed : those associated with milking of the cows by Kṛṣṇa, sending of food cooked by Rādhā for Kṛṣṇa, his bathing and partaking of the food, and Rādhā's partaking of the remains.
7. *Pradoṣa* (night). Duration : 6 *danḍas*. *Līlās* performed : those associated with Kṛṣṇa going to bed at home, his stealing out of home and going to the arbour and Rādhā's stealing out of home for love tryst.
8. *Nakta* (late-night). Duration : 12 *danḍas*. Meeting of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, their dalliance, dance and union.<sup>23</sup>

*Līlā Kīrtan*, when performed for three consecutive days, also follows the above mentioned division of period and selection of *līlā* for each period in each of the three days. Beside the day-long and three-days-long performances, a single *līlā* may also be performed any time of the day or night. The duration of these performances and the choice of *līlā*, ideally, follows the scheme of eight divisions mentioned above. It is therefore unusual to sing *Goṣṭha* or

*Kuñjā-bhaṅga* at night and *Rās* or *Uttara-goṣṭha* in the morning. It is more common to sing *Khaṇḍitā* in the morning and *Kuñja-bhaṅga* at day-break. Some find it difficult to attend *Kalahantaritā* or *Mān* in the afternoon or evening. Again, *Jhulan*, *Nandotsava*, *Holi*, *Vasantā* etc. are usually performed only on the occasion of the festival concerned.<sup>24</sup>

Performance of each *līlā* begins with *hāṭati*, a solo performance on the *khol* by the *kola-bādak*, rendered standing. Devotees believe that Caitanya makes his invisible appearance at every performance space when invoked by the *hāṭati*. It is followed by a song in praise of Caitanya known as *gaura-candra*, which is composed in the same theme as that of the *līlā* to be performed. It is rendered standing by the *kīrtanīyā*, accompanied by choral refrain and music of the *dohārs* and the *bādaks* who remain seated. The *gaura-candras* are compositions in rhymed metrical verse. There exist numerous compositions from which the *kīrtanīyā* is free to choose as long as it echoes the theme of the *līlā* to be performed.<sup>25</sup>

The *gaura-candra* is followed by *mel-jamāṭ*, in which the *kīrtanīyā* and the *dohārs* set their voices in correct scale. It serves the same function as *alāp* in classical Indian music. Of late, the role of *mel-jamāṭ* is declining.<sup>26</sup> The main body of performance follows the *mel-jamāṭ* and is composed of the following elements.

1. *Narrative performance in lyric* : The *kīrtanīyā* renders the verses of the text (*padas*) in lyric, accompanied by the *dohārs* and the *bādaks* singing choral refrain and playing musical instruments. The *padas* sung by the *kīrtanīyās* contain characters' speech as well as description of action (photograph 29).

In order to explain and elaborate the underlying sentiment of the *padas*, the *kīrtanīyās* sing what is known as *ākḥara*. As Harekrishna Mukhopadhyay explains, *ākḥara* expresses what has not been expressed in the *padas*, transcending the primary meaning of the latter into resplendent overtones. The verses of *ākḥara* are usually composed either by the *kīrtanīyā* himself or are handed down to the disciple by the preceptor. On rare occasions, a gifted *kīrtanīyā* may also compose *ākḥara* in extempore during performance. At the end of each *ākḥara* the *kīrtanīyā* rests awhile, during which period the *khol bādaks* play on their instruments intricate rhythmic patterns.<sup>27</sup> (Photograph 26.)

In addition to the *ākḥara*, the *kīrtanīyā* also sings what are known as *tuk* and *chuṭ*. The former is a metrical composition abounding in alliteration, and is sung after *padas* which the *kīrtanīyā* wishes to highlight. These compositions are often from Vaiṣṇava poetry by known or even unknown poets.<sup>28</sup> *Chuṭ*, on the other hand, is a lyrical rendition of a part of a *pada* in a lighter vein in order to bring variation to the usually complex mode of singing.<sup>29</sup>

Simultaneously with rendition of lyrical passages, the *kīrtanīyā* also dances and physically depicts the action of the *padas* (photograph 27). The dance of the best *kīrtanīyās* of the past used to be structured in accordance with *āṅgika abhinaya* formulated in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*; but at present the formulations are not strictly adhered to. With the help of the dance, the *kīrtanīyās* portray the characters of the *līlā* and their actions.<sup>30</sup>

2. *Narrative performance in prose*: Since the *padas* are isolated lyrical pieces and not the narrative of a *līlā* complete in itself, the *kīrtanīyās* link the gaps between two separate *padas* with narration in prose, mostly composed in extempore. During these passages, he uses physical gestures and voice modulation in order to portray the action and rest of the performers remain seated. Beside narrating events, the *kīrtanīyā* also renders dialogue between characters and makes relevant comments on the action.<sup>31</sup>

Salient features of *Līlā Kīrtan* performance :

1. The lyrical passages are highly intricate and complex. Scholars have compared the passages to Indian classical music.
2. The performance is based on a highly developed system of aesthetics (that of the six *gosvāmins*) unlike any other genres of indigenous performances of Bangladesh. It is expected that not only the performers but also the spectators be well versed in the aesthetic system.
3. There is a great degree of participation of the spectators during a performance. It is common to witness performances where both the spectators as well as the performers riding high in devotional ecstasy. It is also usual to see both the spectators and the performers weeping, trembling, expressing unusual delight, falling in stupor or even swooning.<sup>32</sup>
4. At certain points, the performers repeat a choral passage over and over again at high pitch, accompanied by fast rhythm played on the *khol* and the *juḍi*. Known as *mātan*, these passages produce great degree of devotional fervour. The female spectators ululate and also blow on the *saṅkha*.<sup>33</sup>
5. Donation is collected during performance, not by the performers but by the organisers. Often young children dressed as Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa perform the job, as was the case in the Patrail performance.<sup>34</sup> (Photograph 28.)

As a rule, a performance of *Līlā Kīrtan* ends in the union of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. But in those performances, where more than one *kīrtanīyā* perform the same *līlā* in parts, each one but the last end their portions with a brief song on union of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, known as *jhumur*. If a single *kīrtanīyā* performs the same *līlā* over three or four nights, he also suspends each

night's performance with a *jhumur*.<sup>35</sup> At the end of the performance, after Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa have united, the *kīrtanīyā* along with his entire troupe moves around the *āsan* in anti-clockwise direction and sings the *bhuvan-maṅgal* song. Most of the spectators join the cyclic movement of the performers and sing choral refrain with them.<sup>36</sup>

### 3.2.2 *Pālā Kīrtan* :

Most of the episodes enacted in *Līlā Kīrtan* are also performed in a dialogic form known as *Pālā Kīrtan* (or more popularly *Līlā Kīrtan*, which is a misnomer). Performed on similar occasions and with similar objective as *Līlā Kīrtan*, *Pālā Kīrtan* is also given in *nāṭ-maṅḍapas* in front of sanctums of Vaiṣṇavite temples or in temporarily constructed performance space where *nāṭ-maṅḍapas* are not available. The latter (fig. 28) is usually square in shape (some twelve feet each arm) and non-elevated. Four corner posts support the awning on top. "Petromax" lanterns or electric lamps are suspended from the corner posts to serve as illumination for the performance. In the centre of the arm facing the temple sanctum is placed a low stool on which stands a brass pitcher filled with water, a lamp, some china-roses and a few burning sticks of incense. The *kīrtanīyā* (the leader of the troupe), the choral singers and the musicians sit in a semi-circle along the three remaining arms. The *kīrtanīyā* leads all choral passages with five to six choral singers, plays the harmonium himself and also conducts four to six musicians who play *khol*, *kartāl*, flute and a few other instruments. A narrow passage connects the *āsan*-side of performance space with the green-room located at a chamber beside the temple sanctum. Four or more (male) performers who enact the characters of the *līlā* enter from and exit to the above space (green-room).

The texts of *Pālā Kīrtan* are almost entirely dialogic and in verse, interspersed with a few lines of prose dialogue and verse narrations. All the dialogic passages in verse are rendered in lyric by the characters during performance and the verse narrations are rendered in lyric by the choral singers led by the *kīrtanīyā*. The episodes which are popularly performed in *Pālā Kīrtan* are *Māthur*, *Naikā-vilās*, (from the *līlās* of Kṛṣṇa) and *Nimāi Saṁnyās* (from the *līlās* of Caitanya).

The performance of *Pālā Kīrtan* begins with the *kīrtanīyā* rendering a *gaura-candra*, invoking the presence of Gaura (Caitanya) and Nityānanda (his close associate), with choral and musical accompaniment. The main body of performance is given next and it is composed of the following elements:

1. *Dialogic performance in lyric* : Most of the narrative is rendered in lyrical dialogue by performers who portray roles such as Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa, Nimāi (Caitanya), Nitāi and other

companions of Caitanya. Simultaneously with all lyrical passages, the performers also dance and mimetically enact the action of the characters.

2. *Dialogic performance in prose* : At few points between lyrical passages, the characters also render a few lines in prose.

The performance ends with a song of union sung by Vṛndā (with choral and musical accompaniment) as she dances around the divine couple, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, amidst ululation from the female spectators.

Some other important features of *Pālā Kīrtan* performance :

1. *Costume* : The following costume were worn by the performers in the episode titled *Māthur*, given by Nārāyaṇa Bhoumik and his party from Kendua in Netrokona district (greater Mymensingh).

(i) Rādhā: Colourful *sari* a crown on the head, a head-dress attached to the crown which falls over her back and a garland of imitation flower on the neck.

(ii) Vṛndā : Colourful *sari*.

(iii) Kṛṣṇa : Dhoti, colourful shirt, waist band and crown.

(iv) Choral singers and musicians : Not specific.

2. *Make-up*: The most striking make-up was that a Kṛṣṇa, who had his face and hands painted blue.

3. *Gender of performers*: All male.

4. *Tune of the songs*: All in *kīrtān* tune.

5. *Reaction of the spectators* : Intense devotional fervour usually sweeps the spectators witnessing the performance.<sup>37</sup>

### 3.2.3 *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* :

Well known and popular all over Bangladesh, *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* is a genre of performance entirely religious in nature. Based on myths and legends related to Kṛṣṇa and Caitanya, *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* is performed with the objective of dissemination of religious devotion and doctrine. The genre is performed by both professional troupes as well as amateur devotees of the Kṛṣṇa cult. Govinda Opera Party, a *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* troupe led by Govinda Candra Rājvarṣī from Dakshin Mandia village under Gopālpur police station in Tangail, is comprised of performers all of whom are Hindus by faith and engaged in professions such

as farming and small scale trading. The troupe also includes five children, two under 8 years of age and three under 14, all of whom are offsprings of troupe-members. They perform *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* on religious celebrations such as Rās Līlā, Rātha Yātrā, Lakṣmī Pūjā, Durgā Pūjā and also at *Hari-sabhās* held throughout the year. Occasionally, it is also performed during other periods of leisure in the rural areas sponsored only by the Hindus, funded by community's subscription, but is witnessed by Muslims as well.

*Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* is generally performed in *nāt-maṇḍapas* or in temporary performance space constructed in front of those temple sanctums where *nāt-maṇḍapas* are absent. The latter may also be constructed on any public ground or in the courtyards rural homesteads. The temporary space (fig. 29) is square in shape (some 12 to 15 feet a side) and elevated (to a height of about two and a half feet), on four corners of which stand four bamboo posts to support a canopy on top. The spectators usually sit on hay-strewn ground on all four sides of the elevated platform, the men separately from the women. From one corner of the platform runs down a ramp which leads, through a narrow passage, to the green-room located beyond the spectators. About five musicians and equal number of choral singers sit along a side of the performance space (usually on that opposite to the ramp), on a platform about three feet wide and half as high as the central platform. The musicians usually play a harmonium, a clarinet, a cornet, a *khol* and a pair of *kartāl* (photograph 32). When performed in the courtyards of homesteads, the performance space is not elevated. In the *nāt-maṇḍapas*, it is performed in the centre, without any elevation. The green-room is located outside the *maṇḍapa*, at one of the chambers attached to the temple.

There exist quite a number of written texts of *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā*, of which the following appear to be highly popular: *Nimāi Sanmyās*, *Naukā-vilās*, *Rās Līlā*, *Mān-bhañjan*, *Māthur*, *Kāmsa Vadh*, *Goṣṭha Vihāra*, *Kāliya-daman*, *Kṛṣṇa-Kālī*, *Kalamka-bhañjan*, *Yamunā Pulin*, *Nanī Curi* etc. All of these, except the first, depict various *līlās* of Kṛṣṇa in his childhood or of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa as divine lovers.

*Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* texts are usually slight in terms of plot, but it is through these simple plots that the performance successfully infuses devotional sentiment in the devotees-spectators, very much like *Līlā Kīrtan*. There are no act divisions in these texts and the scenes are demarcated by the exit of all the characters. Some of the most renowned *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* playwrights of all times are Govinda Adhikārī, Aghor Candra Kāvyaūrtha, Paśupati Cattopādhyāya and Niyakṛṣṇa Mukhopādhyāya (all from 19th and early 20th c.). In the district of Tangail, Kṛṣṇavihārī Sūtradhara and Rāsvihārī Sūtradhara appear to enjoy substantial popularity today.



Before a performance of *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* begins, it is customary for the leader of the troupe to offer worship to Govinda (Kṛṣṇa). The performance begins at nine or ten in the evening with an overture played by the orchestra. It is followed by a *kīrtan* invoking the presence of Caitanya or Kṛṣṇa, rendered by the *pada-kartā*, with musical and choral accompaniment. Literally, the term 'pada-kartā' denotes 'the composer of verse', hence the playwright, who in earlier times also performed the role of the narrator. Today, the term signifies only the latter, i.e., the narrator. The main body of performance follows next, and it is composed of the elements given below:

1. *Narrative performance in lyric* : The *pada-kartā*, in the role of narrator, sometimes introduces a scene or makes brief comment. He renders these passages in lyric, with choral and musical accompaniment. In *Nimāi Sannyās*, the *pada-kartā* makes five brief entrances in total, singing his lines in *kīrtan* tune, and exits at the end of each song.
2. *Dialogic performance in lyric*: Most of the dialogue between the characters is rendered as songs sung in *kīrtan* tune, with choral and musical accompaniment. Although dance as an element of performance does not feature in *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā*, almost all characters sway to the rhythm of songs they sing (photograph 30).
3. *Dialogic performance in prose*: Interspersed between the songs, brief passages of prose dialogue are also rendered by the characters (photograph 31).

*Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* performances end early in the morning. Those episodes which are related to the sports of Kṛṣṇa end with a song of union between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. On the other hand, *Nimāi Sannyās*, as performed by Govinda Opera Party, ends with plaintive music played by the orchestra after Nimāi exits.

The following are some other important features of *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* performance:

1. *Scenic devices*: These are restricted to the barest minimum. For example, in the opening scene of *Nimāi Sannyās*, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are shown sitting on a chair, holding on to each other, there being no attempt to represent the Tamāl tree. The birds Śuk and Śāri, who are supposed to be resting on the tree, are shown standing beside the chair. The school is shown with the teacher on a chair and the pupils sitting on the floor. Viṣṇupriyā offers meal to her husband Nimāi on an empty plate placed on a mat (a *sari*). She and Nimāi sleep on the same mat (*sari*) laid on the floor of the performance space, in the scene where both are supposed to be sleeping in the bed-chamber.
2. *Costume*: The following examples are drawn from *Nimāi Sannyās* as performed by Govinda Opera Party. Nimāi is clad in a *dhoti* ( red floral motif on yellow ground) and a

white vest; Viṣṇupriyā in a *sari* (red and yellow floral motif on white ground) and a crown (on the head); Jagāi and Mādhāi in *dhotts* (decorated motif on red and yellow ground) tightly wound around the legs, colorful and decorated tunics and waist bands; Śuk, the male parrot, wears a similar *dhotti* (decorated motifs on red ground), a tunic of various colour patched together and a garland of imitation flowers on the head; Śāri, the female parrot, in a *sari* (white floral motif on red ground) and a garland placed on the head.

3. Mask: There is no use of mask, not even for the birds.

4. Make-up: the most striking use of make-up in *Nimāi Sannyās* as performed by Govinda Opera Party is seen in the case of Anil, a comic role of a mischievous students studying in the same class as Nimāi. Half his face is painted red, the other half white. The devotees who chant the name of the Lord with Nitāi are also interestingly made up. The face of one of them is fully painted white and has large white dots printed on his chest; the lips of the other is painted white. All these are curious reminders of *Saṅg Yātrā*, which is performed in the same region.

5. Male performers in female roles: *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* performances are given by a cast comprised mostly of males with a few girls in pre-puberty age. In *Nimāi Sannyās* performed by Govinda Opera Party, the characters of the goddess of slumber and Śāri the female parrot are performed by a girl of about six years of age, that of Śuk, the male parrot, by a boy of about eight years of age, those of Viṣṇupriyā and Rādhā, by a boy of about eleven years of age, that of Nitāi by another boy of about fourteen years of age and Nimāi and *pada-kartā* by boys in their late teens.

6. Collection of donation : There also exists the custom of collecting donation from the spectators during performance. In *Nimāi Sannyās*, the collection is done at the very end when Nimāi goes out to beg alms from the citizens.<sup>39</sup>

Although *Pālā Kīrtan* as a genre of performance appears close to *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā*, there is greater emphasis on dance on the former. It could be taken as a possible indication that *Pālā Kīrtan* evolved at a time when dance was possibly being introduced in *Līlā Kīrtan*, i.e., sometime in the 17th century.<sup>40</sup> There is also difference in performance space and its use as seen in *Pālā Kīrtan* and *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā*.

### 3.2.4 *Sāj Kīrtan* :

In the region of Khulna, there exists a genre of performance known as *Sāj Kīrtan* which is based on legends related to Kṛṣṇa. Entirely devotional in nature, the genre is performed during the celebration of Rās Līlā, held in the month of Kārtika and in annual *Hari-sabhās*

held in the month of Baiśākh. There is no bar for non-Hindu performers to participate in *Sāj Kīrtan* performance, as was seen in the case of one witnessed at Raghudatta-kathi village (under Kachua police station in Bagerhat district) where the cast included two Muslims. Most of the performers were amateurs engaged in professions such as farming, trading etc. Beside Hindus, Muslims also witness the performance.

*Sāj Kīrtan* is not performed in the courtyard of homesteads, but only in public grounds, usually temple precincts, where temporary performance space is specially constructed for the purpose. The performance space constructed at Raghudatta-kathi was in a temple courtyard, on the northern end of which lay the sanctum of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa (facing south), on the eastern end, the sanctum of Durgā (facing west) and on the southern end, the sanctum of Kālī (also facing west). The performance space (fig. 30) was constructed in the centre of the yard. It was square in shape (about twelve feet of a side) with four corner posts to support the canopy on top and elevated with earth to about nine inches height, upon which floor mats were laid. On all of its four sides sat the spectators on hay-strewn ground, men separately from women. A narrow passage (about five feet wide) ran diagonally from one corner of the performance space to the green-room (*sāj ghar*) located beyond the spectators in one of the chambers adjoining the sanctum of Durgā. Characters, costumed in a manner similar to the mythological *Yātrā* performances, entered from and exited to the green-room. Near the green-room end of the entry passage stood a man with a list of entry-queues (the "chart-man") who ensured timely entry of all characters. The musicians (some of whom were professionals) sat on the ground on two opposite sides, immediately outside the performance space: the percussion (*tablā, ḍhol, khol* and *juḍi*) on one side and the wind (harmonium and cornet) on the other. The prompter was seated beside the harmonium player, near one of the corner posts. Immediately in front of the wind instrumentalists, just inside the performance space, sat five girls (all under the age of ten), who performed the role of choral singers (*dohārs*).

*Sāj Kīrtan* texts are structured in five acts, each with a number of scenes. It is entirely dialogic, written mostly in prose, interspersed with a few verses. The latter is rendered in lyric by the performers themselves. Titles of a few popular texts are *Kalamka-bhañjan*, *Mān-bhañjan*, *Nimāi Sannyās*, *Rās Līlā*, *Naukā-vilās*, *Akrūr Saṁvād*, *Kaṁsa Vadh*, *Guru Dakṣiṇā*, *Māthur*, *Vastra Haran*, *Bhakta Prahlāda*, etc. All of these texts extol Kṛṣṇa and his ardent devotees with a view to propagating total devotion in him and projecting efficacy of his cult.

At Raghudatta-kathi, all the performers gathered in the green-room immediately prior to the performance of *Bhakta Prahlāda* and performed the ritual of chanting the name of Hari

("Hare Rāma, Hare Kṛṣṇa ....."). The performance began late in the evening, at around eleven, with an overture played by the orchestra, the tune of which was quite similar to the musical overture played in the *Yātrā* performances. Shortly after, the *dohārs* entered the performance space and rendered a patriotic song, facing all four directions in turn (photograph 33). It was followed by the *bandanā*, rendered by the same *dohārs*, this time sitting (four in a circle and one in the centre) with their hands clasped and later moving in a circle. The main body of performance came next and it was comprised of the following elements:

1. *Dialogic performance in prose*: Major part of the dialogue was rendered in prose. Characters such as Hiraṇyakaśipu, all his attendants, Indra and other gods rendered all their dialogue in prose, often rhetorical (photograph 35 and 36). Nārada, Kṛṣṇa and Prahlāda rendered parts of their dialogue in prose.

2. *Dialogic performance in lyric*: Some of the characters of *Bhakta Prahlāda*, such as Kṛṣṇa, Prahlāda, Nārada, Vivek etc. rendered parts of their dialogue in lyric. In most cases, one of the characters sang while the other rendered prose dialogue. Each line of a lyrical passage was repeated by the choral singers. In few cases, the tune of the lyrical passages was similar to that of *kīrtan* (photograph 34).

The performance ended early in the morning with music played by the orchestra.

The following are a few salient features of the *Sāj Kīrtan*:

1. Presence of Vivek : The character of Vivek personifies Conscience. He warns Hiraṇyakaśipu a number of times against challenging Viṣṇu (Kṛṣṇa) and also urges Prahlāda on to seek the Truth. The tune of his songs are similar to that of Vivek of the *Yātrā*.
2. Collection of donation : Donations were collected at a number of points in the Raghudatta-kathi performance. One of these was when Nārada, having imparted his teaching to Prahlāda, demands the gift due unto him as his preceptor. Since Prahlāda has no money to offer, he collects donation from the citizens (the spectators), singing a song.
3. Scenic devices: The scenic devices are restricted to bare minimum. In *Bhakta Prahlāda*, for example, only two chairs were placed at one of the sides of the performance space. These were used as thrones and also as the crystal pillar (behind which the performer playing Narasimha hid, wrapped in a shawl).
4. Costume: Most of the costume were colourful. For example (in *Bhakta Prahlāda*) Kṛṣṇa was dressed in a *dhoti* (floral design on yellow ground), a half-sleeved tunic (red ground, embroidered over the chest), a black cape and a golden crown; Nārada in a golden-yellow

*pāñjābi* and an unstitched *lungi* coloured off-white; Hiraṇyakaśipu in a navy-blue *dhoti*, a knee-long pink outer garment decorated with silver embroidery, a black half-sleeved tunic decorated over the chest with silver embroidery, a waist-band and a crown; Prahalāda in a pair of blue trousers, red jacket, a breast-piece decorated with silver embroidery and a waist-band; Vivek in a white *dhoti*, a white vest and a *gamchā* tied around the head; and the *dohārs* were dressed in frocks of various colour usually worn by children in daily life.

5. Mask : Only the character of Narasimha used a mask.

6. Make-up : The most striking use of make-up was that of Kṛṣṇa, whose hands and face was painted blue. Other characters used make-up similar to that seen in the *Yātrā*.

7. Female performers : The role of Kṛṣṇa was performed by a girl of about thirteen years of age. The *dohārs*, as stated earlier, comprised of five girls, all under the age of ten. The rest of the roles (including those of Kadayu and goddess Mahāmaya) were played by male performers.

A comparative study of *Sāj Kīrtan* and the *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* clearly shows that both the genres are closely related. But it is important for our study to note the points of difference as well. There is no act or scene division in *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* texts, but *Sāj Kīrtan* texts are clearly structured in five acts, each of which are made up of a number of scenes. Compared to the abundant use of lyric in *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā*, *Sāj Kīrtan* is more oriented towards prose dialogue. Moreover, the songs of *Sāj Kīrtan* are rendered in tunes other than that of *kīrtan*, whereas the songs of *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* are rendered only in the tune of *kīrtan*. In sharp contrast to the presence of the narrator in *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā*, the same is absent in *Sāj Kīrtan* and the absence of Vivek in the former, the same is present in the latter. Again, the repertoire of *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* is restricted to the Vṛndāvana legends associated with Kṛṣṇa along with those associated with Caitanya; on the other hand, the repertoire of *Sāj Kīrtan*, beside those mentioned above, also includes some of the exploits of Viṣṇu as recorded in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas*. Based on these differences, it is possible to believe that the two genres represent two phases of development of what was once a genre based on the legends of Kṛṣṇa.<sup>41</sup>

### 3.2.5 Manipurī Rās Nr̥tya : Rās Līlā and Goṣṭha Līlā

East of Bangladesh, beyond Assam, lies the Indian state of Manipur which borders Myanmar on its eastern and southern boundary and Assam on its northern and western boundary. During a span of seven years from 1812 to 1819, the state (erstwhile Kingdom of Manipur) was torn by internal strife and invasion from Myanmar and as a result a large number of Manipurīs migrated from their homeland and settled in neighbouring regions including the north-eastern border belt of what is today known as Bangladesh. At present,

about one hundred and thirty thousand Maṇipurīs reside in this country, most of whom are farmers by profession and are concentrated in villages under Kamalganj police station in Maulavibazar district (greater Sylhet).<sup>42</sup> The most important performance of the Maṇipurīs is the *Rās Nṛtya* given on the occasion of Mahārās festival held on the full-moon of Kārtika month, in commemoration of the Rās dance performed by Kṛṣṇa with Rādhā and the *gopīs* (milk-maids) at Vṛndāvana. The most famous *Rās Nṛtya* of the of the Mahārās festival in Bangladesh is given at Madhabpur (under Kamalganj police station) where it is being presented annually since 1842.

Based on the *līlās* of Kṛṣṇa and entirely devotional in nature, the *Rās Nṛtya* performances of the Mahārās festival are composed of two episodes: (i) *Goṣṭha Līlā* (photographs 40-42), given in the afternoon and (ii) *Rās Līlā* (photographs 37-39), given at night. It is generally believed that King Bhāgya Candra of Maṇipur (1764-1799), driven by devotional urge, shaped the performance of *Rās Līlā* based on classical dance and *padas* by illustrious poets such as Jayadeva, Vidyāpati, Caṇḍidāsa etc. He also wrote extensively on the structure of *Rās Līlā* performance.<sup>43</sup> What is important for this study is to note that the Vaiṣṇavite devotional fervour which generated *Rās Līlā* originated in Bengal. It was King Bhāgya Candra's grand-father King Pāmheibār (1714-1754) who adopted Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, having been initiated by Śānti Dāsa Gosvāmin.<sup>44</sup> It is also important to note that the Maṇipurīs are mostly followers of Narottama Dāsa, who, if it needs to be reminded, introduced *Līlā Kīrtan* at the festival of Khetur in c. 1576. Thus *Rās Līlā* is important for this study because (i) it is a performance based on the same philosophy and same objective as that of *Līlā Kīrtan*, (ii) it is linked to Gauḍīya (Bengal) school of Vaiṣṇavism and (iii) it is possibly the lone surviving example of performance which evolved at royal court.

Three performances each of *Rās Līlā* and *Goṣṭha Līlā* are presented annually on the occasion of the Mahārās festival, with similar objective as that of *Līlā Kīrtan*. The entire community participates in these performances as a matter of religious duty, either as devotee-spectators, as voluntary performers or by lending a hand in organisational affairs. All material costs are borne by six *karmadhārīs* one for each performance. Each of the three priests of the three Vaiṣṇavite temples located at Madhabpur appoint two *karmadhārīs* by rotation from amongst their parishioners: one for *Rās Līlā* and one for *Goṣṭha Līlā*. The priests themselves, in the role of *adhikārīs*, are engaged in overall supervision of the performances. The role of *karmadhārī* is much coveted by the Maṇipurīs, who consider it a matter of great fortune and honour to be appointed as one. They also organise rehearsals in the courtyard of their homes, two or three days prior to the performance. These are mostly

routine warm-ups because the Mañipurīs are generally skilled performers and the choreography, movement and lyric are all familiar.

*Goṣṭha Līlā* troupes are composed of the following performers:

1. Fourteen or more boys (between 4 to 16 years of age) who perform the roles of Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma and their twelve (or more) companions including Sridāma, Sudāma, Basudāma and Madhumañgala. The role of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma are usually played by two boys about eight years old. It is customary for the *karmadhārī*'s son to play the role of Kṛṣṇa.
2. Two women who perform the roles of Rohiṇī and Yasodā, the mothers of Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa respectively.
3. Five musicians (male), three of whom play large *kartāls* and two *khol*s (locally called *mṛdamṅas*). One of the *kartāl* players is the *guru* (who directs the show) and also performs the role of *sūtradhāra* who leads all lyrical passages.
4. Two female choral singers.

On the other hand, *Rās Līlā* troupe is composed of the following performers:

1. A boy about eight years old performs in the role of Kṛṣṇa, a girl of about similar age in the role of Rādhā, a maiden in that of Vṛndā and about forty girls and maidens in those of *gopīs* (milk-maids of Vṛndāvana). It is customary for the daughter of the *karmadhārī* to play the role of Vṛndā.
2. Three *khol* players (the chief of whom is the *guru* who directs the performance), two to four female performers known as *sūtradhārīs*, who sing all lyrical passages and play *mañjari* (*mandirā*) as well, and a male harmonium player. The *khol* and harmonium players sing choral passages as well.

The costume of the major performers are as follows:

1. Kṛṣṇa: Pink *dhoti*, a decorated waist-band, two cross-bands with decorative pouches at two sides (*khobal*), decorative arm bands, garlands made of paper and golden thread (*zari*), decorated head-dress with peacock feather at the top and ankle-bells.
2. Kṛṣṇa's companions (cow-herds): Same as above, except white *dhotis* instead of pink.
3. Rādhā: A black head-dress knotted at the top and decorated with silver embroidery (*kok-tumbī*), a fine veil pinned over the knot which hangs over chest and back (*meikhum*), a decorated blouse bottle-green in colour, a piece of white cloth wrapped over the belly (*thābret*), a barrel-shaped bottle-green skirt with red border and decorated with silver and golden embroidery (*kumin*), a knee-long white skirt (*pāśoyāl*) worn over the *kumin*.

decorated waist-band, a cross-band with a decorative pouch on the right (*khobal*) and a garland of golden thread.

4. *Vṛndā* : Same as *Rādhā*'s dress.

5. The *gopīs* (milk-maids) : Same as *Rādhā*'s dress.

6. *Yasodā* and *Rohiṇī*: Colourful *saris* and blouses.

7. The musicians (male) : The *khol* players are dressed in white *dhotis* and are bare-bodied at the top in *Rās Līlā* performance, but they wear white or off-white *pāñjābis* with white *dhotis* in *Goṣṭha Līlā* performance. The harmonium player is also dressed in a white or off-white *pāñjābi* and white *dhoti*.

8. The *sūtradhārīs*, and female choral singers: A lower garment wound around the lower part of the body (*lāhing*), a blouse and a white shawl of fine material wrapped around the torso and the head.

Three performances are simultaneously given in three *nāṭ-maṇḍapas* located in front of three temple sanctums at Madhabpur. These are square-shaped pavilions (externally measuring around 48 feet a side) shaded with two tiers of sloping roofs (with four slopes in each tier) and crowned with a finial at the top. The roofs, made of corrugated iron sheets, are supported by six pillars standing on each arm. A central square is created inside the pavilion with four pillars standing on each of its twenty-five-foot-long arms. A white awning decorated with red frills is tied over the central square. Inside it (the central square), a circle of about 18 feet diameter is created with twelve posts on the circumference and one at the centre. Known as the *maṇḍalī*, the circular space is where the performance is given and is held sacred. Only those spectators who are moved with extreme devotional urge may venture within. The central post of the *maṇḍalī* is symbolic of *Kṛṣṇa* (and or *Gauraṅga*) and those at the circumference, of his twelve companions (or the twelve *gosvāmins*). The *maṇḍalī* is decorated with lattice-work on paper, creating a wide border all around at the top. Such decorations are also placed on the posts standing on the circumference of the circle. A second border of latticed paper-work along the bottom of the *maṇḍalī*, leaving two entry passages clear in the north and the south, completes the decoration of the periphery, creating the impression of a circular pavilion with ten windows and two doors. The central pillar is also decorated with latticed paper-work at the top. Branches of flower plants and ritual accessories (including a brass pot and two coconuts) are placed at the bottom of the central post. With the central post creating the impression of a tree and the posts on the circumference creating that of a pavilion, the *maṇḍalī* is visually made to give stylized impression of a pavilion in a bower, the meeting place for *Kṛṣṇa*, *Rādhā* and the *gopīs*. The performance of *Rās Līlā* takes place inside the *maṇḍalī*, while the choral singers and the



orchestra (*sūtradhārīs*, *khol* players and harmonium player) sit immediately outside the circle, on its north-western side. The *adhikāri* is seated on its south-western side, also outside the circle. Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā and the *gopīs* enter through the northern passage-way, prior to which they wait in the verandah of the temple sanctum. The spectators are seated all around the *maṇḍalī*, men separately from women. The entire performance space is lit with fluorescent tube-lights, fixed diagonally on the peripheral posts and two incandescent lamps fixed to the central post (fig. 31).

*Goṣṭha Līlā* is also performed in the same space described above, but the lattice work in paper is absent. A small rectangular enclosure (about 6' x 4'-6" in size) is created immediately outside the northern side of the *maṇḍalī*. It is masked in the lower half of three external sides with white cloth and is covered at the top with an arched ceiling created with a decorated piece of cloth. It represents the house of Nanda and Yasodā, where Yasodā and Rohiṇī are seated with Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. The *maṇḍalī* represents the courtyard. The latter part of *Goṣṭha Līlā* is performed in a field located at a little distance from the three temples. There too three *maṇḍalīs* are created for each of the three performances. Each *maṇḍalī* is slightly raised (about 6" high) and is sloped gently down from the centre. Twelve banana plants stand on the circumference and one at the centre. These too are of same symbolic significance as the posts of the *maṇḍalīs* at the *nāṭ-maṇḍapas*. Ritual accessories are also placed at the foot of the central banana plant. Ropes decorated with triangular pieces of coloured paper are tied to the banana plants; these bound the *maṇḍalī*, leaving clear an entry passage in the west. The open-air *maṇḍalīs* represent the pasture where Kṛṣṇa and the cow-herds graze their cattle. In the *nāṭ-maṇḍapas*, the musicians and the *sūtradhāra* are seated immediately outside the *maṇḍalī* on the south-eastern side and the *adhikāri* on the south-western side. In the open-air *maṇḍalī*, they are seated on the north-western side. The *adhikāri* does not sit in the open-air *maṇḍalī*.

The text of *Rās Līlā* has been created by chronological arrangement of isolated *padas* (songs) on the *līlā* (sport) of the Rās dance (performed by Kṛṣṇa with Rādhā and the *gopīs*) composed by Jayadeva, Vidyāpati, Caṇḍidāsa, Narottama Dāsa and other poets along with a few excerpts in metrical verse from the *Bhagavad-gītā*. As already mentioned, *Rās Līlā* performances are given on the original arrangement of King Bhāgya Candra devised in the second half of 18th century. Although the language of the text is a mixture of Sanskrit, Maithili, Vrajabuli and Bāṅglā, the style of rendition of lyric is typically Manipurī. As a result, it is difficult for untrained ear to follow the words. The narrative of *Rās Līlā* is composed of ten parts preceded by a preamble. The text of *Goṣṭha Līlā* is also created by chronological arrangement of isolated *padas* on Kṛṣṇa's sport in the pastures. It is divided

into two parts, the first of which is set at Yasodā's home and the second in the pastures, both in Vṛndāvana. The performers do not return to the *nāt-maṇḍapa* for the scene of returning home. The brief scene is also enacted at the open-air *maṇḍali*.

Prior to performance of *Rās Līlā* as well as *Goṣṭha Līlā*, two votaries formally receive the musicians, the choral singers, the *sūtradhāra* and the *sūtradhārīs* on behalf of the *adhikāri*. One of the votaries offers each of the performers mentioned above betel-leaf, betel-nut and taka one placed on a small circular plate of banana leaf and the other votary garlands each of them and marks their foreheads with *tilak* (sectarian mark) of sandal paste. Thereafter they salute each of them. The *adhikāri* signals the beginning of performance by standing up from his seat and formally announcing the following line “বল গ্ৰেম সে কহ শ্ৰীরাধাকৃষ্ণ গৌরাঙ্গ নিতাই”. Thereafter, the lead *khol* player (in the case of *Rās Līlā*) or the *sūtradhāra* (in the case of *Goṣṭha Līlā*) sings the *gaura-candra*. Next follows the rendition of *rāga-mūrti*, i.e., singing of the nine syllables আ,রি,তা,না,রি,তা,না,না composed by Bhatta Raghunātha Gosvāmin, with which the body of Caitanya is installed in the performance space. An additional lyrical passage, known as the *bhāvi*, is rendered next in *Goṣṭha Līlā* performance, which seeks to create, appropriate mental state among the spectators for entering into the devotional world. The main body of performance is given next and it is composed of the following elements :

1. *Mimetic performance*: Parts of the narrative is rendered in lyric by the *sūtradhārīs* who also play *māñjalis* as they sing or the *sūtradhāra* who plays *kartāl* as he sings. They are accompanied by *khol* and harmonium players who sing choral passages and play their instruments. Simultaneously as the lyrical passages are rendered, the characters dance to the music and mimetically enact the action described in the lyric. The dance is composed in accordance with the Manipurī school of classical Indian dance, which is renowned for its grace and elegance.
2. *Dialogic performance in lyric* : Parts of the narrative are also rendered in lyrical dialogue by the characters themselves, accompanied by the *sūtradhārīs* or the *sūtradhāra* and the musicians who sing choral passages and play their instruments.
3. *Dialogic performance in prose* : At a few points of the performance, some characters render their lines in prose. Examples of these can be seen in *Rās Līlā*, where Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa separately deliver a few brief passage in prose without musical accompaniment.
4. *Narrative performance in prose* : At a few points, the *sūtradhārīs* or the *sūtradhāra* render a few brief passages of narration in prose.

The duration of *Goṣṭha Līlā* performance is about three hours (from about 1 pm to 4 pm) and that of *Rās Līlā* is about six to seven hours (from around 11 pm to sunrise). *Rās Līlā*

ends with *Nitāi-pada*, in which the musicians and the *sūtradhārīs* render a song of prayer to Nityānanda. On the other hand, the performance of *Goṣṭha Līlā* ends with *ārati* (ritualistic act of according welcome to a deity with lamps) offered by Yasodā and Rohiṇī to Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma after they return home.

The following are a few other characteristics of *Rās Nr̥tya* performance.

1. The lyrical passages are based on the classical tradition of Indian music, as a result, are highly intricate and complex. These passages also contain *tuk*, *chuṭ* and *ākḥara* as seen in the *Līlā Kīrtan*.
2. The performance is based on a highly developed system of aesthetics. Briefly, it can be described as the system originally developed by the six *gosvāmins* and further refined at the royal court of Manipur.
3. A great degree of devotional sentiment is generated among the spectators. It is common to see men as well as women weeping and offering salutation to the chief *khol* player during performance. The spectators also shower the performers with *bātāsā* and other sweet-meats. These are collected by other spectators as *prasād* (food-offerings made to deity) and are taken with the belief that they are blessed by the Lord himself.
4. No donation is collected during performance. Instead, a few devotees offer small sums of money to the lead *khol* player during moments of intense devotional fervour, as offerings made to the Lord himself.<sup>45</sup>

### 3.2.6 *Janmāṣṭamī Michil* :

*Janmāṣṭamī Michil* or the Procession of *Janmāṣṭamī* is taken out in Dhaka city on the occasion of Kṛṣṇa's birth on the 8th of the dark fortnight of Bhādra. Participated mostly by Hindu devotees of Kṛṣṇa, the procession has a history of over four centuries: it was first taken out in 1565.<sup>46</sup> It consists of (i) tableaux mounted on trucks and cycle-vans, of various incidents drawn from the mythologies related to Kṛṣṇa, (ii) some mythological characters walking on foot, (iii) music played by band parties and (iv) devotees on foot and trucks. The tableaux are mostly of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa with a few *sakhīs* (companions) and Kṛṣṇa alone playing a flute. In a few others, Kṛṣṇa is shown with demons or with Kaṁsa. The floats are decorated either with artificial flowers or with colourful canopies. One or two are decorated as chariots. The characters on foot are mostly Nanda carrying infant Kṛṣṇa in a basket placed on his head, often accompanied by dancing demons. A huge figure of the serpent Kālīa Nāg, held by an attendant behind Nanda, provides shade for Kṛṣṇa. (Photographs 43-46.)

Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa and the *sakhīs* are all portrayed by boys and girls of pre-puberty age. A few Kaiṅsas are also presented by young boys. The rest are all portrayed by adult males. The boys in the role of Kṛṣṇa are all dressed in *dhotis*, crowns and garlands. Some of them also wear sleeveless, close-fitting and richly decorated jackets. Rādhā, in most cases, is a little girl in red *sari*, with a crown; her *sakhīs*, in *saris* of bright colour. The demons wear black trousers. Their bodies are painted in light green colour, wear moustaches or goatees and sport two black horns on their shaven heads. Nanda is a bearded man in a *dhoti* with a shawl slung over the neck, or in other cases, wears a half-sleeved jacket.

The *Janmāṣṭamī Michil* starts from Dhakeswari temple at around three in the afternoon, passes through Topkhana Road and Nawabpur Road and finally ends at Bahadur Shah Park before sunset.<sup>47</sup>

### 3.2.7 *Naukā-vilās Michil* :

A procession (*michil*) with a tableau on the *līlā* of *Naukā-vilās* (the boat-ride of Kṛṣṇa with Rādhā and her companions) is taken out on the 9th of Caitra at the village of Patrail (under Delduar police station in Tangail). The exact occasion for the celebration is uncertain. According to some local inhabitants, the procession commemorates the founding of the temple of Caṇḍī, situated on the bank of Lauhajang river not far from the village. According to others, it is an age-old custom which was performed with pomp at earlier times and is nearly extinct now. A fair of sizeable magnitude is also held for two days beginning on the 8th of Caitra. A series of nine episodes of *Līlā Kīrtan* is also performed on the occasion. It begins with *Jāgaran* on the dawn on 8th Caitra and ends with *Naukā-vilās* on the morning of the 9th. The celebration culminates with the *Naukā-vilās Michil* brought out on the afternoon of 9th Caitra. Also according to local inhabitants, at earlier times, processions from neighbouring villages would all assemble at the precinct of the temple of Caṇḍī. Each of these processions would bear a tableau on a myth related to Kālī, Durgā or Manasā. These tableaux would all be displayed on small proscenium stages erected for the purpose at the temple precinct. Today, they say, it is only a memory.

The *Naukā-vilās* procession (photographs 47-49), as it is brought out today, consists of a bottomless boat decorated with a canopy at the centre, under which Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are seated. Eight *sakhīs* (companions of Rādhā), each carrying an oar, mime the action of rowing as they walk inside the boat: four in front of the canopy and four behind. These roles are all portrayed by girls in pre-puberty age. Two additional characters, Buḍi Baḍāi (the old woman Baḍāi) and Dadhiwālā (the yogurt-seller) also "walk" inside the boat: the former in the foremost section and the latter in the rearmost section. The boat is held from the outside by four men, two on each side. A pair of young boys carrying a *makara* (mythological fish)

and a peacock walk in front of the boat and another pair with similar accessories walk behind the boat. Musicians playing *khol* and *kartāl*, choral singers rendering *Nām Kīrtan* (devotional recitation of the names of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa), one or more clowns (*saḥg*) dancing merrily and devotees bring up the rear of the procession (fig. 32). The procession starts at about 3 pm from the homestead of Pareś Ghoṣ, where the characters are all dressed and made up. It visits a nearby temple of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa for ritualised worship. Thereafter it circumambulates the village and finally reaches the *śmaśān ghāṭ* (wharf adjacent to the cremation ground) of the temple of Caṇḍī, located on the bank of Lauhajang river. There the sport (*līlā*) of *Naukā-vilās* is briefly mimed. Then, a group of singers and musicians render *Nām Kīrtan* on a boat as it is rowed on the river. Devotees also bathe in the river for the occasion. There follows another rendition of *Nām Kīrtan* at the *nāt-maṇḍapa* located in front of the temple of Caṇḍī. Thereafter *prasād* is distributed among the devotees and the procession returns to its point of origin. 48

### 3.3 Tales Related to Rāmacandra

#### 3.3.1 *Rāmāyaṇa Gān* :

In parts of greater Mymensingh, Comilla, Dhaka, Jessore, Khulna and Faridpur districts, there exist a genre of performance based on the *Rāmāyaṇa* which is variously known as *Rāmāyaṇa Gān*, *Rāma Kīrtan*, *Rāmalīlā* and *Rāma-maṅgala*. It is entirely devotional in nature and it is believed that the listener of the *Rāmāyaṇa* merits a place in heaven.

*Rāmāyaṇa Gān* is usually sponsored by the more affluent Hindu householders on occasions such a marriage, child-birth, *srāddha* (funeral rite) and as an offering pledged for the fulfilment of desires such as child-birth, personal gain etc. The performance may also be sponsored collectively during Durgā Pūjā, Kālī Pūjā, Lakṣmī Pūjā and Saraswatī Pūjā. It is common for members of both Muslim and Hindu communities to witness the performance. *Rāmāyaṇa Gān* troupes are comprised only of males and are mostly Hindus by faith, although in a few cases, one or two Muslims may also be included. But the lead narrator (*kīrtanīyā*) is always a Hindu (who may belong to any caste). The troupe of Khukumaṇi Dās (aged 60, from Hajipur village under Narsingdi police station and district), possibly the most famous *kīrtanīyā* of *Rāmāyaṇa Gān* in Bangladesh today, is comprised of seven performers including himself. He alone is the full-time performer of his troupe; the rest are engaged in professions such as farming, shop-keeping and bamboo-crafts. Khukumaṇi Dās belongs to the Kaivarta caste; during his early years he was engaged in trading of fish. Another *kīrtanīyā* named Sunil Kumār Sarkār (aged 45) from Rasulpur village under Nabi Nagar police station in Brahmanbaria district, belongs to Śūdra caste and is also a practicing village doctor.

When sponsored by individuals, *Rāmāyaṇa Gān* is usually performed in the inner courtyards of rural homesteads where the performance space is temporarily constructed (fig. 33). It is square in shape (about eight to ten feet each arm) and non-elevated. On its four corners stand four bamboo poles to support the awning on top. "Petromax" (kerosine) lanterns or electric lamps suspended from these posts serve to illuminate the performance space. Mats and clean sheets are laid on its floor. The spectators sit on the ground and on the terrace of adjacent huts, men separately from women. In the centre of the northern or the eastern arm of the performance space, a low stool (*āsan*) is placed, on which stands framed pictures of Rāma and Sītā, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, or Caitanya (Gaura) and Nitāi or Jagannāth, bedecked with flowers and garlands. In front of the *āsan*, on the ground, a water-filled pitcher is placed, along with ritual offerings consisting of paddy grains, grass leaves and articles of food. On one side of the pitcher burns a lamp and on the other, incense. Khukumaṇi Dās arranges his musicians (*bāṅgen*) and choral singer/s (*dohār*) in a circle, with the *āsan* in its perimeter and himself in their midst. Usually his harmonium player sits on one side of the *āsan* and the *khol* player on the other. The rest of the musicians (who usually play flute, *kartāl* and *do-tārā*) and a choral singer sit one after the other to complete the circle. Some of the musicians (such as harmonium, *kartāl* and *do-tārā* players) also sing choral refrain. The number of musicians and choral singers may increase and additional instruments such as *sārindā*, violin, cornet, clarinet and *bāṅgā-tablā* may be added if the sponsor pays higher fee. On the other hand Gopāl Candra Modak, another famous *Rāmāyaṇa Gān* performer from Karimganj in Kishoreganj district, arranges his musicians on two sides perpendicular to the *āsan* side: *khol* and *juḍi* on one, and harmonium and *do-tārā* on the opposite. Beside playing music, most of them also sing choral refrain. Gopāl Candra performs in the space between the two rows of musicians. *Rāmāyaṇa Gān* is also performed in temple precincts (opposite to the sanctum) and in front of *pūjā* pavilions. Where *nāṭ-maṇḍapa* (permanent performance space) is available, it is performed in the central square (of the *maṇḍapa*); where *nāṭ-maṇḍapa* does not exist, *Rāmāyaṇa Gān* is performed in a temporary performance space as described above. In both these cases, the *āsan* is placed in the centre of the arm facing the sanctum or *pūjā* pavilion. Khukumaṇi Dās is usually dressed in a white *dhoti*, a white *pāñjābi* and a *nāmābali cādar* and wears ankle-bells and *tilak* (sectarian mark) on his fore-head. But Gopāl Candra Modak is dressed in an orange half-sleeved *fatuā*, a yellow *dhoti*, a *nāmābali cādar*, an orange *kamar-bandh* and a garland of imitation flowers. He also wears ankle-bells and *tilak*. The musicians of both are usually dressed in *dhotis* and *pāñjābis*.

Texts of *Rāmāyaṇa Gān* performances are based Kṛttivāsa's *Rāmāyaṇa* (15th century), a narrative in rhymed metrical verse, which is divided in the following parts:

1. "Ādi Kāṇḍa" (various episodes prior to the birth of Rāma, birth of Rāma, his brothers and Sītā and marriage of Rāma and Sītā)
2. "Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa" (scenes at Ayodhyā and the banishment of Rāma)
3. "Aranya Kāṇḍa" (Rāma's life in the forest and the abduction of Sītā by Rāvaṇa)
4. "Kīṣkindhyā Kāṇḍa" (Rāma's residence at Kīṣkindhyā, the capital of monkey-king Sugrīva)
5. "Sundara Kāṇḍa" (crossing over to Laṅkā by Rāma and his army)
6. "Laṅkā Kāṇḍa" (the war with Rāvaṇa)
7. "Uttara Kāṇḍa" (Rāma's life at Ayodhyā, banishment of Sītā, birth of Lava and Kuśa, his recognition of them after a battle, Sītā's ascent to heaven and Rāma's ascent to heaven).

*Rāmāyaṇa Gān* performance based on a section of "Uttara Kāṇḍa", known as the episode of *Pitā-putra Yuddha*, is often given by Gopāl Candra Modak. Some of the episodes performed by Khukumaṇi Dās are *Rājā Hariścandra* (a section from "Ādi Kāṇḍa"), *Taraṇī Sen Vadh* (a section from "Laṅkā Kāṇḍa"), *Rāvaṇa Vadh* (also from "Laṅkā Kāṇḍa"), *Lakṣmaṇer Śakti-śel* (from "Laṅkā Kāṇḍa"), *Pitā-putra Paricay* (from "Uttara Kāṇḍa") etc. Beside the above, Sunil Sarkār also performs *Rāma Vanavāsa* ("Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa"), *Mahīrāvaṇa Vadh* ("Laṅkā Kāṇḍa") and a few other episodes. During performance of these episodes, the *kīrtanīyā* renders parts of Kṛttivāsa's verse in lyric and parts in improvised prose of his own. Quite often, the verses sung by the *kīrtanīyā* are adapted or slightly changed by him. The refrain sung by the musicians-cum-choral singers is also added by him. The parts which the *kīrtanīyā* narrates in improvised prose is in standard Bāṅglā. In these sections he often skips parts of Kṛttivāsa's narrative and incorporates contemporary references. Some of these may even be from Islamic sources should there be sizeable number of Muslim spectators witnessing the performance.

*Rāmāyaṇa Gān* is performed at different times in different parts of the country. It may be performed in the fore-noon (from around 9 am to around 2 pm), in the afternoon and evening (from around 4 pm to around 9 pm) or at night (from around 8 pm to around 1 am). It is usual to give one episode a day, but on special request, two may also be performed. The troupe of Khukumaṇi Dās begins its performance with a brief musical overture, at the end of which the *kīrtanīyā* renders the *gaura-āhvān*, accompanied by music and choral refrain. The song invokes the presence of Gaura (Caitanya) and during its rendition, the *kīrtanīyā* is seated in front of the *āsan*. The *gaura-āhvān* is followed by the

recitation of a hymn is Sanskrit, in praise of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. The *bandanā* follows next, this time rendered by the *kīrtanīyā* standing, with choral and musical accompaniment. The song salutes Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata, Śatrughna, Daśaratha, Kauśalyā, the parents and the preceptors of the *kīrtanīyā*, all the gods, the Brahmins, the *pīrs* and the *faqirs*. At the end of the *bandanā*, the *kīrtanīyā* introduces himself, requests permission from the spectators to begin and inquires which episode they wish him to perform. Upon the request of the majority, he begins the main body of his performance. It is comprised of the following elements:

1. *Narrative performance in prose* : The *kīrtanīyā* renders parts of the narrative in improvised prose. His rendition includes description of action as well as words spoken by various characters. Sometimes the *kīrtanīyā* portrays the character of Rāma and several others, making effective use of physical gestures and vocal inflection. Often he rearranges his costume to illustrate the character and uses a few props. When performing the role of Sītā, he wears the *nāmābali cādar* over his head and holds the whisk (*cāmar*) in his hands as though holding a baby. For Sārathi, the charioteer of Rāmacandra, he ties the same *nāmābali cādar* around his head. He also uses a bow and an arrow to depict characters engaged in battle. Sometimes a musician makes brief responses as the *kīrtanīyā* renders the narrative. In some cases such exchanges between the *kīrtanīyā* and the musician is aimed at comic effect (photograph 52). At suitable points in his narrative, the *kīrtanīyā* also makes brief comments to explain the lyrical passages and relates his narrative to contemporary events.

2. *Narrative performance in lyric*: The *kīrtanīyā* switches from prose to lyric during the rendition of the narrative. The lyrical passages, rendered with choral and musical accompaniment, incorporate descriptions of events and words spoken by various characters. Usually, the *kīrtanīyā* dances to the rhythm of music and portrays, with physical gestures, the action described in the song and/or of the character whose words are presented in the song (photograph 53). Most of these songs are sung in *kīrtan* tune.

3. *Dialogic performance in prose*: At a few points, Gopāl Candra Modak and his *khol* player assume some of the roles and exchange improvised dialogue. In such cases, the *khol* player usually remains seated and makes no change in his costume. The *kīrtanīyā*, on the other hand, may rearrange his costume, use a prop and carry out necessary movements and gestures. It is also interesting to watch him invite members of the spectators to play a few roles. For example, in a performance of *Pitā-putra Yuddha* given by him at Bajitpur, Kishoreganj, two young boys were invited to play the roles of Lava and Kuśa when these two characters were introduced in the narrative for the first time (photograph 51). He also



invited a male spectator to play the horse sent out in the Horse Sacrifice. Modak had him bent forward from the waist, covered him from head to waist with a shawl (borrowed from another spectator) and placed his garland of imitation flowers on his (the spectator playing the horse) head (photograph 50). In such cases (where members of the spectators are invited to play roles), the dialogue is spoken by the *kīrtanīyā* and the *khol* player.

Gopāl Candra Modak ends his performance with a song of acclaim sung in honour of Rāmacandra and Sītā, accompanied by ululation from the female spectators and calls of "Hari-bol" from the male spectators. On the other hand, Khukumaṇi Dās ends his performance with a song in praise of Hari and in acknowledgement of the poetic genius of Kṛtivāsa.

The following are some other features of *Rāmāyaṇa Gān* performance :

1. Donation: Known as *Rāmer Dakṣiṇā* or *Rāmāyaṇer Dakṣiṇā*, donation is collected from the spectators at the end of performance. It is customary for the *kīrtanīya* to bless the spectators who donate, with his *cāmar* (whisk). Interestingly, the *cāmar* used by Khukumaṇi Dās is made of white tufts of hair instead of the usual black tufts.
2. There is at least one intermission of about ten minutes duration, during which period the performers drink cups of tea and take turns to play music or sing devotional songs.

It is quite apparent that *Rāmāyaṇa Gān* has been influenced by *Līlā Kīrtan* as one can see that the *gaura-āhvān*, *kīrtan* tune, costume of the *kīrtanīyā* and the very term which denotes the lead performer clearly point to the above conclusion. What is most interesting in *Rāmāyaṇa Gān* performance is the intense devotional fervour which the *kīrtanīyā* succeeds in arousing among the spectators. Very deftly, he manoeuvres from the comic to the pathetic and moves his spectators from roars of laughter to tears.<sup>49</sup>

### 3.3.2 *Kuśān Gān* :

In the region of Rangpur, there exists a genre of popular performance known as *Kuśān Gān* (or *Byānā-kuśān Gān*), in which episodes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* are mostly enacted. It is performed during religious festivals of various deities including Kālī, Bhagavatī (Durgā), Lakṣmī, Jagaddhātri and Saraswatī, with the objective of entertainment. With similar objective, it may also be performed throughout the dry season. The genre enjoys mass appeal among Hindus as well as Muslims. A *Kuśān Gān* troupe led by Jajñeswar Barman from Rajpur village under Lalmanirhat police station and district is comprised of performers who are all Hindus by faith (Kṣatriya by caste) and farmers by profession.

*Kuśān Gān* is usually performed in temple precinct (in front of the sanctum) and in the outer courtyard of homesteads. The performance space (fig. 34) is a temporary structure, square in shape (some 15 feet a side) and non-elevated. On its four corners stand four bamboo posts to support a roofing of corrugated iron sheets on top. The spectators sit on all four sides of the space, men separately from women. Its floor is covered with mats and is bounded by ropes or bamboo poles tied to the corner posts. It (the performance space) is connected to the green-room (*sāj ghar*), located beyond the area of the spectators in one of the nearby huts, with a narrow passage-way. Electric lamps or "petromax" lanterns are hung from the corner posts to serve as lighting.

The lead narrator of *Kuśān Gān*, known as *mūl* (or *kuśānī*), is dressed in a white *pāñjābi*, a white *dhoti* and a white *cādar*. He plays the *byānā*, a small string instrument with a bow. During performance, he sings the narrative and also enacts a few roles. The *mūl* is assisted by the *dohār*, dressed in a white *dhoti*, a white vest and a white *gāmchā* tied around his waist. The most important performer of *Kuśān Gān*, the *dohār* sings the narrative with the *mūl*, enacts quite a few roles (mostly comic) and dances. At least five musicians (*yāntrik*) who play a harmonium, a flute, two pairs of *kartāl* and a *khol* (also *do-tārā* and violin if more players are available) and some of whom may sing choral refrain as well, are dressed in daily-life attire (shirt and *dhoti*). The choral singers (*pāil*) are at least four in number and are dressed like the *yāntrik*. Four or five female impersonators (*chokrās*), who dance with the *dohār* and enact female roles, are dressed in *saris*, wear strong feminine make-up and ankle-bells. Of late, female performers are beginning to replace the *chokrās*.

*Kuśān Gān* performance of the Rajpur troupe is based on written texts (mostly by Jajñeswar Barman). Most of these are adapted from Kṛttivāsa's *Rāmāyaṇa*, composed partly in verse (taken directly from Kṛttivāsa's text with minor changes) and partly in prose dialogue (adapted and expanded from Kṛttivāsa's text). The dialogic sections are prompted by the *mūl* during performance. But the existence of a written text does not prevent improvisation, specially by the *dohār*, who literally rides high on spectators' response. The following are some of the popular episodes of *Kuśān Gān* based on the *Rāmāyaṇa* :

1. *Rāvaṇa Vadh* (The Slaying of Rāvaṇa)
2. *Lakṣmaṇer Śakti-śel* (The Mythical Missile Śakti-śel and Lakṣmaṇa)
3. *Śītā Vanāvas* (The Exile of Śītā)
4. *Śītā Hāraṇ* (The Abduction of Śītā)
5. *Bālī Vadh* (The Slaying of Bālī, the Monkey King)
6. *Mahirāvaṇa Vadh* (The Slaying of Mahirāvaṇa, son of Rāvaṇa)

7. *Aśvamedh Yajña* (The Horse Sacrifice)
8. *Dānabīr Hariścandra* (The Munificent Hariścandra).

Episodes from the *Mahābhārata* by Kāśīrām Dās are also performed in *Kuśān Gān*, of which *Dātā Karṇa* (Charitable Karṇa) and *Sāvitrī-Satyavān* are quite popular.

The text of *Dānabīr Hariścandra* (as performed in *Kuśān Gān*) deviates from Kṛttivāsa in three aspects :

- (i) Addition of comic characters such as Buḍā-didi (the aged danseuse who causes the nymphs to go out of rhythm in Indra's court), Govinda (a disciple of Viśvāmītra who attempts of flirt with the nymphs), Hariścandra's general (who attempts to shoot games with a gun) etc.
- (ii) Adaptation and expansion of Kṛttivāsa's rhymed metrical verse into dialogic composition in prose and lyric.
- (iii) Slight alteration of Kṛttivāsa's verse rendered in performance as lyric.

Before a performance of *Kuśān Gān* given by the Rajpur troupe, the *mūl* recites a few secret magic formulas in order to protect the performance space, the performers and the musical instruments from all forms of evil attack. The performance begins at around ten in the evening with the "concert" (musical overture) played by the *yāntrik*. It is followed by an song of invocation addressed to Nārāyaṇa, sung by the whole troupe sitting in the centre of the performance space. The song is preceded by the recitation of *ślokas* in Sanskrit rendered by the *mūl*. Next to follow is the *bandanā* rendered by the female impersonators as they stand in a line and face each of the four directions in concurrence with the four directions addressed to in the song. The main body of performance comes next and it is composed of the following elements:

1. *Narrative performance in lyric* : The *mūl* narrates events as well as characters' speech in lyric, accompanied by the *dohār* and the *pāil* singing choral refrain. Simultaneously, he dances with the *dohār* beside him and the *chokrās* following him (photograph 54). As noted earlier, the verses sung in these lyrical passages are from Kṛttivāsa's *Rāmāyaṇa* which have been altered slightly. The tunes of most of these passages are similar to that of Bhāwaiyā songs from Rangpur region. A characteristic pattern of the dance involves three long steps forward and three short steps backward. Generally speaking, there is no mimetic gesture in the dance.
2. *Dialogic performance in prose* : The *mūl*, the *dohār*, members of the *pāil* and the *chokrās* either rise from the central circle or enter from the green-room to enact various

scenes in prose dialogue. The *mūl*, at a few places, switches from dialogue to narration and back. (Photographs 55-57.)

3. *Song-and-dance numbers* : The main body of narrative is sometimes interrupted with highly erotic song-and-dance numbers (known as *khemṭā* or *mālsī*). Unrelated to the narrative, these numbers are performed by two or three female impersonators (*chokrās*) and the *dohār*.

Finally, the performance ends before sunrise with the national anthem played by the *yāntrik*. When more than one episodes are performed and there is a great demand among the spectators, *Kuśān Gān* may also be given in the day-time, beginning around four in the afternoon and ending around eight in the evening.

The following are some of the major features of *Kuśān Gān* performances:

1. Entry and exit : Performers rise from and step out of the central circle to denote entry into a particular locale and rejoin the same to denote their exit. Sometimes, entries are also made from and exits to the green-room.

2. Costume : When major changes in costume are required, the performers retire to the green-room; minor changes are made within the central circle, in full view of the spectators. Examples of major changes are: Viśvamitra who wears a white *dhoti*, a red *uttarīya* wrapped across the torso and a wig (of matted hair); Indra a *dhoti*, a *kamar-bandh* and decorated jacket; Hariścandra, a white *pāñjābi* and yellow silken *dhoti*.

3. Mask : Masks are used for characters such as Rāvaṇa with ten heads and twenty hands in the episode titled *Śītā Harāṇ*.

4. Scenic visualisation : Scenic visualisations in *Kuśān Gān* is totally non-illusionistic. The following are a few examples drawn from *Dānabīr Hariścandra* as performed by the Rajpur troupe :

(a) The nymphs trapped in the trees because of Viśvamitra's curse in shown by them standing with their arms entwined to the boundary ropes of the performance space.

(b) Ruhidāsa's death by snake-bite is shown by a *chokrā* standing with extended arms near a corner pole to signify a tree in blossom, the *dohār* hiding behind the *chokrā* to signify a snake; as Ruhidāsa "picks" up invisible flowers from the extended arms of the *chokrā*, the *dohār* strikes him on the chest and doubles up as he rushes out.

(c) Ruhidāsa's body on the funeral pyre is shown with two torches burning on the floor of the performance space beside his body.<sup>50</sup>

### 3.3.3 *Lakṣmīr Gān* :

In pockets of Rajshahi region exists *Lakṣmīr Gān* (lit., "the Lay of Lakṣmī"), a virtually unknown genre of performance based on a popular version of "Uttara Kāṇḍa" of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. It is performed during Durgā Pūjā, Lakṣmī Pūjā, Kālī Pūjā and other Hindu religious celebrations. It may also be performed as an offering to Lakṣmī with a view to propitiating the goddess by Hindus as well as Muslims whose children or husbands are missing or whose granaries have collapsed. It is believed that because of the performance goddess Lakṣmī is appeased and the missing are found and the granary attains plentiful state. The performers of *Lakṣmīr Gān* from Ratuk village in Durgapur police station, Rajshahi, are farmers by profession and Hindus as well as Muslims by faith. Curiously, they believe that Sītā or Jānakī is Lakṣmī, who is synonymous with Fatima and that Rāma is synonymous with Ali. Mohammad Azizul Khan, the lead narrator (*gāyen*) of the troupe mentioned above, ascribes greater merit to the religion of Islam but he also believes that basically Hinduism and Islam are the same. During performance, Hindu spectators consider him equivalent to their preceptor (*guru*) and pay respect by obeisance. He also believes that the earliest exponents of *Lakṣmīr Gān* were Lava and Kūśa (the twin sons of Sītā and Rāmacandra) who performed it during their journey in search of their father.

*Lakṣmīr Gān* is performed in temple precincts or courtyards of rural homesteads in a temporarily constructed space (fig. 35) which is square in shape (some 12 feet a side) and the floor is about 9" high. On its four corners stand four bamboo posts to support the roof made of corrugated iron sheets. Electric lamps or "petromax" lanterns suspended from these posts serve to illuminate the performance space. The spectators sit on hay-strewn ground, on all four sides of the central square. The lead narrator (*gāyen*) is dressed in a white *dhoti* and a white *pāñjābi* (or a shirt) and has a white shawl (*foetā*) hung around his neck. He also wears ankle-bells and carries a whisk (*cāmar*) in his hand. There are about seven choral singers-cum-musicians (*pāil*), all of whom are dressed in *dhotis* (printed *saris* worn as such) and white vests and also wear ankle-bells. One of them plays the *khol* and another plays the *kartāl*. All save the *khol* player sing choral refrain and dance. Two members of the *pāil* who partake in dialogic performance are also known as *dohārs*.

There exist no written text of *Lakṣmīr Gān*, it being entirely an oral composition partly in rhymed metrical verse and partly in prose dialogue. The sections in verse are rendered in lyric during performance and the dialogic sections are partly improvised. Mohammad Azizul Khan learnt the text from his preceptor Mahiruddin Gayen from the same village, who in turn learnt it from Śāśī Gāyen of Belgharia village under the same police station, some fifty

years ago. It takes sixteen sessions spread over eight days and nights to complete the entire narrative. Of these, the sessions which are given at night commence around eight in the evening and end at dawn and those given during the day usually commence around ten in the morning and end at about four in the afternoon. But *Lakṣmīr Gān* may also be given in abridged form in six sessions spread over three days and nights or two sessions spread over a single day and night. The narrative begins with Sītā's exile and runs through the birth of Lava and Kuśa, their adventures during the journey undertaken to meet Rāmacandra, the latter's attempts of union with Sītā, her repeated rejection and finally, the reunion of Rāmacandra and Sītā. The following are some of the important episodes:

1. *Sītār Vanavās* (The exile of Sītā)
2. *Lava-Kuśer Janma* (The birth of Lava and Kuśa and their union with Rāma)
3. *Brāhmaṇa* (Sītā's residence at the city of Brāhmaṇa at a house of a Brahmin, arrival of Rāmacandra in the guise of a Brahmin to beg alms from her and Sītā's refusal)
4. *Pātāl* (The entry of Sītā into the underworld in order to avoid Rāmacandra)
5. *Puṇya* (Rāmacandra's self-immolation on funeral pyre, solicitation of Durgā and Śiva, revival of Rāmacandra back to life and their union).

The Rakuk troupe of *Lakṣmīr Gān* begins its performance with the *pāil* standing in the centre in a circle and playing a musical overture while the *gāyen* faces west with the whisk in his clasped hands as he recites a few secret magical formulas to protect himself and the troupe from all forms of evil attack (photograph 58). At the end of the recitation he blesses the floor and the roof of the performance space, all the musical instruments and the members of his troupe with his whisk. Then he sings the origin of the narrative (*Janma-brittānta*); simultaneously, members of the *pāil* dance in a circle around the *khol* player and also sing the refrain in chorus. When the song of origin is over, the *gāyen* begins to sing the *bandanā* (salutation song) in which Saraswatī, Sītā, Rāma, other Hindu gods and goddesses, Vālmīki, Daśaratha and other eminent figures of the *Rāmāyana*, the preceptors of the *gāyen* and that of the *khol* player are saluted. The *pāil* sings the refrain and dances in anti-clockwise direction around the *khol* player and the latter moves in clock-wise direction. The *gāyen* also dances in anti-clockwise direction. As soon as the *bandanā* is over, the *gāyen* and a *dohār* enter into a brief improvised dialogue through which the episode to be performed is introduced to the spectators. The main body of performance is given next and it is comprised of the following elements :

1. *Narrative performance in lyric*: The *gāyen* describes the action of his narrative as well as dialogue between characters in lyric while the *pāil* members sing refrain following each

line of the *gāyen*. The tunes of the songs are very distinct and ring quite unfamiliar to the ear. During the rendition of lyrical narrative sections, the *pāil* dances in the centre of the performance space (moving in anti-clockwise direction) around the *khol* player (who also moves in anti-clockwise direction). The *gāyen* dances around the ring of the *pāil* (in both clock-wise as well as anti-clockwise direction) only as he sings; when the *pāil* picks up the refrain, he remains stationary (photograph 59). The dance is non-mimetic. The movement pattern of the *pāil*, quite distinct in itself, is composed of (i) circular movement followed by sitting on the haunches and jumping, (ii) circular movement accompanied by swinging of the hips, (iii) circular movement followed by a twirl around a fixed axis.

2. *Dialogic performance in prose*: After each section of lyrical narrative, there follows a dialogic scene in prose, part of which is improvised. These scenes are performed by the two *dohārs* and the *gāyen* and the mood ranges from the comic to the pathetic (photograph 60). Characters portrayed in these scenes include *Sītā*, *Rāmacandra*, *Hanumāna*, Sage *Viśatya* (*Vālmiki*?), *Lava*, *Kuśa*, a ferry-man, a school-teacher, two farmers, a crane, a few bears, etc. Rearrangement of costume is not essential for the performers. The above roles and also that of *Sītā* are portrayed without any change either by the *dohār* or the *gāyen*. For a few other characters, such as the farmers, the two wives and the ferry-man, only the *dhoti* is slightly rearranged. No masks are used for the animals or birds. The *dohār* portraying the crane stands on one leg and ties his head and face with a *gārchā*. As the *dohār/s* and the *gāyen* enact a scene, other members of the *pāil* stand near the edge of performance space. The *gāyen* ends each dialogic scene with a prolonged call ("h-o-o-o-") which gives rest of the performers time to assemble in the centre and begin the following lyrical passage. The language used throughout the performance of the Ratuk troupe is standard *Bānglā* mixed with regional dialect. It is interesting to note the use of Islamic (*Allah*, *mukhlukat*, *dawat* etc.) as well as English words (money-order, master, school etc.) all of which are commonly used in everyday *Bānglā* language. As a rule, a performance must always end with the reunion of *Rāma* and *Sītā*.

The following are some of the salient conventions followed in the performance of *Lakṣmīr Gān*:

1. All the performers remain standing throughout the performance.
2. There is no attempt towards realistic impersonation of characters although noticeable degree of emotion is expressed.
3. No scenic devices are used.
4. Donation (*feri*) is collected from the spectators.<sup>51</sup>

On comparison, it should be evident that *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* (Natore) bears striking resemblance with *Lakṣmīr Gān*. Both the performances are sponsored and performed by Hindus and Muslims alike. In both cases, the performers never sit in the *āsar* during the entire length of performance. The elements of performance are also similar as both contain narrative performance in lyric and prose. *Lakṣmīr Gān* and *Mādār Pīrer Gān* also bear some similarities which will be discussed later.

#### 3.3.4 *Rāma Yātrā*:

Mostly seen among the low caste Hindus (Namaśudras) of Khulna, Faridpur and Jessore region, *Rāma Yātrā* is a totally religious genre of performance given during festivals such as Vāsanti Pūjā, Lakṣmī Pūjā etc. and is based on mythologies related to Rāmacandra, drawn from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. It is performed by both professional troupes and amateur groups. Sometimes even Muslim performers are known to participate, as was the case in a performance witnessed at Bagerhat.

*Rāma Yātrā* is performed in temple courtyards, opposite the sanctum. The performance space (fig. 36) is a temporary construction, square in shape (some 12 feet each arm) and usually non-elevated (although sometimes it is raised with earth to a height of nine inches). On its four corners stand four posts to support a canopy on top. "Petromax" lanterns or electric lamps are suspended from these posts. The space is bounded with ropes on all four sides, leaving open a narrow passage for entry and exit of performers which (also bound with ropes on two sides) leads to the green-room (*sāj ghar*) located at a distance (often behind the sanctum). The spectators sit on mats placed on the ground on all four sides of the performance space, the men separately from the women. At the Bagerhat performance, the musicians (who played *khol*, *ḍholak*, harmonium and *juḍi*) were seated with four choral singe along the edge of performance space, on the side which joined the passage. According to the performers, sometimes the musicians and the choral singers sit on two sides adjoining that which meets the passage: the wind instrument players and choral singers on one side and the percussion players with a few other choral singes on the other. The harmonium player is usually the "master" who conducts music, leads the songs and also prompts the line to the performers. A stage hand waits immediately outside the entrance to carry in and out chairs which represent thrones. Amateur performers also station a "chart-man" at the end of the passage, whose duty it is to give entrance-queue to all waiting in the green-room.

Some of the episodes popularly played in the *Rāma Yātrā* performances are :

1. *Rāvaṇa Vadh* (on the slaying of Rāvaṇa)



2. *Mahīrāvaṇa Vadh* (on the slaying of Mahīrāvaṇa, son of Rāvaṇa)
3. *Sītār Vanavās* (on the exile of Sītā)
4. *Sītā Uddhār* (on the rescue of Sītā by Rāmacandra)
5. *Aśvamedh Yajña* (on the Horse Sacrifice offered by Rāmacandra).

The text of *Mahīrāvaṇa Vadh*, for instance, contains no act division. Changes in locale are denoted by the exit of all characters. In all 27 characters (not including the supernumeraries) make their appearance, of whom eight are female. The dialogue is composed both in verse and prose.

A performance of *Rāma Yātrā* commences around ten in the evening with a musical overture ("opening concert"). It is followed by a patriotic song sung by a group of young boys and the choral singers. A brief music piece in fast pace ("appear concert") follows next. Then begins the main body of performance which is entirely dialogic, some spoken in prose (photographs 61 and 62), others rendered in lyric (photograph 64). The choral singers accompany each song by singing the refrain. There is little variation in the tune of the songs. It is more common for the protagonist and his allies, who represent spotless virtue, to render their words in lyric; the antagonist and his allies, representing absolute vice, usually render their lines in prose.

The performance, in general, resembles that seen in mythological *Yātrā* and is essentially declamatory. Nevertheless, *Rāma Yātrā* generates ardent devotional fervour among the spectators. Amidst intense suffering of Rāmacandra and villainous scheming of Rāvaṇa and Mahīrāvaṇa, Hanumāna and Śiva provide good doses of humour. The latter receives a thorough drubbing at the hands of the former to great delight of the spectators. Hanumāna's first appearance is with a bunch of bananas; he is greeted with cheers and a few additional ones are also thrown by the spectators. All the characters enter from and exit to the green-room through the passage. Sometimes the passage is also used as a performance space in some scenes such as the one in which Mahīrāvaṇa in disguise attempts entry inside the fortress where Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa stay in hiding (photograph 63). All the female roles and those of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa are played by young lads. The costume is colourful and generally follows that of mythological *Yātrā* performances. Orange and yellow colours are used for the righteous and black for the villains. No attempts are made to represent reality. Thus, the entrance of fortress is represented simply with two chairs placed near the entry-space, where Hanumāna lies on the floor with his legs up on the chairs. The same chairs are used as seats for Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa and also as throne for Rāvaṇa. At each change of locale when all characters exit, the musicians play a brief air before the next scene

commences. Thus continues the performances through the night and ends before dawn with joyous acclaim (*jaya-dhvani*) for Rāmacandra by all performers.<sup>52</sup>

### 3.3.5 *Maheśā Khelā* :

In the rural areas of Durgapur and Taherpur (in Rajshahi district) there still exists a nearly extinct genre of performance which is popularly known as *Maheśā Khelā* but called *Rāma Yātrā* by performers themselves. Although the genre bears similarity with the *Rāma Yātrā* of Bagerhat, it is also distinct in a number of aspects. In order to avoid confusion, the *Rāma Yātrā* of Rajshahi district will be termed as *Maheśā Khelā* is the following discussion.

*Maheśā Khelā* is performed specially on the occasions of Bhagavatī (Durgā) Pūjā, Lakṣmī Pūjā, Kālī Pūjā and at various rural festivals. It may also be performed throughout the dry season at rural homesteads, solely for the purpose of entertainment. The performers are "low" caste Hindus who are *mucis* (cobblers who also make rattan goods) by profession. The spectators are Hindus as well as Muslims.

*Maheśā Khelā* is based on the *Rāmāyaṇa* but the narrative varies to a great extent from that of Vālmikī as well as Kṛttivāsa. On the other hand, it bears similarity with that of *Lakṣmīr Gān*, which is also performed in the same region. For example, Sītā in *Maheśā Khelā* is portrayed as the daughter of Rāvaṇa. After her birth, the royal astrologer foretells that her husband would slay Rāvaṇa. As a result, the new born baby is placed inside a vessel and set adrift on a river. The vessel lies buried near a river in the kingdom of Janak. At that time, the kingdom suffered because of draught. The king is requested by the people to plough the land himself in the belief that the act would turn the tide of misfortune. Janak unearths the buried vessel in the act of ploughing. Born of the furrow, the child is named Sītā and she brings plentiful harvest for the people.

The text of *Maheśā Khelā* is oral and entirely dialogic. According to Subal Dās, a *Maheśā Khelā* performer from the village of Jaykrishnapur (under Durgapur police station in Rajshahi district), the performers learn the text orally from their forefathers. It is divided into two episodes. There are:

1. *Rāvaṇa Vadh* (lit., The Slaying of Rāvaṇa) containing the birth of Rāma and his three brothers and the birth of Sītā, the marriage of Rāma and Sītā, the exile of Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa, the abduction of Sītā by Rāvaṇa, the battle of Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Hanumāna against Rāvaṇa, the slaying of Rāvaṇa and the return of Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa to Ayodhyā.

2. *Sītār Vanavās* (lit., The Exile of Sītā) containing the exile of Sītā, the birth of Lava and Kuśa, their training in the use of arms under Vālmiki, the battle of Lava and Kuśa against Rāma and the union of Rāma and his family.

Apart from fair-grounds and temple precincts, *Maheśā Khelā* may also be performed in the inner or outer courtyards of rural homesteads. The performance space (fig. 37) is a temporary structure, square in shape (some twelve feet a side) and non-elevated. On its four corners stand four bamboo posts to support either a canopy or a roofing of corrugated iron sheets or coconut leaves. Burning torches or "petromax" lanterns tied to the corner posts serve as lighting. The spectators sit all around the space, on hay-strewn ground and men separately from women. A narrow passage connects the centre of the southern arm of performance space, through the area of the spectators, with the green-room situated at any of nearby huts or a temporary enclosure. The earthen floor of the performance space is covered with mats made of date-palm leaves. A musician (*bāyen/bādyakar/bājandār*) who plays a *ḍhāk* and six choral singers (*dohārs*) sit in a line inside the performance space, along the edge of eastern or western arm.

A performance of *Maheśā Khelā* commences around seven in the evening with the *bāyen* playing his *ḍhāk*, standing in the space. After a while, a masked performer in the role of Kālī enters dancing to the rhythm of the *ḍhāk*. Suddenly she freezes into a statuesque position when all the performers enter to offer ritualized worship to the goddess. When the ceremony of worship is over, *bandanā* addressed to Allah, Lakṣmī, Saraswatī, the preceptors and the spectators is sung by a few performers accompanied by the choral singers. An astrologer enters next and appears to be calculating with his papers. When asked by one of the choral singers as to what he is doing, he replies that his calculations foresee a terrible battle between Rāma and Rāvaṇa. When asked who will save Rāma, the astrologer replies that it would be goddess Kālī herself. Thereafter he exits and the main body of performance begins. It is composed of the following elements:

1. *Dialogic performance in prose and lyric*: The characters speak their lines in prose as well as lyric. The latter is accompanied by the choral singers who repeat each line after the character.

2. *Mimetic performance* : The battle scenes are portrayed by dance accompanied by rhythm of the *ḍhāk*. The characters who partake in the battle, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Hanumāna and Rāvaṇa, silently enact the action dancing to the rhythm.

Finally the performance ends before dawn with a brief announcement. Some of the salient features of *Maheśā Khelā* are as follows:

1. Mask: Rāvaṇa, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Hanumāna are masked and hence the name of the performance (*maheśā* from *mukhoś*, i.e., *mask*).
2. Costume: All the male characters belonging to the royalty are dressed in the costume of mythological *Yātrā* performances. Thus, as a rule, all the male characters wear *dhotis*, waist-bands and decorated jackets and all the female characters (performed by male actors) are dressed in *saris*. *Sītā*, in addition, also wears a crown. The musician and the choral singers are dressed in daily wear, i.e., *lungis* and shirts.
3. Props: Some of the important props used by Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Rāvaṇa are swords, bows and arrows, and Hanumāna, a *godā* (mace) .
4. Entries and exits: All entries and exits are made from and to the green-room.<sup>53</sup>

### 3.4 Performances Related to Śiva and Kālī

#### 3.4.1. *Saṅg Yātrā* :

In the district of Tangail, there exists a genre of performance known as *Saṅg Yātrā*, which is given during the festival held in honour of Del Ṭhākur (Śiva). The festival commences three to fifteen days prior to Caitra Saṁkrānti (the last day of the Bāṅglā calendar) and ends on the 1st of Baiśākh (the New Year's Day of Bāṅglā calendar).

#### The Festival:

In the morning of day one of the festival, Hindus from all caste who wish to perform the role of votaries for the period of the festival, often in fulfilment of pledge made to Del Ṭhākur, ceremoniously shave off their beard and moustache and bathe in the river Lauhajang. From then till the end of the festival, they refrain from shaving and partaking meat or fish. On completion of bathing, the votaries are ceremoniously initiated by the priest and then, led by the latter, they offer ritualised worship to Del Ṭhākur. The idol is then placed on the Pāṭ (i.e., the "throne", which is a piece of "Bel" or "Nim" wood, a little less than six feet in length, some 10" wide and about 3" thick, one end of which is bent aslant). It is wrapped with red cotton fabric (*lāl śālu*) and Śiva's *triśūl* (trident) is placed on the bend. Then the votaries take out a procession led by the priest in which one of them carries Del Ṭhākur with his Pāṭ on his head as the others recite verses in praise of the deity, accompanied by music played on *ḍhāk*, *ḍhol* and *kāsi*. The procession circumambulates neighbouring villages and finally reaches Lauhajang River. There is a formal ceremony of bathing the idol, following which the procession returns to the temple and it is replaced in the sanctum. Ritualised worship of the deity is held in the evening.

On each of the following days, till the day before the Saṁkrānti, the votaries take out procession in which one of them carries Del Ṭhākur and the Pāṭ on his head and the others recite verses in praise of the deity, accompanied by music played on *ḍhol*, *ḍhak* and *kāsi*. In each of these evenings, ritualised worship of the deity is also held, after which performance of *Saṅg Yātrā* is given in the temple precinct. In the evening of second day before the Saṁkrānti, simultaneously as the *Saṅg Yātrā* performance is going on, the ritual of *Bāhir Bhog* is performed. In it, some of the votaries, in the guise of ghouls and goblins (*bhūta* and *preta*) perform a few rituals and visit cremation ground to make offerings to the ghouls and goblins and collect cremated parts and ashes a human bodies. They return in the last hours of the night when *Saṅg Yātrā* performance is terminated and there follows ritualistic dance with the cremated parts. On the following day (i.e., the day before Saṁkrānti), the votaries take out a procession with three of them dressed as Hara, Gaurī and Nārada, and, accompanied by the music of *ḍhāk*, *ḍhol* and *kāsi*, they visit Hindu households of the locality to perform *Hara-Gaurī Nāc* (the Dance of *Hara-Gaurī*). In it, the costumed characters (Hara, Gaurī and Nārada) dance to the rhythm of music and choral songs on Hara and Gaurī. When the performance is over, they collect rice, lentil or money from the householder and move on to another homestead. In the evening, *Saṅg Yātrā* follows ritualised worship. Late at night, the priest and the votaries visit cremation ground to perform the ceremony of *Hājra*. It includes the ritual of standing on the blade of a chopper (known as the *Dā-hājra*), masked dance and ritualised worship of goddess Kālī (known as *Kālī-hājra*), ritualised worship of other goddesses (known as *Devī-hājra*) etc. The ceremony is concluded by day-break.

The ceremony of *Caḍak* is held on the day of Saṁkrānti, followed by ritualised worship of Del Ṭhākur in the evening. In the morning of 1st Baiśākh (the New Year's Day), the procession of *Satya Bhiksū* is taken out from the temple precinct. In the procession, some votaries dressed as female dancers and clowns (*saṅg*) dance to comic songs and music (of harmonium, *khol* and *juḍi*) rendered by other votaries. The procession visits neighbouring homesteads and shops, where they collect donations of cereal and money after presenting their song-and-dance numbers. The procession ends at the Lauhajang River where all the votaries shave and bathe. Then they return to the temple precinct and hold a feast with the collection made during the processional performance. Thus ends the festival.

The Performance:

*Saṅg Yātrā*, when it is given in the festival described above, is usually performed by the votaries of Del Ṭhākur who are all Hindus by faith. But it is also performed as a secular

entertainment by *Saṅg Yātrā* troupes which are comprised of Hindus as well as Muslims. One such troupe is Biṅāpāṇi Saṅg Yātrā Party from Naga village under Kalihati police station in Tangail. The performers of the troupe are mostly fishermen and daily labours, with one gold-smith, one laundry-man and a field-worker of a non-government organisation (NGO). The structure of performance given at the festival of Del Ṭhākur and those given as secular entertainment are similar. The following is a brief account of *Saṅg Yātrā* performance.

Given during the dry-season in the courtyard of homesteads, a performance of *Saṅg Yātrā* commences around ten in the evening and may run through the night if desired. The performance space (fig. 38) is circular in shape (some fifteen feet in diameter) and non-elevated. There is no roofing on the top. The space is connected to a dressing enclosure located in one of the huts or a temporarily screened-off area at the end of the courtyard. The spectators sit all around the performance space (leaving the entrance passage clear), on the ground as well as in the verandahs of adjoining huts. A separate area is reserved for the women. The orchestra (comprising of instruments such as harmonium, *ḍhol* and *judi*) and four or five choral singers (*dohārs*) sit on a mat spread on the periphery of the space at a point which commands clear view of the entrance-passage. All performers (other than the musicians and the choral singers) enter from and exit to the dressing enclosure. "Petromax" lanterns, electric lamps or kerosine torches serve to illuminate the performance space.

There are usually about four female impersonators in a troupe of *Saṅg Yātrā*. They are dressed attractively in *saris* and blouses, wear wigs of long hair and strong feminine make-up. The performers who enact male roles, at least four in number, are dressed in daily life apparel with ludicrous effect: a pair of trousers with one of the two ends rolled up, a shirt too short or too loose, a patched jacket, a sweater worn the wrong side front, frilled night-caps usually worn by women, earthen pots placed on the head etc. They also carry properties with similar effect: a broom under the arm-pit, a hessian bag etc. (photograph 65). The above is combined with a suggestion of the character's back-ground: a *dhōti* for a Brahmin, a *lungi* for a *faqir* (Muslim mendicant), a pair of trousers for a man from the city etc. In all cases, the male performers always have their heads covered with incongruous caps or earthen pots. Although the performers enact different roles in different skits, the female impersonators make no costume change and the males, only slight changes. Thus, when the same performer has to play the son-in-law in item 3 after playing the son in item 1, he may simply change his shirt.

The make-up of male characters is a distinctive feature of *Saṅg Yātrā*. It is executed in black and white, with sparing use of red. The most characteristic pattern is one or more

circles around the eyes and an ellipse around the lips. A circular line around the outer limit of the face is also not uncommon. The make-up of the female impersonators, on the other hand, tend towards realism (photographs 68-71). None of the performers effect any change in their make-up for the various characters they perform. Another important element which contributes to the appearance of all characters, male as well female, is the donning of ankle-bells throughout the performance.

A performance of *Saṅg Yātrā* usually commences after ten in the evening with a song introducing the troupe, rendered by the female impersonators, accompanied by choral refrain and orchestral music. The female impersonators also dance as they render the song of introduction which ends with salutation paid to the spectators, following the custom of Hindus as well as Muslims. It is interesting to note that the song is rendered in the same tune as that of the "opening concert" of the *Yātrā*. The song of introduction is followed by a medley of skits, song-and-dance numbers and monologic reports, all aimed at comic effect. The following account of a performance given by Bīṅāpāṇi Saṅg Yātrā Party may help illustrate the content of *Saṅg Yātrā*.

1. *Skit*: A woman enters, sits near the edge of the performance space and goes to sleep. Another woman enters and narrates (in prose) her tale of woe as the mother-in-law whose daughter-in-law is always sleeping and performs no house-hold chore. Her son arrives. Immediately the daughter-in-law assumes the role of the faithful and loving wife and attends to him with meticulous care. The mother is infuriated and complains to her son but the wife plays the injured party. The son is caught between mother and wife. Soon his mother-in-law arrives and the two mothers begin to quarrel. Their antagonism reaches climax as the wife and her mother leave home. There ends scene one. Scene two opens with the wife singing her tale of woe to her mother (as well as the spectators) while her mother interjects and comments in prose speech. Soon the son and his mother arrive. Immediately the two mothers begin to quarrel again (photograph 67), using prose speech as well as rhymed metrical verse. At one point the wife jumps on the lap of the son and both depart running. The two mothers are taken aback but they resume their quarrel as they run after their children.

2. *Song-and-dance* : A male performer and a female impersonator enter dancing. The female impersonator sings a Bāṅglā love song ("বৌবনে লেগেছে দোলা") to the tune of a popular Hindi film-song ("Mere lal dopatta malmalka") as both of them dance. They exit at the end of the song.

3. *Skit*: A woman enters and narrates to the spectators (in prose) that she has no children of her own but an adopted daughter, whom she has not seen for a long time. Soon the adopted daughter arrives with her husband and they are served food. But the husband is shy and so he remains half-fed. Late at night, his hunger drives him to the kitchen, where he begins to eat some food from an earthen pot. The noise wakes up the mother and believing it to be a prowling dog, she approaches with a stick. Hearing her approach, the son-in-law attempts to hide by placing the pot over his head. The mother jumps on the hiding son-in-law and clobbers him to death. The commotion wakes up the daughter. She rushes to the spot to discover that her husband is dead and wails, "O my father!" Two performers enter with a bamboo pole, tie up the husband's hands and legs to two ends of the pole and carry him off like an animal with the pole placed over their shoulder (photograph 66). The women exit wailing.

4. *Skit*: A couple enters. The man narrates to the spectators how happily married he is. A bangle-seller appears and the wife wastes no time in cajoling the husband into buying her some. Then they conspire to rob the man and invite him to spend the night at their home. When he is asleep, the couple steals his bag. The man wakes up in the morning to find his bag gone. He asks the couple but they feign total ignorance. The bangle-seller laughs and declares that he who robbed him is a fool because the bag was full of his excreta which he had to unburden late at night since he was afraid to venture out of the hut. Immediately the wife screams, runs indoor and returns to throw the bag at the man's face. The latter exits gleefully. The couple exits screaming at each other.

5. *Song-and-dance* : Two female impersonators enter dancing. They present a Bhāwāiyā song ("ওকি চাংড়া ছুমরা বন্ধুয়ারে/এতো গোসা কেনে তোমার অন্তরে") accompanied by dance; at the end of the song they exit dancing.

6. *Monologic report* : A narrator leads in a "bioscope". It is devised with four men covered with a piece a cloth, inside which they stand in a circle, bent forward from waist so that their heads meet and have their arms locked over each other's shoulders. The narrator proceeds to show pictures in his "bioscope" accompanied by brief description of each in rhyme (rendered in a chant-like tune). Thus, when he describes the wonders of electricity, he lifts up a section of the cloth to reveal a hurricane lantern hanging between bare buttocks and legs of a performer. Next to be displayed is the Howrah Bridge (shown only with bare buttocks), followed by the hanging of Khudirāma (shown with a short staff hanging from the bare buttocks and between the legs) and so on.



7. *Skit* : A Brahmin appears and says he has to go to Dhaka on call of religious duty. His two wives appear, lovingly bid him farewell and begin to quarrel as soon as he disappears. Soon they exit. In the next scene they enter quarrelling again. There appears a Muslim mendicant. It is evening and the two wives take him to be their husband and shower him with kisses. They fight over him and one of them manages to take him to her bed-chamber, leaving to other in distress. Now the Brahmin appears. The second wife is overjoyed at the prospect of what is to befall the first wife. The Brahmin is scandalised when he discovers his wife locked in the arms of the mendicant. He bribes the mendicant who makes good use of the situation and extracts a large sum from the former. As soon as he leaves, the Brahmin charges the wives of infidelity and they exit quarrelling.

8. *Monologic Report* : A performer enters and narrates local events with caricatured effect. His style of narration closely resembles news broadcast over the radio.

Thus a performance may continue till it ends with a choral song rendered by all the performers, in which they declare the end and take leave.

There is no written text of *Saṅg Yātrā* performance. Each troupe works out a number of scenarios which remain in its repertoire as long as their popularity lasts. Each scenario may contain a few songs which are composed in advance but the sections in prose dialogue are improvised by the performers during the show. A few comic acts (like the *lazzio* in *Commedia dell Arte*) are also worked out by the performers in advance. The scenarios are built on type characters and aim at ridiculing various aspects of social life.

*Saṅg Yātrā* performance is composed of the following elements:

1. *Dialogic performance in prose* : Major part of the skits is rendered in prose dialogue, all of which is improvised. Characterisation is based on real-life "types". Each character is portrayed with broad and caricatured strokes, aimed at slap-stick "low" comedy.

2. *Dialogic performance in lyric* : The characters also render parts of their dialogue in lyric, with choral and musical accompaniment. In such passages, they enact their action in rhythm of the lyric. On the other hand, in song-and-dance numbers, the performers enact the action incorporated in the song with the help of dance. These passages are accompanied by choral refrain and orchestral music as well. The dance is extremely sensuous and follows no classical convention.

3. *Dialogic performance in verse*: A few sections of the skits are also rendered in verse spoken as dialogue. An example of such dialogic section can be seen in the first skit, where

the two mothers quarrel. During such renditions, the characters move in rhythm of the verse as they enact the action.

4. *Narrative performance in prose* : Some of the reports, like a weather forecast are rendered in prose narrations.

5. *Narrative performance in verse* : Some other monological reports, such as the one on bioscope, are rendered in verse narrations. Such passages are accompanied by rhythm played by the orchestra.

*Saṅg Yātrā* is an interesting genre of performance because it is a critique of the society from the point of view of the people. Its comedy has a sharp sting and raw flavour as all forms of popular humour is prone to be. It is very interesting to note the presence of regional dialect of Rangpur and Bhāwāryā songs (from the same region) in *Saṅg Yātrā*. But most important of all is the striking similarity of the festival of Del Ṭhākur and *Śiver Gājan* because (i) both are held in honour in Śiva, and on a few days prior to Caitra Saṅkrānti, (ii) similar rituals are present in both (i.e., *Sannyāsī-dharā*, *Maśān Nāc* and *Caḍak* in *Śiver Gājan* and the initiation of the votaries, *Caḍak* and the *Hājirā* in the festival of Del Ṭhākur), (iii) processional performance (including the presence of *saṅg*) is seen in both. These similarities raise the possibility that the festival of Del Ṭhākur and the *Śiver Gājan* are linked to the same source.<sup>54</sup>

#### 3.4.2 *Performances of the Māndāi Community* :

A tiny community of around ten to eleven thousand people, known as the Māndāi, inhabit a few villages of Sakhipur, Madhupur and Ghatail police stations in Tangail district, Bhaluka police station in Mymensingh district and Kaliakair police station in Gazipur district of Bangladesh. Some of them also live in parts of Assam and Coach Bihar (West Bengal) in India. Scholars have identified the community as a branch of the Coach tribals who belong to the South-east Asian group of the Mongoloid race. The Māndāi believe that they are the progeny of Śiva and originally belonged to the Kṣatriya caste. For some unknown reason Paraśurāma (the mythical 'Rāma with the axe' of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas*) waged war against them in which they faced total annihilation. In order to save themselves, they cast their *nagun* (sectarian thread of the Kṣatriyas) and migrated from their homeland. Scholars believe that there may exist some truth in the above mentioned myth of the origin of the Māndāi. They point out that a substantial number of the Coach tribals migrated from their original homeland Coach Bihar when attacked by the

army of ferocious Afghan chieftain Daulat Khan under the command of his Hindu general Kālāpāhād. These displaced people are believed to have settled in parts of eastern Bengal sometime in the beginning of 11th century. It is possible that these people have later been identified as the Māndāi.<sup>55</sup>

The dating of Daulat Khan and Kalapahad given above appears contentious. Historians have identified three personages titled 'Kālāpāhād', all of whom were active from the end of 15th century to the end of 16th century. Of them, the first Kālāpāhād, who died in the beginning of 16th century, was engaged in the service of Sikandar Lodi, but had never set foot in eastern India. In second Kālāpāhād who died in 1571/2, was a general under Sultan Sulaiman Karrani of Bengal. The third Kālāpāhād (Rāju), who died in 1583, was a general under Sultan Daud (non Daulat) Khan of Bengal and was possibly a Hindu or a converted Muslim.<sup>56</sup> Therefore the migration of the Coach into eastern Bengal, if the above source is to be credited, occurred sometime after mid 16th century.

Today, the Māndāi people living in Bangladesh are a poverty stricken and dying community. They can be broadly classified as Hindus by faith and farmers by profession. The performances and festivals of the Māndāi are of interest to this study for at least one of them (comic performances given during the festival of Śīva) shows clear similarity with the *Sanig Yātrā* and the festival of Del Ṭhākur of Tangail region.

#### *The Festival of Śīva:*

The Māndāi festival of Śīva held during the last eight days of Caitra is comprised of a number of rituals. The following is a comparison of only those which bear similarity with that of Del Ṭhākur of Tangail. The Māndāi festival begins with ritualised worship of Deil Pāt on day one. The ritual is basically similar to that of Del Ṭhākur, except that there is no image of Śīva in the ritual of the Māndāi. Instead the Pāt, wrapped with red cotton fabric with a fish-hook and a trident placed on it, is worshipped. Late at night on day seven, a ritual known as *Bāro Bhūter Nimantraṇ* is performed, which is broadly similar to *Bāhir Bhog* ritual (performed on the second day prior to Saṁkrānti) in the festival of Del Ṭhākur, except that the votaries do not return with parts of unburned human bodies. During the day-time of day eight, the masked dance of *Hara-Gauri Nāc* is performed, which, in the festival of Del Ṭhākur, is performed on the day before Saṁkrānti. The ritual of *Hājṛā* is performed late at night of day eight (i.e., the Saṁkrānti) which is held on the day before Saṁkrānti in the festival of Del Ṭhākur. It is in the ritual of *Hājṛā* of the Māndāi that the votaries return to the temple precinct with unburned parts of human bodies. The festival of

Śiva ends on the first of Baisākh with the ceremony of *Caḍak*, which is held on the Saṁkrānti in the festival of Deī Ṭhākur.<sup>57</sup>

*Theatrical Performances:*

There are two theatrical performances which are given during the festival of Śiva as observed by the Māndāi. These are:

(i) *Raṅg Tāmāsā* or "Comic": The performance structure is exactly the same as the *Saṅg Yātrā*. It is performed on the night of Saṁkrānti with a view to entertaining the devotees who await the return of the votaries from the cremation ground. The following is a synopsis of a skit:

A Vairāgī (male Vaiṣṇavite anchorite) is on the way to Vṛndāvana with two Vairāginīs (female Vaiṣṇavite anchorite) while another, with similar destination, is single. The latter requests the former to permit him the company of one Vairāginī but is firmly refused. Finally the crisis is resolved with the help of a mediator and the first Vairāgī parts with one of his Vairāginīs. On the way the second Vairāgī discovers that his "female" companion is actually a male in disguise.

(ii) The Cultivation with Cows: Late in the afternoon of day eight (the Saṁkrānti), a performance illustrating the process of cultivation is presented in a circular space in front of the temple. The following is the synopsis:

A man sows seed in his seed-bed. Then he purchases cows (performed by men bent on all fours) and sets on to till the land. But the cows refuse to move. A doctor is fetched. He looks for the teeth of the cows in their hind parts and as result is kicked by them. There follows a series of other incongruous action resulting in slapstick comedy. Finally the performance ends with successful treatment of the cows by cauterising them in the front.<sup>58</sup>

Clearly the performance of the Cultivation with Cows bears remarkable similarity with *Śiver Cās* of Śaiva Cult discussed in Chapter 2. Again, the *Raṅg Tāmāsā* performance appears to be akin to performances given in *Choṭa Tāmāsā* and *Bādā Tāmāsā* of the *Gambhīrā* festival which features non-masked performance of contemporary social characters. But most important of all, the festival of Śiva as observed by the Māndāi bears close resemblance with *Śiver Gājan* because both are held in honour of Śiva on and a few days prior to Caitra Saṁkrānti and also because two rituals are similar (i.e., *Sannyāsī-dharā* and *Caḍak* of *Śiver Gājan* and initiation of votaries of Deī Pāṭ and *Caḍak* of the Māndāi). Furthermore, anthropological link of the Māndāi and the Coach clearly raises the possibility that the Māndāi festival of Śiva is akin to the festival of *Gambhīrā* which is prevalent among the Coach.

### 3.4.3 *Mukho Nācā* :

In the rural areas of Natore district in greater Rajshahi, there is exists a form of masked performance popularly known as *Mukho Nācā*. Performed by (Hindu) devotees of Kālī, it used to be given two to four weeks prior to Caitra Saṁkrānti but of late the performance has been shifted to the months of Baiśākh and Jaiṣṭhya because, as Bīren Mistri (leader of a *Mukho Nācā* troupe in Natore) says, fruits and grains are more plentiful during these months, which makes it easier for the people to support the performance by donating these articles. The performances are mostly held in the outer courtyards of Hindu homesteads (fig. 39).

In the evenings of the period mentioned above, *Mukho Nācā* troupes arrive at homesteads, announce their presence to the householders and seek permission to perform. When it is granted, the dancers retreat to a secluded corner to prepare for the performance. At the same time, about three musicians (*bāyen*) who play two *dhāks* and *kāsi* and same number of choral singers (*dohār*) who also play a harmonium and a *khol*, take up their position on a mat spread in the middle of one of the arms of the courtyard. The spectators, comprised of residents of the homestead as well as neighbours, take up their position along the periphery of the yard, leaving open a passage-way for the entry and exit of the dancers. When the musicians begin to play the *dhāk* and the *kāsi*, the spectators begin to settle down. As soon as the dancers are ready, the music ceases briefly, to commence again on a faster rhythm. Immediately, the dancers enter through the passage-way to perform a vigorous number known as *Hāth Khelā* for the purpose of warm-up. For this dance the performers are mostly bare-bodied with only a *dhoti* tucked up tightly around the hips. When the *Hāth Khelā* is over and the dancers have retreated to don their costume and masks, the music ceases and the episode known as *Bāḍi Ganānā* (lit., "reading of the homestead") begins. In it, the Master (leader of the troupe) calls the Astrologer, who enters singing a song and there follows a brief dialogue between the two in which the Master requests the Astrologer to calculate which evil spirits haunt the homestead where the performance is taking place. The Astrologer says he will require all his books to make an accurate reading and calls his disciple to bring those to him. Immediately the disciple enters singing a song with choral accompaniment. The Astrologer and his disciple begin to calculate but it has to be halted as the latter rushes out to attend to urgent call of nature; before doing so he manages to take the Astrologer's umbrella, batten and Brahminical chord (*paitā*) on various pretexts. He returns soon but now claims to be an Astrologer and there follows a comic encounter where the disciple attempts to prove his supremacy with

his half-baked knowledge. But he is forced to give in soon and returns the Astrologer his objects. Now the Astrologer and his disciple conclude their calculation and they inform the Master as to which episodes (from a given number constituting the troupe's repertory) need to be performed in order to exorcise the evil spirits. There follows the performance of three or four episodes (as prescribed by the Astrologer) during which the performers also find suitable pretexts to collect donation from the spectators. At the end of the above mentioned episodes, the Dance of Śiva and Kālī is performed as a compulsory after-piece so that the benediction of the deities is bestowed on all. At the end the Master and a priest offer ritualised worship to Śiva and Kālī in accordance with Tantric practice. The troupe then proceeds to another homestead to give another performance in the same format. There are usually two to three performances given each night, the last ending slightly after mid-night.

On the Caitra Saṁkrānti (the date now shifted to the new moon of Jaiṣṭhya), ritualised worship of Śiva is performed in the day-time and of Kālī from around ten in the evening to three in the morning. Just before dawn *Hājṛā Pūjā* is performed, in which a number of devotees paint their bare bodies with vermillion, soot and lime and visit cremation grounds from where they collect human skulls. They return dancing with their collection and perform the dance of ghosts and goblins at neighbouring seats (*āsans*) of Kālī. Previously, the *Caḍak* was also performed on the day of Saṁkrānti but of late the practice has ceased.

The following episodes constitute the repertory of *Mukho Nācā* troupe of Dighapatia, Natore:

1. *Hanumāna Nṛtya* (the Dance of Hanumāna): Hanumāna, the mythical devotee of Rāma, wears of mask (in which the dominant colour is white), a wig of jute fibre, a suit also of jute fibre and a tail. He performs singly, imitating the movement of the monkey but there is no narrative content in the dance.
2. *Narasimha Nṛtya* (The Dance of Narasimha : Narasimha the man-lion incarnation of Viṣṇu, wears a mask which is predominantly white in colour, a wig with black hair and a skin-night suit with black and white stripe. He too performs singly, imitating the gestures of the lion. There is no narrative content in the dance.
3. *Śakuni Nṛtya* ( The Dance of the Vulture): Śakuni is represented by a mask which is predominantly brown in colour, with a wig of black hair, a skin-tight suit with brown dots and a pair of wings. He too dances singly, imitating the movement of the vulture but there is no narrative content in the piece.
4. *Rākṣasī Nṛtya* (the Dance of the Ogress) : The Rākṣasī wears a mask of pink complexion, has a broad grin and large eyes, is dressed in a *sari* (worn like a *ghāgrā*) and a

blouse and carries branches with green leaves in both the hands (photograph 75). The dance portrays some cannibalistic gestures and movements but contains no narrative.

5. *Rāma-Lakṣmaṇa-Rāvaṇa*: Rāvaṇa in disguise appears to beg alms from Sītā in Pancavaṭī and abducts her. Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Hanumāna wage war against Rāvaṇa and *rakṣasas* (ogres) and finally Rāvaṇa is killed. Rāma wears a mask which is predominantly grey (or green) in colour (photograph 73), Lakṣmaṇa predominantly white and Rāvaṇa predominantly blue. Sometimes Rāvaṇa is represented by a mask with ten heads, of which the one in the centre is life-sized and the others are miniaturised. Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Rāvaṇa and the *rakṣasas* carry bows and arrows while Hanumāna carries a mace.

6. *Bāgh O Śikārī* (The Tiger and the Hunter) : The Night Guard appears at night in a village. He is informed by the Master that a tiger is on the prowl and is threatening human life. The Guard loses no time to call a hunter and the latter promises succor. The scene shifts to a jungle where a wild boar is seen. Soon the tiger appears, there is a battle and it kills the boar. Immediately the Hunter appears in the scene and after a hard fight, he kills the tiger. The Guard and the Master appear, congratulate the Hunter and collect donation from the spectators to reward the hunter for his brave act. The Hunter wears a mask which is predominantly blue in colour, carries a bow and a few arrows and speaks Hindi. The Guard's mask is predominantly white in colour and he carries a stick in one hand. The mask of the tiger is coloured yellow with red and blue-black spots.

7. *Budō-Budī* (The Old Man and the Old Woman) : An old woman appears frantically in search of something. On being asked by the Master, she says she has lost her old man. At another end of the performance space, the old man is seen, also looking for the old woman (photograph 74). Soon they find each other, but their happiness is short lived as they begin to quarrel. Finally they make up and depart for Kāśī (Benares). The scene is extremely comic and full of sexual overtones. Both wear masks the ground of which is brown in colour.

8. *Pagaler Misi-mājan*: (The Tooth-cleansing of the Mad Woman) : Another comic episode in which a mad woman entertains the spectators as she cleans her teeth with *misi* (a dentifrice made of roasted tobacco and copperas etc.). The performance is given by the mad woman alone, occasionally interacting with the Master. She wears a mask, the ground in which is coloured pink.

9. *Hara-Gaurī Nr̥tya* (The Dance of Śiva and Gaurī) : It is rendered by Hara (Śiva) and Gaurī (his wife) but contains no narrative. Interestingly, they dance to songs, the texts of

which are drawn from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. When asked for explanation, Biren Mistri said that the songs were recent additions which were made because the spectators requested for extension of duration of performance. The songs are sung by the *dohārs*. Hara is represented by a mask the ground of which is white in colour and he wears a tiger skin; the ground of Gaurī's mask is yellow and she wears a *sari*.

10. *Śiva-Kālī* (The Dance of Śiva and Kālī) : Śiva appears dancing and after a while he reclines on the ground. Kālī appears next dancing vigorously and charging towards spectators a few times, thus inspiring awe among them (photograph 72). Finally she steps on Śiva and the drums reach crescendo. According to Biren Mistri, the dance represents Śiva putting a halt to Kālī's frenzy after she annihilated *aśura* (demon). The ground a Kālī's mask is blue and it shows her blood-red tongue hanging out. She carries a decapitated human head in one of her hands and a *khadga* (large falchion) in the other.

The following aspects feature prominently in the performance of *Mukho Nācā* :

1. Female impersonation: All female impersonations are done by males.
2. Dance and dialogue: All the ten episodes discussed above contain dance. Episodes 5 to 9 also contain dialogue in prose. In these, dance and dialogue alternate, i.e., there is no dialogue during dance.
3. Songs : Songs are rendered only in the *Hara-Gaurī* and the *Bāḍi Gananā* episodes; those of the *Hara-Gaurī* episode are recent additions.
4. Text: According to Biren Mistri, there did exist a written text which had all the dialogue and the songs written but now it is lost. Although this implies that the dialogue and the songs are pre-composed, it is quite apparent from the performance that improvisation in dialogue is not unusual.
5. Music: Except for the songs in *Hara-Gaurī* and *Bāḍi Gananā* episodes, all other musical accompaniment is by the *ḍhāks* and the *kāsi*. The songs are accompanied by the harmonium and the *khol*.
6. The role of the Master: The Master is constantly present in the performance space, prompting and directing the performers and also interacting with the characters.
7. Astrological calculations: The astrological calculations of evil spirits are believed to be true and are held with respect.

It should be clear from the above that the elements of performance which constitute *Mukho Nācā* performance are :

1. *Mimetic performance*



2. *Dialogic performance in prose*

3. *Dialogic performance in lyric.*

The *Mukho Nācā* masks of Dighapatia are made from calabash or margosa timber covered with a few layers of old cotton fabric. The latter is soaked in a paste of clay and tamarind seed before they are applied on the wooden body. When the cotton fabric pieces have been laid, the mask is left to dry. Upon drying, they are polished with a bamboo slip and then coated with synthetic enamel paint for desired effect.

*Mukho Nācā* is also performed in the rural areas of Rajshahi district, in the months of Baisākh and Jaiṣṭhya both in the day time as well as at night, in the outer courtyards of Hindu as well as Muslim households. The performers are Pūrṇa-kṣatriyas by caste who are mostly engaged in farming. The performance given by Prabhāt Kumār Bhāṣkar (a tailor by profession) and his troupe from Puthia, Rajshahi, contains no *Baḍi Gananā* episode and is comprised of the following :

1. *Mahādeva-Kālī* : Similar to the *Śiva-Kālī* episode of the Dighapatia troupe.
2. *Rāma-Lakṣmaṇa-Rāvaṇa* : It begins with the scene showing the cutting off of the nose of Sūrpaṅakhā (Rāvaṇa's sister). The rest is similar to the performance given by the Dighapatia troupe.
3. *Vairāgī-Boṣṭamī* : A comic episode which opens with a blind Vairāgī and his wife Boṣṭamī who cleanses her teeth with *misi* powder. Later a mad man (Pāgal) attempts to and succeeds in eloping with the Boṣṭamī. The Vairāgī recovers his wife and beats up the mad man. The mad man has his head covered with a *gāmhā* tied like a turban, an indication of shaven head, which raises the possibility that the character refers to Buddhist mendicants.
4. *Buḍa-Buḍi*: An old man and an old woman are on their way to their daughter's house. A tiger attacks them but a hunter arrives at the scene to save them.
5. *Nāyeb-Barkandāj*: A clerk of a landlord (Nāyeb) is on the way to a village to realise tax from defaulting peasants and he is accompanied by an armed guard of the landlord (Barkandāj). The rest of the episode depicts acts of harassment and torture meted out by the landlord's men on the peasants. The latter are played by non-masked performers.

The masks in Rajshahi district are made of clay (those which are smaller in size, like that of *Sītā*) and timber of fig tree. In all other respect the *Mukho Nācā* performances of Rajshahi are similar to that of Natore.<sup>59</sup>

#### 3.4.4 *Kālī Kāc* :

In the village of Purva-dashura under the police station and district of Manikganj (greater Dhaka), the Ṛṣi ("low" caste Hindu) community performs a genre known as *Kālī Kāc*. Literally the term denotes a performance in the "costume of Kālī", since the medieval Bangla word *kāc* denotes costume. The genre is performed on the occasion of ritualised worship of Śīva held during the last week of Caitra and is witnessed by Hindus and Muslims alike. Ravindra Maṇi Dās (aged 65), a farm labourer by profession, is the lead performer of the *Kālī Kāc* troupe mentioned above. He is the disciple of Rameś Dās who died at the age of 80 around 1967. Ravindra Maṇi Dās has been performing since the age of 20 and his preceptor began to perform when he was around 20 years of age. Thus, the genre has been performed in and around Purva-dashura village since early 20th century. According to Ravindra Maṇi Dās, however, *Kālī Kāc* has been performed in the locality for the last 24 generations.

The performance of *Kālī Kāc* is a part of a week-long celebration held in the last week of Caitra (or Baiśākh, as it often has been the case in recent years). On the first day of the week, a number of devotees of Śīva (from all castes) temporarily assume the role of *sanmyāsīs* (ascetics) after a brief ritual which includes shaving off their beards. Then they carry Del Ṭhākur (Śīva represented by a piece of wood) from a temple to a nearby river and perform ritualised bathing ceremony. Thereupon they don red *pāñjābis* and red *dhotis* and carry Del Ṭhākur back to the temple. Having performed the rituals, it is obligatory for the *sanmyāsīs* to refrain from partaking meat or fish for the entire week. On each of the following six days, they visit Hindu households of the neighbouring area, dressed in red *pāñjābis* and *dhotis*, wearing ankle-bells and carrying Del Ṭhākur on one's head. In the courtyard of each homesteads they visit, the *sanmyāsīs* sing the *aṣṭa gān* (devotional songs which are supposed to recount the eight supernatural qualities of Śīva) and dance to the accompaniment of *dhāk*. But it is interesting to note that most of these songs are of Vaiṣṇavite origin which recount the birth of Caitanya and Kṛṣṇa. At the end of the performance, they collect rice and lentil from the householder and then move on to another homestead. On the night of the 7th day (i.e., the last day of Caitra) they perform the *Kālī Kāc*. At the end of the performance, around three in the morning, the ascetics perform *Hājṛā Pūjā* in honour of Mahādeva (Śīva). On the following day, the first of Baiśākh, they gather for a feast with the rice and lentil collected from various households, making an end of their temporary life as ascetics.

The performance of *Kālī Kāc* is given in a circular space some forty-five feet in diameter, enclosed by spectators sitting all around. Both the performance space and the spectators' sitting area are on the ground level and is usually located in the courtyard of a devotee's homestead and sometimes also in a temple courtyard. The green-room is usually a neighbouring homestead, conveniently located and is connected to the performance space with a narrow passage-way. The chorus and the orchestra are seated near the passage-way, on the periphery of the performance space (fig. 40). The orchestra is comprised of two *dhāks*, a harmonium and a pair of *judi*. On the other hand, the chorus is comprised of eight to ten singers who accompany the lyrical passages of the characters. Source of lighting is either "petromax" (kerosine) lantern or torch (made with a wick soaked in a jar of kerosine). Two bearers of lanterns/torches constantly accompany the performers on their two opposite sides. Some of the characters don masks (made of *śolā*, i.e., cork-wood), others use heavy make-up. Performances are given at night, beginning before mid-night and ending before dawn. The cast is all male. The performance is partly based on written text (delivered in the form of prose and lyrical dialogue during performance) and the rest is improvised (in the form of prose dialogue). All of it is performed according to a conventional structure.

A performance of the *Kālī Kāc* commences with the *dhāk* players drumming loudly as they move around the performance space. After a while, the *dhāks* cease briefly to signal the beginning of the salutation rituals, which also serve the purpose of introduction of the leading characters. The first two to enter are Kānāi (Kṛṣṇa, photograph 78) and Balāi (Balarāma). Both carry flute, wear ankle-bells, black cape (bordered red and the benedictory sign "Om" inscribed in the centre), *dhoti* made of printed *sari* and white shirt. Kānāi's make-up is predominantly blue, Balāi's white. They dance around the performance space with the two *dhāk* players (the *dhākīs*) following them till they exit. Next to enter is the trio of Śiva and the two Gaurīs. Śiva carries a trident and a snake and the Gaurīs (photograph 76) carry a handkerchief each. After a dance around the performance space with the *dhākīs* following them, Śiva sits in the centre and the two Gaurīs dance around him, paying salutations. Finally the trio departs, bringing the salutation rituals to a close. (Interestingly, Kālī does not appear in this segment.) The pair of the *dhākīs* now take up their positions with the other members of the orchestra. Next follows the main body of performance which is a series of unrelated episodes, titled *Kṛṣṇa-Kālī*, *Durgā-Mahiṣāsura*, *Budā-Budī*, *Petnā-Petnī*, *Hanumāna Nṛtya* and *Baidyā-Baidyānī*.

The first episode titled *Kṛṣṇa-Kālī* depicts the dalliance of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa which is discovered by Kautilyā (Rādhā's sister-in-law) and Āyān (her husband). At the very

moment when Āyān attempts to kill Kṛṣṇa, Kālī appears to save him. The first part of the episode ends with Rādhā, Kautilyā and Āyān paying homage to Kālī. In the second part, Kālī is shown in rampage (photograph 77). She is finally halted by Śiva by laying himself of her way. Interestingly, the episode includes the character of Vivek who appears immediately after Kālī and warns Āyān and Kautilyā of dire consequence if they do not offer the goddess their homage. It should be noted that the episode contains songs (sung by Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā and Vivek) and also frenzied dance (of Kālī) accompanied only by loud rhythm played on the *dhāk*.

In the second episode titled *Durgā-Mahiṣāsura*, the latter (Mahiṣāsura) performs austerities with the objective of attaining eternal life. When he is offered the same by Durgā in exchange of devotion to her, he refuses and wishes the boon to be granted by Śiva. On Śiva's refusal, Mahiṣāsura goes in rampage, defeating even Śiva. Finally he is vanquished by the ten armed Durgā in her terrible form. It should be noted that the episode contains no songs as the previous one but dance and prose dialogue (which is prompted).

Next to follow is a comic episode, non-religious in nature, titled *Buḍa-Buḍi* (the Old Man and the Old Woman) in which two masked characters dance and mime. The episode contains no song or prose dialogue. The characters enter, sit, the Old Woman offers betel-leaf to the Old Man but some incident prompts the Old Woman to go away feeling hurt. The Old Man searches for her, finds her but she is not appeased. The Old Man is hurt in return. Finally, the Old Woman pacifies the Old Man by offering her breast and the couple dance off happily.

A brief dance titled *Petnā-Petnī* (hideous male and female spirits) follows next. The characters are bare bodied save brief loin-clothes, carry branches with leaves and are masked. The masks are black with large protruding eyes and hideous grinning lips.

The fifth episode is *Bāgh-Śikārī* (the Tiger and the Hunter). It begins with the entry of the Hunter (in a pair of trousers and shirt, with ankle-bells and is masked). He carries a gun and appears to be searching for his hunt. The Tiger (also masked, in a hairy suit made of jute and hessian and wearing ankle-bells) is seen crouching among the spectators. The Hunter spots the Tiger and there ensues a dance in which they attempt to kill each other. Finally, the Tiger is victorious, fatally injures the Hunter and escapes. Immediately, the Hunter's wife enters, lamenting his death. She is not masked and wears a *sari*. Soon wild animals (all masked performers) gather. Next to enter is the Neighbour and he calls for the Doctor. The latter enters, examines and sends for his assistant, who makes his entry with a song. All these characters are non-masked and wear daily-life clothes. The Doctor carries

out further investigations with over-sized rusted instruments. Finally, the Hunter recovers and all exit happily. It should be noted that there are no songs or prose dialogue from the beginning to the escape of the Tiger; improvised prose dialogue is freely used in rest of the episode.

Next to follow is a brief dance of the Hanumāna. He is seen sitting on a tree outside the performance space, masked and costumed in a hairy suit made of jute clippings and hessian. To great merriment of the spectators, he descends from the tree, enters the performance space and dances. He then mimes husking of paddy. Finally, he lifts a child from among the spectators and enacts a brief scene of mother and child. There are no songs or prose dialogue in the episode.

The final episode is named *Baidyā-Baidyānī* (male and female snake-charmers) in which two male and two female snake-charmers sing and dance. The characters are not masked and the songs, erotic in nature, do not follow any story-line. With their exit, the performance of *Kālī Kāc* comes to an end.

*Kālī Kāc* performance is composed of the following elements:

1. *Mimetic performance*
2. *Dialogic performance in lyric*
3. *Dialogic performance in prose.*

Some other features related to the performance of *Kālī Kāc* :

1. One of the *aṣṭa gān* referred to earlier is remarkably similar to the section on "the growth of human foetus" recounted in *Yugī Parva* and *Yogir Gān*.
2. Of late, the performance of *Kālī Kāc* is more often held on the last week of Baisākh, very much like *Mukho Nācā* of Natore.
3. *Hājirā Pūjā* is an obligatory ritual for the performers very much like that of *Saṅg Yātrā* and *Mukho Nācā*.
4. Ceremonial procession with and bathing ritual of Del Thākur are also part of celebrations related to *Aṣṭak Gān* (Narail) and *Saṅg Yātrā*.
5. *Kālī Kāc* is performed as well in the courtyard of the temple of Śiva at Manikganj.
6. Some episodes, such as *Buḍa-Buḍi*, *Bāgh-Śikārī* and the dance of Hanumāna appear common to both *Kālī Kāc* and *Mukho Nācā*.<sup>60</sup>

Based on all the points mentioned above, it would be logical to hypothesise that *Kālī Kāc* belongs to the same tradition of performance as *Mukho Nācā*, *Aṣṭak Gan* and *Saṅg Yātrā*.

Perhaps it would not be out of the way to point out that the statue of Śiva at the above mentioned temple at Manikganj is actually a set of disjointed pieces of what possible was a sculpture in stone. It lies at the bottom of a pit (some 15 feet deep) inside the temple sanctum. According to members of the temple management committee, Śiva "appeared" there and the temple was built around him in his honour. When one is reminded of the fact that ancient Buddhist sites of Dhamrai and Savar lie only about ten to twenty miles from Manikganj, is it then possible to hypothesise that the set of stones believed to be Śiva actually points to another ancient Buddhist site buried underneath the temple? Is it also possible that *Kālī Kāc* has been derived from some ancient Buddhist masked dance which was popular at the very site about eight centuries ago (or 24 generations as Ravindra Mani Dās claims) ?

#### 3.4.5 *Aṣṭak Gān* :

In the greater districts of Khulna, Jessore and Faridpur, a genre of performance known as *Aṣṭak Gān* (or *Aṣṭa Gān*) is performed in Hindu homesteads during the last week of Caitra, mostly by the Hindus. The genre is interesting because it features narratives related to Śiva as well as Kṛṣṇa and Caitanya. Although scholars believe that the genre is a derivative of *Gājan* (of Śiva), they are uncertain as to why it is named *Aṣṭak Gān* as the name refers to Śiva's eight supernatural faculties but features Vaiṣṇavite narratives as well.<sup>61</sup> The eight faculties of Śiva are as follows : *aṇimā*, the power of becoming as small as an atom, *maḥimā*, that of assuming large shape, *laghimā*, that of assuming excessive lightness, *garimā*, that of becoming extremely heavy, *prāpti*, that of obtaining everything at will, *prakāmya*, that of obtaining all objects of pleasure, *īśitva*, the power of supremacy and *vaśitva*, that of subduing, fascinating and bewitching.<sup>62</sup>

In the village of Banshgram under Kalia police station in Narail district, *Aṣṭak Gān* is performed in large courtyards with the spectators standing on all four sides (fig. 41). The musicians and choral singers stand along one of the arms of the rectangular courtyards; they play instruments such as harmonium, *ḍholak*, *bāśi*, *juḍi* and *sāringā* and sing the lyrical passages. The dancers, both boys and girls, impersonating as Śiva, Gaurī, Lakṣmī, Saraswatī, Kārtika, Gaṇeśa etc. dance in front of the musicians and choral singers in various choreographic formations. They silently enact the narratives of the songs rendered by the choral singers. During performance, the musicians and choral singers change direction by standing along each of the other three arms; with them, the dancers also change their direction. The genre is composed entirely of the element of mimetic performance.<sup>63</sup>

In Pangsha, Rajbari (greater Faridpur), the performance is given in the evening, for about two to three hours. The narratives usually performed are those related to Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, such as *Naukā-vilās*, *Vāstra-haraṇ* etc. When Kṛṣṇa's actions are to be enacted, Kṛṣṇa and his companions dance while Rādhā and her companions sit in front of the choral singers and musicians; when it is Rādhā's turn, she and her companions dance while the former group sits in the same position as that of the latter. Other features of the performance are quite similar to that of Banshgram.<sup>64</sup>

An *Aṣṭak Gān* troupe encountered at Badhal Bazar, Bagerhat (in greater Khulna), on the evening of 27th Caitra, 1401 (10 April, 1995), consisted of five male dancers (all adults, dressed as Śīva, Pārvaī, Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā and Hanumāna (pictures 79-82), three musicians (who played *ḍhol*, *juḍi* and harmonium) and two choral singers. It was interesting to see that the dancers, in the costume described above, performed silently to Hīndī film music and also a song of Rāma addressed to Lakṣmaṇa (based on an episode of the *Rāmāyaṇa*). The above performance was also interesting because of the presence of Hanumāna and the absence of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. When asked for an explanation, the leader of the troupe, Hṛday Kumār Dās said, "This is the way we perform it".<sup>65</sup>

In Pangsha, *Aṣṭak Gān* is also performed as a contest between four or five troupes. Known as *Cāpān Gān* or *Pāltā-pālti*, it is performed through the entire night.<sup>66</sup>

Judging by the performance of *Aṣṭak Gān* from the three areas mentioned above, the opinions of scholars and also the significance of the name, it is possible to believe that *Aṣṭak Gān* was originally a performance related to Śīva which was later influenced by Vaiṣṇavism. The process of change is still on as can be seen in the case of Badhal Bazar performance.

#### 3.4.6 *Aṣṭak Yātrā* :

In the village of Banshgram under Kalia police station in Narail district, a genre of performance known as *Aṣṭak Yātrā* is performed in evenings of the nine days prior to Caitra Saṁkrānti, in Hīndū households where ritualised worship of Deī Ṭhākūr is held, as a part of festivity in honour of the deity. The performers are Hīndūs by faith (mostly Śaiva-Śākta devotees) and mostly farmers by profession. Beside Hīndūs, members of Muslim community also witness the performance.

The performance space of *Aṣṭak Yātrā* (fig. 42), temporarily constructed in the inner courtyard of rural homesteads, is square in shape (some fifteen feet each arm) and about eighteen inches high (or even non-elevated at times). On its four corners stand four posts to support an awning on top. The musicians sit on two opposite sides: the wind and the string

(*bāsi*, *khamak* and violin) on one side and percussion (*dhol* and *judi*) on the other. They are led by the *sarkār* who also plays harmonium and sits with the wind and string instrumentalists. A ramp descends from any of the other two sides to a passage-way which leads to the green-room situated some seventy-five feet away in one of the neighbouring huts. Actors and actresses, costumed in a manner similar to mythological *Yātrā*, appear from and exit to the green-room. The spectators sit on hay-strewn ground on all four sides of the performance space. "Petromax" (kerosine) lanterns or electric lamps, suspended from the corner posts of the performance space, serve as lighting.

Texts of *Aṣṭak Yātrā* are all based on Hindu mythologies and are composed in dialogic form (prose and lyric), interspersed with a few prose narrations. Some of the more popular texts are *Dānabīr Hariścandra* (also titled *Smasān Milan*), *Behulā-Lakṣmīndar*, *Caṇḍīdūsa-Rajakini*, *Svayambar Sabhā*, *Guru Dakṣiṇā* etc.

A performance of *Aṣṭak Yātrā* begins with the national anthem rendered by the choral singers. It is followed by the *bandanā*, rendered by the *sarkār* with choral and musical accompaniment. The main body of performance comes next and it is composed of the following elements:

1. *Dialogic performance in prose*: Major part of the performance is comprised of dialogic performance in prose.
2. *Dialogic performance in lyric*: At emotionally heightened moments, the characters sing their lines. The performers who render lyrical passages also dance in those scenes which are not pathetic.
3. *Narrative performance in prose*: The *sarkār* introduces each scene, and sometimes also explains a particular action within a scene, with a brief narration in prose.

The performance ends with a musical air played by the musicians.

Some of the other salient features of *Aṣṭak Yātrā* performances are :

1. Collection of donation (*kaḍi-bhikṣā*): Performers collect donation from the spectators at suitable points during performance.
2. Scenic elements: Of scenic elements, only a few set props, such as a chair for a throne, are used.

Obviously the play-text titled *Dānabīr Hariścandra* is a recent composition. But according to Nirmal Kumar Mandal (aged 65), a farmer by profession and a performer of *Aṣṭak Yātrā*, the genre has been given in the village for at least the last three generations. He also



spoke of a large number of play-texts which used to be performed and of great popularity of the genre at earlier times.<sup>67</sup>

### 3.4.7 *Gamīrā Nāc* :

In the rural areas of Thakurgaon district (greater Dinajpur), *Gamīrā* festival is celebrated by the Hindu devotees of Śiva and Kālī during the last eight days prior to the Caitra Saṁkrāntī. It begins with ritualised initiation ceremony of about twelve *bhaktas* (devotees), performed by a priest. The devotees, some of whom undertake the task as fulfilment of vows made in order to propitiate the deities, abstain from partaking fish and meat and from shaving during the entire period of the festival. Following the initiation ceremony, four members of the group dress as female dancers (wearing *saris* and feminine make-up), four as male dancers (wearing *dhotis* and vests) and their leader as *Śiva-dohār* (also in *dhoti* and vest) who carries a wooden stick some four feet long, wrapped in a white piece of cloth, representing Śiva's trident (*trisūl*). Then, accompanied by musicians (in *dhotis* and vests as well) playing *ḍhāk*, *kāsi* and *sehnāi*, the group moves from one homestead to another to perform the *Gamīrā Nāc* (the *Gamīrā* Dance).

The performance of *Gamīrā Nāc* is given in the outer courtyard, where the spectators stand all around the circle of dancers and musicians with the *Śiva-dohār* in the centre (fig. 43). As the latter leads a series of songs accompanied by music, the rest dance in a circle around him and sing choral refrain. The songs are short and disjointed pieces and the dance is non-mimetic. There appears to be no specific themes of the songs as they range from the glory of the deities to every-day family life and even include those from the cinema which are popular. At the end of the performance, the householders donate food-grains and a little money. Then the performers move along to play at another homestead. Thus the group continues for eight days, performing both in the day-time as well as in the evening.

On the day of Caitra Saṁkrāntī the group performs *Śmaśān Nāc* (Dance of the Cremation Ground) in which the dancers are believed to be possessed by goddess Kālī as they dance, one after another, with her mask; the rest of the dancers perform grotesque dance with human skulls. Given in front of temple of Kālī, the dance begins in the morning after ritualised worship of the deity and continues through the day. The ceremony of *Caḍak* is also performed as a part of the celebration.

The devotees end the period of austerities on the day after the Saṁkrāntī with a ceremony of bathing and shaving followed by a feast organized with food-grains and money collected by them.<sup>68</sup>

### 3.4.8 *Śiva-Gaurī Nāc* :

In Bajitpur police station located in Kishoreganj district (eastern Mymensingh), there exists a genre of performance among the R̥ṣi community ("low-caste" Hindus), known as *Śiva-Gaurī Nāc* which bears remarkable similarity with *Muko Nāc* and *Kālī Kāc*.

*Śiva-Gaurī Nāc* (the Dance of Śiva and Gaurī) is performed by two male devotees of Mahādeva (Śiva) one of whom dresses himself up a Śiva (wearing a piece of cloth painted like tiger-skin which covers the torso and the thighs, a wig of matted hair and carrying a trident) and another as Gaurī (wife of Śiva, wearing a *sari*). The pair dances to the accompaniment of *ḍhāk* and *kāsi* from door to door and collect donations throughout the month of Caitra. In the dimly-lit courtyards the dance creates quite an awe-inspiring effect specially because of the loud beating of the drum and crash of the *kāsi*.

With the money collected from the performance of *Śiva-Gaurī Nāc*, a ritualised worship of Mahādeva is performed on the Caitra Saṁkrānti. On that day, the devotees partake only vegetarian diet in the day time and refrain from eating throughout the night. Late in the evening, when the ritualised worship is over, the dance of Durgā and Asura is performed to the accompaniment of *ḍhāk* and *kāsi*. The performance is given in the *chāyā maṇḍapa* (similar to *nāṭ-maṇḍapa*, located in front of the temple of Mahādeva). It opens with individual dance of Kālī, Mahādeva, Durgā, Siṁha (lion) and Asura (the demon). Later, the battle of Durgā and Asura is performed. At the climatic point when Durgā kills Asura, a tableau is formed with Kārtika, Sarasvatī, Mahādeva, Lakṣmī, Gaṇeśa and the Lion. All these characters are costumed and also made-up (with red, white and black paint). About twenty-five years ago, papier-mâché masks were commonly used instead of make-up.<sup>69</sup>

### 3.4.9 *Nīler Gājan and other festivals of Śiva* :

Religious festivals held in the month of Caitra in honour of Śiva is generally known as *Śiver Gājan* (details of which have been discussed in Chapter Two). In some parts of Bangladesh, the festival is known as *Nīler Gājan* (since Śiva is also known as Nīla-kanṭha) and in some aspects it is slightly different from *Śiver Gājan*. Still seen in parts of greater Barisal, *Nīler Gājan* participants are devotees of Śiva, who move in procession from door to door in the rural areas to perform narratives related to Śiva, specially on his marriage and married life. The performance is usually given in the courtyards of homesteads belonging to Hindu families. The troupe is comprised of musicians who play *ḍhāk*, *ḍhol*, *kāsi* and *juḍi*, choral singers and dancers dressed as Śiva and Gaurī who silently perform to the lyric rendered by the choral signers. The genre is composed entirely of the element

of mimetic performance. The performers collect donation of rice and lentil at the end of their performance.<sup>70</sup>

Similar festival is also seen in greater Faridpur where the presiding deity is known as Pāt Ṭhākur. The term 'Pāt' denotes a 'throne' and the deity is conceived as a low wooden stool with iron nails on its sides and a *trisūl* (trident of Śiva) on top. Devotees of Pāt Ṭhākur perform narratives of Śiva in which two of them are dressed as Śiva and Pārvaṭī. Other feature of their performance are similar to *Nīler Gājan*.<sup>71</sup>

Similar festival in honour of Del Ṭhākur have already been noted earlier in connection with *Saṅg Yātrā* and *Kālī Kāc*. In the village of Banshgram under Kalia police station in Narail district, procession of Del Ṭhākur (i.e., Śiva, represented by a piece of wood curved at one end) is taken out during the day-time (from around eight in the morning to four in the afternoon), on all nine days prior to Caitra Saṅkrānti (the last day of Caitra). The participants are mostly Hindus by faith (Śaiva-Śākta devotees) and farmers by profession. The procession is led by a devotee carrying Del Ṭhākur on his head followed by others dressed as Śiva and Gaurī and other deities, musicians playing instruments such as *dhāk*, *ḍhol*, *kāsi* etc., and choral singers. They perform *Aṣṭak Gān* in the courtyards of rural homesteads belonging to Hindu families and collect donation at the end of their performance. Other aspects of the procession are similar to those described above.<sup>72</sup> Two other festivals held in honour of Śiva have already been noted earlier in connection with *Śiva-Gaurī Nāc* and *Gamīrā Nāc*. Another festival held in honour of Deil Pāt have also been noted in connection with the performance of the Māndāi.

### 3.5 Performances Related to Buddhism and Nātha Cult

#### 3.5.1 *Yogīr Gān* :

In the district of Natore there exists a genre of performance known as *Yogīr Gān* (lit., Lay of Yogī) which is performed with a view to enlightening spectators (Hindus as well as Muslims) on the *Kāvā-sādhanā*. In Dighapatia, Natore, it is performed by a troupe comprising of both Hindus and Muslims who strongly believe in the doctrine. By profession they are mostly fishermen, small traders and farmers, some of whom are also *ojhās*. The occasion for performance can be any fair, public festival (including *pūjā* celebration of deities such as Kālī, Bhagavatī i.e., Durgā) and special invitation extended by individuals. It is always given at night, commencing before ten in the evening and ending before daybreak. (Photographs 83-85.) The performance is also known to have existed in the district of Naogaon.

The performance space (*āśar*) is temporally constructed, which is square in shape (some twelve feet a side) and non-elevated. Four bamboo posts on its four corners support a flat roof of corrugated iron sheets or coconut/date-palm branches. The spectators sit on all four sides and in its centre sit seven members of chorus-cum-orchestra (*dohār*) five of whom play musical instruments (a harmonium, two *juḍi*, a *kartāl* and a *khol*) and all save the *khol* player also sing choral refrain. Four performers who enact the four characters required for the performance (i.e., Guru, Bhurtu Dāsa, Yoginī and her disciple Śyām Dāsa) enter from the green-room (*sāj ghar*) located in any nearby homestead situated immediately beyond the spectators' area, through a narrow passage cutting through the spectators and joining the central square near one of the corner posts (fig. 44).

The *dohārs* are dressed in the usual daily-life attire, but the four characters, Guru, Bhurtu Dāsa, Yoginī and Śyām Dāsa, are costumed and wear make-up. Guru wears a white *dhotti* and a *nāmābali cādar* wrapped around the torso, has a *tilak* (a sectarian mark of the Vaiṣṇavites) painted in the middle of his forehead and upper part of the nose and carries a *japa-mālā* (rosary) in one hand and a torch in the other. Bhurtu Dāsa and Śyām Dāsa both wear white *dhotti*, tucked up tightly around the hips, and white vest. They also have a *gāmchā* tied around the head, with its two loose ends wrapped in a short horn-like shape (*cuḍā*) just above the forehead. Performers explain it as the symbol of temple pinnacles in Vṛndāvana. Their facial make-up is comprised of red and white lines painted around the eyes and the lips. Red and white circular shapes are also painted all over their bare arms and legs. In addition, Śyām Dāsa also carries a slapstick made of bamboo, slightly over two feet in length (photograph 84). Yoginī (female *Yogī*), a male impersonator, wears a *sari*, a crown on her head and feminine make-up. She too carries a torch in one hand. The torches serve the purpose of lighting during performance. These are short bamboo staffs, slightly over a foot long, with kerosine-soaked rags stuffed inside the hollow part.

*Yogīr Gān* text is an oral composition, prosometric in form and of unknown authorship. Bhelu Kārikar (aged 65) and Pañcānan Mandal (aged 60), two lead performers of *Yogīr Gān* in Dighapatia (Natore), learnt it from Bādal Gāyen, their preceptor, who in turn learnt it from Supcānd Gāyen, his preceptor (both from Dighapatia). The sections of the text composed in verse are rendered in lyric during performance and the rest in prose dialogue (part of which is improvised). In terms of subject matter, most of the lyrical passages are similar to two texts titled *Yogīr Gān* and *Yogīr Kāc* published by Panchanan Mandal.<sup>73</sup> The former was collected by Rabindranath Tagore from Kushtia and the latter by Panchanan Mandal from northern Bengal. Both the texts were collected from oral sources and contain only the sections in rhymed metrical verse. A third text, edited by Alamgir Jalil

and titled *Yogī Gān*,<sup>74</sup> also bears similarity with that performed in Dighapatia, Natore. The only difference is in language, i.e., choice of words. The plot of *Yogī Gān* (Dighapatia, Natore), comprised of two parts, is simple and it illustrates the doctrine of Kāyā-sādhanā by relating a human story.

The performance of *Yogī Gān* at Dighapatia commences as the *dohārs* take up their position in the centre of the performance space and begin to play musical overture. Next, the *bandanā* is sung by the *dohārs* in which the spectators are advised to serve and worship the preceptor, parents, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Śiva, Kālī, Fatima and Ali. The main body of performance comes next and is composed of the followings elements:

1. *Dialogic performance in prose* : Prose dialogue is rendered between the following characters: Guru-Bhurtu Dāsa, Bhurtu Dāsa-Śyām Dāsa, Śyām Dāsa-Yoginī, Śyām Dāsa-Townsmen, Guru-Townsmen and Bhurtu Dāsa-Townsmen. The *dohārs* play the Townsmen, always sitting in the circle. Bhurtu Dāsa and Śyām Dāsa improvise a few line to add comic effect. An interesting feature of the language used by Yoginī, Śyām Dāsa and some of that of the Townsmen is abundance of Hindi mixed with colloquial Bāṅglā.

2. *Dialogic performance in lyric* : Most of Yoginī's lines, few of Śyām Dāsa and major part of Guru's lines are rendered in lyric. One of the songs describe the origin of life, the birth of Brahma from the membrane of an egg, Viṣṇu from the water and Mahādeva (Śiva) from the yolk. All the songs are accompanied by the *dohārs* singing refrain after each line. Each song is also accompanied by simple dance steps executed by all the characters present. Throughout the first part of the performance, Guru and Bhurtu Dāsa move in anti-clockwise direction: the former executes simple movement, while that of the latter is caricatured. All through these movements both stay together, Bhurtu Dāsa slightly behind and to one side of Guru; but when delivering prose dialogue, they stand face to face. In the second part, after the two pairs have met, they stand face to face, Guru opposite Yoginī and Bhurtu Dāsa opposite Śyām Dāsa. During the lyrical passages, they execute a dance step comprised of two steps forward and two steps back, following which the pairs turn away from each other and re-compose in the opposite part of the performance space. The steps are repeated followed by half circular movement again. And so continues the dance with the song. In these passages, the two disciples execute caricatured movement while Guru and Yoginī maintain dignified posture. The movements of the disciples, specially that of Bhurtu Dasa, are striking for their similarity with that of the male performers of the *Sanig Yātrā*. Finally, the performance ends with a song sung by the Yoginī as she exits through the passage with Guru.

The following are a few examples of performance techniques used in *Yogīr Gān*:

1. *Entries and exits* : As soon as the *bandanā* is over, Guru is seen standing at the far end of the entrance passage, holding a torch in one of his hands. Behind him hides Bhurtu Dāsa, hardly visible. Guru sings each line of his song standing; he moves only when the *dohārs* repeat his line. Thus it continues till he reaches the central square when Bhurtu Dāsa reveals himself (photograph 83). Yoginī and Śyām Dāsa also enter from the green-room in a similar manner, but in this case the latter stands beside the former. Towards the end of performance, Bhurtu Dāsa and Śyām Dāsa depart together through the passage, followed by Guru and Yoginī a little later.

2. *Change of locale*: After Guru accepts Bhurtu Dāsa as his disciple, the latter seeks his permission to take leave of the Townsmen. Guru's granting of permission is immediately followed by a loud crash of cymbals and drum beats as Bhurtu Dāsa runs half a circle around the *dohārs* and Guru joins them (*dohārs*). Bhurtu Dāsa now speaks to them as the Townsmen. As soon as he finishes speaking to them, there is another loud crash of cymbals followed by rolling on the drum and he runs back half a circle to find Guru standing in his previous position. Similarly, change of locale is also effected during the length of performance from the entry of the second pair to its meeting with the first pair, when the latter sits with the *dohārs*, thus denoting separate locale from that of the first pair. 75

*Yogīr Gān* is clearly a didactic piece of theatre in which serious exposition of Kāyā-sādhanā is mixed with slapstick "low" comedy ("sugar-coating for the lay spectators", according to the performers). The names of some of the characters (Śyām Dāsa and Bhurtu Dāsa), some of the costume and properties (the *nāmābali* and the rosary) and reference to Vṛndāvana suggest that its origin is linked to Vaiṣṇavism. But the absence of reference to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, the predominance of Kāyā-sādhanā and the importance attached to renunciation of worldly life appears to belie the above mentioned suggestion. Moreover, the music is far from *kīrtan* style. On the other hand, the performers explain Guru and Yoginī as Śiva and Bhagavatī (Durgā), Bhurtu Dāsa and Śyām Dāsa as Nandī (the bull of Śiva) and Bhiringī (sic., Bhṛngī, an attendant of Śiva). The make-up of the two disciples as well as their movement pattern are strikingly similar to that of the male performers of *Saṅg Yātrā*. Abundant use of Hindi words is an interesting pointer which immediately suggests affiliation with north Indian Yogī sects. The *cuḍa* on the head of the two disciples, although explained by Vaiṣṇavite reference, could actually be long hair of the Yogīs tied up in a knot. Furthermore, *Yogī Gān* edited by Alamgir Jalil, has been clearly

mentioned as a text of the Yogīs who belong to the Nātha cult.<sup>76</sup> Thus there can be no doubt that *Yogīr Gān* of Dighapatia (Natore) was originally a performance of the Nātha cult which underwent various layers of cultural assimilation.

### 3.5.2 *Yugī Parva* :

In the district of Rajshahi, there exists the *Yugī Parva* (photographs 86-89), a genre of performance which bears remarkable similarity with *Yogīr Gān* discussed earlier. A troupe of *Yugī Parva* from the village of Tebila in Durgapur police station, Rajshahi district is comprised of Muslims only who profess strong belief in the doctrine of Kāyā-sādhanā. Oku Prāmāṇik (aged 70), the preceptor of the troupe, claims to be a follower of Hadipā (one of the nine *nāthas* of Nātha cult). Almost all the performers are farmers by profession, except one of the lead performers, Mohammad Akram Ali Prāmāṇik, who is a village doctor and a tailor. The following account notes mainly the important points.

The performance space of *Yugī Parva* (fig. 45) is also temporarily constructed. It is circular in shape (about 18 feet in diameter), non-elevated and on top of it stands a roof (square in shape and made of corrugated iron sheets) on four posts equidistant from each other. The choral singers (known as *pāil*) also play musical instruments such as *khol*, *khañjari* and *juḍi*. The disciple of the Guru is known as Bālyak Dāsa and that of the Yoginī, Rāma Dāsa. They wear a *gāmchā* as a short loin-cloth and tie on their heads another *gāmchā*, the loose ends of which are wrapped in a short horn-like shape (*eḍua*). Their bare bodies are also painted in a manner similar to that of the two disciples of *Yogīr Gān*. The Guru is costumed in a *dhoti*, a *pāñjābi* and a *cādar*, all white. All other aspects of the performance space, costume and props are similar to *Yogīr Gān* discussed earlier.

The performance of *Yugī Parva* by the troupe from Tebila begins with a musical overture played by the *pāil* which is followed by the *bandanā*. Immediately after the *pāil* begins to sing choral refrain, the Guru (with a torch burning in his hand) enters the performance space from the green-room through the connecting passage and he leads the *bandanā* paying tribute to Allah, the Prophet, Ali, Fatima and all other prophets and *pīrs*, at the end of which all four directions are saluted. The song then pays tribute to the preceptor of the troupe Oku Prāmāṇik and his preceptor Kuṅkan Maṅḍal. It is interesting to note that the entire *bandanā* contains only one reference to Hindu deities ("mother", i.e., Saraswatī, in the opening line). The main body of performance is also composed of (1) dialogic performance in prose and (2) dialogic performance in lyric, very much like *Yogīr Gān*. Although the subject matter is similar, the text of *Yugī Parva* varies to some extent. Except

the entry of Bālyak Dāsa (from the central circle of the *pāil*), all other aspects of the performance are similar to *Yogīr Gān*.

Oku Prāmāṅik believes that the character of Guru is in effect Haḍipā, Bālyak Dāsa is Gopīcandra, Yoginī is one of the two queens of Gopīcandra and Bālyak Dāsa's mother (alluded to in the beginning) is Queen Maināmatī, Gopīcandra's mother. Thus, *Yogī Parva* appears to bear some relation to *Gopīcandrer Gān*, which is a text of the Nātha cult. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that Yogī-ghopā, a renowned centre of the Nātha cult, and the ruins of Somapura Vihāra, the ancient Buddhist monastery at Paharpur, are both within a radius of some thirty miles from Durgapur and Natore. Therefore there can be no doubt that both *Yugī Parva* and *Yogīr Gān* were performances of Nātha cult before they passed through layers of cultural assimilation.<sup>77</sup>

### 3.5.3 *Jyā* :

In the south-eastern hills of Bangladesh, there inhabit a minority ethnic community known as the Mārmā. This community (also known as the Magh) were originally inhabitants of Ārākān (a region south-east of Chittagong and west of Myanmar), from where they were forced to migrate to Chittagong Hill Tracts after their original homeland was annexed by Myanmar in 1774. Although Buddhist by faith, the religious practice of the Mārmā exhibit strong influence of animism. The most important genre of theatre popular among them is known as *Jyā*. It is performed during religious festivals and celebrations associated with seasonal harvest. A *Jyā* troupe led by Sau Pru Chīm from the village of Lulyāim (11 km east of Bandarban town) is comprised of thirty-two members (male and female), all of whom are farmers and hunters by profession.

*Jyā* is performed in the courtyards in front of Buddhist temples and also in other open space. The performance space is square in shape (about 24 feet each arm) and non-elevated. "Petromax" lanterns, hurricane lamps or torches are used for illumination. The performers enter and exit from a building adjacent to temple or a conveniently located homestead. The spectators are seated on all four sides, while the musicians are seated on two opposite sides of the performance space and they play the following instruments:

- (i) *pyāi* or *peh* (two feet long double ended drum, with deer skin on one side and tiger skin on the other);
- (ii) *bom* (a small double-ended drum);
- (iii) *ciśi* (brass instruments similar to *juḍi*);
- (iv) *cegri* (brass plate);
- (v) *ne* (a wooden flute about two feet long);



(vi) *lākho* (percussion instrument made of bamboo, about eighteen inches long, played with wooden sticks).

The most popular *Jyā* text which represents well the culture of the Mārmā people is titled *Ālam-nābāha* (lit., "The Five Candidates"). There exists no written version of the text and the performers learn it orally. The name of the composer or date of composition is unknown but it is believed to be of Myanmarian origin. The text is composed in prose and verse. The following is the synopsis:

Māmsām-khā, the prince of Ānmāch-tempā, has amassed a fortune through trade, but at the same time he is also renowned for charity. One day, while distributing relief in a village devastated by fire, he helps his childhood friend Uī-riā, also turned a destitute, with a large amount of money, food and other materials. But the wheel of fortune turns: Māmsām-khā, while on a trading voyage, loses his ship in a storm and is himself turned into a destitute. As a result he is forced to accept servitude under Uī-riā. The news of the storm reaches his wife, Princess Mesām-khā. She sets out in search in her husband but is eventually trapped by Uī-riā. The latter attempts to kill her child by throwing him in the river but he is saved by the grace of goddess Prajñāpāramitā and later ascends the throne. In the mean time Mesām-khā is forced to live with Uī-riā. One day Māmsām-khā escapes to his kingdom, meets his son but dies soon after. Mesām-khā also escapes but only to find the dead body of her husband. The latter visits her in her dream and requests her to build shrines and excavate tanks in his memory so that the merit earned may bring him back to life. Finally, Mesām-khā is reunited with her son. Uī-riā is hanged and Māmsām-khā is brought back to life with the grace of the Buddha.

A *Jyā* performance begins with a musical overture played by the orchestra. It is followed by *pui-u*, a salutation dance, performed by a dancer holding a metallic bowl near the chest. It contains five betel nuts, a brown coconut, 1.25 *seer* (slightly over a kilogram) of rice, a cluster of bananas, five taka and two candle-sticks. The dance is performed in honour of the Buddha and the supernatural forces which are believed to operate in the forest. Next to follow is *tuichā duṅgā*, a dance performed by six to twelve teen-age girls, accompanied by a song on the theme of love and well-being. Another group-dance, called *lechā-māyuiṁ*, is performed next by four young women. It depicts the process of cultivation. The main body of performance comes next and it is composed of the following elements:

1. *Dialogic performance in lyric* : The characters render most of the dialogue in lyric, accompanied by music played by the orchestra.
2. *Dialogic performance in prose* : Characters also render parts of their dialogue in prose.

Finally the performance ends with a benedictory song invoking the Buddha's blessing on all, rendered by all actors, actresses and dancers.<sup>78</sup>

Afsar Ahmad shows that the play *Ālam-nābāha* attempts to disseminate the essence of Buddhist philosophy, in the process of which it also demonstrates the efficacy of Buddhism.<sup>79</sup> Interestingly, the text also contains signs of Tantric Buddhist influence, as in the reference of *Prajñāpāramitā*. Can this be taken as an indication that the Hill Tracts and the Ārākān region were indeed the meeting ground of Tantric Buddhism of ancient Bengal and Theravāda of Myanmar?

It is also interesting to note certain similarity between the ritual offerings made during performances of *Rayānī Gān* and *Jyā*. For example, five betel nuts, a brown coconut, taka five and 1.25 *seer* of rice are common to both. Does this indicate some connection of the cult of *Manasā* with Tantric Buddhist deities? Or is it a remnant of some ancient form of worship related to animism in Bengal?

Salim al-Deen believes that the *Jyā* has been influenced by the *Yātrā* of Bengal and that the plot of *Ālam-nābāha* is a transmuted version of *Hariscandra* legend as related in the *Dharma-maṅgala* texts.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand Afsar Ahmad states that song and dance performances have been strictly prohibited in Buddhism.<sup>81</sup> Obviously, both are grossly mistaken, as our study so far amply proves. Having surveyed Buddhist theatre in Myanmar (in Chapter 2) and knowing that the *Mārmā* people were originally inhabitants of Ārākān, we can definitely conclude that the *Jyā* of the *Mārmā* is only a derivative of *Zat Pwe* of Myanmar and that the term "Jyā" is a phonetic derivative of "Zat" as "Mārmā" is a derivative of "Myanmar". As for the plot of *Ālam-nābāha*, its similarity with the *Hariscandra* legend is possibly because both are based on the *Visvantara Jātaka*. Thus it is more probable that the *Jyā* and the *Yātrā* have both evolved from a common stock, i.e., Buddhist theatre of ancient Bengal. We shall discuss more of it in Chapter 4.

#### 3.5.4 *Buddha Kīrtan (Pālā Gān) Gāyener Nāc and Bulu :*

The Buddhists in the south-eastern Bangladesh (greater Chittagong and adjoining Hill Tracts) are known to perform a narrative genre of theatre, *Buddha Kīrtan (Pālā Gān)*, which is usually based on the *Jātaka* tales intermingled with commentaries and explanations given by the narrator. About ten or twelve members of a chorus-cum-orchestra accompany the lead narrator. The performance is given on the ground level, in the centre of the courtyard facing Buddhist temple, with the spectators sitting on its four sides. Often the performance space, square in shape, is demarcated by mats laid on the ground and is covered by awning placed on four bamboo poles on its four corners.<sup>82</sup>

Sometime in mid-20th century, there also appears to have existed a genre of performance among the Buddhists of Chittagong which was known as *Gāyener Nāc* (lit., "the dance of *gāyēn*"). Unfortunately, nothing further is known about it.<sup>83</sup> Finally, it would be worthwhile to note that the Mārmā people also perform a masked dance, known as the *Bulu*, in which ghosts, animals as well as legendary heroes are represented.<sup>83a</sup> It is possible that the *Bulu* is also related to the ancient Buddhist theatre of Bengal.

### 3.6 Tales Related to Muslim Saints and Legendary Heroes

#### 3.6.1 *Jārī Gān, Jārī Gazal and Bāṅglā Jārī of Eastern Mymensingh :*

In the region of eastern Mymensingh, there exists three genres of performances known as *Jārī Gān, Jārī Gazal and Bāṅglā Jārī*, which commemorate the death of Hosain (the grandson of the Prophet) at Karbala on the 10th of Muharram, 61 A.H. (Arabic lunar calendar, corresponding to October 10, 680 AD). It is performed mostly during the first twelve days of Muharram by performers who are mostly farmers by profession and Muslims (Sunni) by faith. Many of them are followers of the spiritual leader (*pīr*) of Ashtagram (a small town of eastern Mymensingh). It is believed that the forefather of the present *pīr* Syed Abdul Karim (Alai Mian) formally institutionalised the celebration in 1836.<sup>84</sup> From the evening in which the new moon is sighted, the followers of the *pīr* perform austerities which include fasting during the day time and refraining from all forms of physical comfort during the entire period. In most of the villages of the area there exist at least one permanent *dargāh* (shrine) or *mukām-ghar* (consecrated house) constructed by the people in honour of Imam Hasan and Imam Hosain. It is customary to offer live as well as effigies of horses (in memory of Imam Hosain's favourite horse Duldul), chicken, pigeons, candles and money in the *dargāh* or *mukām-ghar* to propitiate the Imams with a view to attaining their blessing for personal success in various undertakings, recovering from serious ailment or even to cause harm to one's enemy. On each of the nine days following the evening when the new moon of Muharram is sighted, *Jārī Gān* (as well as *Jārī Gazal* and *Bāṅglā Jārī*) are performed. In the evening following the ninth day, devotees armed with knives, bamboo-staves, spears, swords and shields, partake in processions and sing songs of lamentation (*Mārsiyā*) accompanied by *dhāk, dhol, kāsī* and *sehmāi* as they go around their respective localities. The procession finally ends at the most important *dargāh* of the vicinity where night-long *Jārī Gazal* and *Bāṅglā Jārī* performances are held. Similar processions with *Mārsiyā* as well as performances of *Jārī Gān, Jārī Gazal* and *Bāṅglā Jārī* continue on the following day, the tenth of Muharram. In the afternoon of the same day, the devotees partake in yet another procession which is

headed by bearers carrying *tābut* (imitation coffin made of bamboo and cane frame-work and covered with decorated paper and fabric, often rising to a height of ninety feet from the ground), *tāziā* (imitation tomb of Imam Hasan and Imam Hosain, also constructed with bamboo and cane frame and covered with decorated paper and fabric) and horses (live as well as effigies), followed by musicians and devotees armed as mentioned above. After circumambulating the neighbourhood singing *Mārsiyā*, the procession ends at the most important *dargāh* of the locality, where the *tābut*, the *tāziā* and the horses are ceremoniously offered. At Ashtagram, the centre of the largest celebration of the region (because it is the seat of the *pīr*), the procession ends at a field known as the Karbala, where the principal *dargāh* is situated. From there, the devotees all return home by eight in the evening. It is believed that *djinns* (supernatural beings) lament the death of the Imams at night and anyone venturing outside their homes could be fatally injured. On the following two days (the eleventh and the twelfth of Muharram) the devotees assemble in front of the *dargāhs* of their localities (or at the field of Karbala at Ashtagram) and day-long performances of *Jārī Gazal* and *Bānglā Jārī* are given at these places. The celebration ends on the twelfth night.

*Jārī Gān* is usually performed in the day-time, from the first to the tenth of Muharram, in the courtyard of homesteads of devotees. The performance space (fig. 46) is circular in shape (above 45 feet in diameter) and non-elevated. The spectators stand or sit all around it. The *mukām-ghar* stands at one end of the courtyard. Inside the circular space, about twenty choral singers-cum-dancers (*kheḍuāl*) perform in a circle of about thirty feet in diameter. Some times about eight choral singers-cum-dancers also perform in a concentric circle (of about fifteen feet diameter) inside the first circle. The choral singers-cum-dancers are led by the *ḍāinā* who performs with his assistant *bāyā* on his left, in the first circle. The lead-narrator (*bayāti*) performs around the first circle. The choral singers-cum-dancers are dressed in white *dhotis*, white vests and green belts, carry red handkerchiefs in their hands and wear ankle-bells. The costume of the *ḍāinā* is highlighted with additional decorative elements. The colour green is symbolic of the poisoning of Imam Hasan and the red, of the decapitating of Imam Hosain. The lead narrator's dress is indefinite: it may be a *pāñjābi* and a *pājāmā* or a *pāñjābi* and a *lungi*. At a few places, the dress of the entire troupe is indefinite or different from that mentioned above (photographs 90-92). Other than the ankle-bells, no musical instruments are used. All the performers are males.

According to performers themselves and informed sources, the texts of *Jārī Gān* are based on the *Biṣād Sindhu*,<sup>84a</sup> a prose narrative by Meer Musharraf Hosain, first published in 1885. It is composed of 61 chapters in total, divided into three parts: the first

26 chapters on the death of the two Imams (Part I, The Muharram), the next 30 on the rescue of the family of Hosain by Hanifa, their step-brother (Part II, The Rescue) and the last 5 on the slaying of Yazid (Part III, The Slaying of Yazid). According to the same source as that mentioned above, in *Jārī Gān* there are a total of 61 episodes in rhymed metrical verse, corresponding to the 61 chapters of *Biṣād Sindhu*, all of which are oral compositions by local poets. The following are a few of the well-known episodes which have been collected and recently published:

1. *Hāsāner Biṣ-pān* (on the poisoning of Imam Hasan)
2. *Jahar-nāmā* (also on the poisoning of Imam Hasan)
3. *Kāsem-Sakhinār Jārī* (on the marriage of Kasem and Sakhina and subsequent death of Kasem in the battle-field)
4. *Śahidnāmā Jārī* (on the decapitation of Hosain by Shimar)<sup>85</sup>
5. *Sakhinār Vivāha O Vilāp* (on the marriage of Sakhina and Kasem and her lamentation on Kasem's death)
6. *Patra-nāmā* (on the letter sent by Jaynal to Hanifa)<sup>86</sup>
7. *Khat-nāmār Jārī* (also on Jaynal's letter to Hanifa)
8. *Kārbālār Pālā Jārī* (on the poisoning of Hasan and decapitation of Hosain)
9. *Hāsān Śahīder Pālā Jārī* (on the poisoning of the Hasan by Yazid).<sup>87</sup>

The texts which are performed in the *Jārī Gān* during the commemorative celebration of Muharram are usually a number of episodes featuring events similar to that of the *Biṣād Sindhu*, the predominating sentiments of which are either pathos or heroism. But all the episodes are not usually performed in the chronological order as, for example, is the case with some of the *Padmā-purāṇ* performances. The most popular episodes performed in the *Jārī Gān* are those related to the poisoning of Hasan, the marriage of Sakhina and Kasem and the decapitation of Hosain. Thus, it is the pathetic sentiment which predominates most of the performances and it is with separation and loss with which these end.

A performance of *Jārī Gān* usually begins with a *bandanā* sung in honour of Allah, the Prophet, Ali, Fatima, the two Imams, the preceptor of the *bayāti* and the spectators. The main body of performance follows next and it is composed entirely of -

*Narrative performance in lyric* : The *bayāti* renders short passages of an episode in lyric as he moves in the rhythm of his song all around the circle of *kheḍuāl* (choral singers-cum-dancers), during which period they may remain stationary or continue to dance (photograph 92). At the end of each passage the *kheḍuāl* sing the refrain and begin to dance (if they had been stationary) or dance more vigorously (if they had continued to

dance). The dance is led by the *ḍiānā*. Occasionally he calls out brief exclamations such as "Hasan-go", "Hosain-go", "Ei je", "Āy hā" etc.. in order to infuse vigour among the *kheḍuāl* or signal to them that their choral passage is about to begin. The *bāyā* assists the *ḍiānā* in overseeing that the rhythm is maintained and that the movement is followed correctly. The choreography of the choral dance is usually circular and is composed of intricate foot-work and swinging of the arms. On the whole it is vigorous, often in fast rhythm and creates spectacular visual effect with the handkerchiefs. The choreography of the dance as well as tune of the lyric may change within each episode. The lyrical passages of the *bayāti* are composed of description of an event as well as speech of the characters.

The performances of an episode ends with a couplet such as the one quoted below:

আল্লার বান্দা নবীর উম্মৎ যারা যেভাবে পাকো  
কাসেম শহীদ সাক্ত হলো আরা বলে ডাকো ।৪৪

*Jārī Gazal* is performed throughout the twelve days of Muharram celebrations in the courtyards of homesteads of the devotees and in front of local *dargāh* (or in the field of Karbala at Ashtagram). The performance space (fig. 47) is also circular in shape (about twelve feet in diameter) and non-elevated. Inside the circular space, eight to fifteen men or women sit in a circle, all of whom are farmers or house-wives. There is no dancing as in *Jārī Gān*. The lead narrator renders passages of an episode in lyric at the end of each of which the choral singers render the refrain, and remain seated throughout the performance. *Jārī Gazal* is entirely a recitative performance in which no musical instruments are used.

*Bānglā Jārī* (sometimes also called *Baitkeli Jārī*) is performed throughout the twelve days of the Muharram celebrations. The performance space (fig. 48) is also circular in shape (about fifteen feet in diameter) and non-elevated. At the centre sit the choral singers-cum-musicians, about six or seven in number. Beside singing choral refrain, three of them also play harmonium, *juḍi* and *ḍholak*. The lead narrator sings and dances around the choral singers-cum-musicians. *Bānglā Jārī* is composed entirely of narrative performance in lyric and verse. The performers are all males and usually farmers and small traders by profession (photograph 114).

*Jārī Gān* is also performed solely for entertainment during the dry seasons, mostly as a contest between troupes. The contests are usually sponsored by villagers who collect donations from among themselves to invite two to sixteen or even more troupes. The troupes are paired off and the winners of each pair are paired off again in the second round, thus proceeding to eliminate the losers till the victor is determined in the final round. In the contest between the pairs, each troupe performs for a maximum of four sessions,

each session of about 15 minutes duration (or as the organising committee may decide). In every session, each troupe performs a section of an episode based on the *Biṣṭād Sindhu*, at the end of which the *bayāti* poses a given number of questions, also on the *Biṣṭād Sindhu*, by quoting passages and asking the opponent as to which chapters the quotations are drawn from. In some of the contests, the narratives which are performed are extempore compositions of the *bayātis*, based on humorous aspects of family life or contemporary social events. In these, questions are not asked but each *bayāti* points out the flaws of the other and presents improved version of the same work. The troupe which wins the contest is awarded a shield or sometimes a he-goat.

*Bāṅglā Jārī* is also performed throughout the dry season, solely for entertainment. These performances are usually sponsored by Muslim householders and are witnessed mostly by the Muslims. Beside the texts performed in *Jārī Gān*, those based on the heroic exploits of Muhammad Hanifa but not related to the rescue of the family of Imam Hosain, (such as *Sonābhān* by Fakir Gharibullah and *Jayguner Pūthi* by Syed Hanza) are also given in *Bāṅglā Jārī* performances (not related to the Muharram celebrations). These are usually given at night, beginning in the evening and ending by dawn. The performance space is lit by "petromax" lanterns. The *bayāti* is usually dressed in a *pāñjābi* and a *pājāmā* or a *dhoti*. He dons ankle-bells and carries a handkerchief. His rendition is partly lyrical (accompanied by choral refrain and music) and partly in verse recitation (rendered singly). During the lyrical passages the *bayāti* also dances. The costume of the rest of the performers is indefinite.<sup>89</sup>

Before concluding this section on *Jārī Gān* and other related performances of eastern Mymensingh, it is important to note the following points:

1. *Jārī Gān*, *Jārī Gazal* and *Bāṅglā Jārī* are among a few performance genres in which some of the episodes end in pathos.
2. According to the performers of *Jārī Gān* of Kendua (in Netrokona district, eastern Mymensingh region), the element of dance was introduced in their performance only fifteen to twenty years ago.<sup>90</sup> The information is important, for it points to the possibility that *Jārī Gazal* and *Bāṅglā Jārī* evolved earlier than *Jārī Gān*.
3. Comments by a few scholars on the origin of *Jārī Gān* also deserves attention. Dr. Asutosh Bhattacharyya argues that the collective nature of *Jārī Gān* and donning of ankle-bells by male performers (which is a feminine practice according to him) are indicative of the culture of the Assamese tribals and thereby he concludes that song-and-dance performances of the tribals gave rise to the genre.<sup>91</sup> On the other hand Muhammad

Saydur notes that one of the calls made by the *ḍāinā* during the dance is "Lāl-go lāl", to which the *kheḍuāl* respond with choral exclamation of "Bihulāl!". Thereby he concludes that the origin of the genre lies in the Bihu festival of Assam.<sup>92</sup> As regards Dr. Bhattacharyya's observation, it should be sufficient to point out that the lead-narrators of a number of genres, such as *Mādār Pīrer Gān*, *Satya Pīrer Gān* etc., don ankle-bells. Moreover, the martial art exercises of *Lāṭhi-khelā* of Bagerhat (discussed later) are all executed in group dance of circular composition, the performers are called *kheḍuāl*, and they don ankle-bells. When we are reminded that *Lāṭhi-khela* is also performed in Ashtagram during Muharram celebrations,<sup>93</sup> it becomes clear that it is this genre, and not the Bihu festival of Assam, which gave rise to the dance of *Jārī Gān* of eastern Mymensingh.

### 3.6.2 *Jārī Gān of Northern Bangladesh :*

In Rajshahi district of northern Bangladesh another form of *Jārī Gān* exists which is slightly different from that of eastern Mymensingh. It is presented from 7th to 10th of Muharram by all-male troupes which visit rural homesteads during the day-time and perform in the outer courtyard. The performance commemorates the martyrdom of Imam Hosain and pays tribute to the Imams, the Prophet, Ali and other members of his family. The performers are all Muslims, mostly engaged in farming and it is usually performed for rural Muslim families.

The performance space (fig. 49) is circular (about fifteen to eighteen feet in diameter) in the centre of which sit on their knees about ten choral singers (*pāil*). The spectators sit or stand beyond the periphery of the circle and the lead-narrator (*gāyen*) dances and sings in the intermediate circle between the spectators and the *pāil*. All the members of the troupe are dressed in daily-life apparel (*lungi* and vest or shirt) and carry a handkerchief in the right hand. Other than ankle-bells donned by the *gāyen*, no musical instruments are used. Householders offer the performers money at the end of their performance.

Texts of *Jārī Gān* are composed in rhymed metrical verse. These are all based on popularly known legends associated with Ali, Fatima, the two Imams Hasan and Hosain and their step-brother Hanifa. Aynuddin Mollah, a *gāyen* from Shahbajpur village under Durgapur police station, has well over twenty-five narratives committed to his memory. Some of the most popular of these are *Śahīd-nāmā* (on the poisoning of Imam Hasan), *Ali-Hānifār Jaṅga* (the battle between Ali and his son Hanifa), *Chil-chatra Rājār Jaṅga* (on the battle between Ali and a Hindu king named Chil-chatra), *Jarip Senār Jārī* (on the attempted but failed survey of Mecca by Jarip Senā) etc.



The performance of *Jārī Gān* begins with a *disā* rendered by the *pāil* without the *gāyen*. The latter joins next to dance and sing the *bandanā* with choral accompaniment, in which salutation is paid to the four directions, the preceptor of the *gāyen* and the spectators. In the above and all through the main body of performance, the rendition of lyric is such that the *gāyen* sings the first half of each line and the *pāil* sings the second half. Also throughout the performance, the *pāil* swing their heads and clap their hands to the rhythm of the song. When the *bandanā* is over, the main body of performance commences with a brief announcement of the title; it may run from an hour to three hours and ends with another brief announcement.

Till 1993, a fair used to be held at Hoja Anantakandī village on the 10th of Muharram. The presentation of *Jārī Gān* at the fair in the afternoon, marked the end of its performance for the year.<sup>94</sup>

In the region of greater Rangpur, there also exist a wide variety of performances with the term "Jārī" suffixed to their names, all of which are performed during the Muharram celebration. Four of these are based on the events of Karbala (*Mocciyā Jārī*, *Mātam Jārī*, *Cāli Jārī* and *Ĵhāṭā-kopā Jārī*), two on mysticism and religion (*Nāḍā Jārī* and *Dharma Sammandhīya Jārī*), one on the exploitation by the rural usurer (*Byāṅga Jārī*) and two on varied types of secular events (*Jab Jārī* and *Racanār Jārī*). The troupes which perform these genres are composed of one to six lead-narrators (*hādī*) and ten to twenty choral singers (*pāil* who also dance in most of the cases). Some of the troupes (such as those performing *Jab Jārī* and *Racanār Jārī*) also include female impersonators (*chhukrīs*) and others (those performing *Cāli Jārī* and *Ĵhāṭā-kopā Jārī*) include two musicians.<sup>95</sup>

The performance space of all these genres are circular and non-elevated, all around which sit the spectators. In *Nāḍā Jārī*, the *hādī* performs in the centre while the *pāil* dances in the periphery of the circle, creating interesting visual with their hand movements. They (the *hādī* and the *pāil*) render the narrative by singing alternate lines. *Cāli Jārī* is performed with the *pāil* and the musicians sitting in a circle at the centre and about six *hādīs* dancing around them. Singing alternate lines, the *hādī* and the *pāil* render the narrative. The musicians play *ḍhol* and *khol*; each member of the *pāil* also have a string of *nūpur* (ankle-bells) tied to their wrists. In *Ĵhāṭā-kopā Jārī*, two musicians who play a *pātil* and a pair of *kartāl* or *judī*, occupy the central position; the *pāil* members execute their movements and repeat the lines sung by the *hādī* while standing in a circle around the musicians and the two *hādīs* dance around the *pāil* and sing the narrative. The most notable feature of *Ĵhāṭā-kopā Jārī* is the interesting visual created by the *pāil* with their colorfully decorated

broom-like bamboo sticks.<sup>96</sup> All forms of *Jārī Gān* of northern Bangladesh are structured entirely in narrative performance in lyric.

### 3.6.3 *Jārī Gān of South-western Bangladesh :*

In the regions of Jessore, Khulna and Barisal, a form of *Jārī* is performed which is distinct from that of eastern Mymensingh in many respects. Popularly known as *Jārī Gān*, these performances of south-western Bangladesh are not connected specifically to the religious celebration of Muharram and can be performed any time of the year. It is sponsored by the Muslims and the spectators are also mostly Muslims, although a few members of the Hindu community are known to witness the performance as well. In southern Satkhira (south of Kaliganj), it is sponsored by individual householders (Muslims by faith) and the spectators witness the performance free of cost. The performance begins around ten in the evening and ends before day-break. But in the northern parts (north of Kaliganj), *Jārī Gān* performances are organised as commercial ventures, very much like the *Yātrā*. Local organisers form a committee who enter into contract with the performers and pay their fee; the same committee admits spectators on sale of tickets. The spectators witness *Jārī Gān* performances mostly with the objective of entertainment and for their interest on religious legends as well as deliberation on religious issues.

The *Jārī Gān* performers are mostly Muslims by faith, who are also engaged in other professions. The *Jārī* troupe of Rubina Parvin, a female *bayāti* (lead narrator) from the village of Islampur under the police station and district of Satkhira, is composed of seven performers: one *bayāti* (herself) and six *dohārs* who sing choral refrain and play harmonium, *cākī* (*juḍi*), *kāsi*, *bāsi*, ankle-bells (played by hand) and *ḍhol*. Save the *ḍhol* player, all are Muslims by faith. The former is a *ṛṣi* by profession, i.e., one who is engaged in leather and rattan work. Rubina's husband Seher Ali, the harmonium player, is also a *kavirāy* (a physician who follows the Āyurvedic system of medicine) and she herself, a housewife. The rest of the performers are either farmers or small traders. Rubina Parvin (aged 40) has been performing *Jārī Gān* for the last ten years and is a disciple of Abdul Jabbar from Kushkhali village under Satkhira police station and district, who has been performing for the last fifty-two years. In her early years, Rubina was a member of a circus troupe. There she married Seher Ali and helped her husband sell medicine by singing songs. Later she rejoined the circus, then switched to the *Yātrā* and finally to the *Jārī Gān*.

The performance space of *Jārī Gān* (fig. 50) is temporarily constructed in the courtyards of rural homesteads (when performances are individually sponsored) and in public places such as school compounds, play-grounds, market-places and fair-grounds (when it is

ticketed). The performance space is an elevated platform (some two to two-and-half-feet high), square in shape (not more than twelve feet a side), on four corners of which stand four poles to support the awning on top. During rainy season, tarpaulin is spread over the awning. Similar arrangement for awning (and tarpaulin) is also made for the spectators who sit on all four sides of the platform. From the centre of one of the sides descends a ramp which leads, through a passage, to the green-room (a small enclosure, some 15' x 5'). The *dohārs* sit on two opposite sides which lie perpendicular to the ramp side: the percussionists on one side and the wind on the other. The entire auditorium is enclosed for the performances given on sale of ticket. "Petromax" (kerosine) lanterns or electric lamps suspended from the four corner posts of the platform serve as lighting. The dress of the female *bayātis* is usually *salwār* and *kāmiz* of any colour, that of the male *bayātis* is white *pāñjābi* and white *pājāmā* and that of the *dohārs* is indefinite. Some of the *bayātis* and the *dohārs* wear ankle-bells. The *bayātis* also carry handkerchief.

At a particular performance space, *Jārī Gān* may be given from three to seven continuous nights (or afternoons and evenings). Each night's (or evening's) performance is usually held as a contest between two *bayātis* and their troupes. On each of the nights they assume any one of a number of conventionally accepted pairs of roles and debate with each other on the issues they represent. Some of the pairs of roles are as follows:

- (i) *Śariat-Mārfat* (Religious law-Mystic ways)
- (ii) *Guru-Śiṣya* (Preceptor-Disciple)
- (iii) *Āsmān-Zamin* (Sky-Earth)
- (iv) *Hindu-Musalmān* (Hindu-Muslim)
- (v) *Ādam-Śaytān* (Adam-Satan).

Thus, on a particular night (or evening), the contesting *bayātis* may assume the roles of Adam and Satan and debate with each other from their respective point of view. All the questions asked and replies offered are, as a rule, in accordance with the scriptures, i.e., the *Qur'an*, the *Hadith* and Sufi mystic texts, their interpretations and various Hindu scriptures. Often, it is the committee which decides as to who would make the first appearance. The *bayāti* who has the opportunity to enter first decides, with the spectators' consent, the roles and the issue to be debated on a particular night. Beside the debate, each *bayāti* also renders a narrative composed in rhymed metrical verse. According to Rubina Parvin, the narratives are always based on the life and deeds of the Prophet, Ali and his immediate descendants. But according to Dr. Lutfur Rahman, the subject-matter of *Jārī Gān* of south-western Bangladesh is not specific and indeed is as varied as the word itself can denote. Thus religious legends from Islamic culture (*Makkār Janma-nāmā*, *Kāsed-*

*nāmā*, *Imām Curir Jārī*), incidents related to natural calamities (*Banyār Jārī*), life of great personalities (*Shere Bānglār Jārī*), comic and satiric tales (*Ṣūṭhi Mūcher Jārī*, *Ghar Jāmāi-er Jārī*) and even politico-economic propaganda (*Pākistāner Jārī*, *Phalan Bāranor Jārī*) may be performed.<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, serious treatment of materials drawn from Islamic legend appears to be more popular and usual. These texts project *Vīra* (Heroic), *Karūṇa* (Pathetic), *Hāsya* (Comic), *Vātsalya* (Parental Love) and *Śānta* (Peaceful) *rasas*.

Prior to the commencement of each night's (or evening's) performance, the *bayātis* recite a few esoteric formulas (*mantras*) to protect themselves, their troupe and their instruments from all forms of evil attack. The performance commences as one of the *bayātis* who occupies the performance space first, begins to sing the *bandanā* (while the other, with his/her troupe, waits near the performance space or in the green-room).

The *bandanā* offers tributes to Allah, the Prophet, Ali, *Sāraswatī*, Fatima and the preceptor. Some *bayātis* also include salutation to the four directions in their *bandanā*. If the debate of a particular night (or evening) is related to Hinduism, the *bayāti* offers salutation to the Hindu gods and goddesses. The *bayāti's* *bandanā* is followed by another *bandanā* sung only by the *dohārs*, often led by the harmonium player. Both the *bandanās* are sung with choral accompaniment.

After the *bandanās* are over, the *bayāti* renders a part of a narrative. The rendition is given partly in lyric and partly in verse, followed by explanatory comments in improvised prose after each lyrical and verse sections. The lyrical sections are accompanied by music and choral refrain played and sung by the *dohārs*. The sections in verse are recited alone by the *bayāti*, with rhythm played on the drum. Having rendered part of the narrative, the *bayāti* suspends it at a suitable point and moves on to open the debate by posing questions in rhymed metrical verse on the issue being contended. These verses are usually created extempore. After posing his/her questions in verse, the *bayāti* repeats the same in improvised prose for the comprehension of all spectators. Thereupon s/he sits, giving the floor over to the *dohārs*, who now render a *dhuā* song (usually on mystic or even other subjects) accompanied by dance. During rendition of the song, the *bayāti* plays the harmonium and three of the *dohārs* play *juḍi*, *kāsi* and *ḍhol* and all the *dohārs* dance. At the end of the *dhuā* song, the *bayāti* and his/her troupe exit from the performance space to the green-room and thus ends session one.

Session two begins as the opponent *bayāti* (along with his/her troupe) occupies the performance space, renders his/her *bandanā*, which is followed by the *bandanā* of the *dohārs* and the rendition of a separate narrative. Suspending the narrative at a suitable

point, the opponent *bayāti* now answers the questions of the previous *bayāti* and poses counter questions from his/her own standpoint. There follows a *dhuā* song accompanied by dance, rendered by the *dohārs*, at the end of which s/he to exits. Thus ends session two. There follows two or three more sessions given by each of the *bayātis*, the length of each of which varies from one and a half hours to three hours. In each of these: (i) The suspended narrative is taken up again (after a brief recapitulation of previous events) and is suspended again at a suitable point. The rendition of the narrative ends in the final session. (ii) The question and answers provided by each of the *bayātis* gradually extend to cover wide ranging aspects of the issue being debated, the point of reference of which is always the scriptures. Often the *bayātis* make personal attacks on the other in verse created in extempore or in prose speech. The range of these attacks vary from subtle wit and humour to gross vulgarity.

After a total of six to eight sessions (three or four by each of the *bayātis*, the performance for a night (or an evening) ends. The same procedure follows on each of the following nights (or evenings). On the final night (or evening), after the final sessions, both the *bayātis* occupy the performance space together for a scene of reunion known as *goṣṭha milan*. It begins as any one of the *bayātis*, along with the *dohārs* of both the troupes, enter the performance space. The *dohārs* sit in a semi-circle, with their backs to the green-room. Thereupon, the *bayāti* assumes any one of a pair of conventionally accepted roles, such as Balāi-Kānāi (Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa), Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa etc., all of which are drawn from Hindu mythology. S/he then proceeds to invite his opponent on stage by singing songs. After repeated invitations, his/her opponent enters, also singing a song. Thereafter, another round of debate in lyric ensues, where each projects the view-point of his/her roles. The text of all these lyrical passages are conventionally set. Finally both the *bayātis* put aside their differences and reconciliation is reached. One of them offers sweets to the other and all exit from the performance space, bringing an end to the contest.

A performance of *Jārī Gān* is comprised on the following elements:

1. *Narrative performance in lyric*, as seen in the rendition of the narrative, *goṣṭha milan* scene and *dhuā* songs. All these are accompanied by choral refrain and music. Sometimes the *bayāti* also dances during his/her rendition of the narrative. As a rule, the *dohārs* always dance when they render *dhuā* songs.
2. *Narrative performance in verse*, as seen in the rendition of the narrative and in posing and answering questions by the *bayātis*. These passages are rendered solely by the *bayāti*, with rhythm played on the *ḍhol*. As noted earlier, the questions and answers are rendered in verse which is often created extempore.

3. *Narrative performance in prose*, as seen in the rendition of the narrative and also in the section where questions are posed and answers are given. The passages rendered in prose are all created extempore.

The following are some of the salient features of *Jārī Gān* performances:

1. *Female bayātis*: The participation of female *bayātis* appears to be a recent development and could be because female performers are more accepted now. Other female *bayātis* of the region who have attained fame are Baby, Hasina, Aklima and Farida. Rubina Parvin believes that as a Muslim woman, she should observe the purdah and not appear in public, but poverty has forced her to disregard religious bindings.

2. *Nature of the debate*: Although heated argument and intense interest is generated during a performance, Rubina Parvin says the debate is usually "fixed". Even opponent *bayātis* help each other by passing the answers to his/her questions in case one of them fails to answer.

3. *Determining the winner*: There is no official announcement of the winner in a contest, but the spectators themselves adjudge, based on the merit of performance and the argument of the *bayātis*.<sup>98</sup>

#### 3.6.4 *Nāicer Jārī*:

About twenty-five years ago, there used to exist in the district of Brahmanbaria (in greater Comilla) a genre of performance known as *Nāicer Jārī*. It was given during the rainy seasons entirely for secular entertainment. The genre was sponsored collectively by the community and was performed by members of the community, mostly farmers by profession and Muslims by faith.

The performance space of *Nāicer Jārī* (fig. 51) was a large circular area, about seventy to eighty feet in diameter, encircled by about three to four feet high bamboo fencing. The spectators stood outside the fence. The performers comprised of about fifty to eighty dancers (*nācuā*), two groups of choral singers (*bahar gātak* and *gosā gātak*) each of which comprised of five to ten members and a *khalifā* (the dance leader). They would all be dressed in vests and *dhotis* (both white), red neck-kerchiefs and red handkerchiefs tied to their small fingers. No musical instruments were used. The performance would be given during the day-time (from around 10 am to sunset).

The texts performed in *Nāicer Jārī* were all composed in rhymed metrical verse and were based on various legends of Muslim heroes (such as those on Imams Hasan and Hosain, Hanifa, Amir Hamza etc.) and sometimes also on various aspects of village life.

During the performance, the *nācuās* danced near the periphery of the performance space in (anti-clockwise direction) and were led by the *khalifā* who danced in the centre. The two groups of choral singers rendered the narrative in lyric as they moved (also in anti-clockwise direction) in the intervening space between the *khalifā* and the *nācuā*, always maintaining diagonally opposite position in respect to each other. Of them, the *gosā gātak* usually repeated each line sung by the *bāhār gātak*. No *bandanā* was rendered before the performance and it ended with a carnivalesque celebration of the performers who reveled in the mud. After the performance, the entire community participated in a feast for which everyone contributed according to their means. On a few occasions, competition between two troupes from two villages was also held and prize was awarded to the group which showed greater skill. *Nāicer Jārī* was composed entirely of narrative performance in lyric. The performance ceased to exist after 1971.<sup>99</sup>

### 3.6.5 *Jaṅg Jārī* :

Popular among the Muslims in the district of Thakurgaon (greater Dinajpur) is another form of *Jārī* which is generally known as *Jaṅg Jārī*. It is performed mostly during the month of Muharram and also throughout the dry season. Performers are mostly farmers by profession and Muslims by faith; but non-Muslim performers are not unknown as *Bocā Faqir* (an ascetic-devotee of Satya Pīr, originally a low caste Hindu, now a Christian) himself performs as a *gāyen*.

Given at night in the outer courtyards of rural homesteads, the performance space of *Jaṅg Jārī* (fig. 52) is circular in shape (some fifteen feet in diameter) and non-elevated. Outside its circumference stand four posts equidistant from each other and the fifth at the centre, all of which support a square shaped awning at the top. The peripheral posts are also used to suspend electric lamps or "petromax" (kerosine) lanterns. The spectators sit all around the performance space, usually on hay strewn ground, men separately from women. At the centre sit the *dohārs* and the *chukrīs*, all in a small circle. The *dohārs* sing choral refrain, play musical instruments (usually *khol*, *dholak*, *kartāl*, *jhāp-tāl* and harmonium) and also enact a few roles. The *chukrīs* sing choral refrain, dance and enact female roles. The *gāyen* (lead-narrator) and his chief assistant, the *śir-dohār*, narrate the text in lyric and prose and also enact most of the major roles.

There is only one episode in the performance of *Jaṅg Jārī*, which begins with the birth of Hasan and Hosain and ends with the death of Hosain at Karbala. The text, learnt by the performers orally, is composed in the form of rhymed metrical verse, prose narration as well as prose and lyrical dialogue. The performance is composed of the following elements:

1. *Narrative performance in lyric*, in which the *gāyen* and the *śīr-dohār* render the narrative in lyric accompanied by the *dohārs* singing choral refrain and playing music; at the same time the *gāyen*, the *śīr-dohār* and the *chukrīs* also dance.
2. *Narrative performance in prose*, in which the *gāyen* and the *śīr-dohār* render the narrative in prose to make the lyrical passages comprehensible to all the spectators.
3. *Dialogic performance in prose and lyric*, in which the performers enact the characters of the narrative with the help of prose dialogue interspersed with songs. The most interesting aspect of the dialogic performance is the portrayal of the Prophet who is enacted by the *gāyen* in white *pājāmā*, a patched *jobbā* and a *tāj*.<sup>100</sup>

### 3.6.6 *Imām Yātrā (Jārī Yātrā)* :

In various parts of Bangladesh, there exists a dialogic genre of performance based on the deaths of Imam Hasan and Imam Hosain which is popularly known as *Imām Yātrā* or *Jārī Yātrā*. It is performed by professionals (as in Bagerhat) as well as amateurs (in Kalihati, Tangail). It used to be performed by both professionals and amateurs in parts of greater Rajshahi and Rangpur districts. The professional troupes of Bagerhat are often composed of predominantly Hindu performers. Similar troupes also existed in Tangail but currently they are non-existent. Most of the amateur performers are Muslims by faith.

The performance space of *Imām Yātrā* (fig. 53) is an elevated platform (about 2'-6" high) and square in shape (about 18 feet each arm). On its four corners stand four bamboo poles to support the awning on top. "Petromax" (kerosine) lanterns or electric lamps suspended from these posts serve to illuminate the performance space. A ramp runs down from the middle of one of the sides to a roped gangway which leads to the green-room (*sāj ghar*) located at a distance. The orchestra sits on the ramp side. It is (or used to be) comprised of a harmonium, a *ḍhol*, a pair of *bāyā-tablā*, a *sehnāi* and a flute in and around Bagerhat region and a harmonium, a *khol*, a pair of *juḍi*, and a *ḍhol* in Rangpur region. The prompter (known as the "prompt master") sits with the orchestra and prompts the performers where necessary. The spectators sit on three sides, leaving the ramp side free, or sometimes even on all four sides of the performance space. About fifty years ago, *Imām Yātrā* is reported to have been performed in Durgapur, Rajshahi, in a space slightly different from that described above. It would usually be earthen, merely 9" high, shaded with coconut branches, date-palm branches or awning made of cloth.



There exist printed texts of *Imām Yātrā* composed by unknown authors.<sup>101</sup> These are mostly based on Meer Musharraf Hosain's *Biṣād Sindhu*. Although all the texts are dialogic, some are distinct for predominance of verse, while the others, for that of prose.

Performance of *Imām Yātrā* begins with a musical overture played by the orchestra. Sometimes (as in the case of those of Rangpur region) the musical overture is followed by a *bandanā*. The main body of performance follows next and it is composed of the elements as noted below:

1. *Dialogic performance in lyric*: Dialogue in lyric is common in all performance. Those which are based on texts predominating in prose, dialogue in lyric is rendered in intensely emotional moments only. In others, there is a tendency towards abundant use of lyric. The lyrical passages are rendered by the characters themselves, accompanied by music played by the orchestra.
2. *Dialogic performance in verse*: In the performances which are predominantly lyrical, characters also render parts of their dialogue in verse.
3. *Dialogic performance in prose* : A few lines of prose dialogue are also rendered by the characters in performances which abound in lyric.

Some other features of *Imam Yatra* :

1. The performance bears similarity with that of historical *Yatrā*.
2. The characters enter from and exit to the green-room.
3. Male impersonators enact female roles.
4. Battle scenes are frequent and are played with swords, bows and arrows.
5. The character of Vivek (Conscience) frequently makes his appearance.
6. Some fifty years ago, the convention of singing by proxy is known to have existed in Durgapur, Rajshahi. As a result, two proxy singers (*juḍī*) would make speedy entrance to sing all lyrical passages of all the characters and would exit similarly as soon as the rendition would be over.<sup>102</sup>

### 3.6.7 *Gāzīr Gān* :

Baḍa Khān Gāzī, also known as Zindā Pīr or Gāzī Sāhib or simply Gāzi, is another folk deity (the god of tigers) whose cult has a large following both among the Hindus and Muslims in greater Dhaka, Faridpur, Mymensingh, Jessore and Khulna districts as well as southern part of West Bengal, specially in the forest belt of the Sundarbans. In some of the cases he is worshipped in the form of a small mound. Occasionally his images are also seen where he is portrayed bearded and fair, wearing a *cogā*, *pirān*, *pājāmā*, *pāgḍī* and shoes,

astride a horse and carrying an *āśā* (metallic staff with supernatural power) in one hand and a whip in the other. Interestingly, in all legends directly related to *Gāzī*, he is shown in conflict with *Dakṣiṇ Rāy*, the god of tigers and the most widely worshipped folk deity of the Hindu community. In narratives by Muslim poets, he is shown belittling and winning over *Dakṣiṇ Rāy*; in narratives by Hindu poets of *Dakṣiṇ Rāy*, he (*Gāzī*) is shown equal to and a friend of *Dakṣiṇ Rāy*. Anthropologists believe, with Muslim invasion beginning in early 13th century, the low caste Hindus oppressed by the Brahminical order were largely won over by the philosophy of equality of all men preached by the Muslim saints (*pīr*). The legend of *Gāzī* and *Dakṣiṇ Rāy* possibly illustrates the above process.<sup>103</sup>

Quite a few texts in rhymed metrical verse have been written on *Gāzī*. Some of these are *Gāzī Sāheber Gān* or *Kālu-Gāzī-Campābatīr Pācālī* by Abdul Gafur, *Gāzīr Pūthi* by Abdul Rahim, *Badā Khān Gāzīr Kerāmatī* by Syed Halu Mian and *Badā-khān Gāzī* by Zain al-Din. None of these were composed before the end of 18th century.<sup>104</sup> *Gāzī Sāheber Gān* opens with a *bandanā* paying tribute to *Kālu*, *Gāzī*, *Gorā Cānd (Pīr)*, *Ekdil Sāhib (Pīr)*, *Badar Sāhib (Pīr)* and *Satya Pīr*. The main body of the narrative begins with the disappearance of *Julhās*, the son of *Sikāndār* (king of *Virāṭ*) in a hunting expedition. The grief-stricken Queen adopts a child she finds adrift on the sea inside a casket and names him *Kālu*. Later, a son is born unto her and is named *Gāzī*. The children grow up showing deep interest in religion. King *Sikāndār* is worried and attempts to dissuade them by force but *Gāzī* displays miracle and foils his father's attempt. Finally *Gāzī* renounces worldly life and with *Kālu*, arrives at the Sundarban Forest where tigers, crocodiles and supernatural beings become his disciple. Later, the brothers convert King *Śrīrāma* of *Sāfāni* and found a village named *Sonāpur*. One night, the angels decide to have *Gāzī* married to the daughter of a Hindu king named *Mukūṭ Rāy* (a devout follower of *Dakṣiṇ Rāy*) and carry sleeping *Gāzī* to the chamber of *Campā*. Initially upset because *Gāzī* is a Muslim, later *Campā* accepts *Gāzī* and they exchange rings. *Gāzī* too is deeply in love but *Kālu* admonishes him for sacrificing God for a woman. *Gāzī* argues against him and finally they reach *Brāhmaṇa Nagar*, the kingdom of *Mukūṭ Rāy*. On *Śiva*'s advice, *Kālu* is sent as the match-maker but the furious King has him imprisoned. *Gāzī* sets his tigers on *Brahmana Nagar* but *Dakṣiṇ Rāy* appears in person to drive the tigers away. There follows a prolonged battle of *Dakṣiṇ Rāy* and *Gāzī* in which the latter finally wins and forgives his foe. *Mukūṭ Rāy* himself attempts to resist *Gāzī* but he too is forced to capitulate and *Gāzī* wins *Campā*. *Gāzī* and *Kālu* then descend into the underworld, whence they return with their elder brother *Julhās* and his wife and all five return to their parents in *Virāṭ*.<sup>105</sup>

There exist quite a few versions of oral texts in which the narrative given above is recounted in two episodes titled *Gāzīr Janma* and *Gāzīr Biye*. There also exist a few other oral texts which are not accounts of the exploits and adventures of Gāzī and Kālu but of members of the royalty. In these, the role of the saints is to aid the devout follower and impede the non-believers. They function as a structural device which serves the forward movement of the action and helps the desire of the central character to attain fruition. Examples of such narratives are *Jāmāl-Kāmāl*, *Lāl-cānd Bādsā*, *Bāhrām Bādsā*, *Mānik Mājhi*, *Hembek-Kembek* etc.<sup>106</sup> All these texts exist as oral narratives in Manikganj district (greater Dhaka). Another oral text from greater Jessore is titled *Erim Bādsā*.<sup>107</sup>

All the above mentioned texts, both written as well as oral, form the basic repertoire of a genre of narrative performance known as *Gāzīr Gān* in parts of greater Dhaka, Jessore, and Khulna. *Gāzīr Pālā*, *Gāiner Pālā* and *Gāiner Tāmsā* in greater Chittagong and *Gāiner Gīt* and *Gāzīr Gān* in greater Mymensingh. Similar performance is also reported to be in existence in parts of greater Rajshahi.<sup>108</sup> The performances in greater Chittagong is reported to be extinct.<sup>109</sup> It is interesting to note that beside the texts mentioned earlier, there is a repertoire of a substantial number of other texts, also performed in *Gāzīr Gān* and related genres (henceforth discussed under the single title of *Gāzīr Gān*), in which Gāzī does not feature at all. The following are some of these :

- |                                      |                                      |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Gul-e-Bakāwalī</i>             | 2. <i>Sonāfar Bādsā</i>              |
| 3. <i>Suḥiyāni Bādsā</i>             | 4. <i>Nurannehār O Kabārer Kathā</i> |
| 5. <i>Bheluyā Sundarī</i>            | 6. <i>Kamal Saodāgar</i>             |
| 7. <i>Kāfan Corā</i>                 | 8. <i>Nezām Dākāter Pālā</i>         |
| 9. <i>Nasar Māhum</i>                | 10. <i>Sujā-tanayer Bilāp</i>        |
| 11. <i>Parī Bānur Hālā</i>           | 12. <i>Sāīful Muhuk-Badiujāmāl</i>   |
| 13. <i>Lāīlī-Majnu</i>               | 14. <i>Nasirām Bādsā</i>             |
| 15. <i>Gorāf Bādsā</i>               | 16. <i>Rākhāl Rājā</i>               |
| 17. <i>Hatī Khedā</i> <sup>110</sup> |                                      |

Of these, *Gul-e-Bakāwalī* appears to be popular (or to have been popular) in all the regions mentioned earlier. The next two have been collected from greater Mymensingh and the rest have been collected from or are reported to have been in existence in Chittagong. Some of these texts (or texts with similar narrative) are also performed in other genres. For example, *Sonāfar Bādsā* and *Sāīful Muhuk-Badiujāmāl* are performed in *Pālā Gān* of Mymensingh and *Gul-e-Bakāwalī* in *Kecchā Kāhini* of Rajshahi. In terms of content, the list of seventeen narratives appear to be a mixed lot : two are on historical personages (10 and 11

on Suja, the brother of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb and his family), seven on romantic love and adventure of the royalty (1, 2, 3, 12, 14, 15 and 16), five on love (4,5,6,9 and 13), two on outlaws transformed into saints (7 and 8) and one on trapping of elephants (17). Of those on love, two stand out for being narratives on illicit relationships: *Nurannehār O Kabarer Kathā* is on the relationship between a brother and a sister and *Kamal Saodāgar* is on the adultery of an employee with his master's second wife. Such narratives are uncommon in religio-ritualistic performances. It should be also noted that four of the above list (4,5,8 and 9) are included in *East Bengal Ballads* edited by D.C. Sen. Many of the above texts are available in cheap printed editions as well.

Performances of *Gāzīr Gān* is generally sponsored by the affluent and the well-to-do sections of the rural community. It is believed that Gāzī can be propitiated by offering performances in his honour and as a result, the child-less are blessed with children and those with children are blessed with general well-being and long-life of their children. The performance is witnessed by Hindus and Muslims alike. A *Gāzīr Gān* troupe is usually comprised of a lead-narrator (variously called *gāyen*, *gāin* or *bayāti*), his assistant (sometimes called *titli gāyen*) and four or five musicians (sometimes called *bāyen*) who play instruments such as harmonium, *ḍhol* (and or *khol*), and *kartāl* (and or *judi*). Most of the musicians as well as the *gāyen's* assistant also sing choral refrain. The *gāyen* is usually a full-time performer and in most of the cases, also treats various ailments in the rural areas. The rest of the performers are mostly engaged in professions such as farming and trading. Scholars have noted that both Hindu and Muslim *gāyens* perform *Gāzīr Gān*: those from the regions of Jessore and Chittagong are mostly Hindus, whereas those from the regions of Dhaka and Mymensingh are mostly Muslims. But the opinion leaders of the rural society often treat them as somewhat of outcasts.<sup>111</sup> This attitude appears to have been strongest in Chittagong region where many *gāyens* were forced to give up their profession in their mature years.<sup>112</sup> The other performers of the troupe are also comprised of both Hindus as well as Muslims.

*Gāzīr Gān* is mostly performed in the courtyards of rural homesteads. It is also performed (or used to be performed) in the fields away from habitation in those areas (such as Chittagong) where religious fundamentalists strongly opposed its performance. In the region of Chittagong, the performance space used to be a temporary construction (fig. 55): square in shape (some twelve feet each arm) and non-elevated. On four corners would stand four bamboo posts to support the awning on top. The floor of the performance space would be covered with mats. The performers sat along the eastern and the southern arms and the spectators on all four sides of the performance space. In the centre of the northern

arm stood Gāzī's *āsā* (symbolic of his supernatural power) which was a metallic staff about 1" in diameter and four feet in length, with a semi-circular metallic insignia attached to the top. Beside it stood a winnowing tray containing rice, mango leaves and other ritual offerings.<sup>113</sup> The performance space in the regions of Jessore, Dhaka and Mymensingh (fig. 54) is generally rectangular (some 12'x8' or 8'x6') and non-elevated. The corner posts and the awning on top do not appear to be compulsory requisites in all cases. The performers often sit along the southern arm and the spectators mostly on the remaining three sides, with a few gathering on the fourth (southern) side as well. The details of ritual offerings vary from region to region. In Jhenaidah district (greater Jessore), a new *gāmchā* is laid over a brass plate on which *atap* (sun-dried) rice, green bananas and taka 1.25 are placed. It is kept on a low stool which stands beside the *asa*.<sup>113a</sup> In greater Mymensingh region (as seen in the performances of Abdul Jabbar), a water-filled brass pot which is covered with mango leaves, stands out prominently beside other ritual offerings. It is customary for the *gāyen* to take the ritual offering in the name of Gazi.

The costume of the *gāyen* also varies widely from region to region. In greater Chittagong, he used to be dressed in a colourful *pājāmā* and *āckān*. Emblems such as red crescent, ace of hearts or ace of diamonds would be stitched on to the back and the sleeves of the *āckān*. He would also wear turban and carry a *cāmar* (whisk).<sup>114</sup> Similar dress is also reported to be worn by *gāyens* in Rajshahi region.<sup>115</sup> On the other hand Abdul Jabbar (in Mymensingh region) dons a red *jobbā* with patches of various colour and a white *pājāmā*. (Curiously, he also wears a band across his chest with his name imprinted on it). Jhaḍu Maṇḍal (from Padmanagar village under Harinkunda police station in Jhenaidah district, greater Jessore) is dressed in white *pājāmā*, white *pāñjābi* and a turban.<sup>116</sup> In Manikganj district (greater Dhaka), Saheb Ali is dressed in white *dhoti*, white *pāñjābi* and black cap. He also wears ankle-bells.<sup>117</sup> Hakim Ali, from the same region, used to wear similar dress but instead of black cap he would have a white shawl slung over his shoulder. The dress of all the other members of all troupes are indefinite. They wear *lungi* or *pājāmā* with shirt or *pāñjābi*.

Pre-performance ritual features as an important aspect of *Gāzīr Gān* performance. In Jhenaidah district, the *gāyen* and his troupe circumambulate the *āsā* seven times during which period the ritual offerings are carried by the *gāyen* over his head. Then the offerings are replaced on the low stool and the *gāyen* bows to the *āsā* with deep reverence. Then he blesses all the spectators by touching their heads with his *cāmar* and bows to them as well.<sup>118</sup> Similar acts of bowing to the *āsā* is also seen in the regions of Mymensingh and Dhaka.

A performance of *Gāzīr Gān* can be given in the morning (beginning at around nine) or in the evening (beginning after eight). The performance commences with a *bandanā*, in which Hindu deities as well as Allah, the Prophet, various *pīrs* and *Gāzī* are saluted. The *bandanā* rendered by Hakim Ali and his troupe (from Jamsha, Manikganj) includes a song of praise sung in honour of *Gāzī*, a separate song saluting *Gāzī*, Saraswatī and the spectators and another song introducing the preceptors of the *gāyen*. On the other hand, the *gāyens* from Chittagong region used to salute Allah, the Prophet, Mecca and Madina in the west, Fatima, Ali, Imam Hasan, Imam Hosain, the sun-god in the east, Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa, the Khīr-nadīr Sāgar (Sea) in the south, the Himalayas in the north, Rāma, Sītā, various *pīrs*, holy sites and the spectators. Interestingly, there appears to be no mention of *Gāzī*. Often as is the case in Manikganj (greater Dhaka), the *gāyen* asks the spectators at the end of *bandanā*, as to which episode they would like to be performed. In other cases, as was the practice in Chittagong, the *gāyen* moves straight on the episode as desired by the sponsor. The main body of performance is comprised of following elements:

1. *Narrative performance in lyric*: The *gāyen* renders parts of the narrative in lyric, accompanied by choral refrain and orchestral music. Simultaneously, he dances all over the performance space or moves in rhythm, often depicting the action described in the song. The songs can be descriptive, or they can be the words spoken by characters.
2. *Narrative performance in prose*: The *gāyen* renders parts of the narrative in improvised prose as he moves all over the performance space. In these passages he describes and comments on the action and also renders the words spoken by various characters with vocal inflection and physical gestures. Sometimes he also uses his props (*āsā*, *cāmar* etc.) and parts of his dress to heighten the effect. For example, in *Jāmāl-Kāmālī*, where Jāmāl discovers the deranged woman and brings her on board the ship, Hakim Ali used to lay his shawl over his extended arms to represent Jāmāl carrying the woman. On the other hand Abdul Jabbar (from greater Mymensingh) uses a pillow, swords, colourful head-dresses etc. to visually enact parts of the narrative. He also has his assistant (*titli gāyen*) bent on all fours to represent a throne and presents sword-fighting with him to enact battle scenes. The *titli gāyen* also makes brief interjections or asks brief questions, sometimes with comic effect and at other times to bring variety in the performance.
3. *Narrative performance in verse*: Parts of the narrative are also rendered by the *gāyen* in verse accompanied by rhythm played on the percussion instruments. During these passages the *gāyen* moves all over the performance space in rhythm of the music.

A performance is usually ends after four to six hours with a brief closing announcement.

Some important features of *Gāzīr Gān* performance are as follows:

1. Donation: The system of collecting donation (*jeri*) is prevalent. These are usually devised at points where a character of the narrative is in material need. In *Jāmāl-Kāmāl*, after Jāmāl sets off for trade, he stops on the way to offer *śirni* (oblation of sweets) in honour of Gāzī. At this point the *gāyen* may stop his narrative and enter into the spectators' area to collect donation on the pretext of organising the *śirni*. During this period he continues singing a song in which the character of the narrative asks for alms and also declares the names of donors who offer substantial amount. All those who offer donations are blessed by the *gāyen* by brushing the head and parts of the body with the *cāmur* as an act of exorcism effected by the power of Gāzī.

2. Gender of performers: All performers are males.<sup>119</sup>

The body of texts which constitute or used to constitute the repertoire of *Gāzīr Gān* includes secular tales of adventure and romance in which Gāzī plays no role. This is specially true for the region of Chittagong where the genre is now extinct. Abdul Huq Chowdhury believes that the rise of fundamentalism in the region forced the performers to move gradually away from presenting narratives in praise of the *pīr* who rose above religious distinction (thus incurring wrath of the fundamentalists) to secular narratives where Gāzī is totally absent. But even this did not stop the gradual dying out of the genre in the region.<sup>120</sup> It is striking that not even performances based on secular narrative of romance and adventure (like *Pālā Gān* of eastern Mymensingh and *Kecchā Kāhinī* of greater Rajshahi) exists in Chittagong region today.

### 3.6.8 *Gāzīr Yātrā* :

In the rural area of greater Khulna, Jessore, Faridpur and Dhaka, performances based on the legend of Gāzī are also given in a dialogic form known as *Gāzīr Yātrā*. It is usually performed at night, during the dry seasons (mostly in the months of Māgh, Phālgun, Caitra and Baiśākh), sponsored by Hindus and Muslims alike as an offering to Gāzī made in order to appease him and earn his blessing to overcome circumstances of difficulties (such as ailment, trials and law suits etc.). It is performed during Kālī Pūjā, Durgā Pūjā, Laksmī Pūjā, and Saraswatī Pūjā as well, since Gāzī enjoys great reverence among the Hindus. Sometimes it is also performed in village fairs, hermitages of *faqirs* or even for entertainment at rural homesteads. The performance is witnessed by Hindus and Muslims alike, although adherents of Sufi mysticism tend to constitute greater part of the latter

group. The performers of *Gāzīr Yātrā* are usually Muslims who are inclined towards or firmly adhere to Sufi mysticism, but existence of Hindu performers is also not unknown. During the months mentioned above, the performers are engaged full-time in *Gāzīr Yātrā* troupes. During the rest of the year, some of them perform *Gāzīr Gān*, while others are forced to take on rickshaw-pulling or farm labour as source of livelihood.

The performance space of *Gāzīr Yātrā* is temporarily constructed in the outer courtyard of rural homestead, fair-ground or hermitage of *faqirs*. In most cases, it is square in shape (about twelve feet each arm) and non-elevated. On its four corners stand four posts of bamboo or banana plants which support the awning on top. Sometimes, the performance space is shaded with corrugated iron sheets or branches of coconut or *gol* trees. In the centre of the northern arm stands the *āsā* implanted on the ground. Beside it stands a low stool on which is placed a *kulā* (a winnowing tray made of bamboo slip) which contains 1.25 kilograms of rice, five betel nuts, some incense sticks, a candle, a new garment (*sari*, *lungi* or vest) and beside it a brass pot filled with water and covered with five mango leaves and five betel leaves, if the performance is a pledged offering given at a Muslim homestead. If the performance is a pledged offering given at a Hindu homestead, the pitcher usually contains milk and the *kulā* contains paddy grains, grass leaves, *sindūr* (vermilion), sweetmeat and a new garment. If the performance is not a pledged offering, the ritual articles are limited to 1.25 kilograms of rice, five betel nuts and taka 35. The performers are seated along the southern arm (fig. 56). Sometimes they also sit in a circle at the centre of the space (fig. 57). The floor of the performance space is covered with mats. The spectators are usually seated on three sides (west, north and east) and sometimes also on the fourth. They usually sit on hay-strewn floor, men separately from women. A narrow passage-way connects the performance space with the green-room (*sāj ghar*), usually a neighbouring hut on the southern side, located beyond the spectators' area.

A *Gāzīr Yātrā* troupe is often comprised on seven to eleven male performers: a *gāyen* (lead-narrator) and six to ten *dohārs*. The *gāyen* narrates (in prose), enacts various characters and also plays musical instruments if necessary. The *dohārs* sing choral refrain, play musical instruments and enact other characters. The female roles are enacted by two male impersonators (*chukrīs*). The musical instruments played by the performers usually are a harmonium, a *dholak*, a *bāyā*, two pairs of *judi* and a flute.

According to Lutfur Rahman Sheikh (manager and lead-narrator of a *Gāzīr Yātrā* troupe from Raghunathpur village under Bagerhat police station and district), there are eight episodes in the repertoire of *Gāzīr Yātrā*. These are :

1. *Mānasik*
2. *Jāmāl Bādśā*



- |                          |                             |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 3. <i>Didār Bādsā</i>    | 4. <i>Aftāb-Māhtāb</i>      |
| 5. <i>Heremāsā Bādsā</i> | 6. <i>Sat Māyer Caritra</i> |
| 7. <i>Tājel Bādsā</i>    | 8. <i>Gāzīr Biye</i>        |

Babul Sheikh, another lead narrator of *Gāzīr Yātrā* from Noapara village under Bagerhat police station and district, performs an episode titled *Ākbar-Manohar* instead of *Sat Māyer Caritra*. Both of them also report that the episode titled *Gāzīr Biye* (lit., the Marriage of Gāzī) is never performed. The *Mānasik* episode, on the other hand, is the compulsory prelude to all other episodes and it recounts how Gāzī renounced worldly life and attained mystic power. Texts of *Gāzīr Yātrā* have been published.<sup>121</sup> These are mostly dialogic (in verse and prose) with a few narrations in prose interspersed in between. Lutfur Rahman also reports that hand-written texts were in existence earlier when his preceptor was the lead-narrator of a *Gāzīr Yātrā* troupe but they are now destroyed. He, as well as Babul Sheikh, learnt their texts orally from their preceptors, Mabinuddin Sheikh (of Jaygacha village under Bagerhat police station and district) and Sohrab Sheikh (from Bagerhat), respectively.

Performances of *Gāzīr Yātrā* are always given at night, from around 8 p.m. to around 2 a.m. When sponsored for one night, the performance of the *Mānasik* episode is given in an abridged form, followed by that of any other episode (save the episode titled *Gāzīr Biye*). When sponsored for more than one nights, the *Mānasik* episode is given in the first night, followed by one or more of the other six episodes in the following nights. Each night's performance begins with a musical overture ("concert") played by all the performers save the *gāyen* and the *chukrīs*. The latter enter after a while from the green-room. Thereupon the *gāyen* offers worship to the *āsā* (sometimes accompanied by other rituals), silently recites a few secret formulas (*mantras*) to protect himself from all forms of evil attack, salutes the musical instruments and proceeds to sing a *Mārfati* (mystic) song, with choral and musical accompaniment. The *Mārfati* song is followed by the *bandanā*, rendered in verse or sung by the *gāyen* alone. The *bandanā* may be addressed either to the goddess Saraswatī or to Allah, the Prophet, Gāzī, Kālu and the *gāyen*'s preceptor. The main body of performance is given next and it is or comprised of the following elements :

1. *Narrative performance in prose* : At a few points, performers use a few lines in prose to explain an action or to link one scene with the next. Then he assumes the role of a character and continues to enact the scene. Sometimes a character also begins to play a scene with a narrative statement, thereby explaining to the spectators who s/he is, what s/he is about to do or where s/he is.

2. *Dialogic performance in prose* : Most of the narrative is rendered in prose dialogue by the characters. In the scenes which tend to be serious in overtone, the language tends to be more formal and decorative. The dialogue of these scenes are possibly pre-composed and memorised, but often the *gāyen* prompts the performers. On the other hand, scenes which are comic in overtone, tend to be rendered in colloquial and less formal language. Often the dialogue of these sections are improvised on the spot.

3. *Dialogic performance in rhymed metrical verse* : Scenes which expound religio-philosophical doctrine are often structured in rhymed metrical verse rendered as dialogue.

4. *Dialogic performance in lyric* : In intensely emotional scenes, characters express their words in lyric. These passages are pre-composed. Some of the lyrical dialogue is also aimed at comic effect. In *Didār Bādsā*, where the angel sent by Gāzī attends to Āymonā Sundari (his sister-in-law), she asks Āymonā which articles of food does she desire to eat for her *sādh* ceremony (arranged for pregnant women). One of the articles desired by Āymonā is *biḍī* (indigenous cigarette). The spectators lose no time to shower her with the object of her desire. Most of the lyrical passages rendered by the female impersonators are accompanied by dance which is highly erotic in appeal and has little to do with the action of the narrative. Some times, dance numbers are also presented unaccompanied by songs, only with music. Lutfur Rahman says, these numbers are necessary to generate interest among the spectators, because not all of them are interested in mysticism.

Performances given as pledged offerings end with a bathing ceremony. The person for whose benefit the pledge is made, is seated inside the performance space and is bathed by the *gāyen* by holding the new garment over his head. He is also blessed with the *cāmar* (whisk) of the *gāyen*. All other performances end with music played by the orchestra.

Some important features of *Gāzīr Yātrā* performance:

1. Entry and exit: Most of the characters "enter" a locale simply by standing up from the position of the *dohārs* (seated along the southern arm or in a circle at the centre). Similarly "exits" are denoted by rejoining the position of the *dohārs*. The entries which require major costume change are carried out in the green-room. Thus, *gāyen* exits to the green room when Jibrāil is speaking to Gāzī. Immediately after the performer playing Jibrāil has joined the position of the *dohārs* (i.e., he has made his exit from the scene), *gāyen* (now playing Kālu) screams from the green-room and enters the performance by running through the connecting passage. In the role of Kālu, he is seen with a paunch, wearing a *lungi* and a torn shirt.

2. Traversing long distance: Whenever characters need to traverse long distance, they carry out a movement around the position of the *dohārs*.
3. Costume: Major costume changes are carried out in the green-room and minor changes, in the area which the *dohār* occupies. Gāzī is dressed in a white *pāñjābi* and a white pair of *pājāmā*, wears the *tasbih* (rosary) around the neck and carries the *cāmar* (whisk) in his hand. The costume of Kālu often varies from troupe to troupe. In the troupe of Lutfur Rahman, Kālu is dressed in a *lungi* and a torn shirt and has a paunch (photograph 95). But in the troupe of Sarat Maṅḍal from Panchagram, Khulna, Kālu wears a red dress. In Lutfur Rahman's troupe, Bāritālā (Allah) is dressed in white *pāñjābi* and white *pājāmā* (photograph 94). The *chukrīs* are dressed in cotton *saris* (photograph 93). All other performers are dressed in daily life wear.
4. Mask : Lutfur Rahman's troupe uses masks. In *Didār Bādsā*, the ogre and its companion wear a plastic and a papier-mâché mask, respectively. Babul Sheikh's troupe also uses masks for characters such as tiger, ogre etc.
5. Props : In the performance of *Didār Bādsā* given by Lutfur Rahman and his troupe, a plastic doll is used for a new born baby (Didār), the executioner carries a tin-sword painted yellow and Janamuddin (Gāzī's brother) is "chained" by the executioner with a muffler.
6. The performance of *gāyen*: In Lutfur Rahman's troupe, the *gāyen* performs the role of Kālu in *Mānasik* episode, and Gāzī in all other episodes, beside playing a number of other minor roles.
7. Collection of donation : It is customary for the *gāyen* to bless the spectators who donate money in the name of Gāzī, with his *cāmar*. In the *Mānasik* episode, donations are collected at the point where Gāzī sends Kālu to collect alms from the citizen.
8. Scenic devices : No realistic effect is sought through the scenic devices. This aspect is very much apparent in the scene where the ogre devours Janamuddin in *Didār Bādsā*. At the end of the battle, the latter crawls under the parted legs of the ogre and joins the *dohārs*; at the same time he (the ogre) holds his stomach as though in great pain (photograph 96). Again, setting the chest with the body of Didār on the river is devised with Didār lying on the floor with a tin box placed on his chest. When the ogre impersonates as Janamuddin, the performer playing the ogre merely takes off his mask, speaks directly to the spectators that he has now changed his appearance to that of Janamuddin and begins to speak to Āymonā.<sup>122</sup>

The performance of *Gāzīr Yātrā* aims at generating devotion towards Gāzī and Kālu and expounding the Sufi doctrine. In the above process, the performers frequently juxtapose the Comic (*Hāsyā*) and the Erotic (*Sṅgāra*) with the Devotional (*Bhakti*). Thus, immediately after the scene with Jibrāil (set in devotional mood), Kālu enters to set the spectators rolling in laughter by undermining the serious-natured Gāzī. The pair of Gāzī and Kālu, therefore, is also the representation of two poles of human existence: the sublime and the profane, the intellectual faculty and the reproductive organs, the rational and the irrational. Thus, the performance succeeds in creating appeal for wide-ranging varieties of spectators. It is also important to note that the performance of the *Mānasik* episode ends in pathetic mood but all other episodes end in joyous mood of fulfilment and union. Again, one should also take note of the fact that the series of questions and answers in riddles set in rhyme in the *Mānasik* episode echoes the *Gorkha Saṁhitā* of the Nātha cult where Gorakṣanātha, the disciple, asks similar questions and Machdalīnātha (Mīnanātha) makes similar answers.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, Kālu's refusal to accompany Gāzī unless his questions are answered is exactly similar to the disciple's demand on his preceptor in *Yugī Parva* and *Yogīr Gān*. These points of similarity makes it evident that *Gāzīr Yātrā* has been substantially influenced by the Nātha cult performances.

### 3.6.9 *Mādār Pīr Gān* :

In isolated rural pockets of greater Rajshahi and Dhaka, *Mādār Pīr* is venerated by Hindus and Muslims alike, as the guardian of fire or protector against cholera. It is believed by his followers that a foetus aborted by a doe in a forest was found by Ali and handed to Fatima, who is turn tied the foetus to her abdomen and gave birth to *Mādār*. Later he is said to have arrived at Varendra (northern Bengal) and performed countless miraculous deeds. In some villages there exist *thān* (a venerated place where devotees make offerings) in honour of *Mādār Pīr*. It is usually a small stepped platform constructed near the trunk of a Bāṭul, Baḷ, Paikar, Gāb or *Mādār* tree. Ascetic followers and devotees of the *pīr* hold annual celebration in his honour on the full-moon of the month of Māgh with great eclac. A fortnight prior to the celebration, a long and straight bamboo along with thirty to forty medium sized ones, are ceremoniously chopped and then bathed in a tank. Thereafter the poles are wrapped in red cotton fabric (*sālu*), which are then decorated with golden or silver embroidery. With these decorated bamboo staves, the ascetics move in procession, visiting homesteads of the locality. In the courtyards they perform *Mādār Bāsēr Gān*, in which the leader of the ascetics and devotees sing a narrative in honour of a *Mādār Pīr* while the rest dance with their bamboo poles and sing choral refrain. At the end of the

performance, they collect donations of rice, lentil and/or money from the householder. The articles and money thus collected go in the preparation of oblation for the celebration on the day of the full-moon, which is distributed among the devotees and ascetics after performing elaborate rituals in honour of the *pīr*. Musical instruments such as *dhāk*, *ḍhol*, *kāsi* etc. are essential for the performance of *Mādār Bāser Gān* and its performers observe a specific set of rules for the purpose.<sup>124</sup>

*Mādār Pīrer Gān* (lit., the Lay of Mādār Pīr) commemorates the miraculous deeds of Mādār Pīr and is performed as a promised offering when the believers are delivered from calamities (often cholera) or when the childless bear children. It is performed by Hindus and Muslims alike who are firm believers of the Sufi doctrine and accept Mādār as their *pīr*. Ibrahim Sardar, the lead narrator (*gāyen*) of a troupe of *Mādār Pīrer Gān* from Banshbhag village in Natore, is a farmer and a fisherman by profession and a Muslim by faith; his chief associate Biṣṇupada Mohanta is a blacksmith by profession and a Vaiṣṇavite Hindu by faith.

*Mādār Pīrer Gān* can be performed in the day-time and also throughout the night, in the courtyard of homesteads or any public ground. The performance space (fig. 58) is square in shape, some twelve feet each arm, on four corners of which stand four bamboo posts to support a flat roofing on top (at about ten feet height), made of date or palm leaves or corrugated iron sheets. "Petromax" (kerosine) lanterns or electric lamps are suspended from the corner posts to provide illumination. There is no elevation of the performance space and the spectators sit on its four sides. The choral singers-cum-musicians (*pāil*) sit in a tight circle at the centre, around whom the lead narrator (*gāyen*) and other performers sing, dance and enact various characters. The performance is also given at *thāns*, where the space may be circular (some twelve to fifteen feet in diameter) but the roofing and other aspects are similar to that mentioned above. The spectators sit on and beyond the periphery of the circle leaving clear the area in front of the stepped platform of the *thān* (fig. 59).

The *gāyen* of *Mādār Pīrer Gān* is dressed in a white *dhoti*, an *ālpī* (the lower part of which is frilled and red in colour and the upper part white or any other colour) and a red *tāj*. He also wears a *tasbih* (rosary) around his neck, a pair of *khāḍu* (a hollow metallic band with beads inside) around his ankles and carries an *āsā* (a short metallic staff with an insignia, signifying supernatural power) to which a handkerchief is tied. At times he uses a *cāmar* as well to invoke blessing of Mādār Pīr. The other members of his troupe are the *gāyen*'s chief associate (*dohār*) who enacts the role of Jumal (the chief disciple of Mādār Pīr), three or four female impersonators (*chukrīs*) and four choral singers-cum-musicians. Of them, the *chukrīs*, who sing, dance and enact female roles, are dressed in cotton *saris*,

frilled head-dresses falling over the back and wear ankle-bells. All other performers are dressed in daily-life attire. The choral singers-cum-musicians play two *khol*s, a pair of *juđi* and a pair of *kartāl*.

Written texts of *Mādār Pīrer Gān* are rare. Sukumar Sen has noted the existence of one such text composed in rhymed metrical verse around 1910.<sup>125</sup> Four other texts, also in rhymed metrical verse and titled *Mādkār Bāsēr Gān* and *Mādārer Gān*, have been published by Bangla Academy.<sup>126</sup> The text performed by Ibrahim Sardar was orally learnt by him from his preceptor Nīl Cānd Gāyen (from Banshbhag village in Natore) who in his turn also learnt it orally from his preceptor Deser Ali Gāyen (from Dighapatia, Natore); the latter, in turn, had learnt the text orally as well from his preceptor Kasir Gāyen (from Dighapatia, Natore). The oral text is composed partly in rhymed metrical verse (rendered in lyric during performance) and partly in prose dialogue and narration (rendered in dialogic and narrative performance) respectively. There are twelve episodes in the repertory of Ibrahim Sardar, some of which are *Bāda Pīr Sāheber Pālā* (on the contest between Mādār Pīr and Abdul Quader Jilani), *Mādārer Janma Pālā* (on the birth of Mādār Pīr), *Oraś-nāmā* (adventures of Mādār Pīr as he sets on the task to preparing *śirnī*, i.e., oblation of sweets, for an *urs*, i.e., religious ceremony in honour of Allah), *Naukā-bāndhā Pālā* (on the construction of a boat made of stone by Mādār Pīr), *Bibi Kusum Pālā* (on the birth of a child unto a childless queen named Kusum on Mādār Pīr's blessing and ascension to the throne by the prince) and *Bibhīṣaṇ Pālā* (on the conflict of Mādār Pīr and Azrail, the angel of death, as the former protests against the death of an innocent child, which is finally resolved after Fatima supplicates to Allah on Mādār Pīr's behalf and Mādār Pīr tricks Bibhīṣaṇ, the cause of cholera, into promising not to visit villages where his followers reside). According to Ibrahim Sardar, all the twelve episodes have never been performed together in consecutive sessions and that *Bibhīṣaṇ Pālā* is not to be performed as his preceptor has command him not to.

Prior to a performance of *Mādār Pīrer Gān* by Ibrahim Sardar and his troupe, it is customary for the *gāyen* to chant a few magical formulas to protect himself from evil attack. These are held in extreme secrecy and are handed down only from the preceptor to the disciple. Known as *sālām phirāno*, the formulas are spoken immediately after the *gāyen* enters the performance space, by standing with clasped hands and facing westward. The performance commences with *bandanā* led by the *gāyen* and sung with choral accompaniment. Beside Mādār Pīr, the *bandanā* also pays tribute to Hasan, Hosain, Israfil, Allah, the Prophet, Fatima, Ali and Mother Śāhādānā (sic., food-grains). The main body of performance comes next and it is a composed of the following elements:

1. *Narrative performance in verse*: Frequently, the *gāyēn* recites parts of the narrative in verse as he moves all around the performance space, while all other performers sit in the centre in a tight circle. Beside describing events and actions, the *gāyēn* also renders dialogue of the characters in his narrative, with vocal and sometimes even physical characterization. In between metrical verses, the *gāyēn* also uses a few lines of prose in his recitation.

2. *Dialogic performance in prose* : The dialogic scenes are performed by the *gāyēn* and the *dohār* in the male roles and the *chukrīs* in the female roles. Sometimes a member of the *pāil* may also participate if more than two male characters are necessary (photograph 99). The *gāyēn* usually performs the roles of Mādār Pīr, Baḍa Pīr and sometimes also Jumal; the *dohār* performs the roles of Jumal, Kālu, Cānd Śāh (the sugar merchant) and also that of Mādār; the *chukrīs* enact the roles of Kālu's mother, Cānd Śāh's wife and other female roles; a member of the *pāil* performs Madnā Guirā (the molasses merchant), a cow-herd etc. The roles of Allah, Fatima and Jibrail are usually not presented as characters. But, as reported by Ghetu Gāyēn, a seventy-year-old ex-*gāyēn* of *Mādār Pīrer Gān* from Dighapatia, Natore, the role of Allah used to be portrayed by him some fifty years ago. The comic scenes are mostly engineered by *dohār*, who is a master comedian. He often represents Jumal as a simpleton who asks silly questions but is actually very shrewd and extremely dependable companion of Mādār (photograph 98). Through him, Mādār Pīr is also ridiculed and de-sanctified. The dialogic sections also contain a few lines in rhymed verse.

3. *Narrative performance in lyric*: Quite often the *gāyēn* switches from narration in verse to narration in lyric, in which he is accompanied by the *pāil* playing music as well as singing choral refrain. These lyrical passages are usually brought into play at climactic moments or at important points of the narrative. The song always ends with a drawn out vocal exclamation ("ai-i-i-i") made by the *gāyēn*. All the songs are accompanied by dance of the *gāyēn* and the *chukrīs* (photographs 97 and 100). The *gāyēn* begins to dance as soon as he switches over to a song and immediately the *chukrīs* rise from the central circle and join him in dancing. The rest of the performers continue sitting in the central circle, to play the music and sing choral refrain. The dance is non-mimetic, quite vigorous and the choreography is circular, in which a recurring pattern is a combination of forward and backward movements followed by a brief stationary posture and a leap. Sometimes the dance of the *gāyēn* includes circular movement around stationary axis which allows his frilled *ālpī* to swell up, thus creating striking visual effect; but the *chukrīs* often verge on to sensuousness.

The performance ends with a song which signifies conclusion. The following are some of the salient conventions followed in *Mādār Pīrer Gān*:

1. Entry: The performers stand up from the central circle to signify that they have "entered" a locale.
2. Exit: The performers rejoin the central circle.
3. Journey or change of locale: The characters move around the central circle, often accompanied by music.
4. Use of props: The tendency is to avoid pure mime and use a substitute object to represent the real object. Thus, musical instruments frequently serve as properties. For example, the *kartāl* plate is used as a plate of food, the drum as a sack a sugar, etc.
5. Collection of donation: Two or three times during a performance, the performers may use an incident of the narrative as a pretext to collect donation (*feri*) from the spectators. Thus, on the event of the death of Kālu (a cowherd in *Baḍa Pīr Sāheber Pālā*), her mother collects donations to buy a piece of cloth requested by Mādār Pīr. These donations serve to supplement the fee paid by the sponsor. The spectators deem these donations as having been made to Mādār Pīr.<sup>127</sup>

Sukumar Sen has rightly pointed that the philosophy propounded in *Mādār Pīrer Gān* is a fusion of Sufism and the Yogic practice of the Nātha cult.<sup>128</sup> More specifically, the school of Sufism followed in *Mādār Pīrer Gān* is the Mārfati doctrine and the influence of the Nātha cult has been drawn from *Yogīr Gān*. The legend of the egg which explains the origin of life in both *Mādār Pīrer Gān* and *Yogīr Gān* is an interesting example of the influence. Moreover, *Mādār Pīrer Gān* is but an extension of the preceptor-disciple structure seen also in *Yogīr Gān*: Mādār = Guru; Bhurtu Dāsa/Bālyak Dāsa = Jumal. Moreover, the emphasis laid on the preceptor in the Mārfati doctrine is also an echo of similar emphasis clearly discernible in *Yogīr Gān*. In comparison, it should also be evident that *Lakṣmīr Gān* and *Mādār Pīrer Gān* bear some similarities in terms of performance as well as philosophy. Prior to both the performances, the *gāven* recites magical formulas facing west. Although there are no female impersonators, no narrative performance in verse and the *pāil* never sits in the *Lakṣmīr Gān*, there is dialogic performance in prose and narrative performance in lyric in both the genres. On the philosophical level, it is interesting to note tendencies towards synthesis of Hinduism and Islam in both. Whereas the performers of *Mādār Pīrer Gān* equate the Prophet with Kṛṣṇa, those of *Lakṣmīr Gān* equate Ali with Rāma. But both equate Sītā with Fatima.



### 3.6.10 *Satya Pīrer Gān* :

Since early 16th century, there has existed the cult of a mythic Muslim saint named Satya Pīr.<sup>129</sup> It is possible that various religio-social pressure caused the cult to evolve in Bengal, in which earlier Purāṇic offshoots amalgamated with Dharma cult and/or decadent Buddhism with a branch of Sufism.<sup>130</sup> Although the earliest manuscript dedicated to the saint point to the Muslim ruler Hussain Shah as the popularizer of the Cult, its historicity has not been established. Nevertheless, scholars believe that prior to 19th century, the cult knew no distinction between "Hindu" and "Muslim". Since 19th century, Muslim reform movements sought to disregard the Cult. At the same time the saint was gradually assimilated into the fold of Hinduism and he has now established himself as Satyanārāyaṇa, an incarnation of Viṣṇu. Today, it appears imminent that Satya Pīr will disappear from the Muslim world of Bangladesh and West Bengal.<sup>131</sup> Even though all forms of image worship is forbidden in Islam, Satya Pīr is still worshipped by a few rural Muslims in parts of West Bengal where *dargāh* (shrine) dedicated to him is often built. Inside the *dargāh* symbolic image of Satya Pīr is conceived in the form of a small earthen mound within a circle, placed on a low stool (*pidi*); a small dagger or similar weapon made of iron and a garland of flower is placed on the mound.<sup>132</sup> Only one *dargāh* of Satya Pīr is known to exist in Bangladesh : at Nekkard under Ranisankail police station in the district of Thakurgaon. It is also interesting to note that the ruined temple of Tārā located near Somapur Monastery in Paharpur, greater Rajshahi (discussed in Chapter 4.1.2) is popularly known as Satya Pīrer Bhitā (lit., the foundation of Satya Pīr's homestead). The name obviously implies that the Cult was highly popular in the locality.

*Satya Pīrer Gān* is a genre of performance given at rural homesteads of greater Dinajpur and Rajshahi districts, with a view to propitiating Satya Pīr and earn his blessings for overcoming physical illness, attaining wealth or bearing children. It is performed by *faqirs* of Satya Pīr and his disciples and devotees who are offered oblation of sweet (*śirni*) and money at the end of performance. The *faqirs* are usually low-caste Hindus as well as Muslims. One such is Bocā Faqir (Rañjit Dāsa, aged 70) from Sardar Para, Mohespur village under Thakurgaon police station. Originally a Śudra (Hāḍī), Bocā Faqir accepted Christianity in early seventies because of poverty and hunger. But he continued to perform *Satya Pīrer Gan* although forbidden by the padre, because, as he says, "my heart knows no restraint".

Given in the outer courtyard of rural homesteads, the performance space of *Satya Pīrer Gān* (fig. 60) is circular in shape (some fifteen feet in diameter) and non-elevated. Outside

the circle stand four poles equidistant from each other and a fifth at the centre, all of which support a square shaped awning on top. The peripheral poles are also used to suspend electric lamps or "petromax" (kerosine) lanterns. The spectators sit all around the performance space usually on hay-strewn ground and men separately from women. At the centre sit five to seven *dohārs* (choral singers) and two to four *chukrīs* (female impersonators), all in a circle. The *dohārs* also play *khol*, *ḍholak*, *kartāl*, *ḡhāp-tāl* and harmonium. The *gāyen* (*faqir* who performs the role of lead narrator), the *śir-dohār* (the chief assistant of the *gāyen*) along a few other *dohārs* and the *chukrīs* narrate, dance and enact various characters in the intermediate circle between the spectators and the central circle. The *gāyen* is dressed in a white *pājāmā* and white *pāñjābi* on top of which he dons a *khilkā*. He also wear a *tāj*, a pair of shoes and uses a *cāmar* (whisk). The *chukrīs* are dressed in *saris*, wear ankle-bells and strong feminine make-up but not head-dresses as in *Mādār Pīrer Gān*. The *śir-dohār* and the *dohārs* are dressed in daily-life apparel (i.e., *lungi* and shirt).

According to Tony K. Stewart, "the collection of writings dedicated to Satya Pīr is arguably the largest literary heritage in Medieval Bengal, even challenging in breadth the prolific Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava literature of the period". But he also points out that the cult has no theology or aesthetic theory as Vaiṣṇavism and its literature is essentially popular.<sup>133</sup> Nearly fifty-five to sixty texts on Satya Pīr have been written in rhymed metrical verse by both Hindu and Muslim poets of western and southern Bengal.<sup>134</sup> The earliest of these was possibly composed in 1070 BS (c. 1663 AD) by Dvija Gūrdhara. Of the Muslim poets, Arif (?) and Faizullah (2nd half 16th century) feature prominently. According to the narrative composed by Kṛṣṇa Haridāsa in north Bengal in early 19th century, Princess Sandhyābatī, the virgin daughter of King Maydānab of Mālañca, conceives and therefore is banished to a forest where she gives birth to Satya Pīr. At the age of five he persuades Khwāj Khizir (the saint who commands the seas) to accept him as his disciple. Later he preaches monotheism, performs a number of miracles and adventures, wins a large following, forces his grandfather to accept his cult and has his mother reinstated at her parental home with full honour.<sup>135</sup>

Oral texts on Satya Pīr are also known to exist. Bocā Faqir, who learnt his texts orally from his preceptor Dhutrā Faqir (from Kani Kasalgaon village under Thakurgaon police station) at the age of 35, lists the following episodes from among a large number he claims to know.

- |                 |                 |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Satya Pīr    | 2. Bādsā Bāhrām |
| 3. Sundar Sādhu | 4. Dilbar Bādsā |

- |                        |                     |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| 5. Cāndā Rākhāl        | 6. Ākbar Bādśā      |
| 7. Bīśu Kāngāl         | 8. Rājā Hariścandra |
| 9. Tilak-pati Saodāgar | 10. Dātā Karṇa.     |

Of these, the first is on the life of Satya Pīr himself and the text is quite similar to that of Kṛṣṇa Haridāsa mentioned earlier. The last two are adaptations of well known legends recounted in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Māhābhārata*. For example, Viśvāmitra is replaced by Satya Pīr in *Rājā Hariścandra*. Otherwise, the narrative is similar to that of *Rāmāyaṇa*. The rest of Bocā Faqir's texts are largely tales of fantasy which recount adventures and romance where *parīs* (fairies), *djinns* (supernatural beings), *rakṣasas* (ogres), winged horses, monsters and flying *dākinīs* (female Tantric practitioners possessing occult power) are common. The role of Satya Pīr is that of a divine agent who blesses child-less royal couples or poverty-stricken ordinary men and those of his devotees who are in extreme difficulties whence children are begotten, riches are attained or obstacles are overcome. Often he appears only when the protagonist has no alternative but to fail. Thus, in most of the performances of *Satya Pīrer Gān*, religious didacticism serves as a frame for secular tales of adventures and romance.

Performances of *Satya Pīrer Gān* may be given in the day-time as well as at night. Day-time performances usually commence at around ten in the morning and end by two-thirty in the afternoon; those at night commence at about eleven and end before day-break. Performances comprised of two to nine episodes have been given by Bocā Faqir both on consecutive nights and days and also on consecutive nights. If a single episode is to be performed, it is always that titled *Satya Pīr*; if more than one episode is performed, *Satya Pīr* is given as the opening piece in the first session and is followed by any of the other episodes in later sessions. Before a performance, Bocā Faqir usually recites a few secret formulas to protect himself and the performance space from all forms of evil attack. The performance begins with a *bandanā* rendered by the *śir-dohār*, along with choral and musical accompaniment by the *dohārs*. The song offers salutations to Allah, Nirañjan, the Prophet, the four directions, Lakṣmī, Saraswatī, the preceptor of the *gāyen* and the Hindu and Muslim spectators. Reference to Dharma Nirañjan appears to be an important element of the *bandanā*.

The main body of performance is composed of the following elements:

1. *Narrative performance in lyric*: Parts of the narrative are rendered in lyric in which the *gāyen* sings first half of each line and the *śir-dohār*, the second half; the *dohār* sings choral refrain and plays music. These lyrical passages can be descriptions of an event or rendition

of what a character says. Simultaneously with passages of narrative performance in lyric two of the *chukrīs*, the *gāyen* and the *śir-dohār* dance around the central circle of *dohārs*. The dance is non-mimetic and the choreography is circular (photograph 101).

2. *Narrative performance in prose:* Immediately after each passage of narrative performance in lyric, the *gāyen* enacts the same in prose so as to make the substance of the song comprehensible to all the spectators. The text of such passages is mostly composed of the lines of the song mixed with a few improvised words. Quite often, as the *gāyen* enacts portions of prose narrative, the *śir-dohār* joins in and explains to the spectators or asks the *gāyen* quite opposite of what the latter means, thus producing roars of laughter from the spectators.

3. *Dialogic performance in prose and lyric :* Climactic sections of the narrative is performed in dialogic scenes composed in prose and lyric. In these sections, the *gāyen* usually enacts Satya Pīr, the King and other major male roles, the *śir-dohār* enacts the minister, the Kotoyāl (police chief) and other minor male roles and the *chukrīs* enact the Queen, the ogress disguised as the deer and later as the beautiful maiden etc. as in *Ākbar Bādsā*. If more than two male roles are required for any scene, members of the *dohār* may also join in. (Photographs 102-104.)

The performance usually concludes with Satya Pīr blessing the protagonist.

The following are some other features of *Satya Pīrer Gān* :

1. Entry and exit: The *dohārs* and the *chukrīs* arise and step out from the central circle to denote their entry into a locale and rejoin the circle to exit from the same.
2. Traversing long distance: A circular move around the central circle of *dohārs* represents change of locale or traversing long distance. For example, in the deer chasing scene of *Ākbar Bādsā*, a *chukrī* mimes the motion of a deer in her dance around the central circle and is followed by the *gāyen* and the *śir-dohār* portraying the characters of the King and his retinue. Suddenly the music stops and the *chukrī* rejoins the central circle to denote the disappearance of the deer.
3. Costume and scenic devices: No set props or masks are used. As regards the costume, there is no change, only the slightest rearrangement.
4. Collection of donation : At appropriate moments, the *gāyen* collects donations from the spectators and blesses those who donate, with his whisk.
5. The role of *śir-dohār*: Beside singing with the *gāyen* and enacting some of the roles, the *śir-dohār* is extremely important for he is the primary source of comic humour and

provides much of life in a performance as he misinterprets the *gāyən* during the sections of narrative performance in prose. Thus, variety is achieved, commentaries on contemporary life is made and often, the sublime is juxtaposed with the mundane.<sup>136</sup>

### 3.6.11 *Satya Pīrer Yātrā* :

In the region of greater Dinajpur, there used to exist some thirty years ago another genre of performance based on eulogies of Satya Pīr which was known as *Satya Pīrer Yātrā*. The back-ground of performers and the objective of performance being similar to that of *Satya Pīrer Gān*, *Satya Pīrer Yātrā* was entirely dialogic in form and was performed only during the night.

The performance space of *Satya Pīrer Yātrā* (fig. 61) used to be a temporary construction, the shape of which was circular (some 15 feet in diameter) and non-elevated. Four posts outside the periphery of the circle and standing equidistant to each other along with a fifth at the centre supported a square shaped awning on top. The *dohārs* sat in a circle at the centre and the spectators outside the periphery of circular performance space. A narrow passage cutting through the spectators' area joined the performance space and the green-room. The latter would usually be located at a nearby house or in a temporary enclosure created for the purpose. Performers dressed in costume similar to that of mythological *Yātrā*, would enter from and exit to the green-room.

Narratives similar to that of *Satya Pīrer Gān* were adapted into dialogue both in prose as well as in lyric, the language of which used to be standard Bāṅglā.

The performance would usually commence with a *bandanā* addressed to Dharma Nirāñjan, the Himalayas in the north, Mecca (or the House of Pāruā) in the west, the mythical Khīr-nadī (or the Kālīdaha) sea in the south, the sun in the east and other deities and saints. The main body of performance was composed of :

1. *Dialogic performance in prose*
2. *Dialogic performance in lyric* (which included dance).

Nothing more is known with certainty about *Satya Pīrer Yātrā* as the form has been extinct for at least thirty years.<sup>137</sup>

### 3.6.12 *Mānik Pīrer Jāri* :

In south-western Bangladesh (greater Khulna) and southern part of West Bengal (Hugli, Nadia and Twenty-four Parganas), there exist the cult of Mānik Pīr, another local demi-god who is believed to be the protector of domestic animals (specially cows). He is

worshipped by the Muslims and the Hindus alike, although Muslim *faqirs* usually perform the role of attending priest during the rituals and also exorcise evil spirits believed to be the cause of pestilence among domestic animals. Mānik Pīr is usually worshipped in the form of a low earthen mound, but on rare occasions icons are also seen. The latter is shaped in the form of a fair male figure with a mass of long curling hair and large eyes, dressed in an *ākhellā* and a small turban, with the *āṣā* (source of his occult power in the shape of an inverted crescent attached to a short staff) in one hand and a *tasbih* (rosary) or the *jāmbil* (a pot believed to contain all the diseases of the world) in the other.<sup>138</sup> There appears to exist no icons of Mānik Pīr in Bangladesh, but a number of *thāns* are still revered by the people. Three of these are located at Gazir Hat (Devhata, Kaliganj police station), Mithabari (Nagarghata, Tala police station) and Devnagar, all in Satkhira district. The *thān* at Devnagar is a low earthen square (some three feet each arm and about four inches high) under a Jibil tree, which devotees mark with *sindūr* (vermilion) and on which they offer milk. On the last Friday of the month of Āṣādh, the annual ritualised ceremony in honour of Mānik Pīr is held at this *thān*, funded by all the money offered to his *faqirs* in his name.

According to Sukumar Sen, Mānik Pīr is not a composite demi-god like the other mystic saints (*pīrs*) of Bengal but is Manichee of Persia (from 2nd or 3rd century AD) who was later recognised by the Sufi order.<sup>139</sup> But Gopendrakrishna Basu maintains that the cult of Manik Pīr is very much a Bengali phenomenon, which possibly arose in the early years of proselytisation by Sufi mystics who won a large following among the common populace.<sup>140</sup>

*Mānik Pīrer Jārī* is a genre of performance seen in the district of Satkhira (greater Khulna district) in which the life and miraculous deeds of Mānik Pīr is recounted. (Although called a *Jārī*, it is not to be confused with *Jārī Gān*.) It is sponsored mostly by the Hindus (and also by some Muslims) as an offering pledged to Mānik Pīr for securing his blessing in order to avert or overcome pestilence among domestic animals (specially cows) and sometimes also to overcome serious ailment of men and women. Occasionally it is also performed with devotional objective. *Mānik Pīrer Jārī* is always performed at homesteads, never at fairs or on the occasions of any ceremonial worship (*pujā*) of deities, usually from the month of Kārtika to Jaiṣṭhya and is witnessed by Hindus and Muslims alike.

Mohammad Sahar Ali Sardar, aged 60, from Akhrakhola village under the police station and district of Satkhira, is the lead-narrator (*gāyen*) of a *Mānik Pīrer Jārī* troupe and also a *faqir* of Manik Pīr. His troupe is composed of six performers including himself. They are (i) the *gāyen* who narrates and also enacts various roles including that of Mānik Pīr, (ii) the *dhartā* or *mūl dohārī*, the chief assistant to the *gāyen*, who makes brief interjections in the

gayen's narrations, enacts various roles, plays the *cau-tārā* and also sings choral refrain. (iii) two *bājīye* (musicians) who play harmonium and *ḍhol* and also sing choral refrain and (iv) two *dohārs* (choral singers) who also play *prem-juḍi* (*khañjari*) and *juḍi* (*cāki*) beside singing choral refrain. Sahar Ali is the disciple of Akbar Ali Bāul (from Bhanga, Satkhira), who in turn, was the disciple of Gahar Ali Gāyen (from Mithabari, Tala, Satkhira). The latter is believed to have lived some hundred years ago. According to Sahar Ali, Gahar Ali Gāyen's preceptor was from what is today West Bengal. He also claims to be the 10th generation of direct disciple-performers who played *Mānik Pīrer Jārī* some three hundred years ago.

*Mānik Pīrer Jārī* is usually performed in front of cow-sheds, in the inner courtyards of rural homesteads. The performance space (fig. 62) is a temporary construction, some nine feet square and non-elevated, on four corners of which stand four pillars to support the awning on top. Spectators sit on all four sides, on hay-strewn ground as well as in the verandahs of nearby huts. At the centre of the western arm stands a low stool (*āsān*) on which the *āśā*, the whisk and other ritual accessories are placed. In the centre of the eastern arm sits the harmonium player, on the southern arm sits the *prem-juḍi* player and the *dhartā* and on the northern arm sits the *juḍi* and the *ḍhol* players. The *gāyen* performs in their midst. He is dressed in a white *pāñjābi* and a white *pājāmā*. Often he uses the *āśā* and the whisk. The dress of rest of the performers is indefinite.

There exist a few narrative texts of *Mānik Pīr*, written in rhymed metrical verse. Two of these are *Mānik Pīrer Gīt* by Anāth Fakir and *Mānik Pīrer Jahurānāmā* by Jaidi (Jairaddi). *Mānik Pīrer Gīt* appears to have been scribed sometime in the first two decades of 19th century but is definitely of earlier origin. Its text narrates two miraculous tales of *Mānik Pīr*.<sup>141</sup>

Sahar Ali and his troupe have seven episodes in their repertoire of *Mānik Pīrer Jārī*. All of these are oral compositions by anonymous poets, structured in the form of rhymed metrical verse (rendered as lyric and verse recitation during performance) and prose dialogue (parts of which are created extempore). The seven episodes are as follows :

- |   |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Māniker Janma</i> (on the birth of <i>Mānik Pīr</i> ) | 5. <i>Meher-Burup</i>         |
| 2. <i>Kānu Ghos̄er Pālā</i> (on <i>Kānu Ghos̄</i> )         | 6. <i>Sheikh Farider Pālā</i> |
| 3. <i>Mānik Curi</i>  | 7. <i>Kāhu-Gāzī-Campāvātī</i> |
| 4. <i>Gul-e-Bakāwālī</i>                                    |                               |

Sahar Ali and his troupe performs each of the above mentioned seven episodes in separate sessions. These may be given at day-time (from around 10 am to around 3 pm) or at night

(from around 9 pm to 3 am). The episodes may be performed in consecutive sessions, at day and night or only at night, or, if the sponsor so desires, only one episode may be given. For those performances given as pledged offering, it is obligatory to perform the first episode (the Birth of Mānik) in the first session, followed by one or more in consecutive sessions.

Prior to the performance of each session, the *gāyen* silently recites a few secret formulas to protect himself, members of his troupe and the performance space from all forms of evil attack. The performance of the first session begins with the ritual of *ārati* (act of greeting a deity by waving a lamp) at Hindu homesteads or singing Mārfaṭī Murśidī (mystic) songs at Muslim homesteads. There follows a musical overture ("concert") and then the *bandanā* is sung. There exists three songs in which salutations are offered to (i) the preceptors, (ii) the four directions, Allah, the Prophet, all the saints and the honourable spectators and (iii) Mānik Pīr. On each session, one, two or all the three of the *bandanās* may be sung. Except the first session, all others begin with musical overture. The main body of performance, which commences after the *bandanā*, is composed of the following elements:

1. *Narrative performance in lyric* : The *gāyen* renders parts of the narrative in lyric, with choral and musical accompaniment. The lyrical passages describe action of the narrative as well as speech of the characters. Simultaneously with his song, the *gāyen* also portrays action as well gestures of the characters with the help of dance (photograph 108).

2. *Narrative performance in verse*: At places, the *gāyen* renders portions of his narrative in verse. These passages contain descriptions of action as well as speech of the characters. The *gāyen* usually renders his recitation in verse with the musical accompaniment of harmonium and *judi*.

3. *Narrative performance in prose* : The *gāyen*, accompanied by music played on harmonium, renders parts of the narrative in prose. In these passages, he often makes use of physical gestures and vocal inflections to depict action of the narrative as well as speech of the characters. Most of the narrative passages in prose are created extempore by the *gāyen* (photograph 105).

4. *Dialogic performance in prose*: Some sections of the narrative are rendered in prose dialogue by all the performers except the *ḍhol* and the harmonium players. There is no costume change and the dialogue is partly created extempore (photograph 106, 107).

5. *Dialogic performance in lyric* : Beside rendering dialogue in prose, the characters also render their lines in lyric at climactic points.

The performance of each session ends with a brief announcement in verse.



Other salient features of *Mānik Pīrer Jārī*:

1. The performers cleanse themselves before performance of the first episode (on the birth of Mānik Pīr) and refrain from smoking during performance.
2. Donation is collected from spectators at suitable points.
3. The mood of performance is controlled by performers in accordance with the response of spectators.
4. References to the city of Gokul, Kānu Ghoṣ and his herd of a hundred thousand cows as seen in *Kānu Ghoṣer Pālā*, possibly indicate veiled antagonism towards Vaiṣṇavism.
5. A similar narrative is also performed by Akhtar Hosain (of *Mā Māi Campār Kicchā-kāhinī Jārī*) where dialogic performance is absent. Called *Mānik Pīrer Kicchā-kāhinī*, the performance is a recent creation.<sup>142</sup>

### 3.6.13 *Mānik Yātrā* :

A text on *Mānik Yātrā* has recently been published which was originally collected in 1974 from Paikgacha in Khulna district. The performance is reported to have been extremely popular all over southern Bengal a hundred years ago. Its popularity began to wane after the creation of Pakistan and is now nearly extinct. In the region of Paikgacha, it is believed that Mānik Pīr introduced the technique of extracting the juice of date-palm. The people who are engaged in the profession of extracting the juice still pay homage to Mānik Pīr by offering *śirni* prepared with the first extract of a season to the *pīr*.

The text opens with a *bandanā* paying tribute to Manik Pir and Nirañjan. The main body is composed in the form of dialogue, mostly in prose but also in lyric at a few places. There is no narrative or commentary except at the end. One of the characters is Faqir who functions in a manner similar to the Vivek of the *Yātrā*.

Although no account about the performance of *Mānik Yātrā* is available, the structure of the text suggests a form quite similar to that of *Gāzīr Yātrā*.<sup>143</sup>

### 3.6.14 *Mā Māi Campār Kicchā-kāhinī Jārī* :

There exists at Labsa village in Satkhira district, the *māzār* (mausoleum) of Mā Māi Campā (i.e., Mother Campā), where people from distant parts of the country gather for the purpose of securing deliverance from serious ailment or to be blessed with children. Mā Māi Campā is venerated by the people of the region as a saint and is believed to be the wife of another legendary saint, Gāzī. The annual festival of Māi Campā is held on 12 Jaiṣṭhya

at Labsa. A genre of performance based on her life and miraculous deeds, known as *Mā Māi Campār Kicchā-kāhinī Jārī*, is extremely popular in the region and its vicinity.

*Mā Māi Campār Kicchā-kāhinī Jārī* is mostly sponsored by the Muslims (and sometimes by Hindus as well) as an offering pledged to Mā Māi Campā for securing her blessing in order to overcome serious ailment, obtaining children or attaining deliverance from calamities. Occasionally, it may also be performed at fair (*melā*). The troupe of Mohammad Akhtar Hosain (aged 39), the *bayāti* (lead-narrator) of *Mā Māi Campār Kicchā-kāhinī Jārī* from the village of Kasempur under the police station and district of Satkhira, is composed of seven performers other than himself. Six of them are Muslims and only the *ḍhol* player is a Hindu. Of the six, four play harmonium, *juḍi*, *kāsi* and *cautārā* and also sing choral refrain; the other two sing choral refrain only. They are mostly engaged in farming and small trade as profession. Akhtar Hosain himself sells medicine in weekly markets (*hāt*). He is the disciple of Mohammad Abdul Jabbar who is a famous *Jārī* performer of the region.

The performance space of *Mā Māi Campār Kicchā-kāhinī Jārī* (fig. 63) is temporarily constructed in the courtyards of rural homesteads and in the fair grounds. It is square in shape (some twelve feet each arm) and about eighteen inches high (elevated with wooden platforms). On its four corners stand four bamboo posts to support the awning on top. "Petromax" lanterns or electric lamps are suspended from these posts to illuminate the performance space. The choral singers (*dohārs*) and the musicians sit on two opposite sides: the percussion (*ḍhol*, *kāsi* and *juḍi*) on one side, the wind, string (harmonium, *cautārā*) and the two *dohārs* sit on the other side. The spectators sit on hay-strewn ground on all four sides of the performance space. The *bayāti* is dressed in a white *pāñjābi* and a white *pājāmā* (or a Kābuli *sālwār-kāmirz*) and also carries a handkerchief. The costume of rest of the performers is indefinite.

The text of *Mā Māi Campār Kicchā-kāhinī Jārī* performed by Akhtar Hosain credits one Kutub Pagal of Masudpur (Satkhira) as the original composer of the text. The date of origin is uncertain but Akhtar Hosain's text refers to the period as one during which *Bhūsān Gān* was very popular in the region. The text is completely oral, composed in prosometric form and has only one episode.

The performance of *Mā Māi Campār Kicchā-kāhinī Jārī* is usually given on Fridays, in the afternoons or evenings. Prior to the performance, the *bayāti* silently recites a few secret formulas (*mantras*) to protect himself, his performers and the performance space from all forms of evil attack. There follows the *bandanā* rendered by the *bayāti*, with choral and

musical accompaniment. The main body of performance begins after the *bandanā* and is composed of the following elements:

1. *Narrative performance in lyric* : The *bayāti*, with choral and musical accompaniment, renders parts of the narrative in lyric. The lyrical passages describe action as well as speech of the characters. The *bayāti* also dances in all lyrical sections, portraying the action and also the gestures of the characters (photographs 111 and 112).
2. *Narrative performance in verse*: Often the *bayāti* renders brief passages of his narrative in verse, with only harmonium and *ḍhol* players accompanying him. Usually these passages precede lyrical passages (photograph 110).
3. *Narrative performance in prose*: Beside the use of lyric and verse, the *bayāti* also renders parts of the narrative in prose. These passages are performed alone by him. With physical gestures and vocal inflections, the *bayāti* presents events and also depicts the characters and their speech (photograph 109).

The performance ends with a brief introduction of all the performers and an announcement about the completion of the narrative. The total duration of performance is about one and a half hours.

Some other salient features of the performance are:

1. Use of handkerchief: The handkerchief used by *bayāti* is symbolic of the tail end of Campa's *sari* which was left in Gāzī's grip.
2. Islamic partisan spirit : There appears a strong bias for Islam in the performance, unlike any other discussed so far. Many 19th century popular works, such as *Sonābhān* and *Jayguner Pūthi*, exhibit similar animosity towards non-Muslims.<sup>144</sup>

### 3.6.15 *Beḍā Bhāsān* :

In isolated rural pockets of Bangladesh there exists the cult of Khwāj Khizir both among the Hindus and the Muslims. Although there is no historical evidence to suppose that there ever lived any eminent ascetic by the name, the Muslims believe that Khwāj Khizir is the immortal *pīr* who commands over all animals, birds and aquatic life. Bedecked in green apparel, Khwāj of the green eyes is also believed to be the source of greenery in landscape and is capable of giving life to dead plants and trees. To the Hindus, he is the aquatic god who is the son of a sister of goddess Ganges.<sup>145</sup>

The celebration in honour of Khwāj Khizir is variously known as *Beḍā Utsab* or *Beḍā Bhāsān* and is still held in parts of greater Dhaka (Dohar, Manikganj and Munshiganj) and Mymensingh (Kishoreganj). It may be celebrated individually or by a family as an irregular

event, undertaken with the objective of propitiating Khwāj Khizir and can be held any time of the year. These are usually organised by the elderly women, where the participation of women by far outnumber that of men. It may also be organised collectively by a village, where the participation of men is higher than the women and which is undertaken as an irregular event when the village faces an aquatic disaster such as flood or river erosion. It is also celebrated as an annual event under the auspices of *māzārs* and *dargāhs* established in honour of the five venerated *pīrs* (Khwāj Khizir, Mādār, Gāzī, Mānik or Satya and Badar) or those of the seven (Fatima, Ali, Khwāj, Mādār, Badar, Gāzī and Mānik). These celebrations are organised by the *faqirs* (who supervise and serve the venerated sites), their disciplines and devotees and are usually held on the last Thursday of Bhādra. The villagers of the locality pay their tributes and also make offerings. In both cases where the celebration is organised by the village or is held under the auspices of the *māzārs* and the *dargāhs*, various items of food and money are collected from the villagers from about fourteen days prior to the event. The collected articles go into preparation of *śirni* (oblation) on the day of celebration, some of which is offered to Khwāj Khizir by placing it on the raft floated in his honour and the rest is distributed among the devotees who assemble for the occasion. Although it is difficult to ascertain the cult followers by their profession, it is believed that all those whose livelihoods are connected to the water system, such as divers who collect pearls, fishermen, boatmen, traders, and also the *kavirāj* (physicians who follow the ancient Indian Āyurvedic system), village mid-wives and *ojhās* hold the celebration with great respect.<sup>146</sup>

The most important ritual of the celebration is the construction and setting adrift of a decorated raft known as *beḍā*. It is often made with uneven number of banana plants (3, 5 or 7), on top of which a miniature structure (in the shape of a mosque or temple) is built with bamboo slips and is then covered with the rind of banana plant. Finally it is decorated with frills of coloured paper, flowers and triangular shaped red and blue flags. After performing necessary rituals, devotees decorate the raft with lamps. Thereupon it is carried to a river, a marsh (*bil*) or a pond, with the devotees following in procession, sometimes also accompanied by music played on *ḍhāk* and *kāsi*. Finally the raft (*beḍā*) is set adrift on the water.<sup>147</sup>

In quite a few celebrations, the devotees return to the *dargāh* or *māzār* to attend performance of devotional songs rendered in honour of Khwāj Khizir. In the celebration organised at Maṅgal Dewāner Bāḍi in the village of Paschim Hanshali (Manikganj district, greater Dhaka), a narrative performance known as *Khwāj Khizirer Jārī* is given after the *beḍā* is set adrift.<sup>148</sup> The text recounts miraculous exploits of Khwāj Khizir as a child, his

effort with Emperor Sikāndār to discover the water of immortality in which only the former is successful because of Allah's blessing and apparently malicious actions of the *pīr* committed in the company of Moses which enrages the latter but he is forced to acknowledge the former's superiority when it is revealed that they were undertaken for the benefit of the people concerned.<sup>149</sup> The performance of *Khawāj Khizirer Jārī* is given with the accompaniment of music played on *ḍhol*, *khol*, *caṭi*, *do-tārā*, *khañjari*, harmonium, flute, etc.<sup>150</sup>

### 3.6.16 *Pāillyā Yātrā (Pātilā Gān)* :

In the district of Bogra there exists a genre of performance known as *Pāillyā Yātrā* (or *Pātilā Gān*) which is performed with the objective of meeting popular interest on Sufi mysticism. It may be performed throughout the year on occasions such as Milād Māhfil (assembly of the Muslims for reflection on and in praise of the Prophet), Hālkāye Zikir (congregation of the Muslims for chanting the names of Allah) and seasonal fairs (such as Nabānna). *Pāillyā Yātrā* is usually sponsored collectively by village elders and youths who collect subscription for the occasion and is witnessed by member of all religious communities.

A troupe of *Pāillyā Yātrā* led by Mohammad Kafiluddin (Rajapur village, Bogra district) is comprised of six to seven performers. Two of them (including himself) alternately perform the role of lead-narrator (*gāyāk*) and also play *ek-tārā* and *do-tārā*; three others play *juḍi*, *caṭi*, and *pātil*; the rest, along with the some of the musicians, render choral refrain. All of them are full-time performers by profession; they are Muslims by faith except the two lead narrators who are Bāuls. Mohammad Kafiluddin has been performing since the age of twelve. He is the disciple of Mohammad Mujibur Rahman (age 65) from the same region. The latter is the disciple of late Khoka Mian (from Solartari village under Gabtali police station in Bogra district) who in turn was the disciple of late Majid Mian from Netrokona.

The performance space of *Pāillyā Yātrā* (fig. 64) is a temporary construction: square in shape (some 12 feet each arm) and elevated (about 18" in height). On its four corners stand four bamboo posts to support the awning on top. "Petromax" (kerosine) lanterns or electric lamps are suspended from these posts to illuminate the performance space. The spectators are seated on all four sides of the elevated square, mostly on hay-strewn ground and men separately from women. On the north-eastern corner of the performance space sits one of the *gāyaks* with his *do-tārā*, on the south-western corner, the other *gāyāk* with his *ek-tārā*, on the south-eastern corner, the *juḍi* player and on the north-western corner, the *pātil* player. The *khañjani* player sits in the centre of the eastern arm and the choral

singer/s, in the centre of any of the other three arms. The *gāyaks* are dressed in white *pāñjābis* and white *pājāmās* whereas the musicians and the choral singer/s are mostly dressed in *lungis* and *pāñjābis*.

The texts performed in *Pāillyā Yātrā* are oral compositions, mostly based on the following:

1. *Visvanabī*, by Golam Mustafa, a biography of the Prophet composed around mid-20th century.
2. *Biśād Sindhu* by Meer Musharraf Husain.
3. *Dāstān-i-Šahīd-e-Kārbālā*, by Abul Hossain, a narrative in rhymed metrical verse on the events of Karbala.
4. *Khāiral Hasr* by Kamaluddin, a narrative in rhymed metrical verse on the miracles and legends associated with the Prophet, other prophets and saints.
5. *Qāsāsul Āmbiā* by Mohammad Khater, a narrative in rhymed metrical verse describing various legends from the creation of Adam to the life of the Prophet, based on an Urdu translation which in turn is based on a Persian translation of Arabic original of the same title.

The troupe of Mohammad Kafiluddin has in its repertoire the following episodes which are composed with materials drawn from the above texts:

1. *Duniyā Sr̥ṣṭi Rahasya* (lit., The mystery of creation of the world)
2. *Ādam Sr̥ṣṭi Rahasya* (lit., The mystery of creation of Adam)
3. *Ādam O Šaitāner Rahasya* (lit., The mystery of Adam and Satan)
4. *Āllāh O Šaitāner Rahasya* (lit., The mystery of Allah and Satan)
5. *Nur Sr̥ṣṭir Rahasya* (lit., The mystery of creation of Nur)
6. *Visva Nabīr Jīban Kāhinī* (lit., The life of the Prophet)
7. *Nabīr Merāj Rahasya* (lit., The mystery of the Prophet's Meraj)
8. *Hazrat Ibrāhimer Kāhinī* (lit., The story of Prophet Ibrahim)
9. *Hazrat Musār Kahinī* (lit., The story of Prophet Moses)
10. *Šahīde Kārbālā* (lit., The martyrs of Karbala)
11. *Fātimār Jīban Kāhinī* (lit., The story of Fatima's life)
12. *Hazrat Alir Jīvanī* (lit., The life of Ali)
13. *Yusuf-Zulekhār Prem-kāhinī Rahasya* (lit., The mystery of the love of Yusuf and Zuleykha).

All these episodes are created in prosometric form. The sections in rhymed metrical verse are partly composed by the *gāyaks* and their preceptors and are partly drawn from the

original source materials mentioned earlier. The sections in prose are improvised during performance, following the same source.

Performance of *Pāillyā Yātrā* is given at night (from around 9 pm to sun-rise) or in the forenoon (from around 7 am to 12 noon). Prior to performance, one of the *gāyaks* silently recites a few secret formulas (*mantras*) to protect the whole troupe from all forms of evil attack. The performance begins with a brief musical overture played by the musicians, followed by a *bandanā* rendered by one of the *gāyaks*. In it, salutations are usually paid to Allah, the Prophet, Fatima, the Imams Hasan and Hosain, all human beings created from Adam till date and all the spectators (Hindus as well as Muslims). The *gāyak* then proceeds to question the other *gāyak*. He begins with a brief introduction in lyric and then places a few questions in prose so as to enable the other *gāyak* to render a portion of the narrative to be performed, from the beginning. Having placed his questions, the *gāyak* takes his seat (at one of the corners of the performance space) and the other *gāyak* rises and sings a *bandanā* and an introductory song. Then he renders in lyric and improvised prose, the opening section of the narrative to be performed as his reply to the questions posed by the first *gāyak*. When he completes his section, the (second) *gāyak* poses a few questions to the first *gāyak* so as to enable him to render (also in lyric and improvised prose) the following section. Thus continues questioning by both and rendering sections of the narrative in chronological order (as answer to the question) by both. In this manner continues the entire performance till the whole text is narrated to the spectators, alternately by the two *gāyaks*. Finally, the performance ends with a song of salutation of the spectators, rendered by one of the *gāyaks*.

The performance of *Pāillyā Yātrā* is composed of the following elements:

1. *Narrative performance in lyric*, in which the *gāyaks* render parts of the narrative and the introductions to questions and answers. All lyrical passages are accompanied by music and choral refrain.
2. *Narrative performance in prose*, in which the *gāyaks* render other parts of the narrative and the questions. All renditions in prose are performed by each *gāyak* alone.

The following are some other features of *Pāillyā Yātrā* performance:

1. **Donation:** Donations are collected from spectators during performance.
2. **Devotional fervour:** The performance succeeds in generating intense devotional fervour among the spectators. It is common to see people moved to tears.

The word 'pāillyā' is a regional derivation of 'pātil', i.e., 'earthen pot'. The genre appears to have been named after the curious use of 'pātil'. It is also interesting to note that *Pāillyā Yātrā* is similar, in terms of performance structure, to *Bhāsān Pālā Gān* of Narail.<sup>151</sup>

### 3.6.17 *Kaḍcā* :

*Kaḍcā*, a genre of performance bearing similarity with *Kavi Gān*, still exists in the district of Narail (greater Jessore). It is usually performed and sponsored by the Muslims, although a few members of the Hindu community occasionally witness the performance as well. *Kaḍcā* is performed for secular entertainment at village fairs but not at home. Sometimes its performances are given on sale of tickets.

The *Kaḍcā* troupe of Abul Khayer (aged 45), a tailor by profession and the *bayāti* (lead-narrator) of his troupe, from Kalna village under Lohagara police station in Narail district, is composed of eight performers including himself. He plays a *sārindā* or a *do-tārā* during performance and is assisted by seven *dohārs* who sing choral refrain; three of them also play *ḍhol*, harmonium and *cāḳī*. All of them are Muslims by faith and tailors or masons by profession.

*Kaḍcā* is usually performed in public grounds such as school compounds and play-grounds etc. where fairs are held. The performance space (fig. 65) is a temporarily constructed elevated area (about 18" high), square in shape (fifteen feet each arm), on four corners of which stand four poles to support the awning on top. "Petromax" (kerosine) lanterns or electric lamps are suspended from the corner posts to illuminate the performance space. Two contesting troupes of performers sit opposite each other, in straight lines, along two opposite arms. The *bayāti* and the *ḍhol* player of each troupe perform standing, in between the two rows, with choral and musical accompaniment of their respective *dohārs*. The spectators sit on all four sides of the performance space. Awning is also provided for them. The entire area is enclosed when the performance is given on sale of ticket.

A *Kaḍcā* performance is given in the form of contest between two *bayātis* who assume any of a number of conventionally accepted pairs of roles and debate with each other on issues such as Man-Woman, Hindu-Muslim, Guru-Śiṣya (Preceptor-Disciple), Śariat-Mārfat (The way of the Scripture-The way of the Preceptor) etc. The troupes give alternate sessions, each of which is composed of (i) *bhāva-gān* (a type of popular song in which deeper meaning is implied with the help of apparently absurd metaphors) to reinforce argument, (ii) answer in lyric to the question posed by the opponent, (iii) explanation of the answer in prose, (iv) question for the opponent in lyric, (v) explanation of the question in prose and (vi) another *bhāva-gān* for reinforcing the argument. Each session lasts about half an hour.



In the first session of each troupe, the *bandanā* is sung, in which salutations are paid to Allah, the Prophet, other prophets and saints and sometimes also to Saraswatī. In the final session, both the troupes resolve their differences by arriving at a solution acceptable to both. A performance usually commences at about eight in the evening and ends before sun-rise. Sometimes, when the contest generates tremendous heat of argument, a performance may continue through the following morning.

Although *Kaḍcā* appears similar to *Kavi Gān*, it is important to note that all lyrical passages (*bhāva-gan*, questions and answers) are usually pre-composed. Only on rare occasions the questions and answers are asked and given extempore.<sup>152</sup>

### 3.6.18 *Ṗuthi Pāth (Kitāb-paḍā)* :

All over Bangladesh, Muslim peasantry spend their evenings informally reciting and listening to *Ṗuthi*, i.e., printed or hand-written texts composed in rhymed metrical verse. Seated on a mat spread in the courtyard, verandah or inside the house, the performer who recites *Ṗuthi* (sometimes called a *bāyāti*) places his text on a *rehel* (a low, foldable and cross-shaped wooden stand) or a low stool in front of him while the spectators are mostly seated facing him and on his two sides (fig. 66). Dressed in a *lungi* (or a *pājāma*) and *pāñjābi* and aided by a flickering kerosine lamp, he recites the *Ṗuthi* in melodic chanting tune (photograph 113). The performance, composed solely of the recitative element, is entirely vocal and is rendered by a single performer (without choral or musical accompaniment) and he remains seated throughout. He varies the tune of his recitation and at places may also explain a section of verse in prose speech if requested by the spectators. The length of performance usually varies from an hour to three hours.

Mohammad Alekh Sheikh (aged 63), a farmer by profession and a Muslim by faith, is from Kamthana village under Lohagara police station in Narail. He recites *Ṗuthi* at home or upon request, in marriage celebrations, circumcision ceremonies and other festivities with the objective of imparting entertainment. The texts he recites are all based on Islamic legends, such as various events and miracles associated with the Prophet, the life of Ali and his family (including the tragedy of Karbala and the heroic deeds of Hanifa), legends related to other prophets and saints and secular tales of romance and adventure. The title of some of these are: (i) *Khāiral Hāsr*, (ii) *Qāsāsul Āmbiā*, (iii) *Jaṅg Oudh* (iv) *Jaṅg Khāirul* (v) *Kāsed-nāmā* (vi) *Āmir Hāmzā*, (vii) *Sonābhān*, (viii) *Gāzī-Kālu-Campāvatī*, (ix) *Yusuf-Zulekhā* etc. An interesting feature of these texts is that they are paginated from right to left (instead of the normal Bengali practice of left to right), although each line reads from left to right. The practice follows the pagination of Arabic, Persian or Urdu texts. It is

also important to note that these very texts are also performed in the *Jārī Gān* and other performances based on Islamic legends (secular as well as religious).

### 3.6.19 *Sawāl Jawāb (Kitāb-paḍā)*:

In the district of Narail (greater Jessore), there used to exist a genre of performance known as *Sawāl Jawāb* (or *Kitāb-paḍā*) which bore remarkable similarity with *Jārī Gān* of south-western Bangladesh. The performers were all Muslims by faith and farmers by profession, the majority of the spectators were Muslims and the performance was also sponsored by the Muslims. It was usually performed after harvesting, with the objective of entertainment and for the interest of the spectators on religious legends as well as deliberation on religion.

*Sawāl Jawāb* performances were given in a temporarily constructed performance space, square in shape (some twelve feet each arm) and elevated (about eighteen inches). Four posts stood on four corners to support the awning on top. "Petromax" (kerosine) lanterns suspended from the posts served as illumination. The spectators would be seated on all four sides of the performance space and two contesting troupes of performers would sit in two rows on any two opposite sides (fig. 67). Each troupe would be comprised of a *bayāti* (the lead-narrator) and six or seven *dohārs*, who would sing choral refrain and also play a *ḍhol*, a harmonium, a *sehnāi*, a *do-tārā* and a pair of *cākī* (*juḍī*).

*Sawāl Jawāb* (literally "Question Answer") performances were essentially contests between two *bayātis* who assumed any of a number of conventionally accepted pairs of roles and debated with each other on issues such as Guru-Śiṣya, Hindu-Muslim, Śarait-Mārfat, Man-Woman etc. Each of the troupes would also render a *ṣūthi*. Prior to an evening's performance, the issue to be debated and the roles to be represented were decided. The performance would begin with one of the *bayātis* singing the *bandanā* in which salutations would be paid to Allah, the Prophet, other prophets and saints. At the end of the *bandanā*, he would proceed to narrate a *ṣūthi* of his choice (or spectators' choice), from the beginning to a suitable length. Then he would suspend his narration and pose questions to the opponent *bayāti* from the view point of the role he represented. At the end he would take his seat along with his *dohārs* and leave the floor for the opponent *bayāti*. Thus would end the first session. The opponent *bayāti* would also sing his *bandanā*, narrate any other *ṣūthi* of his choice and then suspend it to enter the debating phase. In it he would first answer the opponent's questions and then pose his questions from the view point of the role he represented. Having asked his questions and given his answers, he would go back to his position with his *dohārs*. Thus would end the second session. The following sessions would continue alternately, in each of which each *bayāti* would resume narrating the *ṣūthi*

from the point where it was suspended in the previous session and continue up to a suitable length, answer the other *bayāti's* questions and pose his own questions. In the final session both the *bayāti's* would resolve their difference. There would be no official announcement of the winner but the spectators would make their individual decisions based on the quality of *ṣūthi* rendition and the merit of argument of the *bayāti's*.

The main body of performance would be comprised of the following elements:

1. *Narrative performance in verse:* The *bayāti* would render parts of his *ṣūthi* in verse, accompanied by music played by the *dohārs*. He would also pose his questions and render his answers in verse created extempore, accompanied by rhythm played on the *ḍhol* and the *cākī*.

2. *Narrative performance in lyric:* Some sections of the *ṣūthi* would also be rendered by the *bayāti* in lyric, along with choral and musical accompaniment. Beside singing, the *bayāti* would also perform rhythmic movement.

*Sawāl Jawāb* performances would begin in the evening, at around eight and end before sunrise. Sometimes, if the debate of the *bayāti's* generated enough heat, the performance would continue the following morning.<sup>154</sup>

### 3.7 Secular Tales

#### 3.7.1 *Yātrā* :

Popular and well-known all over Bangladesh, *Yātrā* is entirely secular in character. It is performed by fully professional and itinerant companies, which travel to distant villages and small towns to appear in brief engagements usually ranging from six to twelve nights or more. The companies are mostly engaged by groups of local sponsors, known as "nāyak party", who organise performances as commercial ventures. They pay each company guaranteed fee per night (which is usually five to ten thousand taka) and admit spectators on sale of tickets. On a few occasions, committees in charge of organising Pūjā festivals (such as those of Durgā, Kālī, Saraswatī, Lakṣmī etc.) may raise fund by subscription in order to sponsor performances by professional troupes, without charging admission fee. *Yātrā* is performed during the dry season. The performance season of professional companies usually commences with the Durgā Pūjā (held in the month of Kārtika, from the 7th to the 10th of the bright fortnight) or Kālī Pūjā (held about twenty days after the Durgā Pūjā) and ends in the month of Caitra. The members of *Yātrā* companies are Hindus as well as Muslims by faith. It is witnessed by spectators belonging to all the communities. *Yātrā* is also performed in the rural areas by amateur groups on occasions such as the Pūjā festivals. Most of the

members of these groups are Hindus by faith. Sometimes amateur groups, mostly consisting of Muslims, also perform *Yātrā* during unspecified evenings of the dry season. The groups raise funds by subscription from local enthusiasts. Except the musicians and the female performers (who are contracted on payment), the group members are not paid. In most cases, the amateur performances are given free of admission fee.

The proprietor of a professional *Yātrā* company is known as the *svatnādhikāri*. S/he is usually assisted by a manager. The performers are comprised of: (i) seven to ten musicians who usually play clarinet, cornet, trumpet, violin, *dhol*, *bāyā-tablā*, congo drums and *mandirā*. They are led by the "harmonium master" who conducts music and plays harmonium during performance and also rehearses vocal music with the actors and actresses; (ii) eight to ten female dancers-cum-singers who are trained in dance by the "dance master" often a male who also performs *sañg*, i.e., comic dance numbers; (iii) about twelve actors and four or five actresses and a director who acts during performance as well. The rest of the company consists of a prompter and about three stage hands who also perform miscellaneous duties such as perform in supernumerary roles, cook and carry out odd jobs. On a few occasions, a famous actor/actress may himself/herself be the proprietor, director as well as an actor/actress. Performers are usually contracted for a period of about eight months (or less), the first three of which (Śrāvaṇa, Bhādra, Āsvin and the first few days of Kārtika) are spent in organising and rehearsing the company and the rest for performance. It is the manager's job to negotiate with prospective performers prior to the rehearsal period and also to organise the tour.

*Yātrā* is performed in public grounds and temple precincts. The performance space (fig. 68), constructed temporarily, is square in shape (about eighteen feet a side) and elevated (some two and a half feet high). The dimensions of the central platform appears to be quite flexible, but never under sixteen feet or over twenty-two feet, the variance of which is dictated by the size of spectators expected as well as the space available. At a few places, the performance space is also constructed in the shape of a rectangle (some twenty-two feet by twenty or twenty by eighteen). On two opposite sides sit the musicians, their space designated by adjoining platforms running the whole length of the two arms, about two and a half feet wide and a little lower than the central platform. One of these adjoining platforms is occupied by the percussion instrument players and the other by the wind and the string. Two ramps (about three feet wide) descend from the third side to two passages which lead to the green-room (*sāj ghar*, which also serves as the living quarters of the performers), often some sixty feet away. The characters enter through one of these and exit through the other. On four corners of the central platform stand four posts which support a roofing on

top. The roofing is usually of corrugated iron sheets with a canopy hung under the sheets. Electric lamps or "petromax" lanterns are suspended from horizontal poles tied to the vertical corner poles. The spectators are seated on three sides of the performance space (leaving the ramp side free) or, as most often is the case, on all four sides. Quite often, a separate section is reserved for female spectators. The sitting arrangement ranges from chairs for the costlier and hay-strewn ground for the inexpensive ticket holders. The entire auditorium area (some 120 feet to 180 feet a side) is enclosed by temporary boundary wall for performances given on sale of tickets. Some form a awning is also provided for the auditorium area.

*Yātrā* performances are based on written texts, composed mostly in prose, interspersed with a few lyrical passages. In terms of content, the texts can be categorised into three broad heads. There are:

(i) Social: In which characters drawn from contemporary society are set in conflict on issues arising from values, principles and ideals of family and social life. The following are a few popular examples.

*Ekti Paisā* by Bhairavnāth Gangopādhyāya, structured in five acts with 13 male and 4 female characters and containing 8 songs.

*Mā Māti Mānuṣ* by Bhairavnāth Gangopādhyāya, structured in 5 acts with 13 male and 4 female characters and containing 10 songs.

*Sindūr Niyonā Muche* by Nirmal Mukhopādhyāya, structured in 16 scenes with 16 male and 4 female characters and containing 8 songs.

*Sonādāngār Bau* by Nirmal Mukhopādhyāya, structured in 17 scenes with 11 male and 4 female characters and containing 8 songs.

(ii) Historical: In which characters and events drawn from history are intermingled with those of fictional nature to project heroism, patriotism, nationalism and communal harmony (of the Hindus and Muslims). The following are a few examples.

*Tāj Mahal* by Bhairavnāth Gangopādhyāya, structured in 19 scenes with 17 male and 4 female characters and containing 10 songs.

*Beimān Bidhātā* by Kānailāl Nāth, structured in 5 acts with 13 male and 4 female characters and containing 5 songs.

*Vijay Nisān* by Jaynāl Ābedin, structured in 3 acts with 13 male and 3 female characters and containing 9 songs.

(iii) Mythological : Where characters and events drawn from mythology and religious legends project divine glory and seek to infuse devotional fervour. The following are a few examples.

*Nimāi Saṅgyāsī* by Kālīpādā Dāsa, structured in 5 acts with 13 male and 4 female characters and containing 22 songs.

*Rāvaṇa Vadh* by Rasamay Sarkār, structured in 23 scenes with 11 male and 4 female characters and containing 7 songs.

*Bhāsān Yātrā* by Makbul Hossain, structured in 4 acts with 7 male and 6 female characters and containing 24 songs.

Besides, there are also a few texts based on (iv) biographies of important personalities of recent times such as *Hitler*, *Napoleon*, *Lenin*, *Ho Chi Minh* and *Madhusūdan* and (v) imaginary tales where characters from the royalty and the peasantry project contemporary social problems such as *Rakta Diye Kinlām*, *Yātrā Hala Śuru*, *Mātir Pradīp* and *Ke Kāde*. Of all the five categories described above, the social texts enjoy widest popularity among the spectators today.

It is typical of *Yātrā* texts to delineate characters as representatives of contemporary social archetypes, divided into clearly demarcated black and white camps. The difference between the characters of social, historical and mythological texts is finally a matter of degree and scale. Thus, the archetype of a virtuous woman totally devoted to her male "guardian" (brother, father, or husband) is common to Śabarī (in *Ekti Paisā*), Śītā (in *Rāvaṇa Vadh*) and Jahanara (in *Tāj Mahal*). Her guardian (Suvaṅkar-Rūp-Aśok in *Ekti Paisā*, Rāma in *Rāvaṇa Vadh* and a Shajahan in *Tāj Mahal*) is always a virtuous man who often proves ineffective against the villainous scheming of the antagonist (Bhūjaṅga in *Ekti Paisā*, Rāvaṇa in *Rāvaṇa Vadh* and Aurangzeb in *Tāj Mahal*) who, along with his henchmen, are out to annihilate the virtuous. It is usually a third party, an ally of the protagonist (Debakar in *Ekti Paisā*, Sharif of *Tāj Mahal* and Hanumāna of *Rāvaṇa Vadh*), through whose might the cause of the protagonist and his/her party is upheld, even if s/he is captivated or dies at the end. There are variations of course: Rāvaṇa is actually a devotee of Rāma who seeks to die at his hand. But then, it is typical that justice is meted out and the villain usually recants at the end. Another typical feature of all *Yātrā* texts is the presence of a character known as *Vivek* (Conscience). Similar to the personification of abstract qualities as seen in the Morality plays of medieval Europe, *Vivek*, as the Conscience urges the protagonist/s on to the path of truth and virtue and warns the antagonist/s of fatal outcome for their violation of the same. Since mid-20th century, the role of *Vivek* has been projected through a real-life

character, often a Bāul mendicant or a mentally deranged person. Structurally, texts may or may not be divided into five acts but are usually eventful, fast moving and built on the principle of exposition-inciting incident-rising conflict-climax-denouement (and variations thereof), derived from European dramaturgy.

A *Yātrā* performance usually commences around eleven in the evening. About two hours before the performance begins, a stage-hand strikes a bell to notify all, including the performers, that it is time to get ready. At the same time, the musical instruments are placed on the platforms designated for the musicians. Immediately following the warning bell, a prayer is sung by all company members in the green-room. Thereafter, the performers begin to put on their make-up and dress. After about an hour from the first bell, the second bell is rung, following which the musicians take their positions and begin to play the slow-paced 'opening concert' for half an hour to three quarters of an hour. The tune of the 'opening concert' is the signature piece of all *Yātrā* performances. It carries signal for the spectators that the show is about to begin, and they gradually assemble in the auditorium. The musicians usually take a break for about fifteen minutes after the 'opening concert', following which the third bell is sounded and there follows another 'concert', this time for a brief period. As soon as the 'concert' ends, a group of female choral singers shout slogans from the green-room ("Bangladesh Zindabad", i.e., "Long Live Bangladesh") and file in to the performance space to sing a patriotic song (picture 117). There follows a session of 'variety show' for about an hour, after the choral singers exit, in which song-and-dance numbers and brief comic interludes are presented. At the end of the 'variety show', near about midnight, the fourth bell is sounded and there ensues a fast paced 'appear concert' for about three to five minutes, following which the main body of performance begins. After each act or a number of scenes, the prompter (who prompts the entire play from a corner of the musicians' platform) rings a bell, when an interlude of song-and-dance numbers and/or farce (enacted by *sañg*, i.e., comic characters) is given. The performance ends by day-break.<sup>155</sup>

The main body of *Yātrā* performance is composed of the following elements:

1. *Dialogic performance in prose*: Characters render major part of the narrative in prose dialogue. The style of acting is dynamic and highly charged, which appears melodramatic when attempted by the less experienced. There is a tendency towards great degree of movement of the characters during performance which is executed to facilitate spectators on all sides to see the faces. The delivery of dialogue is powerful, often tending to be rhetorical with the less experienced.

2. *Dialogic performance in lyric*: At a few emotionally charged points, some of the characters deliver their lines in lyric. The characters do not execute definite dance movements but move in rhythm of the song (picture 119). An exception to the above are song-and-dance numbers performed by danseuse in court scenes, where specific dance movements are executed.

3. *Song-and-dance numbers*: Isolated song-and-dance numbers are performed by female dancers before the main body of performance and during the intermissions between acts. Sometimes comic-song-and-dance numbers are also enacted by comic characters (*sañg*). The dance numbers are highly sensuous in appeal and have often led *Yātrā* performances to be labelled 'vulgar' and 'inmoral'.

The following are some other important features of *Yātrā* performance:

1. *Scenic elements*: The use of scenic elements are minimal. Only chairs are used for drawing rooms when characters are required to sit. The same chairs, covered by a decorated piece of cloth serves as a throne. Sometimes, in the performances of historical texts, a permanent throne may be placed along the ramp-side since court scenes are oft repeated. In all other performances, a stage hand swiftly carries in chair/s in the scenes where they are required and removes the same at the end of the scene. All other scenes are performed on bare platform.

2. *Costume*: *Yātrā* costumes follow certain accepted conventions. Performances based on social texts largely follow accepted conventions of contemporary social life. For example, all male characters from urban areas with 'educated' background generally wear trousers, shirts and shoes. Higher they go in social and economic ladder, the greater is the tendency to wear suits, ties and sometimes even hats. The "evil" characters have the tendency to sport dark sun-glasses. An occasional bow-tie could be the choice for extremely fashionable characters. On the other hand, those from rural areas usually wear *lungis* (if they are Muslims) and *dhotis* (if they are Hindus), with shirts, *pāñjābis* or vests. The conservative upper-class elite, rural or urban, could be expected to wear fine *dhotis*, silken *pāñjābis* and shoes if they are Hindus and *pājāmas*, *pāñjābis* and shoes if they are Muslims. An occasional shawl of costly material may also be added for both. All married female characters wear *saris*: the affluent, those of silk and the poor, those of cotton. *sālwār* and *kāmiz* are usually worn by unmarried women of urban background and *saris*, by the same of rural background (photograph 120). An extremely fashionable urban woman could be expected to wear a pair of trousers and a shirt or even a skirt and a blouse. The costume of the royalty and the courtiers of historical texts, known as 'royal dress', are generally very colourful and decorative. Hindu kings



usually wear silken *dhotis* and knee-long inner garment (*jodā*), decorated waist bands, decorated breast pieces (*royal-buki*), crowns (*mukut*) and shoes. Ministers and other courtiers wear similar costume without the crown. None of them are bearded. Hindu queens usually wear *saris*, blouses and crowns. Muslim kings wear silken *salwar*, a knee-long full-sleeved silken upper garment (*jodā*), a decorated breast piece (*royal-buki*), a *cogā* or similar loose-fitting knee-long and decorated outer garment, a cap decorated with golden and silver embroidery (*tāj*) and colourful beads and shoes. The courtiers wear similar costume save the *cogā* and the cap. Sometimes the generals are dressed in capes and boots, the rest being similar to the courtiers (photograph 118). All of them are usually bearded. Queens and princesses usually wear *ghāgrā*, full-sleeved and tight-fitting upper garment, a sleeve-less decorated jacket (*Bombai chādri*), necklaces, decorated caps and shoes. Sometimes they also wear fine *urnis* (modesty scarf) over their heads and chests. Male European characters wear breeches, broad belts, full-sleeved shirts with broad and decorated collars, capes and boots. The gods and goddesses of the mythological texts are dressed similarly as the Hindu royalty.

3. Props : All kings, princes and generals usually carry swords. European characters often carry revolvers but sword is not uncommon. A tyrant usually has a whip and peasants in revolt often carry bamboo staves.

4. Donations : Donations from the spectators (known as *pelā* or *fēri*) are not collected.

5. Gender of performers : Male and female performers enact male and female roles, respectively.<sup>156</sup>

### 3.7.2 *Jhumur Yātrā* :

Popular in rural areas almost all over Bangladesh is *Jhumur Yātrā*, a genre of performance non-religious in nature and based on romantic folk-lore. It bears remarkable similarity with *Pālā Gān*, *Kecchā Gān* and *Kecchā-bandī Gān* in terms of content. According to Mohammad Jafar Mollah, the "master" (director) of an amateur troupe from Madan Hat village in Natore, *Jhumur Yātrā* is so called because of abundant use of songs in *jhumur* rhythm ( a cycle of eight beats ). It is performed by both amateur as well as professional troupes. Jafar Mollah's troupe is composed mostly of his family members and relatives, who are Muslims by faith and farmers by profession. They usually perform during the months of *Āsvin*, *Kārtika*, *Agrahāyana* and *Paṣ* when harvesting is over and there is ample free time. The professional troupes are composed of both Hindus and Muslims, whose performance season is similar to that of *Yātrā*. *Jhumur Yātrā* is performed purely for secular entertainment.

Amateur troupes usually perform *Jhumur Yātrā* in the outer courtyards of rural homesteads but professional troupes perform it on public grounds. The performance space is an elevated platform (some 18 inches high) and square in shape (about 12 feet each arm). Near the corners of the platform stand four bamboo posts to support a canopy on top. "Petromax" (kerosine) lanterns or electric lamps suspended from these posts serve to light the performance space. A ramp runs down from the platform to a passage which leads to the green-room (*sāj ghar*) situated beyond the spectators. On all four sides of the central platform sit the spectators, the men separately from the women. There appears to be a number of variations in the position of musicians (*yāntrī-dal* or *bājīdār*) and choral singers (*dohār*). In a performance witnessed at Madan Hat village in Natore (fig. 69), the musicians played harmonium, *bāyā-tablā*, flute and *juḍi* and sat on the ground along one of the sides adjoining the ramp side; the choral singers, five in number, also sat on the ground but along the side opposite the ramp-side. In another performance witnessed at Narillya Bazar in Madhupur, Tangail (fig. 70), the musicians played harmonium, *ḍholak* and *juḍi* and sat on the ground along one of the sides adjoining the ramp-side; the choral singers, six in number, sat with the musicians. In contrast to the two amateur troupes mentioned above, professional troupes such as Nabarupa Opera from Manikganj, Kohinoor Opera also from Manikganj, Sonali Opera from Tongi in Gazipur and Rupali Opera from Buri Choing, Comilla have no choral singers in their performances. The musicians sit on the ground on two opposite sides adjoining the ramp-side: the wind on one side and the percussion on the other (fig. 71). The musical instruments played by these troupes were also elaborate. For example, Nabarupa had a harmonium, two cornets, a clarinet, a synthesizer, a pair of *juḍi*, a *ḍhol*, a *ḍholak* and a pair of *ḍugi-tablā* in its orchestra. In all the cases mentioned above (both amateur as well as professional), a prompter sits at the corner nearest to the ramp. A stage-hand who carries and removes set props, sits with the prompter. In some cases (as in professional troupes), he also rings a bell to signal the end of an act and whistle to signal entry of characters.

A few popular titles of *Jhumur Yatra* are (i) *Āpan-Dulāl*, (ii) *Ālomati-Premkumār*, (iii) *Gunāi Bibi*, (iv) *Kajal-Rekhā*, (v) *Sāgar Bhāsā*, (vi) *Gafur Bādsā*, (vii) *Rahim Bādsā O Rūpbān Kanyā*, (viii) *Kamalār Banabās*, (ix) *Arun-Śānti* and (x) *Nāchimaner Banabās*. There are no act divisions, for instance, in *Nāchimaner Banabās*; scene divisions are marked by exit of all characters. The text is composed of 43 scenes in which a total of 32 characters appear. The dialogue, in standard Bānglā, is composed both in prose as well as lyric. There are a total of 45 songs. Although *Nāchimaner Banabās* is unpublished, few other *Jhumur Yatra* texts, such as *Sāgar Bhāsā*, *Kamalār Banabās*, *Ālomati-Premkumār*, *Gunāi Bibi*,

*Kajal-Rekhā*. *Rahim Bādsā O Rūpbān Kanyā* and others have been published. All the above are composed in five acts. But, like *Nāchimaner Banabās*, union of the lovers at the end of heart-rendering pain and hardship, predominance of lyric and large cast are also characteristic features of these texts. For example:

1. *Gunāi Bibi*, a text with 29 characters and 23 songs, features union of Gunāi Bibi and Totā Mian after the latter's uncle Dulu Mian's repeated attempts to marry Gunāi fails.
2. *Rahim Bādsā O Rūpbān Kanyā*, a text with 29 characters and 43 songs, illustrates the union of Rūpbān and Rahim after twelve years of exiled life in a forest where the former brings up her 12-day-old husband Rahim incognito.
3. *Kajal-Rekhā*, a text with 19 characters and 27 songs, portrays the union of Kajal and his true love Rekhā but not before the former marries and is abandoned by a courtier's daughter Marjinā.

Interestingly, *Gunāi Bibi* and *Kajal-Rekhā* have also been published in the *Pūrbabangagitikā* (ed. Dineshchandra Sen), as narratives in rhymed metrical verse.

Performance of *Jhumur Yātrā* mostly opens with a patriotic song presented by four or five female performers (as in *Gunāi Bibi* by Sonali Opera, Tongi, *Rahim Bādsā O Rūpbān Kanyā* by Nabarupa Opera, Manikganj, *Kamalār Banabas* by Rupali Opera, Buri Choing, Comilla) or by same number of female impersonators (as in *Kajal-Rekhā* performed at Narillya Bazar, Madhupur, Tangail). At places it also opens with a *bandanā* (as in *Nāchimaner Banabas* performed in Madan Hata village in Natore), which is addressed to Allah, the Prophet, Lakṣmī, Saraswatī, Fatima and the two Imams, the Himalayas, the sun-god, Karbala, and the Khīr-nādi Ocean, the *pīrs*, the preceptors of the composer and all the Hindu and Muslim spectators. Acting style is quite similar to the *Yātrā*. Characters enter from and exit to the green-room (*sāj ghar*). In a few performances like *Gunāi Bibi* and *Rahim Bādsā O Rūpbān Kanyā*, the character of Vivek appears in a manner similar to *Yātrā*, but is absent in *Kajal-Rekhā* and *Nāchimaner Banabās*. Dance numbers are presented by female dancers in some performances such as *Āpan-Dulāl* given by Kohinoor Opera, Manikganj, but similar dance numbers are totally absent in *Nāchimaner Banabas* and *Kajal-Rekhā*. Male performers enact female roles in the two latter performances mentioned above (photograph 121) but female performers enact the same roles in rest of the performances. Scenic devices are always minimal and is non-illusionist in nature. Thus a chair may denote a school (with the teacher sitting on it and the students sitting on the ground) or an audience hall of a palace (with the king sitting on it and the courtier standing); the forest is always visually bare; a ship is simply presented with two oars-men rowing "oars"

of bamboo poles as they sing and slowly walk on bare stage; a character flying on the back of a bird is presented with a performer bent forward from the waist and covered with a piece of white cloth, waving his hands like wings, with another sitting on his back. The costume is colourful and similar to the historical *Yātrā* performances. Animals are presented with masks, oft-repeated and popular of which appears to be the tiger in a mask made of papier-mâché and a jump-suit made of imitation leopard-skin (photograph 122). An interesting example of make-up can be seen in photograph 123.

The main body of *Jhumur Yātrā* performance is composed of the following elements:

1. *Dialogic performance in prose*
2. *Dialogic performance in lyric* (photographs 121, 124).

Performance of professional troupes also include song-and-dance numbers.<sup>157</sup>

The *Jhumur Yātrā* performances mentioned above illustrate stages of evolution which the genre passed through over the past one and a half centuries. The absence of act or scene division and the character of *Vivek*, the presence of choral singers and female impersonators and *bandanā* addressed to *Nirañjan*, the Shi'ite venerated figures and Brahminical deities and the abundance of songs in *Nāchimaner Banabās* suggest the text and style of performance to be from around mid-19th century, when the above characteristics were common in the *Yātrā*. The presence of *Vivek* and act division, the absence of choral singers and the abundance of songs in *Gunāi Bibi* and *Rahim Bādsā O Rūpbān* suggest that the current version of the text is based on some earlier model from the beginning of 20th century; presence of actresses and absence of *bandanā* in the same text suggest that the original was extensively reworked in the post-partition (1947) period.

### 3.7.3 *Pālā Gān and Kicchā Gān of Eastern Mymensingh :*

In the region of greater Mymensingh, there exists a genre performance known as *Pālā Gān* (also *Kicchā-kāhīnī*) which is given exclusively with the objective of secular entertainment. It is usually sponsored collectively by subscription from Hindus as well as Muslims of nearly all classes. *Pālā Gān* is generally performed throughout the dry season in the rural areas, specially on occasions such as Eid, *Durgā Pūjā*, *Kālī Pūjā*, *Lakṣmī Pūjā*, *Caitra Saṅkrānti* and *Paṣ Melā* (seasonal fair held in the month of Paṣ after harvest). Of late it has also gained currency in urban areas like Dhaka city where it is often performed on occasions such as Victory Day (16th December), *Bānglā New Year's Day*, *Martyr's Day* (21 February) etc. A *Pālā Gān* troupe is led by the *bayāti* (the lead-narrator) and about five choral singers-cum-musicians (*dohār* or *pāil*) who play instruments such as harmonium, *dhol* (or *tablā*),

*juḍi*, *caṭi* and *do-tārū* or flute. In a few cases the *bayāti* is a full-time performer. But in most cases all the performers depend on professions such as farming (or rickshaw pulling, daily labour etc.) as their primary source of livelihood.

The performance space of *Pālā Gān* (fig. 72) is an elevated platform (some 18" to 24" high), rectangular in shape (some 12' x 16'), on four corners of which stand four bamboo posts to support a canopy on top. Sometimes "petromax" lanterns or electric lamps are suspended from two pairs of bamboo poles (with a cross-piece on top), positioned beside the two shorter sides. The choral singers-cum-musicians sit along one of the longer arms and the spectators on hay-strewn ground mostly around three remaining arms of the platform, along with a few on the fourth side as well. The *dohārs* of Alauddin Bayati's troupe (from Kendua police station in Netrokona district) sit along the eastern or the southern arm. Alauddin Bayati also has an additional bamboo pole implanted beside the northern or the western arm of the elevated performance space; this he uses as a stair-case, a tree, a door or a window during performance. The costume of the *dohārs* is indefinite: it can be anything between *lungi*, *pāñjābi*, *pājāmā* and shirt. The *bayāti*, who uses the whole space in front of the *dohārs*, is variously dressed: sometimes in a white *dhoti* and a white *pāñjābi* or a white vest (as in the case of Asmat Ali Bayāti from Jaydevpur, originally from Jamalpur); a *lungi* and a T-shirt with an end of a *sari* tied to the waist, which is used in different combination (as in the case of Muhammad Kuddus Bayāti from Kendua, Netrokona); *lungi* and *pāñjābi* (three-quarter sleeve) and a *sari* tied to the waist like Kuddus Bayāti (as in the case of Alauddin Bayāti from Kendua, Netrokona); or a blue *kāmiz* decorated with silver embroidery, maroon *ghāgrā* and green *pājāmā*, with an end of a *sari* tied to the waist (as in the case of Islamuddin Bayāti of Kishoreganj, a disciple of Kuddus Bayāti). All of them also wear ankle-bells.

There appears to be over seventy narratives which are performed in *Pālā Gān*. Kuddus Bayāti claims to know as many as sixty-three. These are : 1. *Kamalā Rānī*, 2. *Firoz Khān Dewān*, 3. *Mahūā Sundarī*, 4. *Āynamatī*, 5. *Hālek Bādsā*, 6. *Cān Bādsā*, 7. *Rahim Bādsā*, 8. *Innāch Bādsā*, 9. *Ratan Bādsā*, 10. *Kāñcān Bādsā*, 11. *Sonāhar Bādsā*, 12. *Emrān Bādsā*, 13. *Mātilāl Bādsā*, 14. *Chanāfar Bādsā*, 15. *Śāhe Ālam Bādsā*, 16. *Āsmāt Bādsā*, 17. *Phulcānd Bādsā*, 18. *Jālī Ālam Bādsā*, 19. *Bādsā Tarmuz*, 20. *Jaynāl Millik Bādsā*, 21. *Tāj Millik Bādsā*, 22. *Sekāndār Bādsā*, 23. *Kāron Bādsā*, 24. *Jāhāngīr Bādsā*, 25. *Halud Bādsā*, 26. *Bādsā Āynal Huq*, 27. *Ruttan Sādhu*, 28. *Āmir Sādhu*, 29. *Āilsā Rājā*, 30. *Om Rājā Kom Rājā*, 31. *Tāleb Saodāgar*, 32. *Chorāt Bānu*, 33. *Atulā Sundarī*, 34. *Sundar Matī*, 35. *Harbulā Sundarī*, 36. *Gule Harmuz Gendāphul Kanyā*, 37. *Madhumālā*, 38. *Bilkis Rānī*, 39. *Cimu Rānī*, 40. *Dālim Parī*, 41. *Candra Śekhar*, 42. *Rāju Sundar*, 43.

*Ālmās Kumār*, 44. *Sukhe Ālam*, 45. *Rūp Kumār*, 46. *Ājab Līlā*, 47. *Rām Birām*, 48. *Sāiful Muluk*, 49. *Dil Pasand*, 50. *Firoz Rokeyā*, 51. *Meher Niḡār*, 52. *Sit Basanta*, 53. *Bidyā Sāgar*, 54. *Manowār Golām*, 55. *Jahar Mālā*, 56. *Pāloān Khān*, 57. *Sāheber Bāp*, 58. *Deṅgu Miā*, 59. *Kāgādharer Khelā*, 60. *Jibar Mallik*, 61. *Dātā Hātem Tāi*, 62. *Dubarāj* and 63. *Gotrer Hālki*.<sup>158</sup> Of these, the narrative titled *Āmir Sādhu* is the same as *Sundar Matī*, *Atulā Sundarī* is the same as *Kāgādharer Khelā*, *Harbulā Sundarī* is the same as *Rūp Kumār* and *Innāch Bādsā* is the same as *Dil Pasand*. There could be a few more repetitions. Therefore, Kuddus Bayāti's list actually contains 59 or less number of narratives. Alauddin Bayāti claims to perform the following narratives: 1. *Imān Bādsā*, 2. *Ādam Khān-Birām Khān*, 3. *Gule Manowār*, 4. *Cāndu Miā-Jahurā Matī*, 5. *Mahuā*, 6. *Bhāwāler Rājā Rāmendar Nārāyaṇ*, 7. *Gokul Cānd-Bhagvabātī*, 8. *Jamilā Sundarī*, 9. *Yusuf-Zulekhā*, 10. *Musā Nabīr Janma*, 11. *Hārunur Rashid*, 12. *Sohāg Bādsā* and 13. *Āpan-Dulāl*. Besides, he also performs the narratives numbered 1, 2, 3, 11, 12, 21, 24, 28, 35, 36, 39, 42, 43, 47, 48, 49, 55, 60 and 61 of Kuddus Bayāti's list. Islamuddin Bayāti performs *Gahur Bādsā-Banesā Parī* and also the narratives numbered 1, 2, 8, 13, 24, 28, 33, 35, 36, 42, 43, 47 and 48 of Kuddus Bayāti's list. Thus, a total number of seventy-three narratives is arrived at from three *bayātis*. The number could be doubled with further survey. A cursory review of the above mentioned seventy-three narratives reveal that at least twelve of them are of Persian-Hindi origin (*Sāiful Muluk*, *Dātā Hātem Tāi*, *Yusuf-Zulekhā*, *Gule Manowār*, *Gule Harmuz*, *Musā Nabīr Janma*, *Hārunur Rashid*, *Ālmās Kumār*, *Madhumālā*, *Innāch (Yunus)-Dilpasand*, *Tāj Millik Bādsā* and *Jaynāl Millik*), about fifteen are based on local legends (*Kamalā Rānī*, *Cāndu Miā-Jahurā Matī*, *Firoz Khān Dewān*, *Mahuā Sundarī*, *Āynamatī*, *Mahuā*, *Rājū Sundarī*, *Cimu Rānī*, *Manowār Golām*, *Pāloān Khān*, *Deṅgu Miā*, *Ādam Khān-Birām Khān*, *Āpan-Dulāl*, *Jamilā Sundarī* and *Bhāwāler Rājā Rāmendar Nārāyaṇ*) and the rest, about fifty, are fairy tales of mixed (Persian-Hindi-indigenous) origin. In terms of content, romance is a dominant theme of all (save *Musā Nabīr Janma*) and the royalty (kings, queens, ministers, princes and princesses) and supernatural beings (fairies, ogres and monsters) also play dominant roles. Furthermore, all save the following end in union and fulfilment of desire of the central characters: *Mahuā*, *Firoz Khān Dewān* (also known as *Biranganā Sakhinā*), *Cimu Rānī* (also known as *Bāhādur Khān*), *Bhawāler Rājā Rāmendar Nārāyaṇ*, *Deṅgu Miā*, *Pāloān Khān* and *Ādam Khān-Birām Khān* (partly). The sources from which the *bayātis* have obtained the narratives of Persian-Hindi origin are (i) their preceptors (all from greater Mymensingh region), in the form of prosometric oral texts, (ii) Muslim scholars and preachers (*ālems*) in the form of oral texts in prose and (iii) written texts in rhymed metrical verse (*ṗuthis*). The fairy tales of mixed origin have mostly been obtained from the elderly of the community in the form oral texts in prose. The local legends

were obtained from two major sources: (i) the elderly of the community in the form of oral texts in prose and (ii) *Maimansimha-gītikā* and *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā*. As Alauddin Bayāti reports, he and Kuddus Bayāti obtained the narratives of *Mahuā*, *Maluā* and *Firoz Khān Dewān* from one Golam Ershadur Rahman from Kendua who had read the *Gītikā*. Furthermore, Alauddin Bayāti acknowledges to have obtained the narrative of two texts, *Bhāwāler Rājā* and *Āpan-Dulāl*, from the *Yātrā* and the *Jhumur Yātrā* respectively and claims to have created two texts, *Gokul Cānd-Bhagvabāṭī* and *Sohāg Bādśā*, all by himself. It is usual for the *bayāṭis* to create their version of performance text, composed orally and in prosometric form, from any of the sources mentioned above.

Islamuddin Bayāti's version of *Kamalā Rānī* bears close resemblance with that performed by Kuddus Bayāti. There exists another version of the same text which is performed by Mozammel Huq Bayāti from Kishoreganj, which is at variance with Islamuddin Bayāti's on certain points. A comparison of Islamuddin Bayāti and Kuddus Bayāti's texts with *Kamalārānīr Gān (Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā II, ed. Dineshchandra Sen)* reveals that the latter is but a part of the former (from the excavation of the tank to the disappearance of Kamalā after Dharma Rājā, Jānakināth in the latter, attempts to hold her). Alauddin Bayāti's version of *Kamalā Rānī* is closest to *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā (II)* version. Again, part of *Rājā Raghur Pālā (Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā, IV)* is clearly reminiscent of Islamuddin Bayāti and Kuddus Bayāti's text from King Raghur's mourning of the death of Queen Kamalā to her final disappearance in the water. The rest of the narrative runs of different course. It is significant that Islamuddin Bayāti obtained the narrative of his text from Kuddus Bayāti, who in turn obtained it from the elderly of his village. On the other hand, Alauddin Bayāti obtained his version of the narrative from source well-versed in D.C. Sen's edition.

A performance of *Pālā Gān* begins usually at around nine in the evening with a brief musical overture played by the *dohār*, followed by a *bandanā* rendered by the *bayāti*, with the *dohār* singing choral refrain and also playing music. The *bandanā* is usually addressed to Allah, the Prophet, the sun-god in the east, Himalayas in the north, Mecca, the two Imams and the mythical Kālī-daha Sea in the west, the mythical Khīr-nadī Sea in the south, the saint Shah Jalal, eighty thousand *pīrs*, the parents of the *bayāti* and the spectators. Interestingly, the refrain sung by the choral singers of Islamuddin Bayāti's troupe is often "মোহররমের চান আকাশে উঠিল" (lit., "The Moon of Muharram has risen in the sky"). The main body of performance follows the *bandanā*. In it, as in the *bandanā*, the *bayāti* alone renders the total performance standing and the *dohārs* remain seated throughout. The following elements constitute the main body of performance:

1. *Narrative performance in lyric* : The *bayāti* describes events of his narrative in lyric, accompanied by the *dohārs* playing music and singing choral passages. Usually the *bayāti's* assistant (known as the *ḍāinā*), heightens the effect of the song by singing a few words embellishing the action described in the song. As he sings, the *bayāti* also dances and mimetically enacts the action described in the song. Often he also depicts the characters by rearranging his costume. Where Kamalā's bathing is described in Islamuddin's version of *Kamalā Rānī*, the *bayāti* rearranges the *sari* tied to his waist to portray the character and her action. Beside description of events, the *bayāti* renders words spoken by various characters of the narrative, also in lyric. These passages too are accompanied by dance to present the action and rearranged costume to portray the character (photographs 126-128). All the lyrical passages are pre-composed and the dance is devoid of any classical idiom (photographs 115-116).

2. *Narrative performance in prose* : Interspersed between the lyrical passages are sections of improvised prose rendered singly by the *bayāti*. In these passages, he describes parts of action and also renders words spoken by the characters, accompanied by appropriate gestures and movements. He also rearranges his costume and uses a few props to heighten the visual effect (photograph 125).

3. *Dialogic performance in prose*: Occasionally, the *bayāti* switches from narrative to dialogic performance with the help of the *ḍāinā*. In these passages, the *ḍāinā* remains seated in his position without effecting any costume change; but the *bayāti* rearranges his costume to portray the character and also applies gestures and movements necessary to enact the action. Often he also uses props such as a pillow, a bag, a pair of sun-glasses, a toy revolver, a rope, a rosary etc. As a rule, the *bayāti* always enacts the more important character and leads the scene; the *ḍāinā* supports him with brief statements. All these passages of dialogue are improvised by the performers.

The duration of *Pālā Gān* performances vary from three to four hours. It usually ends with a brief announcement rendered in lyric, followed by a brief musical finale played by the *dohārs*.

The following are a few important features of *Pālā Gān*:

1. Donation from spectators: Donations are not always collected. In all the performances witnessed, only Asmat Ali Bayāti made a collection.
2. Gender of performers: All the performers are males.



Another secular performance, known as *Kecchā Gān*, is also seen in eastern Mymensingh, in which the type of texts are similar to that of *Pālā Gān* but the performance space is different. The lead-narrator (known as *dewānji*) sits in a non-elevated circle (about six to eight feet in diameter) with about six to eight choral singers (*bahar-gatak*). The spectators sit all around the circle. Apart from a pillow which *dewānji* has on his lap (and which he uses variously) no other prop or musical instrument is used. The entire performance is given sitting. *Kecchā Gān* is performed in the courtyard of rural homesteads on full-moon nights, or even indoor. It usually begins after eight in the evening and runs through the night. A few well-known texts performed in *Kecchā Gān* are *Mahidhar Bādsā*, *Gahur Bādsā Banesā Parī*, *Kāñican Mālā*, *Āynā Bibi*, etc.<sup>159</sup>

Writing on actual performance of the *Maimansīnha-gītikā* narratives, D.C. Sen notes,

The minstrel or the chief singer is called the *gāven*. He is the main singer, adding interpretations and bringing out the hidden meaning of the poetical ideas, assisted by a chorus of eight to ten men who are called 'Pāile' (...). They play on cymbals, tabors and violins in course of singing. The harmonium is now and then seen amongst the musical instruments, which is of course a modern innovation. Sometimes, young lads are introduced attired in picturesque dresses who sing and dance by way of diversion.<sup>160</sup>

A comparison of *Pālā Gān* (the performers, mode of performance, the content of texts and the region in which it is performed) and D.C. Sen's editions of *Maimansīnha-gītikā* and *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā* along with scant information he provides on performance, leaves no doubt that both belong to the same genre. There can also be no doubt about the conclusions drawn by Dusan Zbavitel: (i) that the preserved versions of the *Gītikās* are of relatively late origin, "at a much later time than Dineshchandra Sen believed them to belong to", (ii) that they were oral compositions prior to D.C. Sen's publication, (iii) that they were composed by individuals from rural areas for the rural population, (iv) "that they are practically devoid of any religious implications", and (v) "that they have a marked predilection for secular stories of love .....".<sup>161</sup> But when he adds that they also have a predilection for "love tragedies", it appears far from what is actually seen in the case of *Pālā Gān* today. As noted earlier, only seven out of seventy-three *Pālā Gān* texts can be termed "love tragedies". Curiously, three of these texts are based on the *Maimansīnha-gītikā* itself. As it will be seen in the following section on *Māitṭyā Tāmsā*, there exist texts the narratives of which are similar to *Mahuā* of the *Gītikā* and the *Pālā Gān*, but these end in union of central characters.

There can be no question that "the main peculiarity of folk-literature is its ever changing character", as Zbavitel points out quoting Chittaranjan Deb.<sup>162</sup> Nevertheless, the case of *Maimansīnha-gītikā* can not but raise a few questions specially when Zbavitel defends their

authenticity and explains that "the Mymensingh ballads seem to have died out in the form in which they are preserved in D.C. Sen's edition, their function has been taken over by the popular prints called *puthī*, on the one hand, and by the recitals of the 'long songs' (*lambā gītī*) on the other."<sup>163</sup> Nowhere else in the indigenous theatre of entire Bangladesh, except the romantic narratives composed by the Muslim poets at the *Ārākān* court (south-eastern Bangladesh) and the *Rās Nrtya* of the Manipurīs, there exists such refined quality and compact structure as the *Gītikā* narratives. How is it that the latter corpus could crop up from the people at a relatively late period (end of 18th century) and disappear entirely by 1930s when Poet Jasim Uddīn failed to locate them?<sup>164</sup> How is it that the evidence of Nātha literature, in the form of *Yogīr Gān* (also based on oral narratives) can exist and not the *Gītikā* narratives? Two other cases where corpus of texts are seen to end in separation are those created by Muslim poets (such as *Lailī-Majnu* by Daulat Uzīr Bahram Khan, c.1575) and those on the deaths of Imam Hasan and Iman Hosain (such as *Jaynāber Cautisā* by Sheikh Faizullah, second half of 16th century). How is it that texts like the latter can still exist in popular literature, albeit much altered, but the *Gītikā* corpus face extinction? Unfortunately, all these questions merely go to raise strong doubts about the authenticity of the *Gītikā* texts. In all probability, there existed a popular tradition of performance based on secular tales of romance since ancient times, from which arose *Pālā Gān*, *Kicchā-kāhanī*, *Kecchā Gān*, *Ḍhak Yātrā* and *Pālā Gān* (Bogra); Chandrakumar De edited and refined existing narratives of the above tradition to give shape to what now go in the name of *Gītikā* narratives. But the popular tradition continues in all the genres mentioned above.

#### 3.7.4 *Māṭṭyā Tāmsā* :

In the region of greater Mymensingh, there exists a genre of performance known as *Māṭṭyā Tāmsā* (also as *Tāmsā Gān* or *Bāiddhyār Gān*) which is performed solely for secular entertainment on occasions such as marriage ceremonies, ceremonial opening of new account-books on the New Year's Day (of Bānglā calendar), Baiśākhī Melā (fair held on the month of Baiśākh), bull-fights (held towards the end of winter) and on other secular festivals. It is sponsored mostly by the affluent section of rural community and sometimes collectively by others as well, both Hindus and Muslims. The performance is witnessed by spectators from both the communities, both the sexes and all classes.

A *Māṭṭyā Tāmsā* troupe led by Abdul Hekim Bayāti (aged 65) from Aima village under Atpara police station in Netrokona district, is comprised of about 22 performers, all of whom are Muslims by faith. Abdul Hekim himself is a singer by profession, the rest are mostly farmers, small-scale traders and shop-keepers. Earlier, the female roles used to be performed

by two male impersonators: of late, three of Abdul Hekim's daughters perform the female roles. Abdul Hekim himself performs the role of the *bayāti* whose duty it is to lead all choral songs, prompt the lines to the performers and direct them during rehearsals. There are five instrumentalists in his troupe and they play a *ḍholak*, a pair of *kartāl*, two flutes and a harmonium. Beside accompanying the lyrical passages sung by the characters, they also provide transitional music during scene-change and also back-ground music during climactic moments. There are two choral singers, who, along with some of the musicians, render all choral passages. The rest of the performers enact various male roles. There is no specific costume for the choral singers and musicians. The female performers are dressed in *saris* and the male performers are dressed in accordance with their roles such as those described below.

Nader Čād : *Dhott*, half-sleeved vest, and *pañtā* (holy thread of the Brahmins)

Unrā Bāiddiyā : *Pājāmā*, and *pāñjābi* (he also carries a small bundle)

Policeman : Khaki shirt and trousers

Modal : *Pāñjābi* and *pājāmā* (he also carries a walking stick).

*Māṭṭyā Tāmsā* is performed in the outer courtyards of rural homesteads and in fair-grounds. Abdul Hekim's troupe performs in a temporarily constructed space, rectangular in shape (about 16' x 13'-6" or 13'-6" x 10'-6") and elevated (about 18" high), created with six or four *caukis* (wooden platforms used as beds). Four bamboo posts which stand on four corners support the awning on top. Two other posts which stand in the middle of two shorter arms are used to suspend "petromax" (kerosine) lanterns or electric lamps. A few steps descend (from a corner of the northern arm) to a narrow passage which leads to the green-room (*sāj ghar*) located in a hut or a temporary enclosure constructed with walls of mats made of bamboo-slips, located some 50 to 60 feet away. All the characters enter from and exit to the green-room. The orchestra members, the choral singers and the *bayāti* are seated on the ground, along the southern arm. The spectators are seated on all four sides of the performance space but the southern arm is considered the front side (fig. 73). According to Muhammad Saydur, *Māṭṭyā Tāmsā* is also performed in non-elevated and circular space. The orchestra, the choral singers, the *gāyen* (*bayāti*) and the performers playing minor roles sit in a circle at the centre. Only the performers playing the lead roles enter from and exit to the green-room (fig. 74). The instruments played by most of them are *ḍhol*, *khol*, *sārindā*, *kartāl*, *mandirā* and flute.<sup>165</sup>

Abdul Hekim Bayāti and his *Māṭṭyā Tāmsā* troupe performs only one text, titled *Bāiddiyār Gān*. It is composed by Abdul Hekim himself, based on a narrative by the same title which he had learnt from his father late Abdul Sobhan Faqir. The text is mostly dialogic (both in

prose as well as verse), interspersed with a few passages of narrations in verse. The dialogic sections are rendered by the characters during performance and the narrations in verse are rendered by the choral singers. The text contains over a hundred lyrical passages, is composed in three acts and ends with the union of central characters. It is interesting to note that there exists at least two other versions of the same text, one composed by Santos Kumār Sūtradhar from Mohinanda Bhadrpara village under Kishoreganj police station and district and the other has been collected from Iman Ali Bayāti from Nogua village also under Kishoreganj police station and district.<sup>166</sup> Santos Kumar's text varies from Abdul Hekim's text in some respect but it ends with the union of central characters; it also contains over one hundred lyrical passages. On the other hand Iman Ali's text, at variance with Abdul Hakim's text at certain points, ends with the death of central characters; it also contains a large number of lyrical passages (both dialogic and narrative) but no act division. The narrative of all the three texts mentioned above bear remarkable similarity with that titled *Mahuā* (which is also known as *Bāiddyār Gān*), ascribed to Dvija Kānāi and published in the *Maimansimha-gītikā* edited by Dineshchandra Sen. Composed entirely in the form of a narrative in rhymed metrical verse, *Mahuā* is closer to Iman Ali's version (as it ends with the death of central characters) but is also at variance in some aspects.

Although *Bāiddyār Gān* is the most popular text in *Māittiyā Tāmsā*, there are in existence two more texts which are also performed in the same form. These are titled *Maluā Sundarī* and *Lāl Bānu-Śāh Jāmāl*. The former has been collected in the form of a written text from eastern Mymensingh region in 1969 by Muhammad Saydur and the latter from Abdul Faqir (resident of Bogadia village under Kishoreganj police station and district) in the form of an oral text in 1962, also by Muhammad Saydur.<sup>167</sup> *Maluā Sundarī* is structured in five acts and is entirely dialogic (mostly in prose). *Lāl Bānu-Śāh Jāmāl* is composed in two acts (with 18 scenes in the first and 16 in the second). It is also entirely dialogic but contains more lyrical passages than *Maluā Sundarī*. It is important to note that the narrative of *Maluā Sundarī* (collected by Muhammad Saydur) bears remarkable similarity with *Maluā* (published by D.C. Sen in his *Matmansimha-gītikā*) which is composed entirely in narrative form of rhymed metrical verse, very much like *Mahuā*. But what is most striking is that *Maluā Sundarī* (collected by Muhammad Saydur) ends in union of the central characters Cānd Vinod and Maluā Sundarī whereas *Maluā* (published by D.C. Sen) ends with the death of Maluā. On the other hand, *Lāl Bānu-Śāh Jāmāl* is also interesting because it bears remarkable similarity with *Jāmāl-Jurinā Sundarī*, collected from greater Rangpur.<sup>168</sup> The latter is also dialogic, composed in prose as well as verse (to be rendered as lyric during performance). Both the texts end with union of central characters.

*Māṭṭyā Tāmsā*, as performed by Abdul Hekim Bayāti and his troupe, begins at around nine in the evening with a brief musical overture. It is followed by a *bandanā* rendered by any two performers, in which salutations are paid to the sun-god in the east, the Himalayas in the north, Mecca in the west, Khīr-nadīr Sāgar in the south, the goddess Saraswatī, the parents and the preceptors of the *bayāti* and the assembled spectators.

The main body of performance is given next and it is composed of the following elements:

1. *Dialogic performance in lyric* : All the characters render parts of their dialogue in lyric. The orchestra plays music while the choral singers repeat the lines sung by the characters. Some of the characters, such as Candrā, Nader Cānd, Nāsir Bāiddyā and Lavjān (in *Bāiddyār Gān*) also dance to the songs they sing. It is interesting to note that the refrain “প্রাণ আমার যায় যায় রে ---” recurs in all the lyrical passages of all the three texts of *Bāiddyār Gān*.

2. *Dialogic performance in prose* : All the characters render parts of their dialogue in prose.

3. *Mimetic performance* : At a few points, the choral singers describe an action while the characters mimetically enact the same.

*Māṭṭyā Tāmsā* performances usually end with music played by the orchestra. The total duration of performance is about three and a half hours.

Some other important features of *Māṭṭyā Tāmsā* performance :

1. Set: Use of set properties to depict a locale is minimal. Only chairs are used to denote thrones.

2. Props: Some of the major props used during performance are bows, arrows, swords, bamboo staves etc. 169

That (i) Abdul Hekim Bayati created the dialogic text of *Bāiddyār Gān* from a narrative by the same title which he learnt from his father, that (ii) Santos Kumār's text is also claimed to have been created by himself, that (iii) the language of the text is clearly of recent times and that (iv) *Bāiddyār Gān* (Abdul Hekim), *Maluā Sundarī* and *Lāl Bānu-Śāh Jāmāl* all contain act divisions, are indicative of the possibility that *Māṭṭyā Tāmsā* as a genre evolved not earlier than the beginning of 20th century. Furthermore, the similarity of the narratives of *Bāiddyār Gān* and *Maluā Sundarī* with *Mahuā* and *Maluā* respectively, are also indicative of the possibility that *Māṭṭyā Tāmsā* developed from *Pālā Gān*. (Note the fact that Abdul Hekim created his text from a narrative he learnt from his father.) Again, the similarity of the narratives of *Lāl Bānu-Śāh Jāmāl* and *Jāmāl-Jarinā Sundarī* points to the clear possibility

that *Māṭṭya Tāmsā* belongs to the tradition of performances based on secular narratives of romance and adventure which existed beyond eastern Mymensingh. What remains a matter of intrigue nevertheless is the fact that *Bāiddhār Gān* (Abdul Hekim), *Bāiddhār Gān* (Santoṣ Kumār) and *Maluā Sundarī* (collected by Muhammad Saydur) texts of *Māṭṭya Tāmsā* end in union of the central characters but both the texts with similar narrative in the *Maimansimha-gītikā* end in separation. It merely goes to strengthen the conclusion drawn in the previous section.

### 3.7.5 *Pālā Gān* (Bogra) :

In the region of Bogra, there exists a genre of performance known as *Pālā Gān*, which is performed during the dry seasons of the year solely for the purpose of secular entertainment. The performers, who are both Hindus and Muslims by faith, belong to professions such as farming, daily labour and teaching. It is sponsored by the affluent section of the village community and also collectively by clubs and organising committees during *pīṭjā* celebrations, village fairs and seasonal festivals (such a Nabānna). *Pālā Gān* is witnessed by Hindus as well as Muslims.

A *Pālā Gān* troupe led by Mohammad Gaffar (age 32) from Karnapura village under Bogra police station and district, is comprised of eighteen performers, all of whom are males. Mohammad Gaffar himself performs the role of *gāyen* (lead-narrator), four others play musical instruments such as *khol*, *judi*, *khāñjari* and *sāringā*, two female impersonators (*chukris*) play female roles and the rest play male roles. There is no specific dress for the musicians. One of the *chukrīs* is dressed in *sari* and the other in *sālwār* and *kāmiz*. The rest of the performers are dressed in colourful costume of the royalty, as seen in the historical *Yātrā* performances.

*Pālā Gān* is performed in the outer courtyard of rural homesteads when sponsored by individuals and in public grounds or fair grounds when sponsored collectively. The performance space (fig. 75) is circular (about twelve to fifteen feet in diameter) and non-elevated. On four corners of a square, inside which the circular space is contained, stand four posts supporting the awning on top. The floor of the performance space is covered with mats or hessian. At its centre sit all the performers in a circle: the actors, costumed and made-up, with their props and the musicians with their instruments. No green-room is used. The spectators sit all around the performance space, usually on hay strewn ground and men separately from women.

The lone text performed by the troupe of Mohammad Gaffar is titled *Lasīman*, which is quite similar to *Nāchimaner Banabās* of the *Jhumur Yātrā* in terms of the narrative. The

text performed by Mohammad Gaffar and his troupe is composed in *narration and dialogue*, both prose and verse (the latter rendered in lyric during performance). The name of the composer is unknown. Mohammad Gaffar learnt it orally from his preceptor Jayen Kasāi (from Chakajani village in Bogra police station and district).

Prior to performance the *gāyen* of the troupe Mohammad Gaffar recites a few secret formulas (*mantras*) to protect himself, the performers and the performance space from all forms of evil attack. The performance begins at around eight in the evening with a musical overture played by the orchestra. There follows the *bandanā*, rendered in lyric by four performers, with choral and musical accompaniment. In it, salutations are paid to Allah, the Prophet, Mecca in the west, the Himalayas in the north, Khīr-nadī Sea in the south and the sun-god in the east. The main body of performance is given next and it is comprised of the following elements.

1. *Dialogic performance in prose* : Parts of the narrative is performed in prose dialogue by characters who rise from the central circle to make their "entry" and rejoin the circle to denote their "exit".
2. *Dialogic performance in lyric* : Interspersed between prose dialogue, the characters also render their dialogue in lyric.
3. *Narrative performance in prose*: In between the scenes, the *gāyen* links the narrative with brief descriptions rendered in prose, as he moves around the central circle.
4. *Narrative performance in lyric* : Sometimes the *gāyen* also links the scenes with lyrical passages, rendered with choral and musical accompaniment, as he moves all around the central circle.

Some other important features of *Pālā Gān* performance:

1. Mask : Only one mask is used, that of a tiger, in one scene.
2. Props: Use of props such as swords, a ship, bamboo staff and a few household utensils can be seen.
3. Donation: Donation is collected from the spectators by *Lasiman* as she wanders as a deranged woman.<sup>170</sup>

*Pālā Gān* performance (from Bogra) is interesting because the narrative of both *Lasiman* and *Nāchimaner Banabās* (performed in the *Jhumur Yātrā*) are similar. Although the narrative is unknown in the region of eastern Mymensingh, the similarity in the names of *Pālā Gān* from Bogra and *Pālā Gān* from Mymensingh, also similar type of narratives presented in both and quite similar use of performance space seen in *Māittvā Tāmsā* and

*Pālā Gān* (Bogra) makes it possible to believe that *Pālā Gān* (eastern Mymensingh), *Pālā Gān* (Bogra), *Māittya Tāmsā* and *Jhumur Yātrā* belong to the same tradition of secular performances based on tales of romance and adventure

### 3.7.6 *Kecchā Kāhini* :

*Kecchā Kāhini* is a performance popular in the region of greater Rajshahi, which, like the *Pālā Gān*, is also based on secular tales predominating in romance and adventure. According to Abdul Matin, the lead narrator (*gāyak*) of *Kecchā Kāhini* from Arail village under Durgapur police station in Rajshahi district, a professional folk-singer from Naogaon named Saidur (aged 35) began to adapt folk-tales told by the elderly of the region around 1989, to give shape to the genre. Today, it is extremely popular all over greater Rajshahi region and the popularity appears to be on the rise. At present there are four major *Kecchā Kāhini* troupes in the region of greater Rajshahi of which Saidur's troupe is fully professional. The members of all the others are farmers by profession who perform on payment mostly during the winter months when work in the fields is minimal.

The performance space of *Kecchā Kāhini* (fig. 76) is constructed temporarily in the outer courtyards of rural homesteads or any public ground. It is elevated (about 18") and square in shape (some 15 feet each arm), on four corners of which stand four bamboo posts to support a roof (usually of corrugated iron sheets) on top. Electric lamps or "petromax" (kerosine) lanterns are suspended from the corners to serve as lighting during performance. The spectators sit on all four sides of the platform on hay-strewn ground and the men separately from the women. The *pāil* (choral singers) who sit in a straight line along one of the arms of the platform, are five in number and they play *bāyā-tablā*, *juḍi* and *caṭi* (locally known as *khañjari*). The lead narrator (*gāyak*) himself plays the harmonium (slung across his shoulder) as he performs. His costume deserves special attention : a full-sleeved shirt, a pair of trousers worn like breeches with both ends tucked under a pair of knee-length socks, a pair of sneakers and ankle-bells. When inquired about the origin of the costume, Abdul Matin explained that initially Saidur used to wear *lungi* and *pāñjābi* but later he changed to what is currently worn because it is more fashionable and convenient for performance.

Abdul Matin lists the following narratives in his repertoire:

- |                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. <i>Śīt-Basanta-Mānik Kumār</i> | 6. <i>Binā Bāper Santān</i>             |
| 2. <i>Bakāwalī Kanyā</i>          | 7. <i>Satī Kanyā Rābeyā</i>             |
| 3. <i>Hīrak Cān Bādsā</i>         | 8. <i>Sakhī Sonā</i>                    |
| 4. <i>Bideśī Kumār</i>            | 9. <i>Rākhāl Cān</i>                    |
| 5. <i>Belbatī</i>                 | 10. <i>Chay Andher Byātā Bālācandra</i> |



All these narratives are oral compositions and prosometric in form. They focus on love and adventure in which the Comic, the Erotic and the Pathetic *rasas* co-mingle. They are based on local tales and legends which are told by the elderly in story-telling sessions. The two exceptions are *Bakāwalī Kamvā* (which has been adapted from *Gul-e-Bakāwalī*, a tale of Persian origin) and *Śīt-Basanta-Mānik Kumār* (which was adapted from a fairy tale published under the title of *Śīt-Basanta*). All the adaptations into performance text have been done by Abdul Matin himself. An important point to note is that all the narratives end in union or reunion of the central characters after they pass through excruciating experience of pain and hardship.

Before any performance of *Kecchā Kāhini*, it is customary for the *gāyak* to recite a few magic formulas to protect himself, the musical instruments as well as all other members of the troupe and also to ensure remembering the story and the songs in correct order. These formulas are held in extreme secrecy and the performers strongly believe in their efficacy. The performance by Abdul Matin and his troupe begins with an Islamic devotional song (for some unexplained reason called *Lalaner Bicched*) sung by the *gāyak* with choral accompaniment. The devotional song is followed by the *bandanā* which includes salutations paid to ten thousand *pīrs*, nine hundred thousand prophets, the parents and the preceptor of the *gāyak*, the spectators and the goddess Saraswatī. The *bandanā* is followed by a light-hearted song (known as *chanda*) which makes known the demands of the performers and the attractive quality of the performance. The main body is given next and it is composed of the following elements:

1. *Narrative performance in lyric*: The *gāyak* renders parts of his narrative in lyric with the *pāil* playing music and singing choral refrain. Beside description of events the *gāyak* also renders emotionally heightened speech of the characters in lyric. All the lyrical passages are accompanied by dance (photographs 130 and 131). It deserves special note of the following foot-work patterns -

- (i) hop and cross one leg over other in forward movement, 1-2-1-2-
- (ii) one leg crosses over other in side-wise movement and elbow swing, 1-2-1-2-
- (iii) legs stationary, torso bends and describes circular motion.

2. *Narrative performance in prose* : The *gāyak* describes sections of his narrative in prose which is partly improvised. In these sections, he also renders dialogue of the characters. Quite often a member of the *pāil* (sitting with the rest) corrects the *gāyak* mispronouncing words (such as "মোরগ" i.e., "rooster" for "মরদ" i.e., "man"; "নাড় খায়" i.e., "eating hay" for "না খায়" i.e., "not having eaten" etc.), thus producing comic effect. During the passages of

prose narration, the *gāyak* makes effective use of his voice as well as his hands and body postures to portray the characters with subtle details (photograph 129).

*Kecchā Kāhinī* is a recent creation and clearly shows how folk-tales told by the elderly in story-telling sessions (which excludes physical movement or gesture) is transformed into a performance with physical movement and gesture. It is interesting to note the similarity of the genre with *Pālā Gān* of Mymensingh region in terms of -

- (i) composition of performance: both the genres are basically composed of similar elements of narrative performance in lyric and prose;
- (ii) text: both the genres present texts which are prosometric in form, oral in composition and are based on secular tales of romance and adventure mostly ending in union.

But there are points of textual dissimilarities as well: in *Kecchā Kāhinī*, there is a greater degree of Islamic strain and divine intervention.<sup>171</sup> If the points of difference can be explained as cultural differences generating from greater or lesser degree of blind faith in religion in different periods of time and different space, then it is possible to hypothesize that *Pālā Gān* was also created from folk-tales told in story-telling sessions. Perhaps the intermediate form between *Pālā Gān* and story-telling sessions was *Kecchā Gān* (of eastern Mymensingh). And since performances of *Pālā Gān* and *Kecchā Kāhinī* mostly end in union, it further raises the possibility that *Pūrbabāṅga-gītikā* and *Maimansīnha-gītikā* are indeed edited versions of popular performances based on secular tales of romance and adventure.

### 3.7.7 *Kecchā-bandī Gān* :

Popular in rural areas of greater Rangpur is *Kecchā-bandī Gān*, another genre of performance based on secular tales predominating in romance and adventure, quite similar to the *Kecchā Kāhinī* of Rajshahi and *Pālā Gān* of Mymensingh. It is performed both by the Hindus as well as Muslims, mostly farmers and small traders by profession, entirely for secular entertainment of spectators both Hindus and Muslims.

*Kecchā-bandī Gān* is performed in the outer courtyards of rural homesteads as well as in public grounds (such as play-grounds, market places and school compounds). The performance space (fig. 77), a temporary structure, is square in shape (some nine feet each arm) and non-elevated. On its four corners stand four bamboo posts to support the awning on top. "Petromax" (kerosine) lanterns or electric lamps are suspended from the corner posts for illumination. The spectators sit on all of its four sides and in the centre sit the musicians and the *pāil* (choral singers), in a small circle. The musicians play *khol*, harmonium and two

pairs of *juḍi*: they also sing choral refrain. The *pāil* is comprised of two singers, the *ḍāinā* (who leads the choral refrain) and the *būoā* (his assistant). The lead-narrator, *gīdal*, is dressed in a white *dhoti*, a white *pāñjābi* and a white *cādar*. He also carries a *do-tārā* in his hand. The *gīdal* is assisted by the *dohār*, dressed in a white *dhoti*, a vest and a *gāmchā*. The female impersonators (*chokrās*), at least two in number, wear *śāṅhis* and ankle-bells. The rest of the performers are dressed in every-day wear. Of late, female performers are replacing male impersonators (*chokrās*).

The texts of *Kecchā-bandī Gān* are oral compositions, prosometric in form. The sections in rhymed metrical verse are recited and sung, and those in prose are partly improvised during performance. The following are the names of a few popular texts.

- |  |                                |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Madhumālā</i>                                  | 5. <i>Surat Jāmāl</i>          |
| 2. <i>Lakṣapati Saodūgarer Chele Dhanapati Kumār</i> | 6. <i>Karim Bādśā</i>          |
| 3. <i>Haripur Śaharer Khās-bhān Rājā</i>             | 7. <i>Candra Satīr Banabās</i> |
| 4. <i>Multān Śaharer Sultān Bādśā</i>                |                                |

In essence, all these tales are similar in nature to those of *Kecchā Kāhinī* and *Pālā Gān*. If fully performed, each of the *Kecchā-bandī Gān* texts may take three consecutive sessions to complete; but they may also be performed in abridged version in a single session.

The performance of *Kecchā-bandī Gān* begins around ten in the evening with a *bandanā* addressed to Sarasvatī and the four directions. The main body of performance is comprised of the following elements:

1. *Narrative performance in lyric*: Sections of the text are rendered in lyric where the first line of each couplet is sung by the *gīdal* and the second by the *dohār*, following which the *pāil* picks up the refrain. Beside the musicians playing their instruments, the *gīdal* also plays his *do-tārā* as he moves all around the central circle in dance steps. At the same time, the *dohār* and the *chokrās* follow the *gīdal*, dancing around the central circle. The dance is non-mimetic and that of the *chokrās* is often highly erotic.
2. *Narrative performance in verse*: The *gīdal* and the *dohār* also recite parts of the text in verse as they move around the central circle. The first half of each line is rendered by the *gīdal* and the second half by the *dohār*. Their rendition is effected by vocal inflections and physical gestures. During these passages of verse recitation, the *chokrās* sit with the musicians and the *pāil* in the central circle.
3. *Narrative performance in prose*: After each passage of lyric and verse, the *gīdal* explains the narrative in prose, part of which is improvised. Usually he also adds topical comments and the *dohār* joins in to add comic humour.

Finally, the performance is either suspended or ends at day-break.<sup>172</sup>

### 3.7.8 *Śāstra (Hāstar Gān)* :

There exists in Pangsha (greater Faridpur) a genre of performance known as *Śāstra* (or *Hāstar Gān*), which is performed in rural homesteads mostly by the Muslims entirely for the purpose of secular entertainment. The performance is attended by Hindus and Muslims alike. Most of the texts are secular in nature, are based on tales of adventure and romance and are composed in prosometric form as oral narratives. Some popular examples are *Śāh Jāmāl* (or *Jāmāl Bādsā*), and *Jāne Ālam Bādsā*. Interestingly, *Cānd Saodāgar*, based on the *Padmā-purāṇ*, is also extremely popular. The performance space (fig. 78) is circular in shape (some eight to nine feet in diameter) and non-elevated. Four bamboo poles stand on four corners of the square which contains the circle and these support an awning on top. "Petromax" lanterns are suspended from these poles for illumination. The spectators sit all around the circular space. On the circumference of the circle sit five to seven choral singers but there are no musicians. The lead narrator performs in their midst. *Śāstra* is composed of (i) narrative performance in prose and (ii) narrative performance in lyric. In the first, the lead narrator renders the text singly in improvised prose; in the second, he renders it in pre-composed lyrical passages, accompanied by choral refrain. Occasionally the choral singers also ask brief questions to help the lead narrator. The performers, all dressed in daily attire, usually begin after dinner, at around eight or nine in the evening and end after about three hours.<sup>173</sup>

### 3.7.9 *Dhak Yātrā* :

In the district of Narail, there exists a genre of performance known as *Dhak Yātrā*, which is based on fairy tales. Given by both Hindus and Muslims (most of whom are farmers by profession), *Dhak Yātrā* may be sponsored by Hindu as well as Muslim house-holders, entirely for entertainment, during all religious festivals or even on any non-festival evening, throughout the dry season. According to Tārāprasād Cakrabartī, the music "master" of a *Dhak Yātrā* troupe (from Mollah Danga village under Kalia police station, Narail), the genre has existed in and around the villages of Banshgram and Mollah Danga for at least the last three generations.

The performance space of *Dhak Yātrā* (fig. 79) is square in shape (some twelve feet each arm) and non-elevated. On its four corners stand four bamboo posts to support an awning on top. "Petromax" (kerosine) lanterns or electric lamps are suspended from these posts for illumination. The spectators sit on hay-strewn ground, on all four sides of the performance

space. The performers consist of a *sarkār* (the lead-narrator) who sings and also narrates in prose and about six to seven *dohārs* who sing choral refrain and play harmonium, *ḍhol*, *ḍāsi*, *juḍi*, *khamak*, *do-tārā* and violin. They are seated on two opposite sides, in straight lines: the string and the wind on one side and the percussion on the other. The *sarkār* is usually dressed in a *pāñjābi* and a *dhoti* or *pājāmā*. He also wears ankle-bells. There is no definite dress for the *dohārs*.

The texts of *Dhak Yātrā* are orally composed in prosometric form. Most of these are fairy tales, in which the prevailing mood is that of romantic comedy.

The performance begins at round nine in the evening with a musical overture ("concert") played by the *dohārs*. The overture is followed by the *bandanā* rendered by the *sarkār*. In it, salutations are offered to the sun in the east, the Himalayas in the north (where resides Hara and Gaurī), god Jagannāth in the west, Ganges and Bhāgīrathī in the south, goddess Saraswatī, the preceptors, the parents and the spectators. The main body comes next and it is comprised of the following elements:

1. *Narrative performance in lyric*: The *sarkār* renders part of the narrative in lyric, accompanied by choral refrain sung and music played by the *dohārs*. He dances in all the lyrical passages, visually enacting the action described therein.
2. *Narrative performance in prose* : The *sarkār* also renders parts of the narrative in prose. Sometimes a *dohār* may respond vocally, sitting in his position. During his rendition, the *sarkār* also enacts with his gestures and vocal inflections, the action of the narrative.

The performance ends around midnight or slightly later with a brief announcement. The total length of performance is from three to four hours.<sup>174</sup>

### 3.7.10 *Dhañg Yātrā* :

There are exists in the region of greater Comilla a genre of performance known as *Dhañg Yātrā*. It is performed mostly by "low" caste Hindus and also a few Muslims belonging to professions such as fishing and weaving. In earlier times it used to be sponsored by affluent *zamindars*, entirely for secular entertainment. Today it is a dying genre, sponsored occasionally by subscription of those interested, during winter months. It is witnessed by both Hindus as well as Muslims.

*Dhañg Yātrā* is performed in the outer courtyards of rural homesteads or in any public ground. The performance space (fig. 80) is rectangular in shape (some 15'x9' or 9'x7<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>', constructed with four or two *caukis*, respectively) and about 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>' in height. Four banana plants stand on four corners, on top of which four bamboo poles are tied horizontally to

form a rectangular frame, from which "petromax" lanterns are suspended for illumination. The banana plants also support an awning on top. A diagonal entry passage connects the centre of one of the larger arms of the platform with the green-room (*sāj ghar*) located at a distance from the performance space. The musicians sit on the ground along one of the shorter arms of the platform. A fence of bamboo-slip separates the spectators (sitting on all four sides) and the performance space.

A *Dhañg Yātrā* troupe is comprised of a lead narrator (*gāyen*), two or three choral singers (*pāil* or *dohār*), four to six young lads dressed as female dancers (*chukrīs*) and about five musicians (*vāntrik*). The *gāyen* is dressed as the lead characters of his narrative require, and changes costume accordingly. These are similar to those used in the *Yātrā*. He carries a red handkerchief and sometimes dons ankle-bells. The *dohārs* are also dressed as required by the narrative to be performed, in costume similar to that of the *Yātrā*. The *chukrīs* are dressed in *saris* and the musicians, in everyday wear. The latter play instruments such as harmonium, *khol*, *sārindā*, *kartāl* and *bānglā-dhol*. The harmonium player ("master") is usually the trainer of the *gāyen*. The latter and the *dohārs* wear make-up.

The texts of *Dhañg Yātrā* is prosometric in form and are based mostly on the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. A few well-known examples are *Lava-Kuśa*, *Mahīrāvaṇa Vadh*, *Kumbhakarna*, *Rāvaṇa Vadh* etc. A text based on the *Manasā-maṅgala*, titled *Behulā*, is also included in *Dhañg Yātrā* repertoire. Since 1974, secular tales of Muslim origin, such as *Sāiful Muluk*, *Lāilī-Majnu*, *Rumjhum Bādsā* etc. have also been performed.

Performance of *Dhañg Yātrā* commences at about eight or nine in the evening, with a musical overture ("concert") played for ten to fifteen minutes. Then the *chukrīs* enter from the *sāj ghar* to render *bandanā* in honour of goddess Saraswatī, the four directions, the preceptor, the musical instruments and the respectable members of the spectators. The *chukrīs* exit after the *bandanā* and then enters the *gāyen*. He introduces himself and gives a synopsis of the text in improvised prose for the benefit of the spectators. The main body of performance comes next and it is composed of the following elements.

1. *Narrative performance in prose*: The *gāyen* renders major portion of the narrative in improvised prose. In these sections, he describes parts of the action and also renders words spoken by the characters, accompanied by appropriate gestures and movements. He is dressed in the costume of primary character of each section. The musicians heighten dramatic moments by providing music appropriate to the mood.
2. *Narrative performance in lyric*: Interspersed between sections of prose renditions are passages of lyric. The *dohārs* enter the performance space from the *sāj ghar* during these

passages and accompany the *gāyen*'s lyric by singing the choral refrain, as the orchestra provides music. Both the *gāyen* and the *dohār* execute intricate and graceful movement. The *dohars* exit as soon as the lyrical passage ends.

3. *Song-and-dance numbers*: The narrative is punctuated by brief song-and-dance numbers rendered by the *chukrīs*. During these periods the *gāyen* exits from the performance space to change his costume in accordance with the primary character of the next section. The *chukrīs* also collect money from the affluent spectators.

The performance, about two and a half to three hours in length, ends with a song rendered by the *dohārs*.<sup>175</sup>

### 3.7.11 *Ghāṭu Gān* :

In the region of eastern Mymensingh, its adjoining belt of Sylhet and Comilla and in parts of western Mymensingh and Tangail, there still exists a genre of secular performance variously known as *Ghāṭu Gān*, *Ġāḍu Gān*, *Gāḍu Gān* and *Gāṭu Gān*. It is mostly performed during rainy season when the *hāor* (extensive marshland) of eastern parts of Mymensingh and western parts of Sylhet are flooded and as a result there is little farming to be attended to. It may also be performed during rest of the year if desired and also on occasions such as the Ratha Yātrā celebration held in the month of Āṣāḍh, the ceremonious opening of new account-book on the New Year's Day of Bāṅglā calendar, Baiśākhī Melā (seasonal fair held on the month of Baiśākh), the festival of Caḍak (held on the last day of Bāṅglā calendar) etc. *Ghāṭu Gān* is mostly sponsored by the affluent section of the rural community. The performers are mostly Muslims by faith and farmers by profession. The performance is witnessed by Hindus and Muslims alike.

A *Ghāṭu* troupe is led by the *sarkār*, the lead singer and trainer of the dancers. Most often they buy young boys of pre-puberty age from poverty-stricken rural house-holders for a period of two to five years and train them in singing and dancing as male and female impersonators (known as *ghāṭus* or *chokrās*). Trained *chokrās* of *Ghāṭu Gān* are usually twelve to fifteen years of age and they are maintained by the *sarkārs*. As most often is the case, the *sarkārs* themselves are one-time *chokrās*. The rest of the troupe is comprised of some choral singers (*pāil*) and a few musicians (*bāyen*). A *Ghāṭu* troupe led by Abul Kalam (aged 65) from Magur Jora village under Trishal police station in Mymensingh, is comprised of himself as the *sarkār*, two *chokrās*, twenty-five members of the *pāil* and two *bāyens*. The instruments played by the latter are a *dholak* and a pair of *mandirā*. The *Ghāṭu* troupe led by Hasan Ali (aged 40) from Radha-krishnapur village under Madhupur police station of Tangail district is comprised of himself as the *sarkār*, two *chokrās*, eight *pāils* and two

*bāyens* (who play a *ḍholak* and a pair of *mandirā*). *Ghāṭu* troupes are also known to be comprised of four *chokrās* and four or five *bāyens*. The latter, beside the instruments mentioned above, also play flute, harmonium *sārindā*, *kartāl* and violin.<sup>176</sup>

*Ghāṭu Gān* is performed in public grounds (seldom in the courtyards of rural homesteads) and on the decks of large country-boats. Abul Kalam's troupe performs in a space (fig. 82) which is circular in shape (about 18 feet in diameter) and non-elevated, often under branches of large trees. The spectators are seated all around the circular space. Awning is used only during winter and rainy seasons. It is supported on four posts which stand on four corners of a square containing the circle. Two or three "petromax" lanterns placed on the periphery of the circle serve the purpose of lighting. All the performers save the *chokrās* sit in a circle immediately inside the periphery of the circular performance space, the two *bāyens* sitting diagonally opposite to each other. The *chokrās* dance inside the circle of sitting performers. Performances given on the decks of large country-boats follow similar arrangement. When moored at piers, the spectators usually gather on the river-banks. On the other hand, the arrangement is slightly different in the case of Hasan Ali's troupe (fig. 81). All the performers save the *chokrās* are seated in a small circle at the centre of the performance space; the *chokrās* perform in the intermediate circle between them and the spectators. All the performers save the *chokrās* are often dressed in *lungis* and a vests. The *chokrās* dress as maidens (Rādhā and her companions) with detailed feminine make-up and costume. The make-up includes false hair, garlands on the head, *āltā* (lāc-dye) on the border of the feet, collyrium on the eyes, lipstick on the lips etc. Their usual dress is *sari* (worn as a *ghāgrā*) and blouse, both of which are attractive in terms of colour and material. One of the *chokrās* dress as Kṛṣṇa in a *dhoti*, a sleeve-less and tight-fitting jacket and a crown with peacock feathers; he also carries a flute in his hand. In a few cases, the role of Kṛṣṇa is also performed in daily-life attire. Sometime the *chokrās* don ankle-bells.

Various episodes of *Ghāṭu Gān* are performed in different parts of the region mentioned earlier. But common to all the episodes is a thinly woven narrative on the theme of love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, most of which end in yearning for union but not union in itself. The narrative is followed by a series of isolated songs on the theme of separation.<sup>177</sup> Although the theme of all of *Ghāṭu Gān* texts is love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, there is little of devotional fervour characteristic of *Līlā Kīrtan*. Instead, it is essentially temporal love and physical yearning, blended with an undercurrent of *madhur rasa* (as propounded in the Vaiṣṇava theory of *rasa*) and the spirit of dynamism and fire characteristic of mystic songs of the Sufi tradition, that the texts (and performances) of *Ghāṭu Gān* focus on.<sup>178</sup> The texts are composed entirely in lyric, which are rendered as dialogue during performance. Although the



composers are anonymous, scholars believe that they were created orally by non-literate Muslim farmers.<sup>179</sup> Performers learn the text orally from the *sarkārs*.

A performance of *Ghāṭu Gān* usually begins with a *bandanā*, often sung in honour of Kṛṣṇa or Saraswatī (and other deities) and the preceptor by one or more *chokrās* with choral and musical accompaniment. There follows a brief lyrical passage known as *sālām*, in which the troupe introduces itself and offers salutation to the spectators. The main body comes next and it is composed of the following elements:

1. *Dialogic performance in lyric*: The *chokrās* sing lyrical passages, with choral and musical accompaniment, and simultaneously dance as well. The choral singers also clap to the rhythm throughout. All lyrical passages are rendered as words spoken by Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa and their companions but there is no dialogue between the two characters. In each scene, there is only one speaker: the other is either absent (as Rādhā pining for Kṛṣṇa alone at home) or silent (as Rādhā is in the last scene when Kṛṣṇa speaks to her). The dance is mimetic, extremely graceful and highly erotic. (Photographs 132 and 133.)

2. *Mimetic performance* : At places the *sarkār* sings the lyrical passages as the *chokrās* dance silently. All other aspects are similar to the above. (Photographs 134 and 135.)

A performance a *Ghāṭu Gān* usually commences after eight in the evening and ends by day-break. In some cases, the penultimate song sung is on Kṛṣṇa *līlā* and the last song which signals the end of performance is a song on Nimāi (Caitanya).

Sometimes *Ghāṭu Gān* is given by a single *chokrā* dressed as a maiden, who performs both the roles of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Rest of the features of these performances are same as above. *Ghāṭu Gān* is also performed as a contest between two troupes which it is known as *laṣṭāk*. In these, two troupes occupy two circular space placed side by side (the arrangement of performers follows that of Abul Kalam's troupe) and the spectators sit around the two circles (fig. 83). Each troupe chooses for itself either the role of Rādhā or that of Kṛṣṇa and pose questions to each other in alternate sessions. Questions posed are usually on the *līlās* of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and related scriptures but sometimes may even include Sufi mysticism. The troupe which fails to answer or sings a song which should be sung by the opponent, is declared the loser and it accepts the *sarkār* of the other troupe as its *guru*. Sometimes these performances continue for six days and nights. In all other aspects, the *laṣṭāk* performances are similar to that described earlier.

Important features of *Ghāṭu Gān* performance are as follows :

1. The end: The end is not in fulfilment of desire characteristic of *Līlā Kīrtan*, but in anguish resulting from separation and yearning for union.

2. Erotic quality: The dance of the *chokrās* is extremely erotic and sensuous, capable of arousing excitement of the spectators. The predominance of Erotic (*Sṛṅgāra*) *rasa* is characteristic of *Ghāṭu Gān*.
3. Dialogue: Each character speaks when the other is either absent or remains silent.
4. Costume : Any of the dancers may perform any of the roles without any change in their (feminine) costume. Thus, when the role of Kṛṣṇa is being enacted, there is a double transformation: male performer transformed into a female performer who enacts a male role.
5. Donation : Donations are collected from the spectators.<sup>180</sup>

As Mohammad Sirajuddin Kasimpuri points out, it is popularly believed that in the first half of 16th century, a Vaiṣṇavite *ācārya* from Ajmiriganj in Sylhet, overcome by his intense devotional urge for union with Kṛṣṇa in a manner similar to Rādhā's desire, created a troupe of young lads who were trained to dance as *sakhis* (companions) of Rādhā, possibly with the hope of purging at least part of his anguish. *Ghāṭu Gān* gradually evolved from the mimetic dance of the above mentioned female impersonators.<sup>181</sup> Kasimpuri further shows that quite a few songs of *Ghāṭu Gān* contain Hindi words and goes on to build his thesis that the performance is not a local product but imported from the Vaiṣṇavite centre of Vraja near Mathurā in north India.<sup>182</sup> But it is possible the Hindi words are actually colloquial derivatives of what were once Vrajabuli words. This hypothesis is supported by the fore-mentioned popular belief that *Ghāṭu Gān* was created by a Vaiṣṇavite *ācārya*, who possibly made use of *padāvalī kīrtan* lyrics laden with Vrajabuli words. Ashraf Siddiqi and Abdul Hafiz generally agree with the hypothesis of Vaiṣṇavite origin of *Ghāṭu Gān*.<sup>183</sup> Developing out of Vaiṣṇavite devotional practice, the genre was transformed into a secular performance when local feudal lords began to retain *Ghāṭu* troupes. Today, deprived of their patronry, *Ghāṭu Gān* is on the verge of extinction.

### 3.7.12 *Pālāṭiā Gān: Raṅg Pācālī*

*Pālāṭiā Gān* (also known as *Dhāmer Gān*) is an extremely popular genre of performance in Thakurgaon district (greater Dinajpur). It is performed mostly during the *pūjā* festivals in honour in Durgā, Kālī and Laksmī as well as religious festivals of Dol Purnimā, Holi and Kṣetī Pūjā held from the months of Bhādra to Caitra solely for the purpose of entertainment. During these festivals, *Pālāṭiā Gān* runs continuously day and night, as one troupe performs after another. The length of performance of each troupe is determined by a jury empowered to terminate any performance when it fails to hold the attention of spectators (hence the name *Pālāṭiā*, i.e., that which is given in turn). Soon after a troupe finishes its performance

(or it is terminated), the performers move (with their costume and make-up on) to one of other festival sites in the locality and wait for their turn to perform in the same manner described above. The jury is comprised of members of the festival committee and local specialists of *Pālāṭiā Gān* who select the best troupe and they are awarded prizes beside appearance fee paid to each troupe. The members of the *Pālāṭiā Gān* troupes are mostly Hindus (of all caste) along with a few Muslims. For most of them performance is a secondary profession and are engaged in cultivation and small-scale trading for their livelihood. Although *Pālāṭiā Gān* performers are all males, there exists a troupe of all female members at Dhulihatī village (Thakurgaon district) who are all Hindus by faith and perform mostly for female Hindu spectators, during the festival of Dol Pūrṇimā held in the month of Phālgun.

Two types of *Pālāṭiā Gān* are commonly seen in greater Dinajpur district. These are (i) *Raṅg Pācālī* and (ii) *Śāstriya Pācālī* (or *Sāmājīk Pacali*). The following is a brief account of *Raṅg Pācālī*.

*Raṅg Pācālī* performances are based on texts by local playwrights, composed on locally popular tales, actual or fabricated. The plays begin with highly entertaining comedy, often develop into serious situation but always end in union of the central characters. The texts, usually unpublished, demarcate no act or scene divisions; only entries and exits are noted. The number of characters are relatively small. Composed in the dialect of Thakurgaon, in verse as well as lyrical dialogue, they usually contain a great degree of erotic references. A few of the popular texts are *Cacilā Siṅg-Basilā Siṅg*, *Dukker Sāgar*, *Kāmār-Kāmārnī*, *Bekār Ājlā*, *Śāntibālā-Jhānu Faterā* etc. *Śāntibālā-Jhānu Faterā*, for instance, contains twenty scene changes, twenty-one songs and nine characters (of whom two are female) and is structured on action built on conflict.

*Raṅg Pācālī* is performed in front of a *dhām*, i.e., a holy place or a seat of a deity and hence the name *Dhāmer Gān*. The performance space (fig. 84) is a permanent area, square in shape (some 15 feet a side) and elevated with earth (to a height of about 9 to 15 inches). On each of its corners stand a tree (often Śimul) which serves as a permanent corner post. "Petromax" lanterns or electric lamps suspended from these trees serve to light the performance space. At a height of about ten feet, the space is roofed with corrugated iron sheets, date-palm mats, jute-sticks or tarpaulin. The space is also bounded with a fence made of bamboo-slips, leaving two narrow openings near two corner posts: one for entry and the other for exit of the troupes during *Pālāṭiā* performances. The spectators are seated on hay-strewn ground, men separately from women, on all four sides of the performance space, leaving two narrow passages connecting the two openings mentioned above, for entry and

exit of the troupes. The troupes which await their turn for performance, are seated at the end of entry passage, beyond the spectators. When performing, they are seated in a small circle at the centre of the performance space. Comprising of about twelve members, a troupe includes two to four female impersonators (*chukrīs*) who perform the female roles and also sing choral refrain when not performing, the choral singers (*dohārs*) who also perform the male roles, the musicians (*bāyēn*) who also sing choral refrain and a prompter. Sometimes the *dohārs* also play instruments which include a harmonium, a flute, a *dhol*, a pair of *juḍi* and a pair of *ḍugi-tablā*. The musicians and the prompter are dressed in daily-life wear and the rest in costume of the characters they perform.

A performance of *Raṅg Pācālī* begins with a *bandanā* addressed to the deities and saints (Saraswati in *Śānti Bālā-Jhānu Faterā*, Dharma, Kālī, Ganges and Muslim saints in *Kāmār-Kāmārñī*) and also to the four direction and the spectators. Most often it is brief and sometimes proceeds to announce the name of the play and the playwright. The main body comes next and it is composed of the following elements :

*Dialogic performance in verse and lyric* : The characters speak their lines in verse or lyric as they move around the central circle (photograph 136). The rhythm and the metre is not strictly adhered to. In some performances such as *Śāntibālā-Jhānu Faterā*, lyrical passages alternate with verse. Others, like *Kāmār-Kāmārñī* are composed entirely in lyrical dialogue. The duration of a performance usually ranges from two to two and a half hours. It ends with cheers, usually for the central character of the play.

The following are some of the salient features of *Raṅg Pācālī* performances:

1. Entry and exit: Characters step out of the central circle to denote their entry into a locale. Exit is denoted simply by joining the central circle.
2. Introduction of characters: The first entry of each character in the opening scene is followed by a salutation and brief introduction of him/herself. The identities of characters who enter later are indicated by the manner in which they are addressed to.
3. Change of locale: The locale of each new scene is indicated by the first character to enter the scene. A scene at a given locale ends when all characters exit.
4. Scenic elements: Use of set props is minimal. Thus, a chair may be the lone object used in a class-room of a school or in a drawing room.
5. Costume: All characters are dressed in a manner which reflects contemporary sartorial practice. For example in *Śāntibālā-Jhānu Faterā*, Jhānu wears a pair of trousers and a T-shirt; Śānti Bālā wears a *sari*, a pair of sun-glasses and delicate feminine make-up

(photograph 137); Dilu the robber wears a black jacket with a pair of black trousers and has his face painted black (photograph 138). The performers occupy the performance space with their costume on, but often have themselves wrapped in a shawl as they await their entry while sitting in the central circle.

6. Mask : On a few occasions, masks are used, specially to represent animals. The cow in *Śāntibālā-Jhānu Faterā* is played by a boy with the mask of a cow.<sup>185</sup>

*Raṅg Pācālī* is interesting because, on the one hand, it indicates popular practice (i.e., that of the people), specially in the choice of stories. On the other hand, it indicates a curious blend of European dramaturgy (as evident in the building of action on conflict) with indigenous elements of performance (dialogue in lyric and verse, presentational mode of performance etc.). The name "Pācālī" is also of interest because it possibly indicates that *Raṅg Pācālī* was created in early medieval period when it was initially a narrative form.

### 3.7.13 *Pālāṭiā Gān : Śāstrīya Pācālī*

Another form of *Pālāṭiā Gān* is *Śāstrīya Pācālī* (also known as *Sāmājik Pācālī*), which is performed on similar occasions, with similar purpose and by similar performers as that of *Raṅg Pācālī*. Thus at the same *dhām*, both *Śāstrīya Pācālī* as well as *Raṅg Pācālī* may be performed one after the other.

Earlier on, *Śāstrīya Pācālī* was based on the *śāstras*, i.e., the scriptures (hence the name *Śāstrīya*) as well as historical events. Examples of those based on the *śāstras* are *Dātā Karna*, *Hariścandra*, *Laṅkā Kāṇḍa*, *Sāvitrī-Satyavān* etc., and those based on historical events are *Nawāb Sirājuddaulā*, *Ek Muṭho Āgun*, *Palāsīr Pare*, *Ṭīpu Sultān* etc. Of late, *Śāstrīya Pācālī* performances have been based on social themes and hence are referred to as *Sāmājik Pācālī*. The texts of *Śāstrīya Pācālī* are usually abridged versions of *Yātrā* texts based on social themes and adaptations screen-plays of Bānglā films also on social themes. These are composed in prose dialogue, interspersed with a number of songs to be rendered by the characters. As a rule, the language is always standard Bānglā. The performance is serious in tone, contains hardly any erotic references and end in union of the central characters. The action is often built on the principle of conflict derived from European dramaturgy. Some of the popular *Śāstrīya Pācālī* texts are *Anusandhān*, *Jīban Nadīr Tīre*, *Śeṣ Bicār* etc.

The performance space of *Śāstrīya Pācālī* (fig. 85) is the same as that of *Raṅg Pācālī*. But the *dohārs* (choral singers) who also play musical instruments (*ḍholak*, *khol*, harmonium, *kartāl* and flute), usually sit along one of the sides nearest to the entry-passage and outside the boundary fence. On a few occasions, they are also seen to occupy the centre of

performance space. The position of the prompter is in the corner nearest to the entry-passage. Characters enter from and exit to the waiting space situated at the end of the entry passage, beyond the spectators.

The duration of a performance of *Śāstrīya Pācālī* is usually about three hours. It opens with a *bandanā* addressed not to the four directions or the deities but the spectators, in which current social maladies, such as the "robbing" of men's honour by women, is/are criticized. The *bandanā* is rendered by four performers who form a square-shaped composition and turn to all four sides. The main body of performance is composed entirely of :

*Dialogic performance in prose and lyric:* The performers, aided by the prompter, render their lines in prose (photographs 139 and 140). Sometimes they also sing their lines, accompanied by the *dohārs* singing choral refrain and also playing music. The style of performance is declamatory and melodramatic, quite similar to that of the *Yātrā*. The performance ends with three cheers for the central character of the play delivered by all the performers assembled in the performance space.

The following are some of the salient features of *Śāstrīya Pācālī*:

1. Entry and exit: All characters enter from and exit to the waiting space through the entry-passage.
2. Introduction of characters: There is no self introduction of the characters; their identities are revealed through the usual techniques of exposition.
3. Change of locale: A scene at a locale ends when all characters exit. The locale of a new scene is indicated by the first character to enter it.
4. Scenic elements: Use of set props is minimal and only those essential for sitting are used. Thus, a chair and a bench suffices for a police station (photograph 139) and a drawing room: these are placed at the corners or edges of the performance space right from the beginning of performance. For the scene where the central character is to be hanged in *Śeṣ Bicār*, a noose with a pulley is tied to one of the corner trees (photograph 141).
5. Costume : All characters are dressed in a manner which reflects contemporary sartorial practice. For example, Jīban Dārogā, a police officer in *Śeṣ Bicār*, is dressed in khaki trousers and shirt with a pair of brown sneakers but without the barret caps worn by the police, Dīpak, the clerk of a land-lord, is dressed in trousers and shirt, Suman, son of Jīban Dārogā, in T-shirt and a pair of trousers, Campā, his beloved, in a *sari* and a pair of sunglasses etc.<sup>186</sup>

It is possible that the *Śāstrīya Pācālī* was earlier performed with the *dohār* sitting at the centre, as the practice is still current with a few troupes. Like the *Raṅg Pācālī*, *Śāstrīya Pācālī* was possibly rendered previously as a narrative performance for which reason its name is also suffixed with 'Gān' (i.e., a performance which contains narrative rendition) and not *Yātrā* (i.e., a performance which is entirely dialogic). As the *Yātrā* evolved with popular taste, it could have influenced *Śāstrīya Pācālī* and the latter too changed from performances based entirely on mythologies till the end of 19th century, to the inclusion of historicals by early 20th century and social plays after mid-20th century.

### 3.7.14 *Gambhīrā Gān* :

Performed in Nawabganj district, *Gambhīrā Gān* of Bangladesh is in many respects distinct from that of Maldah in West Bengal (India), the reason for which is linked to the political history. In 1947, when Bengal was partitioned, a number of Muslim performers of *Gambhīrā Gān* migrated from Maldah to Nawabganj (erstwhile East Bengal, Pakistan). Some of the notable among them were Sheikh Shafiqur Rahman (Sufi Master), Mohammad Solaiman Mokhtar, Mohammad Mohsin Ali Mokhtar, Mohammad Wajed Ali, Mohammad Fajlur Rahman, Tayeb Ali, Lutful Huq and Mominul Master. These performers transformed the role of Śiva (still seen in the *Gambhīrā Gān* of Maldah) into that of Nānā (maternal grandfather) and created a completely secular form of performance with only the "duet" episode, eliminating the "cār-yari", "pālā-bandī" and "report" episodes.<sup>187</sup> Thus since 1947, it has been given by two male performers in the roles of Nānā (the grandfather) and Nānī (the grandson) who represent the respectable elderly of Bengali community and the oppressed common man, respectively. The pair, with the help of song, dance and improvised prose commentary, critique existing social condition. But the state machinery of Pakistan, suspicious of scathing criticism characteristic of *Gambhīrā Gān*, always attempted to suppress its performance. It was only after the liberation of Bangladesh that the form received encouragement from the government and as a result of which, *Gambhīrā Gān* received nation-wide popularity.

*Gambhīrā Gān* in Bangladesh today is performed all the year round in various festivals and in cultural soirees presented in honour of state dignitaries. It can be performed in the morning, afternoon or evening and the duration is usually three hours or less. The performance space is often a proscenium stage or any elevated platform, opposite which the spectators sit. The green-room is located behind the stage. The musicians, who play harmonium, *bāyā-tablā*, *mandirā*, *khañjani* and *do-tārā*,<sup>188</sup> sit with four or five choral singers on stage in a semi-circle facing the spectators (fig. 86). The songs (sung by Nānā and

Nāti) are pre-composed and are rendered in a few tunes which are distinctive of *Gambhīrā Gān*. The dance presented by the pair is limited to a few rhythmic steps, swinging of the hips and simple hand gestures, there being no attempt at mimetic enactment. Although the costume of the choral singers and musicians is indefinite, those of Nānā and Nāti follow established convention. Nānā is dressed only in a *lungi*, often torn and patched, carries a *pācānī* (a short stick) and sometimes also a plough over his shoulder. Nāti wears a loose knee-long pair of shorts or a *lungi* and a torn vest. Each character also has a *gāmchā* tied to their waists, a *māthāl* (a kind of wicker umbrella worn as hats by the peasants) and dons ankle-bells. Sometimes Nāti carries a hookah or has some coarse bread tied to an end of his *gāmchā*.<sup>189</sup> In terms of physical appearance, Nānā is usually bearded and has a large paunch; Nāti, on the other hand, is clean-shaven and wears the countenance of a simpleton.

The performance of *Gambhīrā Gān* is structured with the following elements:

1. *Dialogic performance in lyric*: Nānā and Nāti dialogue with each other in lyric, accompanied by music and choral refrain rendered by the musicians and the choral singers. The lyrical passages depict and critique social conditions. The songs are pre-composed. Both Nānā and Nāti carry copies of the text in their hands and sing off the text in full view of the spectators. The pair also executes simple dance pieces when the choral singers render the refrain (photographs 143-145).
2. *Dialogic performance in prose*: In between lyrical passages, Nānā and Nāti also render dialogue in prose, improvised and witty, which serves as commentary on social condition depicted in the lyrical passages (photograph 142).

A performance of *Gambhīrā Gān* begins with *bandanā* presented by Nāti. With choral and musical accompaniment he dances and sings the *bandanā* which contains no religious reference. Immediately after the *bandanā* is over, Nānā enters in a huff, apparently furious, looking for his grandson. As soon as he locates him, Nānā loses no time in making good use of his stick and explains to the spectators that his grandson is very self-willed and that he was supposed to go to the field but tricked him and instead has landed here. There follows a quarrel, much to the amusement of the spectators. Finally Nāti pacifies Nānā and veers him to an issue (the theme of the performance) which has caused him (Nāti) quite a lot of trouble. The issue heats up Nānā as well and the two begin to discuss and critique the matter at hand. In the ensuing discussion, Nāti asks foolish and impertinent questions and complains to Nānā both in lyric and improvised prose speech, causing great amusement to the spectators. On the other hand, the role of Nānā is that of experience and wisdom, coated in rural wit. A performance may cover a single or a number of issues, all related to



contemporary social life such as rising price in the market, problem of getting children admitted to schools and colleges, problem of receiving proper treatment in government hospitals and clinics, corruption, black-marketing, crime, violence, drug-addiction, politics, natural disaster, family planning and much more.

Finally a performance ends with Nānā advising Nāti to get everyone united, perform their duties and bring about peace and amity.<sup>190</sup>

The following information related to *Gambhīrā Gān* is worth noting:

1. Background of the performers: None of the performers are full-time professionals and they belong to semi-urban middle-class. The most famous pair of Nānā and Nāti is Kutubul Alam and Rakibuddin respectively; the former has been a government servant in the agricultural department till recently and the latter is a businessman. Another prominent *Gambhīrā* performer, Mahbul Alam, is a librarian at a college.
2. Female performers: Although *Gambhīrā Gān* is usually performed only by male performers, recently it has been given by a group of women (with only a male percussionist) at Hujrapur Bahumukhi Mahila Unnyan Samity, an NGO at Nawabganj, greater Rajshahi.<sup>191</sup>

### 3.7.15 *Gambhīrā Yātrā* :

In the rural areas of Nawabganj district, there appears to have existed some thirty years ago a genre of performance known as *Gambhīrā Yātrā*. It used to be performed by both Hindus and Muslims who were traders and farmers by profession, entirely for the purpose of entertainment.

The performance space (fig. 87), a temporary construction built in the outer courtyard of a homestead, would usually be square in shape (about fifteen feet each arm) and non-elevated. On its four corners would stand four bamboo posts to support an awning or roofing made of corrugated iron sheets. "Petromax" (kerosine) lanterns would be suspended from the posts to serve as illumination. The spectators would sit on all four sides of the performance space, on hay-strewn ground and men separately from women. A narrow passage-way, running from any of the arms of the performance space, through the area of the spectators, joined the green-room (*sāj ghar*) located in one of the huts adjoining the courtyard. The performers (all males), would enter the space from the green-room (*sāj ghar*) through the passage-way and would exit back through the same way. The musicians and the prompter sat in a circle at the centre of the space; the latter prompted lines throughout the performance.

Performances of *Gambhīrā Yātrā* would be based on written texts structured in five acts. Some of the popular of these were *Rājā Hariścandra*, *Rāma-Lakṣmaṇa* (both based on well-known Hindu myths), *Yādullāh O Hārān* (on romance and marriage of a servant named Yādullāh and the daughter of his master named Hārān) and *Rāmānāth Ṭhākur* (on the romance and marriage of the wife of a priest named Rāmānāth Ṭhākur and his servant, which later breaks up and the priest is reunited with his wife).

The performance of *Gambhīrā Yātrā* would usually commence any time between nine to eleven in the evening with a musical overture played by the orchestra which would be followed by a patriotic song rendered by four or five female impersonators (*chokrās*). The main body of performance would be comprised of the following elements:

1. *Dialogic performance in prose*: The dialogue was mostly in prose composed in standard Bānglā.
2. *Dialogic performance in lyric*: At emotionally heightened moments, the characters rendered their lines in lyric.
3. *Song-and-dance numbers*: In between the acts, the *chokrās* would render a few sang-and-dance numbers not related to the text.

The performance would usually end before dawn.<sup>192</sup>

### 3.7.16 *Ālkāp Gān* :

In the district of Nawabganj and other parts of greater Rajshahi, there exists the *Ālkāp Gān*, an extremely popular genre of performance which is completely secular in character. It is also known to have existed in southern parts of greater Rangpur district. It is performed during Durgā Pūjā, Kālī Pūjā, Lakṣmī Pūjā, Saraswatī Pūjā and other festivals, primarily for entertainment. It is also performed with similar objective during social occasions such as marriage, circumcision, *annaprāsana* (Hindu rite of allowing a child to taste rice for the first time), *sādh* (a ceremony for giving desired food to a pregnant woman) etc., throughout the dry season, in the courtyards of rural homesteads. In social occasions, *Ālkāp Gān* is sponsored individually by the celebrant, usually a well-to-do householders of both Hindu and Muslim communities; in religious festivities, it may be sponsored by the *pūjā* organising committee or an affluent individual of the Hindu community. The performers are both Hindus and Muslims by faith and farmers and traders by profession.

*Ālkāp Gān* is performed in the outer courtyard of rural homesteads, in temple precincts (in front of the sanctum) or in public grounds. The performance space (fig. 88) is a temporary construction, square in shape (some fifteen feet a side), on four corners of which stand four

bamboo posts to support a roofing of corrugated iron sheets on top. "Petromax" (kerosine) lanterns or electric lamps suspended from the corner posts serve the purpose of lighting. The performance space may be raised (about 9") with earth on top of which mats are spread. The spectators sit on all four of its sides and the performers in a circle at its centre. A troupe of *Ālkāp Gān* is comprised of the *sarkār* (the music-teacher who directs and trains the performers, and during performance, plays harmonium, renders verse recitations and enacts a few roles), *kāippyā* (or *kāpiāl*, the master comedian), two to four *nāciyās* (or *chokrās*, who present song-and-dance numbers and also enact female roles), about seven members of the *pāil* (choral singers) three of whom also play a pair of *ḍugi-tablā* and two pairs of *juḍi*. The *pāil* members also act when necessary. The female impersonators wear *saris* and detailed feminine make-up, the *kāippyā*, a white *dhoti*, a white vest and a *gāmchā*, and the rest, *dhotis* and shirts or *pāñjābis*.

Texts of *Ālkāp Gān* are oral compositions which provide ample scope for on-the-spot improvisations. In recent years, Bangla Academy has published two texts titled *Kāthuriār Ālkāp* and *Tapan-Madan Ālkāp* and a compilation of dialogic texts, lyrics and verse narratives titled *Nawābgañjer Ālkāp Gān*.<sup>193</sup>

Performances of *Ālkāp Gān* are usually given at night, beginning around ten and ending before sun-rise. On some occasions, it may also be performed in the day-time. A troupe of *Ālkāp Gān* from Belgharia village under Durgapur police station in Rajshahi, begins its performance with a "concert" (musical overture) played in fast rhythm after all the performers have occupied the centre of the performance space. When the overture ends, the *sarkār* rises to lead a song of invocation in honour of Saraswati. It is followed by a *bandanā* in honour of Hindu deities such as Brahma, Kārtika, Durgā, Kālī, Mahāmāyā and Tārā and then a song of ovation (*juyādhvani*) for Saraswati, Śiva, the troupe and Bangladesh. The main body of performance is comprised of a number of sessions (*pālā*), each of which opens with (i) a song-and-dance number (*khemṭā*) presented by a *nāciyā* and is usually followed by (ii) a duet (*skit*), (iii) a *chaḍā* (rhymed metrical composition) presented by the *sarkār*, (iv) a *kāp* (a dialogic performance of sizable length), (v) another *chaḍā* by the *sarkār* and ends with (vi) another song-and-dance number by a *nāciyā*. Each session may run from one to three hours and the total performance may be comprised of three sessions. The following are the major characteristics of each type of episodes which constitute a performance of *Ālkāp Gān*:

(i) *Song-and-dance number (khemṭā)* : It is presented by a *nāciyā* who dances alone and sings with choral and musical accompaniment (photograph 146). The song dwells on the theme of erotic love and the dance is also highly erotic.

(ii) *Duet*: It is a short skit of twenty to forty minutes duration in which two performers, the *kāippyā* and a *nāciyā* play leading roles (photograph 149). Often devised by the performers themselves, the text is completely oral and it provides ample opportunity for on-the-spot improvisation. The dialogue is composed in prose as well as lyric. Often, before a character renders a lyrical passage, s/he declares "tāi to boli" (lit., "so I say"). The plot is usually structured on some form of disagreement between a man and a woman which is finally resolved by an elderly character (sometimes a grandfather or a headman). It is interesting to note that the *kāippyā*'s movement and body stance, in many cases, is similar to that of the male performers of the *Saṅg Yātrā* (photograph 148). Even a tune used in the quarrel scene of some duets is exactly similar to a tune used in the quarrel scenes of the *Saṅg Yātrā*.

(iii) *Chadā* : It is a metrical rhymed verse recited in tune by the *sarkār* and is accompanied by rhythm played on the drum (photograph 147). It is also orally composed, either by the *sarkār* or by his preceptor. The subject-matter of the *chadā* can be varied, ranging from communication system, education and crime to paddy, clothing and more.

(iv) *Kāp*: It is a humorous play of about one to two hours duration. Like the duet, it is orally composed by the troupe and contains ample scope for on-the-spot improvisation. It is also structured in prose and lyrical dialogue.<sup>194</sup> A *kāp* can be mythological (drawn from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata* or the *Padmā-purāṇ*), historical (on Mughal emperors, emperors of Gauḍa, Battle of Plassey etc.) or social (on exploitation of the poor, village life, family life, folk-lore with pithy moral etc.).<sup>195</sup>

Performances of *Ālkāp Gān* are composed of the following elements :

1. *Dialogic performance in prose and lyric* (as in *kāp* and duet)
2. *Narrative performance in lyric* (as in *khemtā*)
3. *Narrative performance in verse* (as in *chadā*).

The following are some of the salient characteristics of *Ālkāp Gān* performance:

1. *Entry and exit*: The characters rise and step out of the central circle to denote "entry" into a locale; "exit" is denoted by rejoining the circle. For example, when the king sends for the queen (in a *kāp* performed by a troupe from Belgharia), she stands up from the central circle as the sentry calls for her.
2. *Establishing a locale and a character*: Each character announces who he or she is in his/her first entry and also describes where he/she is going. For example, in a duet, a female impersonator rises from the central circle and narrates directly to the spectators that she is

newly married but her husband has only stayed a few days and left her. So, she says, she is going to her grandfather.

3. *Change of locale*: A circular move around the central circle of performers, accompanied by music, denotes change of locale. For example, in the same duet referred to above, the wife goes around the central circle after she announces that she is going to her grandfather. As soon as the circular move has been completed, she calls out for him and he rises from the central circle.

4. *Dialogue*: As noted earlier, the dialogue is in lyric (some of which is pre-composed, others improvised) as well as in prose speech (all of which is improvised).

5. *Costume*: No historical or period costume is used. Performers wear their daily attire (with a *dhoti* even if they are Muslims) for all characters, effecting slight change if necessary. Thus, the king in a *kāp* makes no change in his *dhoti* and shirt; when enacting an aged woman, a member of the *pāil* wears his *dhoti* like a *sari* simply by un-tucking a length from the rear and covering his head with it; the Persian maid simply adds a pair of sunglasses and ties a muffler around her head but effects no change in her *sari*.

6. *Props*: Use of props is minimal. A simple chair denotes a throne, one of the brass plates of the *kartāl*, a plate of food, and the *ḅāyā*, a pitcher full of water, etc.<sup>196</sup>

7. *Donation*: There also exists the custom of collecting donation (*ferri*) from the spectators usually by the *nāciyā* after the *khemtā*.

8. *Nāciyā*: A boy of seven or eight years of age is usually trained by an ex-*nāciyā* for four or five years. From then, till he is twenty or twenty-five years of age, he continues to perform as a *nāciyā*.

9. *Contest*: *Ālkāp Gān* is also held as a contest between two troupes. In these, each troupe occupies the performance space alternately to present a session. The contesting troupes choose one of a set of conventional pairs of opposing roles (such as Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, Śiva-Durgā, Man-Women, etc.) and debate against each other in lyric.<sup>197</sup>

Scholars are totally uncertain about the origin of *Ālkāp Gān*. Prodyot Ghosh has pointed to Muslim origin on the ground that the word "Ālkāp" has been derived from Arabic (denoting "fun"). He also believes that the Muslims created *Ālkāp Gān* in order to compete against *Gambhīrā Gān* but the music of the latter was influenced by that of the former.<sup>198</sup> Some others credit Tansen, the court musician of Emperor Akbar, for having created the genre.<sup>199</sup> On the other hand, Syed Mustafa Siraj, a reputed author and himself a performer of *Ālkāp Gān* shows that the word "Ālkāp" signifies a play-let of comic humour and it has

been derived from ancient Bāṅglā words "āl" and "kāp" denoting "fun and drollery" and "comic play-let" respectively. He also believes that the origin of the form is linked to the *Gājan* of Śiva, that in earlier times, *chadā* in honour of Śiva was common in *Ālkāp Gān* and that *Gambhīrā Gān* has been derived from *Alkap*.<sup>200</sup>

It is evident that *Ālkāp Gān* and *Saṅg Yātrā* are closely related. Structurally, both the performances contain song-and-dance episodes, *chadā* and humorous skits. The duet and the report of *Gambhīrā Gān* (Maldah) are also quite similar to the duet and the *chadā* of *Ālkāp Gān*. Again, the body stance of the *kāippvā* in *Ālkāp Gān* bears close similarity with that of the male performers of *Saṅg Yātrā*. Even the names are similar: *kāippvā* is also known as *saṅg*. Moreover, there are some similarities in the case of tunes of *Ālkāp Gān* and *Saṅg Yātrā* as well. And if Syed Mustafa Siraj is correct in believing that *Ālkāp Gān* has indeed been derived from the *Gājan* of Śiva and that *Gambhīrā Gān* is a derivative of *Ālkāp Gān*, then there can be no doubt that the two above and *Saṅg Yātrā* have all been derived from the same source.

### 3.7.17 *Ṭāḍī Gān* :

Sometimes in early 1980s, a group of young men at Kalia, Narail, evolved a genre of performance known as the *Ṭāḍī Gān* based on a type of satirical work-song (*Ṭhyās Gān*) sung by farm labourers while reaping paddy. Although it is not strictly 'traditional' or 'folk' performance, nevertheless it deserves attention because it points to one possible direction in which indigenous theatre of Bangladesh can incorporate contemporary issues.

Today (in 1995) *Ṭāḍī Gān* is generally performed in cultural shows organised by the Kalia branch of Bangabandhu Sanskritik Parishad (a cultural organisation) and Narail Sanskritik Parishad (a literary organisation) during festivals such as Durgā Pūjā, Kālī Pūjā, Kārtika Pūjā, Saraswatī Pūjā etc., at various towns and villages, with the objective of creating social consciousness against oppressions and malpractice. The spectators from all classes (specially the working class), all age-groups and all communities attend *Ṭāḍī Gān* performances in large numbers. The performers, all males, belong to Muslim as well as Hindu communities, most of whom are students, unemployed youths and private tutors.

*Ṭāḍī Gān* is usually performed in the evening, in the play-grounds of schools and colleges, other public grounds or in the outer courtyards of rural homesteads. The performance space, a temporary construction, is an elevated platform (some 18" high), square in shape (12' each arm) with an awning at the top which rests on four corner posts. The spectators sit on the ground, on its three sides and a back-drop is hung on the fourth. The troupe is comprised of a *kavīyāl* (the lead-narrator), five musicians (who play *ḍhol*, harmonium, *bāsi*, *do-tārā* and

*juḍi*) and four to six *dohārs* (choral singers). The wind and string instrumentalists, along with some of the *dohārs*, sit in a line along one of the arms of the platform which runs perpendicular to the back-drop; the percussionists with the other *dohārs*, sit in a line along the opposite arm. The *kaviyāl* performs in the space between them (fig. 89). Sometimes the musicians and choral singers also sit in a semi-circle. All the performers are dressed in white *pājāmās* and white *pāñjābis*.

*Ṭāḍi Gān* texts are short pieces composed in prosometric narrative form by the *kaviyāl* Tulu Ali Gazi (aged 28) himself. The themes of these pieces usually are the ideals of the Liberation War, various oppressions on the rural society and various malpractice of both rural and urban societies. A text on dowry, for example, shows how a large amount of money as dowry plays the most important role in a marriage, how, in order to arrange for the money, the father of the bride has to sell all his possessions but still fails to fulfil all conditions, and finally, how the marriage breaks up at the last moment or how the newly-wed bride, subjected to daily oppression by the in-laws, decides to commit suicide.

A *Ṭāḍi Gān* performance begins with a musical overture ("concert") played by the musicians. It is followed by a brief *bandanā*, after which the performers present a number of texts, each on a different issue. These, which constitute the main body of performance, are comprised of the following elements:

1. *Narrative performance in verse*: Performance of each text opens with a brief introduction in rhymed metrical verse, rendered by the *kaviyāl*.
2. *Narrative performance in prose and lyric*: The *kaviyāl* sings, with choral and musical accompaniment, the events as well as the speech of the characters. In between the songs he adds explanatory comments in prose and also links the speech of different characters in prose. Often one of the choral members also respond to the *kaviyāl* with a brief question or a remark. The songs are usually rendered in popular tunes such as that of *kīrtan*.

The performance, which usually lasts from about an hour to ninety minutes, ends with a song which introduces all the performers to the spectators and pays salutation to the them. 204

### 3.8 Tales Related to Other Deities and Hybrid Performances

#### 3.8.1 *Pācālī*:

Popular all over Bangladesh, specially among the "low" caste Hindus, is a genre of religious performance known as *Pācālī*. It is usually performed with the objective of propitiating various gods and goddess, such as Maṅgala Candī (for recovery of lost articles or

deliverance from danger and difficulties), Lakṣmī (for ensuring the blessing of the goddesses of fortune), Śani (for ensuring that the evil eye of the god of ruins is averted), Bipattāriṇī or Bhagavatī (for deliverance from adversity), Satyanārāyaṇa (for recovery of lost articles) etc. The performances are given on the following days and time:

1. Lakṣmī - Thursdays of bright fortnights, in the evening and hours immediately prior to and after.
2. Maṅgala Caṇḍī - Sundays, in the evening.
3. Bipattāriṇī or Bhagavatī - Saturdays or Tuesdays, in the evening.
4. Śani - Saturdays of dark fortnight, in the evening.
5. Satyanārāyaṇa - any day, in the evening or at night.

The duration of performance is usually about an hour.

*Ṣācālī* is generally performed in the inner courtyards of rural homesteads or even indoor. The performers sit in a semicircle with the *ṣācālīkār* (lead-narrator) in the centre, flanked by the *pāl* (orchestra-cum-choral singers) who play *khol*, *kartāl*, *khañjani* and harmonium and also sing choral refrain. In front of the *ṣācālīkār* stands a low stool (*āsan*) on which is placed a picture of the deity (in whose honour the performance is given), decked with flowers and garlands. Ritual articles and offerings of food are placed in front of the *āsan*. These vary from deity to deity, but a pitcher filled with water, decorated with ritual signs and covered with mango or mameelos leaves, is common to all (fig. 90). The performers are all dressed in *dhoti*, *pāñjābi* and wear *tilak* (sectarian mark) on their fore-heads. The *ṣācālīkār* also wears a *nāmābali cādar*.

Ritualised worship of the deity is offered prior to performance. It begins with a song invoking his/her presence, followed by *bandanā* addressed to other deities, the four directions, the preceptors and the parents of the *ṣācālīkār* and sometimes even the musical instruments. Thereafter, the *ṣācālīkār* speaks on the objective and the efficacy of the performance. The main body follows next, in which a narrative eulogising the deity (in whose honour the performance is held) is performed. Composed in rhymed metrical verse, it recounts how an ardent devotee, passing through misfortune, was finally delivered by the deity and as a result, his/her ritualised worship gained wide popularity. The narrative is rendered by the *ṣācālīkār* in lyric, accompanied by choral refrain and orchestral music. Sometimes, a musician-cum-choral singer may ask a question and request for elaboration or explanation. In such circumstances the *ṣācālīkār* explains parts of the narrative in improvised prose, adding references and comments. The performance ends with ululation



from the female spectators and distribution of *prasād* (food-offerings made to the deity). *Ṣācālī* is entirely a recitative performance.

Finally, it should be noted that a narrative on Behulā-Lakṣmīndar is also known to have been performed in the region of greater Comilla till recent past. Also known as *Ṣācālī* and given in a space similar to that described above, the *ṣācālīkār* of Behulā-Lakṣmīndar narrative used to perform standing and the chorus-cum-orchestra used to be seated on the periphery of circular space in the same manner as described above.<sup>202</sup>

### 3.8.2 Performances of the Santhals :

Mostly in the districts of Nawabganj (in greater Rajshahi) and Dinajpur, and also in the districts of Rangpur and Bogra, there live the Santhal tribals who are proto-Australoid by racial origin and animists by faith. Having their largest concentration in the Medinipore district (West Bengal, India), the Santhals have been living in the above mentioned districts of what today is Bangladesh since 1870s. There exist a number of performance genres among the Santhals, of which important for this study is that based on their cosmogony.

According to Santhal cosmogony, in the beginning there was only water and the earth lay under water. The Crab, the Earth-worm, the Tortoise, the Crocodile, the Sheat fish and the Lobster lived in the water. Desirous of creating Man, Jiu the Creator shaped a pair of human forms with earth but before he could give life, the sinister horse Sānsādom devoured them. Jiu was grief-stricken and so he created a pair of ducks instead. The pair floated over water and finally grew tired. So they requested Jiu to create a resting place. He sent the Crocodile to fetch earth from under water. The latter attempted, but before it could carry it above, all the earth dissolved in the water. Thereupon Jiu sent the Crab and the Sheat fish but they too failed. Finally he sent the Earth-worm. With the help of the Tortoise, it succeeded and built a land-mass. Soon grass grew on the land, the duck laid an egg and from it were born a man and a woman.

The performance of cosmogony, known as *Jāher*, is given on various Santhal festivals, such as the Bāhā (the Festival of Flower) and the Manasār Bhāsān (held in honour of goddess Manasā). It is also performed in honour of the dead, for solace of the dying and for the well-being of members of a family united after long separation. The performance space, known as *Jāher-sthān*, may be square (6 feet each arm) or rectangular (6' x 4') in shape and is non-elevated. Four corner posts support a flat roof on top which is made of hay. A bow and an arrow are placed at the centre of the eastern arm. The spectators sit on all four sides of the *Jāher-sthān*. The performers, about twenty in number, comprise of a male lead-narrator (usually an elderly person well-versed in the cosmogony), about three male musicians (who

play two *mādals* and a *nākāra*) and about sixteen male and female choral singers-cum-dancers. All the male performers are dressed in *dhotis* and vests and the female performers in *saris*. During performance a priest sits at the centre of the *Jāher-sthān*, facing east, performing rituals and casting *śāl* flowers on the bow and arrow. The performance is comprised of the following elements:

1. *Narrative performance in lyric*, in which all the performers dance around the *Jāher-sthān* as the lead-narrator sings the narrative along with choral and musical accompaniment of the rest.
2. *Narrative performance in prose*, in which all the performers remain standing as the lead-narrator explains the lyrical passages in prose.

*Jāher* is always given in the day-time, beginning around noon and ending by evening.<sup>203</sup>

### 3.8.3 *Kavi Gān* :

A popular form of debating contest between two professional minstrels (*kaviyāl* or *sarkār*) who create their argument in extempore verse and lyric, with musical and choral accompaniment, is known as *Kavi Gān*. The genre is popular all over Bangladesh but the regions where it has flourished most are greater Mymensingh, Jessore, Faridpur and Khulna. It is usually performed during *pūjā* celebrations and in the *melās* (village fairs), with the objective of providing entertainment based on popular interest in deliberation on important social and religious issues. Mostly sponsored collectively by committees which organise public *pūjā* celebrations (comprised of Hindus only) or village fairs (comprised of both Hindus and Muslims), *Kavi Gān* is performed during nine months from Āsvin to Āṣāḍh by Hindu as well as Muslim performers. The troupe of Matilāl Sarkār (from Chandkathi village under Swarupkathi police station in Pirojpur district) is comprised of seven performers including himself, all of whom are Hindus by faith. When not performing, they are all engaged in farming. Matilāl Sarkār traces his lineage of preceptors back to Bholā Mayrā (end 18th c. to early 19th c.), the famous performer of *Kavi Gān* from Calcutta. His lineage is as follows: 1. Bholā Mayrā, 2. Tārak Ğosāi (Lohagara, Laksmipasha, Narail), 3. Manohar Sarkār (Gopalganj, Faridpur), 4. Niśikanta Sarkār, (Bhairabnagar, Faridpur), 5. Rājendranāth Sarkār (Kotalipara, Faridpur), 6. Matilāl Sarkār.

*Kavi Gān* is usually performed by Matilāl Sarkār in temple courtyards, *nāt-maṇḍapas* adjacent to temples, ground in front of public *pūjā* pavilions, fair grounds or other public grounds. The performance space (other than that of *nāt-maṇḍapas*) is a temporarily constructed platform, square in shape (some 12 feet each arm) and elevated (to a height of about two and a half feet). On its four corners stand four bamboo posts to support the

awning on top. A ramp runs down from the side opposite to that facing the *pūjā* pavilion (or from any side if the performance is given at a space other than that in front of a temple and *pūjā* pavilion). On the two sides which are perpendicular to the ramp side sit the choral singers-cum-musicians (*dohārs*): *ḍhol* and *kāsi* on one side and harmonium, violin, *do-tārā* and *ḍāsi* on the other. The *sarkār* performs in the space between the two rows of *dohārs*. When one of the troupes is performing, the other waits nearby, outside the performance space; the spectators sit all around it (fig. 91). All male performers are dressed in *dhotis* and *pāñjābis* (if they are Hindus) or *pāñjāmās* and *pāñjābis* (if they are Muslims). Female performers (usually only the *sarkārs*) are dressed in *saris*.

*Kavi Gān* performances are given in the afternoon and evening (from around 2 pm to 10 pm) or at night (from around 10 pm to day-break). A performance is held as a contest between two *sarkārs* and their troupes. In each performance, the *sarkārs* assume any one of a number of conventionally accepted pairs of roles and debate with each other on the issues they represent. Some of the pairs of roles are as follows:

1. *Hindu-Musalmān* (Hindu-Muslim)
2. *Nārī-Puruṣ* (Woman-Man)
3. *Sākār-Nirākār* (Idolatry-Incorporeal form of worship)
4. *Śākta-Vaiṣṇava* (Follower of Śaktism-Vaiṣṇavite)
5. *Darsan-Vijñān* (Philosophy-Science).

Thus, in a performance, the contesting *sarkārs* may assume the roles of Hindu and Muslim (regardless of their personal faith) and debate with each other from their respective points of view. The issue to be debated in a given performance is determined by the organising committee and the spectators. The roles are determined by the committee with mutual consent of the *sarkārs*.

A performance is composed of a number of sessions given alternately by both the troupes. Each session is composed of all or some of the following parts:

1. *Dāk*: Both the troupes open their performance with salutation songs known as *dāk*, rendered in honour of Śākta deities. Sometimes salutation is also offered to Kṛṣṇa. Some troupes specially the Muslims, also offer salutations to Allah, the Prophet, other prophets and *pīrs*. Sung in the first session of each troupe without the *sarkār*, *dāk* is pre-composed (usually by the *sarkār* himself).
2. *Mālsī*: Akin to *dāk*, *mālsī* is a lyrical composition in which salutation is paid again to the Śākta deities. It is rendered immediately after the *dāk* by each troupe in their first session, also without the *sarkār*. The *mālsī* is also pre-composed but longer in length.

Characteristically, *mālsī* is rendered either as a complaint to, or as an eulogy of, the Śākta deities, with particular reference to a recent event of considerable importance. (Photograph 150.)

3. *Sakhī-saṁvād*: It is a brief exchange of argument between two troupes on the theme of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. In it, the first troupe to take the floor advocates for Rādhā and poses questions in lyric (*cāpān*) in its first session. The contesting troupe, in its first session, advocates for Kṛṣṇa and presents answers to the questions posed (*jawāb*), corrects mistakes in the question of the former or finds faults with their view (*kāṭni*) and poses counter questions (*cāpān*). The first troupe in its second session, rounds up the argument with its *jawāb* and *kāṭni*. The reason for the argument between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa is often is the latter's prolonged absence from Vṛndāvana after his departure for Mathurā.

4. *Kavi*: Another exchange between the two contesting troupes, this time on any contemporary issue and secular theme. In it also the first troupe to take the floor poses its *cāpān* in its first session. The contesting troupe, in its first session, presents *jawāb*, *kāṭni* and counter *cāpān*. The first troupe, in its second session, rounds up the argument with its *jawāb* and *kāṭni*.

5. *Ṭappā*: Contest proper commences with the *ṭappā*. In it the *sarkārs* of the contesting troupes, in their respective roles of the debate, render the synopsis of their argument in lyric. The *sarkārs* compose their argument in extempore as the *dohārs* play music, sitting in their positions. The first troupe to take the floor opens the debate in the first session by posing questions (*cāpān*) in its *ṭappā*. The rival troupe, in its first session, tenders reply (*jawāb*) in its *ṭappā*. In rest of the sessions of both the troupes, counter argument (*kāṭni*) is presented in their respective *ṭappās*. (Photograph 152.)

6. *Ṣācālī*: In it the *sarkārs* elaborate the argument placed in the *ṭappā*, in the form of extempore verse composed in *paṅcā* (couplets) or *tripadī* (triplets). In the first session of the first troupe, its *sarkār* presents his/her questions (*cāpān*). In the first session of the rival troupe, its *sarkār* tenders reply to the questions posed (*jawāb*). In rest of the sessions, the *sarkārs* of both the troupes present counter argument (*kāṭni*). (Photograph 151.)

7. *Dhūā-gān*: Pre-composed lyrical pieces, known as *dhūā-gān* are rendered between *ṣācālī* recitations of order to break the monotony of the latter (*ṣācālī* recitations). These self-contained songs may or many not be related to the argument posed by the *sarkārs* but are extremely popular among the spectators.

8. *Goṣṭha Milan*: It is the final session in which both the *sarkārs* and their troupes occupy the performance space together and resolve their differences.

In brief, the following is the scheme in which *Kāvī Gān* is performed:

	<i>Troupe 1</i>	<i>Troupe 2</i>
<i>Session 1</i>	<i>Ḍāk. Mālsī.</i> <i>Sakhī-samvād (cāpān)</i> <i>Kāvī (cāpān),</i> <i>Ṭappā (cāpān)</i> <i>Ṣācālī (cāpān)</i> <i>Dhūā-gān</i>	<i>Ḍāk. Mālsī.</i> <i>Sakhī-samvād (jawāb, kāṭni, cāpān)</i> <i>Kāvī (jawāb, kāṭni cāpān)</i> <i>Ṭappā (jawāb)</i> <i>Ṣācālī (jawāb)</i> <i>Dhūā-gān</i>
<i>Session 2</i>	<i>Sakhī-samvād (jawāb, kāṭni)</i> <i>Kāvī (jawāb, kāṭni)</i> <i>Ṭappā (kāṭni)</i> <i>Ṣācālī (kāṭni)</i> <i>Dhūā-gān</i>	<i>Ṭappā (kāṭni)</i> <i>Ṣācālī (kāṭni)</i> <i>Dhūā-gān</i>
<i>Session 3</i> <i>to the</i> <i>penultimate</i> <i>session</i>	<i>Ṭappā (kāṭni)</i> <i>Ṣācālī (kāṭni)</i> <i>Dhūā-gān</i>	<i>Ṭappā (kāṭni)</i> <i>Ṣācālī (kāṭni)</i> <i>Dhūā-gān</i>
<i>Final session</i>	<i>Goṣṭha Milan</i>	

Some of the salient features of *Kāvī Gān* performance :

1. The entire performance is rendered in lyric and verse. There is no dance.
2. There is no narrative content.
3. Sometimes the lyrical passages are composed by a separate member of the troupe who is known as the *bādhandār*.
4. The performers do not collect donations from the spectators.<sup>204</sup>

During mid-18th century, a form of erotic *Kāvī Gān* commonly known as *Kheur*, came to be highly popular in and around Shantipur, West Bengal. Also popular in West Bengal was the *Tarjā*, another form of *Kāvī Gān* in which the debate between two troupes focused on popular riddles. *Ḍādākāvī*, another 18th century variant of *Kāvī Gān*, was also a form of lyrical debate in which the songs were pre-composed. Still another form of debating contest of professional minstrels popular in Bangladesh even today is *Bicār Gān*, in which the debate focuses on Sufi mysticism. The famous minstrel Rameś Śīl (1877-1964) from Chittagong, is credited for incorporating Marxist socio-political analysis in *Kāvī Gān* by introducing debate on issues such as "Capitalism-Socialism", "War-Peace", "Bourgeois Literature-Proletarian Literature", etc.<sup>207</sup>

### 3.8.4 *Putul Nāc* and *Putul Yātrā* :

Performance of string puppets, known as *Putul Nāc*, is highly popular all over Bangladesh. It is sponsored entirely for secular entertainment by affluent individuals of the rural community (Hindus as well as Muslims) on occasions such as marriage, *ākikā* (naming ceremony of Muslim children), *Durgā Pūjā*, *Kālī Pūjā* etc. It is also performed as a public performance on sale of tickets at village fairs held on religious as well as seasonal festivals and at seasonal fairs held in the urban areas (such as the *Baiśākhī Mēlā* at Feni and Srimangal, *Vijay Mēlā* at Chittagong, Rangamati and Rangunia and *Meena Bazar* in Dhaka). Of late it is also being sponsored by government agencies for creating mass awareness on family planning. Spectators from all age-groups, all religious communities and both the sexes witness *Putul Nāc* performances. The usual performance season for the genre is from the month of *Kārtika* to the month of *Jaiṣṭhya*.

Brahmanbaria is the most renowned centre of *Putul Nāc* in Bangladesh, where a number of companies are based. A company is usually comprised of one puppeteer, three to six musicians (who play harmonium, *ḅāyā-tablā*, congo drums, flute, violin, *kartāl* and *khol*) and one to four female dancers. The number of musicians may increase and additional instruments such as clarinet may also be included if the sponsor desires. Most of the performers of puppet theatre companies in Bangladesh are Muslims by faith. Helu Mian (Helaluddin, aged 35), the proprietor and puppeteer of *Vāṇivīṇā Putul Nāc Company* from north Madhyapara, Brahmanbaria, is also a professional *tablā* player and a shopkeeper. He inherited the company from his father Phul Mian who was also a puppeteer. The latter, in his turn, had inherited the same from his brother Tara Mian, who too was puppeteer. The harmonium player of the company is Kabir Hosain (a Muslim, aged 38), who is also a *kāvāl* (a singer who performs *kāvālī* songs) and occasional trader of fruits. The rest of the musicians are all under 35 years of age and Muslims by faith. One of them trades *muḍī* (fluffed rice), another is a full-time professional musician and two others are members of professional *Yātrā* companies. Shahana (aged 10), the lone dancer of the company is a student. Nazrul Islam, the proprietor and puppeteer of *Campā Putul Nāc Company* (Shabujbag, Brahmanbaria and the younger brother of a renowned puppeteer of Bangladesh named Dhan Mian), is also an electrician by profession. Members of his company are all Muslims by faith and are also engaged in various trades in the town of Brahmanbaria.

*Putul Nāc* is performed in a temporarily constructed miniature proscenium stage, with opening of about 4 feet 6 inches to 7 feet 6 inches, height of about 2 feet 6 inches to 4 feet 6 inches and depth of about 2 feet to 2 feet 6 inches (fig. 92). The stage is raised to a height of

about 2 to 3 feet from the ground. The puppeteer stands behind a black back-drop and operates the puppets from above (photograph 155). He has a whistle made of leaf attached to his lips. By convention, the sound of the whistle stands for the "words" spoken by the puppets. The female dancers perform their numbers on the floor in front of the stage and the musicians sit on one of the sides. Sometimes, if the space is small, the harmonium player sits on one side of the dance floor and the rest of the musicians on the other. If the auditorium is large, the dance floor and the orchestra space may be raised to a height of about 1 foot 6 inches (photograph 154). The harmonium player (usually called the harmonium "master") sings the songs and also performs the role of the *hatāl* who speaks to the puppets and interprets for the spectators the meaning of their response provided by the puppeteer's whistle. Sometimes, other members of the orchestra may also perform the role of *hatāl*. The female dancers perform brief song-and-dance numbers in the beginning, in between and/or at the end of performance of the puppets. There is no specific dress for the musicians, who may wear *lungi*, *pājāmā* or trousers with *pāñjābi* or shirt. The female dancers are dressed voluptuously in tight-fitting *pājāmā*, slacks or *sari* with a blouse. The spectators witness the performance sitting opposite the dance floor: on hay-strewn ground in front and chairs at the back. For public performances, the entire auditorium is enclosed and covered.

The duration of a performance of *Putul Nāc* varies from half an hour to about three hours. It may be given in the morning, afternoon, evening or late at night. The public performances at village fairs are given continuously, from about eleven in the morning to about one or two at night, with brief intervals in between. A performance commences with a brief musical overture, followed by a scene in which the major characters are introduced. It is followed by one or two dance numbers given by the puppets, accompanied by popular Bānglā or Hindi film songs sung by the harmonium "master" and music played by the orchestra. There follows a series of short episodes, each composed of one or two scenes. Usually a performance ends with an episode titled *Rādhā-Kṛṣṇer Yugal-milan*.

*Putul Nāc* episodes are composed orally. It is structured mostly in dialogue (rendered by the *hatāl* during performance) interspersed with a few lyrical passages (also rendered by the *hatāl*). The dialogic sections are mostly improvised on the spot, based on plots structured in advance; the tunes of lyrical passages are mostly taken from popular folk or film songs. Skits are based on popular folk-lore; the episodes on Rāma and Kṛṣṇa are based on well known stories. There may also be episodes based on historical or social events. When sponsored by individuals, specific stories, plays or tales may also be performed by the company on request.

Performances of *Putul Nāc* are composed of the following elements:

1. *Dialogic performance in prose*: The puppeteer responds for the puppets by whistling. All the dialogue is rendered usually by the *hatāl*. Sometimes, other members of the orchestra may also join in to oppose what the puppet or the *hatāl* says, and thereby create comic effect.
2. *Dialogic performance in lyric*: At a few points, the puppets render parts of their dialogue in lyric. These passages are always sung by the harmonium "master", along with music played by the orchestra. All the lyrical passages are accompanied by dance of the puppets.
3. *Narrative performance in lyric*: Brief lyrical passages are rendered by the harmonium "master" accompanied by music played by the orchestra, which serve to describe an action.
4. *Song-and-dance numbers*: Isolated dance numbers are performed both by the puppets and the female dancers. The dance rendered by the puppets (known as *baijī putul*) are sung by the harmonium "master" with musical accompaniment of the orchestra. Those rendered by the dancers are mostly rendered by the harmonium "master" with orchestral accompaniment, but may also be sung by the dancers themselves. All the songs sung are well-known and popular, mostly from Bāṅglā and Hindi films and are based on the theme of love. The dance is extremely sensuous and erotic.

Only string puppets are known to exist in Bangladesh. Their size vary from nine to eighteen inches. But on rare occasions, twenty-four-inch long puppets are also used. The larger types are usually the *baiji putul* (danseuse puppets), which are operated with eight to twelve strings. When twelve strings are used, they are attached to the following parts of the body and dress: two on two sides of *ghāgrā* or *sari*, three to the waist (two on two sides and one at the back), one to the naval, one to the chest, one to the neck, one to each hand and two additional strings for special manipulation. These strings are operated with a cross-piece which is joined to a rod held by the puppeteer. The smaller puppets are operated with two strings, attached to the waist and the neck and tied to two ends of a small rod about six inches in length. Usually only one of the larger puppets can be operated on stage at a time, whereas two to three of the smaller ones can be simultaneously operated. Where a group is required to perform, as in the episode titled *Rādhā-Kṛṣṇer Yugal-milan*, they are operated with two strings each, all of which are attached to a malleable rod (usually rattan). The rod is bent to form two rows or a circle, as and when required. The puppets are usually made to appear from and exit to off-stage areas on the right and the left, but for special effects, entries are also effected from the top.



The basic frame of the bodies of puppets (from waist upwards) is made of sponge-wood or wood. These are coated at first with clay mixed with cow-dung, then with a layer of fine fabric soaked in glue, and finally with another layer of clay mixed with cow-dung, after each layer dries. Then the heads, the torso, the necks and the hands of human puppets and the whole body of animals are painted. The human puppets are dressed colourfully in a manner so as to conceal the feet. Of the animals, horses, crocodiles, monkeys, tigers and snakes are common. Sometimes ogres (photograph 153), demons and peacocks are also seen. Props such as axe, plough, machete, *bīn-bāsi*, violin and boat are also used by the puppets. A company can be expected to possess as many as forty to sixty puppets in total.

Some other important features of *Putul Nāc* performance:

1. Female dancer: The presence of female dancer is common to all *Putul Nāc* performances.
2. Comic element: Almost all the episodes of *Putul Nāc* performances are rendered in light-hearted comic tone.
3. Use of microphone: It is common for the harmonium "master" to use a microphone. All the songs and all his words in the role of *hatāl* is amplified over speakers which are also positioned outside the auditorium for attracting spectators.
4. *Bandana*: No *bandanā* was rendered in all the performances witnessed so far and no puppeteer reported of its rendition in all the interviews taken. But according to Abdul Hafiz, *bandanā* is rendered in *Putul Nāc* performance.<sup>208</sup>

#### *Putul Yātrā*

In the region of greater Faridpur, *Yātrā* type of performances are given with large string puppets. Some of the texts which are known to be performed are *Rūpbān*, *Gunāi Bibi*, *Sāgar Bhāsā*, *Saiful Muluk-Badnujamāl*, *Kamalā Rānir Banabās*, *Ekti Patsā* etc. According to Mahjush, a musician of Vāñivīnā *Putul Nāc* Company, the puppets are operated with audio cassette recordings of the above texts. In these performances, the *hatāls* play no part.<sup>209</sup>

#### **3.8.5 *Lāṭhi-khelā* :**

A very popular form of martial art in Bangladesh is the *Lāṭhi-khelā* which has quite a long tradition of its own. Specially during the British rule, local *zamindars* (land lords) for whom retaining an army was against the law, resorted to maintaining *lāṭhiāl bāhinī*, i.e., men equipped with stout bamboo staves. Fierce and dauntless, the members of the *lāṭhiāl bāhinī* could achieve wonders with their intricate stick-work. Even today, influential quarters of

rural areas, specially in the distant *cars* (strips of land rising out of the bed of a river or sea) are known to engage *lāṭhiāl bāhinī* to forcibly occupy newly risen land. The tradition of martial art continues outside the periphery of battles and blood-shed in performances known as *Lāṭhi-khelā* which can be seen all over Bangladesh. It is performed during Muharram celebrations in Ashtagram (eastern Mymensingh) as well as various parts of north Bengal. That of the latter is visually spectacular as it is given in fair-grounds illuminated by torches.<sup>210</sup> In Khulna region the performance is specially interesting for it involves, beside skill in stick-work and foot-work, enactment of brief episodes, thus enriching performance value. According to Afzal Hosain, a skilled performer of *Lāṭhi-khelā* from Bishnupur, the enactment of episodes were added in the performance of Khulna region some sixty years ago.

The performance space of *Lāṭhi-khelā* (fig. 93) is a large and flat field, some fifty to hundred feet a side, bounded by bamboo poles beyond which the spectators sit. In the centre of one of the sides sits the lone musician on the ground who plays rhythm on *thālā-bāḍya*, an instrument producing sharp and deafening sound. The performers (*kheḍuāl* or *kheḍu*, i.e., "player"), wear *lungi* or *sari* wrapped around their hips, white vests and ankle-bells. Sometimes they also wear shorts and caps. The staff they perform with is made of bamboo, about three feet in length and less than 3/4" in diameter.

A performance of *Lāṭhi-khelā* begins as the *kheḍuāls*, some fifteen in number, enter the performance space in a single file, led by the leader and accompanied by the music of *thālā-bāḍya*. Their first act is to pay respect to the ground by touching it with their right hands and then kissing the same. The file proceeds to the centre where they form a tight circle, then kneel on their right legs by extending the left backward and bend their torso to the ground with their right palms over their mouths and left hands over their backs. Thus placed, the members of the group utter a sharp battle-cry by rhythmic patting of the palm over the mouth. Next the group performs a salutation dance to the spectators as they move in a circle and offer *sālām* and *namaskār* to the Muslims and the Hindus respectively. There follows a series of brief non-verbal episodes, each preceded by a short dialogue between the leader and his assistant. The dialogue is a way of announcing to the spectators, as well as preparing the performers, as to which episode will be performed next. All episodes are accompanied by rhythm played on the *thālā-bāḍya*. The performance ends with another salutation dance and then the *kheḍuāls* move out of the space in a single file.

Two types of episodes are performed in *Lāṭhi-khelā*: (i) martial art exercises and (ii) enactment of various incidents. The martial art exercises display different skills related to stick-work and foot-work. Few examples commonly seen are *ādāi-bāḍi* (two-and-a-half

strokes), *pañc-bāḍī* (five strokes), *āṣṭ-bāḍī* (eight strokes), *bāro-bāḍī* (twelve strokes), *āṭhāro-bāḍī* (eighteen strokes), *batris-bāḍī* (thirty-two strokes), *joḍā-bāḍī* (with two staves carried by each performer) etc. These are all executed in group dance of circular composition. On the other hand, the enactment of various incidents involves particular use of staff and body to represent brief events drawn from daily life experience, is accompanied by dance-movement and is also non-verbal. The following are a few examples.

1. *Monkey drinking water:* The group-members, on their hands and knees, form a circle and perform movement of crabs. A lone performer enacting a monkey, enters the circle to drink water. A crab grabs one of his legs. There ensues a struggle at the end of which the monkey is over-powered.
2. *Pigeons pecking grains:* The group-members, each holding a staff in their hands and sitting on their haunches, create a circle facing the spectators. Thus positioned, they illustrate pigeons pecking grains from the ground with the help of their staves (photograph 156).
3. *Harvesting of paddy:* Part of the group enacts harvesting of paddy. Soon, others attack the harvesters. A battle ensues in which one of the harvesters is killed.
4. *Boat race:* The group sits on the ground in a straight line, with their legs extended forward and locked to the one in front. Thus positioned, the members of the group mime rowing a boat. The rear-most member of the group rises, and with his legs spread, he moves over the others as he cheers them on. As soon as he sits in front of the line, another follows the same movement from the back to the front, thus simulating forward motion of the boat. In another variation, the group enacts the same event on feet, each rowing a staff like an oar and moving forward. A performer with a tiger-mask, enacts a tiger roaring at the oars-men. The boat capsizes, a man drowns, others abandon the boat to rescue him and carry him ashore.
5. *Deer hunting:* A man goes to the forest with his daughter (one of the performers dressed as a woman) to hunt deer. He sees a group of deer and kills one. A tiger appears and runs off with the deer killed by the hunter. (Photograph 159.)
6. *The crow and a water pitcher:* A performer, with his head covered with a *gāṃchā*, operates a frame-work of bamboo-slip under the *gāṃchā* to simulate movement of a crow's beak. The crow drinks water from a pitcher balanced on the head of another performer (photograph 157).
7. *Thief in the paddy-field:* Two performers mime reaping of paddy from a field. At the end, they carry off of sacks filled with paddy, shown with the help of double-somersault.

8. *The Mukti Bāhini fighting against Pakistani troops*: Two groups enact two columns of troops: one, of the Mukti Bāhini (the freedom fighters in the Liberation War, 1971) and the other, of the Pakistanis. A battle ensues, in which the performers use their staves as guns. Finally, the Pakistanis are beaten as the crowd cheers (photograph 158).

*Lāṭhi-khelā* performances are composed of the following elements: (i) the mimetic (enactment of the episodes) and (ii) the dialogic in prose (of the leader and his assistant).

Performance of *Lāṭhi-khelā* can also be organised as a competition between three or four groups. A jury selected from amongst the spectators adjudges the best group and gives prizes (often brass pitchers). The *kheḍuāls* are mostly farmers by profession. Instead of appearance fee, they prefer to be invited to a sumptuous feast. At times, they also expect to be awarded small sums of money by the spectators during a scene which involves special skill as well as ingenuity. Performances are mostly given during the months of Phālgun, Caitra and Baiśākh, as entertainment during public festivals or private celebrations (such as Pūjā, fairs, weddings, birthdays, arrival of special guest at home, etc.). It can be performed in the morning, afternoon or at night (that of the latter lit by "petromax" lanterns). The duration of a performance varies from three to twelve hours. The physique of the performers are worth noting: Pācu from Choto Bishnupur village and Mamtazuddin from Bishnupur village under Bagerhat police station and district are still in excellent shape and physical fitness although they are 85 and 75 years of age, respectively. It is usual for the performers to train from early age.<sup>211</sup>

### 3.8.6 *Paṭuā Gān* :

In the regions of Mymensingh, Sylhet, Comilla, Dhaka and Jessore, itinerant performers travelling from door to door in the rural areas were well-known till recently for their performance which comprised of narrative recitation with visually illustrated scroll paintings. Popularly known as *Paṭuā Gān*, the performance is on the verge of extinction in Bangladesh today.

Two types of scrolls are known to have existed in Bengal: *jaḍāno paṭ* (wrapped scroll-painting) and *cauka paṭ* (square-shaped scroll-painting). Single-framed, often square in shape (12"×12") and self-contained, the *cauka paṭ* gained ascendancy in Calcutta in the 19th century and are generally known as "Kālighāt Paṭ".<sup>212</sup> On the other hand, *jaḍāno paṭ* can be as long as 12 to 16 feet (sometimes even over 35 feet) and are usually about 2 to 3 feet wide.<sup>213</sup> Separate panels illustrating a narrative are painted horizontally one after the other, which are arranged in horizontal rows one below the other. Attached to two rollers at the two ends, the scrolls are rolled and hence the name *jaḍāno paṭ*. It is this wrapped type of

scroll which is generally used for *Paṭuā Gān* performance. Traditionally, these scrolls are made of cotton fabric, paper or jute hessian on which vegetable dye and mineral extract mixed with tamarind seed or marmelos juice is applied. At present, chemical paint is more commonly used. The most renowned centre for scroll painting in Bangladesh has been Mymensingh.

Two wrapped scrolls in the collection of the Museum of Folk Arts and Crafts, Sonargaon, titled *Rājā Hariścandra* (Mymensingh, 20th century) and *Śrībatsa Rājā* (Mymensingh, 20th century), exhibit rudimentary effect of perspective combined with figures portrayed with effective lines and attractive colours. On the other hand, a rectangular scroll titled *Gāzīr Paṭ* (Mymensingh, 20th c.), also a collection of the above museum, has been painted without any attempt at perspective effect. Beside the above, scrolls titled *Lakṣmīndar O Behulār Paṭ* and *Rāmāyaṇa Paṭ* (collection of Museum of Folk Arts and Crafts, Sonargaon), *Gāzīr Paṭ* (collection of Bangla Academy, Dhaka) etc., are a few examples of a long drawn heritage of Bangladesh.<sup>214</sup>

The narratives of *Paṭuā Gān* are based on legends related to Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, Behulā-Lakṣmīndar, Rāma-Sītā, Nimāi (Caitanya) and Pīr Gāzī. Although written texts of *Paṭuā Gān* have been published,<sup>215</sup> the performers learn them orally. These are short pieces in rhymed metrical verse which recount briefly various incidents related to the myths and legends associated with the deities and legendary figures mentioned above. To these, brief comments on proper conduct and pious life may be added, also in rhymed metrical verse. Moreover, the narrator may add his own explanations in improvised prose speech.

A performance of *Paṭuā Gān* is often given as a promised offering to a deity on fulfilment of a desired objective or when dangers and difficulties befalling a family member are overcome. Itinerant performers may also visit rural homesteads and give unscheduled performances, witnessing which are deemed by the devotees as an act of piety. It is customary to pay the performers some money or offer food grains. Usually the performance is given in the courtyard, at one end of which stands the lead-narrator with the scroll and the spectators gather in front of him. In some cases where the scrolls are shorter than eight feet, its top-end roller is hung on to a thin bamboo pole which the narrator holds with one hand (photograph 160). In other cases, where the scrolls is longer than eight feet, it is unrolled and placed on a small and collapsible bamboo stand with four legs. The narrator picks up the roller at the top end with one of his hands and rolls the scroll as he proceeds.<sup>216</sup> In his other hand, the narrator holds a pointer with which he points the illustrations one after the other. Concurrently he sings or recites his narrative in verse and sometimes also explains in prose speech. Usually the narrator also dances to the rhythm of music played by the choral singers (*dohārs*). The number of the latter may vary from one to seven and beside singing

the refrain, some of them also play *juḍi*, *caṭi* and *ḍhol*. They may stand beside the narrator or sit on two sides of the scroll (fig. 94). The costume of the narrator is usually *pāñjābi* and *pāñāmā* (for performers of *Paṭuā Gān* on *Gāzī Pīr* which is known as *Gāzīr Paṭ*) or *dhoti* and *pāñjābi* (for those related to Hindu mythologies).

A scroll 5'-8" long and 1'-11" wide displayed by the *Gāzīr Paṭ* performer Durjan Ali (aged nearly sixty, from Hajipur village, Narsingdi district), contains a central panel (22" × 17") showing *Gāzī* seated on a tiger, behind him stands *Kālu* holding an umbrella and in front of him stands *Mānik Pīr* holding a banner (photograph 161). In addition, there are four rows of panels above and below the central panel, each row containing three small panels (8"×6"). These depict King *Sikāndār*, goddess *Ganges*, *Monāi Saodāgār*, goddess *Lakṣmī*, a man beating his wife, a man smoking hookah, two wives eating before their husband and more. Perhaps the most interesting panels are those of the bottom row, which shows the mother of *Yāma* in the centre and two of his messengers on two sides (photograph 162). The refrain of Durjan Ali's song ("If you die thus, your mother will weep for a day or two") and the panels of *Yāma* clearly show that *Paṭuā Gān* of Bangladesh is but a derivative of *Yāma Paṭ* of ancient India.<sup>217</sup>

Traditionally, the scroll painters (*paṭuās*) themselves performed *Paṭuā Gān*. According to Khogeskiron Talukdar, they belong to the *paṭuā* and the *nāgārci* communities of Comilla, Sylhet and Mymensingh regions.<sup>218</sup> Rajatananda Dasgupta notes that the *paṭuās* of Bangladesh are Hindus who claim to belong to the Brahminical caste and use the title of "Ācārya".<sup>219</sup> On the other hand, Baridbaran Ghosh believes that the *paṭuās* of West Bengal, India are Muslims who have been forced to gravitate towards Hinduism because of poverty and rebellion against fundamentalism of the Muslims.<sup>220</sup> But according to Asutosh Bhattacharyya, Benoy Ghosh and Wakil Ahmed, the *paṭuās* (of Bangladesh as well as West Bengal) belong neither to the Muslim nor the Hindu community.<sup>221</sup> In the light of disagreement among scholars regarding the religious identity of the *Paṭuā Gān* performers, the following tradition related by Gurusaday Dutt may help to resolve the issue. The tradition ascribes the origin of the *paṭuās* and the *nāgārcis* to descendants of *Visvakarmā* (the divine architect) who were cursed by *Mahādeva* (*Śiva*) to follow Muslim custom and Hindu religion for painting without his permission.<sup>222</sup> Thus it is possible that these communities rebelled against orthodox Brahminical ritualism and gravitated towards casteless Muslim community but at the same time they retained substantial degree of Hindu customs. Today, *Paṭuā Gān* performers, in many cases, are distinct from the scroll painters. According to Durjan Ali the tradition of performing has been in his family for the last seven generations. Currently, his major source of livelihood is small-scale trading of vegetables with which he scrapes through a meagre living. He claims to be a Muslim, and an earnest devotee of *Gāzī*.

His scroll has been painted by Śambhu Acārya, a resident of Kath-patti, Kalindī-para, Munshiganj. For some unexplained reason, Durjan Ali claims to be a *saodāgar* (a merchant, who at earlier times, sailed to distant lands).<sup>223</sup> It is possible that the Brahmins have also been associated with scroll painting and that at least some of the *Paṭuā Gān* performers in Bangladesh (especially those associated with *Gāzīr Paṭ*) have been Muslim devotees of Gāzī Pīr.

End-notes: Chapter Three

1. The following for instance is the synopsis of *Lakṣmīndarar Bibāha* :

Lakṣmīndar is born unto Sanekā (wife of Cānd Saodāgar) at Campaka city and Bipulā unto Sumitrā (wife of Bāco Baṇik) at Ujāni city. Cānd returns home from his disastrous voyage to Laṅkā after many years, having lost all his men and ships, but is happily reunited with his family. Lakṣmīndar is imparted the best of education and he gradually grows up. Still in his teens, Lakṣmīndar unknowingly rapes his own aunt Kauśilyā. The latter reports the matter in confidence to Sanekā, who in turn, informs Cānd Saodāgar. Alarmed at the state of physical desire of his son, Cānd decides to get him married at once to the most virtuous maid. In order to ascertain her virtue, he decides to set a test of boiling lentils made of iron and preparing lentil soup with the help of only three handfuls of sugar-cane leaves. Accordingly he sends his man to black smiths and has a *seer* (slightly under a kilogram) of iron lentils prepared. Then he sets off to visit three merchants. In the house of the first, the maid is one-eyed, in the second, she is haunch-backed and in the third, the maid has rabbit-teeth. Dissatisfied with all that he has seen, Cānd rests under a banyan tree near a lake and thinks of giving up the hopeless task. Padmā (Manasā) and her companion Netā learns of Cānd's frustration and is alarmed, because, in order to fulfil the prophecy of taking the life of Cānd's son, the latter has to be married. So Padmā sends Netā, disguised as a Brahmin's widow, to Bipulā who was playing with her friends. The widow finds a pretext to inform Bipulā that she would surely obtain the ideal husband if she bathes in a lake not far from there. Bipulā sets off with her friends to the lake and there she finds an aged Brahmin woman (also Netā in disguise). The latter finds another pretext to pick up a quarrel with Bipulā which precipitates in a test of virtue of the two women. As per condition of the test, the Brahmin woman dives under water and comes up with ashes and charcoal. On her turn, Bipulā calls for Padmā's help and comes up with *śaṅkha* (bangle made from conch shell) and *sindūr* (vermilion powder), both signs of marriage. As a result, Bipulā is proved to be more virtuous. Padmā's ploy works as Cānd witnesses the test and immediately selects Bipulā as her future daughter-in-law. He learns of the maid's identity and arrives at Bāco Baṇik's residence at Ujāni city. When Cānd expresses his desire, Bāco is hesitant as all of the former's six sons have died because of Padmā's curse. Cānd allays his fear by informing Bāco that Lakṣmīndar was born because of Śiva's blessing. Finally Bāco consents and then Cānd requests him to ask Bipulā to prepare soup with his iron lentils. Bāco rejects his request as absurd but Cānd insists that he ask his daughter. Bāco is forced to comply and much to his surprise, Bipulā agrees. She begins to cook the lentils but they are not boiled. In desperation, she asks for Padmā's help and the goddess sends Anāl, the god of fire and has the lentils boiled. Cānd is immensely pleased and fully satisfied. After finalising the details of marriage, he returns home. There he tells Sanekā about Bipulā. Sanekā advises him to have an impenetrable bridal chamber made of iron so as to ensure that no snake is able to enter. Accordingly Cānd commissions the masons Saṅkai, Paṅkai and Durgābar to construct the bridal chamber of iron. The masons complete their task in a single day and are paid in gold and silver. As they are on their way back home, Padmā bars



their way and threatens to wipe off their families unless they leave a passage-way as fine as a thread on the north-west corner of the chamber. The terrified masons are forced to comply. When Cānd tests the impenetrability of the chamber by producing smoke inside it to see if any escapes, Padmā clasps the fine passageway with her left foot. Satisfied, Cānd sets himself to make other arrangements for the marriage. On the wedding day, Sanekā is highly apprehensive of misfortune as she sees ill-omen. She tells Lakṣmīndar but Cānd is determined and he sets off with a large party in which even Hasan, Hosain and hundreds of *pīrs* (Muslim saints) accompany. The bridegroom's party arrives at Ujāni city and is received by Bāco Baṅik with due honour. Netā cautions Padmā that if the marriage is solemnized at the scheduled auspicious hour, she will fail to take Lakṣmīndar's life. Therefore, to delay the marriage ceremony, Padmā herself arrives at the wedding and reveals her terrible form only for the eyes of the bridegroom. The latter is terrified, loses his sense and dies. Bipulā pleads to Padmā for mercy and the goddess informs her to proceed to Kālīdaha Sea. Bipulā sets off immediately. When she arrives there, she realises that she has forgotten to bring any offering for the goddess. The latter informs her again that the test of her devotion to the goddess is in making offerings from whatever she has at her possession. Unhesitatingly Bipulā chops off her tongue, breasts, hair and ten fingers and offers them to the goddess. Meanwhile, the auspicious hour has passed. So, having attained her objective, Padmā restores Bipulā's body and hands her magic flower and water with which the latter brings Lakṣmīndar back to life. Thereafter, the marriage is solemnized without further mishap and the bridal party returns to Campaka city. As Sanekā receives the bride, she sees ill-omen again. Evening sets in and the couple is taken inside the iron chamber and the door-way is sealed. Lakṣmīndar is desirous of physical union but Bipulā refrains him. Later he wishes to eat. Since there is no food-grain inside the chamber, Bipulā seeks Padmā's blessing and succeeds in preparing a large variety of dishes from a few grains that lay as accessories of marriage ritual. By the time the preparation is complete, Lakṣmīndar is fast asleep. Bipulā attempts to wake him, fails and she too falls asleep. By now the night has nearly passed by and Netā reminds Padmā that if dawn breaks, Lakṣmīndar will be saved. And so Padmā assembles all the snakes at her command and promises that one who succeeds in taking the life of Lakṣmīndar will be given the place of honour beside her. But none agrees. Finally Kālī Nāg is called from the under-world and it agrees to perform the task. Transformed into a shape as fine as a thread, Kālī Nāg enters the bridal chamber but is charmed by the beauty of the sleeping couple and can find no pretext to bite. As it moves around the couple, its tail strikes by accident the blade of a knife (a part of accessories required for marriage ritual) and it is chopped off. So the snake decides to wait by the feet of Lakṣmīndar. At one stage he accidentally strikes its head. The act gives Kālī Nāg the pretext it was looking for. Calling on the Sun and the Moon as witness, it strikes Lakṣmīndar in the small finger of his foot and escapes. Lakṣmīndar wakes up in pain, cries for help but fails to wake Bipulā. Thereupon he dies.

2. An excerpt of the *bandanā* offered to Padmā is as follows :  
প্রণাম করি পদ্মাবতী, আস্তিক জননী সতী,  
নাগ ঠশ্বরী ঘোড়শ সাপিনী ।  
তুমি জগতের মাতা, তুমি ত্রিলোচন সূতা,  
তুমি মাগো মুক্তি বিধায়িনী॥  
তোমার কনক মুকুট শিরে, কিবা শোভা নাগ হারে,  
সর্বাপে ভূষণ ভূজঙ্গিনী ।  
ব্রহ্মা বিষ্ণু মহেশ্বর, যত ইতি চরাচর,  
তোমা ভয়ে সদা কম্পমান॥
3. পূবে বন্দিলাম আমি অখিলের পতি ।  
অষ্ট ঘোড়া ছোড়া যেথায় অরুণ সারথী॥  
দক্ষিণে বন্দিলাম আমি কালিদহের জল ।  
চন্দ্রধরের চৌদ্দ ডিগ্গা যাতে হৈল তল॥  
পশ্চিমে বন্দিলাম আমি আয়োধ্যা ভূবণ ।  
তারি অংশে জন্ম করলেন স্বয়ং নারায়ণ॥  
উত্তরে বন্দনা করি কৈলাস শিখর ।  
যেখানেতে বিরাজ করেন সদা পার্বতী আর শংকর॥  
এতসব বন্দনা গাইতে আমার হবে অনেকক্ষণ ।  
একবার বন্দি গাব তেত্রিশ কোটি দেবগণ॥'
4. Based on a performance of *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* given by Haripada Rāy and his party from Phul-khan Chakla village under Rajarhat police station in Kurigram district at Mahinganj, Rangpur, on 25 April, 1995 and interview with Haripada Rāy at Phul-khan Chakla on 3 October, 1995.
5. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vāṅgala-Mangal Kavyer Itihas*, 333-34.
6. Śiva, while travelling through a wood-land bedecked with trees and plants in blossom, is physically aroused and unable to contain himself, he ejaculates. Not knowing how to dispose of his sperm of intense energy, Śiva decides to place it on a lotus (*padmā*). A bird, blind in thirst, attempts to partake the sperm but the energy is too great for it to contain and so it is forced to vomit it back to the lotus. The sperm descends through the stalk of the lotus to the under-world, where Padmā is born. The king of serpents welcome her with fan-fare.
7. The following is the synopsis of Vijay Gupta's text, from the birth of Padma to Śiva's affair with the ferry-woman (Caṇḍī in disguise), from the death of Sonā Rānī's six sons to Padmā's blessing of Sonā Rānī at Jhālu's home and the journey of Behulā on the raft:  
Śiva, resident of Vārāṇasī, travels to the wood-land bedecked with flowers. At home his wife Caṇḍī wakes up to find Śiva missing. Believing he is up to some mischief with women, she is enraged and curses him. Thereupon she goes in search of her

husband to the wharf where Kaluā Ḍom is the ferry-man. There she befriends Kaluā's wife Gaurī and inquires from her if she has seen Śīva. Gaurī, who crosses hundreds of people across the river, knows not who could be Caṇḍī's husband, but describes a strange person dressed in tiger-skin. Immediately Caṇḍī recognises him as Śīva. She requests Gaurī to stay at home and let her perform the job of ferrying people. Meanwhile, Śīva has been wandering in the wood-land. At one stage he sees Padmā. He is immediately enamoured by her beauty and desires her. Padmā reveals her identity as his daughter and describes how she was born. Śīva is ashamed of himself and showers Padmā with kisses and blessing. Padmā wishes to go home with her father and meet her step-mother. Fearful of Caṇḍī's wrath, Śīva hides Padmā in his basket of flowers and sets off for home. Upon reaching the ferry-wharf, he is attracted to the ferry-woman (Caṇḍī is disguise) and makes advances to her. Determined to apprehend him in the act, Caṇḍī offers to cook for Śīva, which the latter is to partake disregarding her low caste, as a proof of his devotion. Śīva agrees, the goddess prepares food and he eats with delight. Thereupon Caṇḍī reveals her true identity, accuses Śīva of extra-marital relationship and disappears. (.....)

On Netā's advise, Padmā goes to Cānd Saodāgar's home disguised as a milk-maid with poisoned yogurt. Fearing reprisal from Padmā, Sonā Rānī attempts to dissuade her six sons from having the yogurt. But they begin to cry and so she is forced to buy the ware from the milk-maid. After the meal she serves the yogurt, partaking which all the six sons die immediately. Amidst bitter lamentation the dead bodies are set adrift on a raft. Padmā intercepts the bodies, revives the six brothers to life and place them at the disposal of goddess Ganges. On her part Sonā Rānī goes deep in the forest to lament the dead. Thereupon Padmā visits the mother of Jhālu and Mālu (two poverty-stricken fishermen) in a dream, commanding her to send her sons with their net for fishing, thereby earn her blessing. The brothers do as bidden and strike a golden pitcher. The goddess appears before them and commands them to worship the pitcher. The terror-stricken brothers comply and immediately their poverty is turned into affluence. Thereupon Padmā visits Sonā Rānī in a dream, commanding her to worship the golden pitcher at Jhālu's home in order to be blessed with a son. Sonā Rānī complies and Padmā fulfils her promise on condition that her son would die on wedding night. Sonā Rānī accepts the blessing, thinking in her heart that she will never have her son married. (.....)

Behulā sets off on the raft with the dead body of her husband Lakṣmīndar. She laments her plight and beseeches Padmā for a way to inform her parents about her misfortune. Padmā sends Netā in the guise of a white crow and she carries a letter written by Behulā on a leaf with ink made from collyrium on her eyes. Behulā's mother Sumitrā is grief-stricken when the letter reaches her. Behulā's brother Hari Sādhu rushes to her raft and begs her to return home with him. Behulā rejects the offer, determined to continue the journey with the dead body. Soon the raft reaches a pier where Godā, a man with elephantiasis, is fishing with a rod. Attracted by Behulā's beauty, Godā attempts to woo her and jumps into the water to capture her. She seeks Padmā's help and the goddess renders Godā helpless. The raft floats on till it reaches another pier where the brothers Dhanā and Manā toil as ferry-men. They too attempt to possess Behulā. She appeals again to Padmā for help. The goddess causes a fight between the brothers which leaves them struggling for breath in the water. Behulā takes pity and requests Padmā to free them from their plight. Padmā grants her wish and the fear-stricken brothers run away to their home. The raft drifts on till it reaches another pier where Behulā sees a young man, Teṭan, attempting to drown himself. When asked, he narrates his tale of woe: how he lost everything, even his wife, in gambling. Behulā gives Teṭan her jewel-decked ornament and promises further help on return. In the mean-time, nearly a month has passed. The rotting flesh on the dead body has been decomposing. Padmā asks Netā to take the body away from Behulā. As the raft drifts on the river near a thick forest, Netā appears disguised as a tiger and attempts to rob the dead body. Behulā comprehends the truth and on her plea, Netā takes pity and reveals herself in her true form. She informs Behulā that Padmā's abode is at a distance of four days' journey. On Netā's advice, Behulā washes clean the bones of Lakṣmīndar. Finally, after further journey she sees Netā washing clothes of the deities. (.....)

8. Kshetra Gupta, "Mātīr Buke, Sikāde - Gabhire," *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana* vol. 2, no. 4 (Śrāvaṇa/Āśvin, 1398 BS), 118.
9. Based on a performance of *Rāvānī Gān* given by Uṣā Rānī and her troupe from Bishkhali village under Kachua police station, at Fatepur village under the police station and district of Bagerhat, on 11 April, 1995, and interviews with Pulin Bihārī Sāhā (the *sarkār* of the troupe) on 11 April, 1995 and Dhīrendra Nāth Mrdhā (the "master" of the troupe) on 26 October, 1995 at Fatepur and Bishkhali respectively; Tulsī Prasād Naṭṭa, an amateur *Yātrā* performer from Kirtipasha village, Jhalakathi district, on 16 June, 1996, at Kirtipasha.
- 9a. Based on an interview and a brief enactment by Bāṭul Candra Karmakār, the *sarkār* of a troupe of *Manasār Pācālī* from Lohagara, Narail, on 28th October, 1995.
10. Based on a performance of *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* given by Manahar Hāldār and his troupe at Dighapatia, Natore on 26 December, 1994 and interviews with Manahar Hāldār at Dighapatia on 14 and 15 September, 1995.

11. Based on performances of *Bhāsān Gān* witnessed at Shilpakala Academy, Dhaka, on 19 April, 1993 and at Shahid Minar, Dhaka, on 20 January, 1995 and also an interview with Kaṇṭikā Rānī Sarkār at Radali, Paikgacha, Khulna, on 25 October, 1995.
12. Based on an interview with Pareś Candra Sarkār, the *sarkār* of a troupe of *Bhāsān Pālā Gān*, from Dakshin Narail village under Narail police station and district, on 28 October, 1995.
13. Based on an interview with Haripada Rāy, the *gīdāl* of a troupe of *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* from Phul-khan Chakla village, Rajarhat police station, Kurigram district, who has witnessed *Biṣaharīr Gān* performances in his village. The interview was taken on 2 October, 1995, at Phul-khan Chakla village.
14. Based on a performance of *Beilyā Nācārī* given by Saman Ali and his troupe in his own village (Sundar) in Gopalpur, Tangail, on 17 November, 1994 and interviews with Saman Ali in Gopalpur town on 25 July, 1995 and 14 November, 1995.
15. Based on performances of *Bhāsān Yātrā* given by troupes based at Nepal-dighi village under Natore police station and district and Kalihati, Tangail at Nepal-dighi and Tangail on 29th December, 1994 and 15 December, 1994, respectively and interviews with Nirmal Kumār Maṇḍal (age 65), one time performer of *Bhāsān Yātrā* from Banshgram village under Narail police station and district, on 19 October, 1995, Debeś Candra Sen (age 65), one time performer of *Bhāsān Yātrā* from Senpara, Ruhia, Thakurgaon, on 30 September, 1995, Bonā Prāmāṇik, a performer of *Bhāsān Yātrā* from Nepal-dighi, Natore, on 27th December, 1994 and Tulsī Prasād Naṭṭa, an amateur *Yātrā* performer from Kirtipasha village under Jhalakathi police station and district on 19 June, 1996.
16. Abdul Hafiz, *Loukik Sanskar O Manabsamaj* (Dhaka: 1994), 348.
17. Based on an interview with Khan Mohammad Morshed Ali, President, Bangabandhu Sanskritik Parishad, cultural activist, playwright and private tutor, Bara Kalia, Kalia police station, Narail district, on 28 October, 1995.
18. Hiteshranjan Sanyal, *Bāṅglā Kīrtaner Itihās* (Calcutta: 1989), 194.
19. *Ibid.*, 190-191.
20. Mridulkanti Chakravarti, *Bāṅglā Gāner Dhārā* (Dhaka: 1993), 36; K. Mitra, *Kīrtan* (Calcutta: 1352 BS), 10.
21. H. Sanyal, *Kīrtaner Itihās*, 170, 180.
22. *Ibid.*, 206-209; Harekrishna Mukhopadhyay, *Banglar Kirtan O Kirtania*, (Calcutta: 1990), 73-74.
23. H. Mukhopadhyay, *Banglar Kirtan*, 89-92.
24. K. Mitra, *Kīrtan*, 37.

25. H. Sanyal, *Kīrtaner Itihās*, 301.
26. *Ibid.*, 201.
27. *Ibid.*, 200.
28. *Ibid.*, 198.
29. *Ibid.*, 199.
30. *Ibid.*, 203-205.
31. *Ibid.*, 196.
32. *Ibid.*, 194.
33. *Ibid.*, 201.
34. Other than those mentioned in end-note numbers 18 to 36, the information given in this section is based on performances of *Līlā Kīrtan* witnessed at Patrail, Delduar, Tangail on 22 March, 1995, Gopalpur, Tangail on 17 November, 1994, Dhaka on 17 August, 1995 and interviews with Kantibandhu Brahmachari at Jagadbandhu Mahaprakash Math. K.K. Dasa at Radha Govinda Jiu Temple, Dhaka on 17 August, 1995 and Bāul Ānanda Lāl Dāsa at Moishini village under Kachua police station in Bagerhat on 26 October, 1995.
35. H. Sanyal, *Kīrtaner Itihās*, 199-200.
36. *Ibid.*, 201-202.
37. Based on a performance video-taped by the Folklore Division of Bangla Academy, Dhaka and preserved at its archive and interview with Nandagopāl Gosvāmin, a *kīrtaniyā* of *Pālā Kīrtan* from Betila village, Manikganj police station and district.
38. Gaurishankar Bhattacharya, *Bāṅglā Lokanāṭya Samikṣā* (Calcutta : 1972), 552.
39. Based on a performance of *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* given by Govinda Opera Party from Dakshin Mandia, Gopalpur police station, Tangail district, on 20 April, 1995, at Palpara, Gopalpur, Tangail and interview with Anil Candra Rāy, a *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* performer from Suti village under Gopalpur police station in Tangail, at Gopalpur on 14 November, 1995.
40. H. Sanyal, *Kīrtaner Itihās*, 203-205.
41. Based on a performance of *Sāj Kīrtan* witnessed at Raghudatta-kathi village, under Kachua police station in Bagerhat district (greater Khulna) on 10th April, 1995 and interview with Haripada Dāsa (aged 65, a farmer by profession) who played the character of Nārada in *Bhakta Prahlāda*, at his residence at Moishini village under Kachua police station in Bagerhat district on 26 October, 1995.
42. Rasamohan Sirmha (ed.), *Mekhālī* (Madhabpur: 1992), 32.
43. *Ibid.*, 28.

44. *Ibid.*, 15-16.
45. Based on performances of *Rās Līlā* and *Goṣṭha Līlā* witnessed during the Mahārās festival of 1995, at Madhabpur on 7 November, 1995 and interviews with Kāminī Kumār Sirmha, a *paṇḍit*, Candra Kumār Sirmha, a scholar and Surendra Kumār Chattopādhyāya, one of the three priests of Madhabpur temples, at Madhabpur, under Kamalganj police station in Maulavibazar district on 6 and 7 November, 1995.
46. Muntasir Mamun, *Bangladesher Utsava* (Dhaka : 1994), 69.
47. Based on observation of the *Janmāṣṭamī Michil* of 17th August, 1995 in Dhaka city.
48. Based on observation of *Naukā-vilās Michil* at Patrail on 23 March, 1995.
49. Based on a performance of *Rāmāyaṇa Gān* given by Gopāl Candra Modak from Karimganj, Kishoreganj, at Bajitpur, Kishoreganj, on 31 December, 1994 and interviews with Khukumaṇi Dās from Hajipur village under Narsingdi police station and district at his residence on 23 September, 1995 and 14 October, 1995 and also with Sunīl Kumār Sarkār from Rasulpur village under Nabi Nagar police station in Brahmanbaria at Brahmanbaria on 27 October, 1995.
50. Based on a performance of *Kuśān Gan* given by Jajñeswar Barman and his troupe from Rajpur village under the police station and district of Lalmanirhat, at Mahinganj, Rangpur, on 25 April, 1995 and an interview with Nirmal Candra Barman, the *dohār* of the above troupe, at Rajpur village on 3 October, 1995.
51. Based on a performance of *Lakṣmīr Gān* by Mohammad Azizul Khan and his troupe from Ratuk village in Durgapur police station, Rajshahi, witnessed on 21 April, 1995 and interviews with Mohammad Azizul Khan on 22 April, 1995 and 17 September, 1995, at Kismat Maria village, Durgapur police station, Rajshahi.
52. Based on a performance of *Rāma Yātrā* witnessed on 9 April, 1995 at Harikhali, Bagerhat.
53. Based on interviews with Subal Dās (aged 55) and Nārāyaṇ Candra Dās (aged 60), both actors of a *Maheśā Khelā* troupe run by Śānticandra Dās from Jaykrishnapur village under Durgapur police station in Rajshahi; and also interviews with Kader Ali Mollah (aged 50) and Mohammad Ainul Mollah (aged 50) from Kismat Maria village under Durgapur police station in Rajshahi who witnessed performances of *Maheśā Khela*. The interviews were taken at Kismat Maria village on 15 September, 1995.
54. Based on performances of *Saṅg Yātrā* witnessed at Naga village under Kalihati police station in Tangail given by Bīṇāpāṇi Saṅg Yātrā Party on 28 November, 1994 and at Tangail Shahid Minar given by Muhammad Mohiruddin and his party from Bara Bashail, Tangail on 16 November, 1994 and also interviews with Swapan Kumār Cakrabartī, the manager of Bīṇāpāṇi Saṅg Yātrā Party at Palima Bazar on 10 April, 1995, 14 November, 1995 and 16 December, 1995.

55. Sajjad Ahsan. "Nṛ-goṣṭhī Māndāi : Luptaprāy Saṁskṛtīr Sandhāne", *Theatre Studies* vol. 2., June, 1994, 169-172.
56. Muhammad Ibrahim. "Prasaṅga: 'Kālāpāhād'," *Itihāsa*, vol. 12, no. 1, Baisākh-Śrāvaṇa, 1395 BS, 57-61.
57. Sajjad Ahsan, *Theatre Studies*, vol. 2, 175-180.
58. *Ibid.*, 179-182.
59. Based on a performance of *Mukho Nācā* witnessed at Dighapatia, Natore, given by Birendranāth Sūtradhar (Biren Mīstri), Kṛṣṇapada Sarkār and their party on 29 December, 1994, interview with Birendranāth Sūtradhar on 14th September, 1995 and interview with Prabhāt Kumār Bhāskar (Puthia, Rajshahi) on 19 September, 1995.
60. Based on a performance of *Kālī Kāc* given by Ravindra Maṇi Dās and his troupe at Purva Dashura village under the police station and district of Manikganj, on 20 April, 1995 and an interview with Ravindra Maṇi Dās on 21 April, 1995.
61. Karunamaya Goswami. *Sangeet Kosh*. (Dhaka, 1985), 21-22.
62. Gupta, *Obscure*, 212.
63. Based on an interview with Nirmal Kumār Maṇḍal, music trainer of *Aṣṭak Gān* troupe of Banshgram village and Śaktipada Cakrabartī, a priest, both from Banshgram under Kalia police station in Narail district. on 22 October, 1995.
64. Based on an interview with Munibur Hasan Quddus, a performer of *Aṣṭak Gān* from Char Durlavdia, Pangsha, Rajbari, at Pangsha, on 14 July, 1996.
65. Based on a performance of *Aṣṭak Gān* given by Hṛday Kumār Dās and his troupe from Kathipara village, Banagram union, Moralganj police station, Bagerhat district, on 10 April, 1995, at Badhal Bazar, under Kachua police station in Bagerhat district.
66. Interview with Munibur Hasan.
67. Based on an interview with Nirmal Kumār Maṇḍal (aged 65), a performer of *Aṣṭak Yātrā* and Śaktipada Cakrabartī (aged 30), a priest, from Banshgram village under Kalia police station in Narail district. on 22 October, 1995.
68. Based on an interview with Debeś Candra Sen, a performer of *Gamīrā Nāc*, from Sen-para, Ruhia, Thakurgaon on 30 September, 1995.
69. Based on an interview with the performers of *Śiva-Gaurī Nāc* in Rsi-para, Dighir Par, Bajitpur, Kishoreganj on 31 December, 1994.
70. Based on an interview with Tulsī Prasād Naṭṭa, and amateur *Yātrā* performer from Kirtipasha village in Jalakathi district, at Kirtipasha, on 16 June, 1996.
71. Based on an interview with Munibur Hasan Quddus from Char Durlavdia, Pangsha, Rajbari, at Pangsha, on 14 July, 1996.



72. Based on an interview with Nirmal Kumār Maṇḍal, music trainer of *Aṣṭak Gān* troupe of Banshgram village in Narail and Śaktipada Cakrabartī, a priest, also from the same village, at Banshgram on 22 October, 1995.
73. Panchanan Mandal (ed.), *Gorkha-vijay* (Calcutta, 1356 BS), 48-201.
74. Alamgir Jalil (ed.), *Loko-sahitya: 14* (Dhaka: 1976), 35-70.
75. Based on a performance of *Yogīr Gān* given by Bhelu Kārikar, Pañcānan Maṇḍal and party at Dighapatia, Natore, on 26 December, 1994 and interview with Pañcānan Maṇḍal at Dighapatia, Natore, on 15 September, 1995.
76. Alamgir Jalil, *Loko-sahitya : 14*, 31-33.
77. Based on a performance of *Yugī Parva* given by Oku Prāmāṇik and his troupe from Tebila village (Durgapur police station, Rajshahi) at Kismat Maria village (Durgapur police station, Rajshahi) on 31 January, 1995 and interview with Oku Prāmāṇik and Mohammad Akram Ali Prāmāṇik at Tebila village on 19 September, 1995.
78. The entire section on the *Jyā* discussed so far is based on Afsar Ahmad, "Mārmā Jyā Ālaṁ-nabāha", *Theatre Studies*, vol. 2, June 1994, and also on discussion with the author.
79. Afsar Ahmad, "Mārmā Jyā", *Theatre Studies*, vol. 2, 56, 64.
80. Salim al-Deen, Editorial, *Theatre Studies*, vol. 2, June 1994.
81. Afsar Ahmad, "Mārmā Jyā", vol. 2, *Theatre Studies* 2, 55.
82. In a discussion with Professor Sumangal Barua, Department of Sanskrit and Pali, University of Dhaka, on 11 December, 1994.
83. Ohidul Alam, *Chattagramer Lokosahitya* (Dhaka: 1985), 78.
- 83a. Afsar Ahmad, "Mārmā Jyā", *Theatre Studies*, vol. 2, 46.
84. Muhammad Saydur, *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 49 : Muharram Anusthan*, (Dhaka : 1988), 3.
- 84a. Shafiqur Rahman Chowdhury, "Field-work Bhattik Ekti Samikṣaṇ", *Bangladesher Lokasangeet : Kendua Anchal*, ed. Shamsuzzaman Khan (Dhaka: 1993), 33-34; Muhammad Saydur, Bangla Academy, in an interview on 26 November, 1995.
85. Jasim Uddin, *Jarigaan* (Dhaka: 1968), 168-204.
86. Muhammad Saydur, *Folklore Sankalan 49*, 15-46.
87. Samiul Islam (ed.), *Lokosahitya Sankalan - 44* (Dhaka: 1985), 3-61.
88. Jasim Uddin, *Jarigaan*, 192.

89. Also based on a visit to Ashtagram during the Muharram celebration of 1995 and witnessing of performances of *Bāṅglā Jārī* by Amiruddin Bayāti from Bangal-para, Ashtagram, at Ashtagram (Kishoreganj district) on 10 June, 1995, *Jārī Gān* by Abdul Shahid Bayāti at Khalekar-bandha village under Bajitpur police station (Kishoreganj district) on 9 June, 1995, *Jārī Gazal* by Billal Bayāti at Balla village under Bajitpur police station on 9 June, 1995, and interview with Muhammad Saydur, Bangla Academy, on 26 November, 1995.
90. Shafiqur Rahman Chowdhury, "Field-work", *Kendua Anchal*, 34.
91. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Bāṅglār Loka Sāhitya* (Calcutta: 1962), 49-50.
92. Muhammad Saydur, "Lokosangeet Samikshan," *Kendua Anchal*, 59.
93. Muhammad Saydur, *Folklore Sankalan* 49, pictures between pp. 32-33.
94. Based on an interview with Mohammad Aynuddin Mollah, a *gāyen* of *Jārī Gān*, from Shahbazpur village under Durgapur police station, Rajshahi, on 15 September, 1995.
95. Samiul Islam, *Uttar Banglar Lokosahitya* (Belka, Rangpur: 1973), 78-104
96. *Ibid.*
97. Lutfur Rahman, *Bangladeshi Jari Gan* (Dhaka: 1986), 4.
98. Based on an interview with Rubina Parvin at her home in Islampur village under Satkhira police station and district, on 23 October, 1995.
99. Based on interviews with Daro Mian (aged 70), a famous Bāul singer from Brahmanbaria and Abu Mian (aged 70) and Manu Mian (aged 50), both farmers, from Uttar Foirtala village in Brahmanbaria, all of who performed in *Nāicer Jārī* in their youth.
100. Based on an interview with Bocā Faqir, a *gāyen* of *Janṅ Jārī*, at Maheshpur village under the police station and district of Thakurgaon, on 30 September, 1995.
101. Momen Chowdhury (ed.), *Lokshahitya Sankalan 18 : Jari Gaan* (Dhaka: 1981), 27-59; Samiul Islam, *Uttar Banglar Lokosahitya*, 89-100.
102. Based on interviews with Kader Ali Mollah, a farmer aged 65, Kismat Maria village, Durgapur police station, Rajshahi; Wahidul Islam Paltu, amateur *Yātrā* performer, aged 35, Fatepur village, Bagerhat police station and district; Mohammad Gaznavi Mian, aged 30, amateur performer of *Imām Yātrā*, Bara-baju village, Kalihati police station, Tangail.
103. Gopendrkrishna Basu, *Bāṅglār Lokik Devatā* (Calcutta : 1978), 44-47.

104. Sukumar Sen. *Islāmi Bānglā Sāhitya* (Calcutta : 1400 BS), 82, 73; Asim Roy. *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (Dhaka), 236. According to Abul Kalam M. Zakaria. Abdur Rahim composed his text in 1853 and Abdul Gafur sometime after him. Zakaria also cites a text by Khoda Baksh (composed in 1798-99) and another by Halu Mir (end of 18th or early 19th century). For details please see *Gazi Kaloo-o-Champabati Upakkhan* (Dhaka : 1989), lxxviii, lxxxii, cvi.
105. Sukumar Sen. *Islāmi Bānglā Sāhitya*, 82-86.
106. Interview with Saydur Ralunan Bayāti, *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 66: Gazir Gan*, ed. Khondaker Reajul Haque (Dhaka : 1995), 10.
107. Khondaker Reajul Haque (ed.) *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 66*, 16-19.
108. Momen Chowdhury "Gāzīr Gān", *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 66*, 74.
109. Abdul Huq Chowdhury, "Gāzīr Gān" *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 66*, 69.
110. Khondaker Reajul Haque (ed.), *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 66*, 20-63; Abdul Huq Chowdhury, "Gāzīr Gān", *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 66*, 69-71.
111. Muhammad Saydur, *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 66*, 80.
112. Abdul Huq Chowdhury. *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 66*, 68.
113. *Ibid.*, 65.
- 113a Momen Chowdhury, *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 66*, 75.
114. Abdul Huq Chowdhury, *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 66*, 65.
115. Momen Chowdhury, *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 66*, 74.
116. Interview with Jhaḍu Maṇḍal, *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 66*, 2.
117. Momen Chowdhury, *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 66*, 76.
118. *Ibid.*, 75.
119. Also based on performances of *Gāzīr Gān* given by Hakim Ali and his troupe from Jamsha village under Manikganj police station and district, at Jamsha, on 9 October, 1986, 17 November, 1986 and 11 December, 1986 and video taped performance of Abdul Jabbar from Tarakandia village under Kendua police station in Netrokona district, preserved at the audio-visual archive of Bangla Academy, Dhaka.
120. Abdul Huq Chowdhury, *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 66*, 68-69.
121. Muhammad Saydur (ed.), *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 61* (Dhaka: 1993), 87-112; Saikat Ashgar, *Manikganj Zillar Lok Sahitya* (Manikganj: 1986), 119-127.

122. Also based on a performance of *Gāzīr Yātrā* given by Lutfur Rahman Sheikh and his troupe from Raghunathpur village under Bagerhat police station and district, at Fatepur village under Bagerhat police station and district on 9 April, 1995, interview with Lutfur Rahman Sheikh at Fatepur on 10 April, 1995, interview with Babul Sheikh from Noapara village under Bagerhat police station and district on 26 October, 1995 at Fatepur and video recording of a performance of *Gāzīr Gān (Gāzīr Yātrā)* by Śarat Maṇḍal from Panchagram village in Khulna, preserved at Bangla Academy, Dhaka.
123. Panchanan Mandal (ed.), *Gorkha-vijay*, 205-207.
124. Muhammad Saydur (ed.), *Lokasahitya Sankalon 45 : Anushthanik Geet* (Dhaka: 1985), 127.
125. Sukumar Sen, *Islāmi Bānglā Sāhitya*, 145.
126. Muhammad Saydur, *Lokasahitya Sankalon 45: Anushthanik Geet*, 129-133, 138-168; Samiul Islam (ed.), *Lokasahitya Sankalon - 44*, 108-112, 209-218.
127. Based on a performance of *Mādār Pīrer Gān* given by Ibrahim Sardar and his troupe from Banshbhag, Natore. at Dighapatia, Natore on 25 December, 1995 and interviews with Ibrahim Sardar on 25 December, 1995, Biṣṇupada Mohanta on 15 September, 1995 and Gheṭu Gāyen on 17 August, 1996 at Dighapatia, Natore.
128. Sukumar Sen, *Islāmi Bānglā Sāhitya*, 147.
129. Tony K. Stewart, "Satya Pīr : Muslim Holy Man and Hindu God", *Religions of India in Practice* (Princeton : 1994), 578.
130. Gopendrakrishna Basu, *Bānglār Loukik Devatā*, 211-219.
131. Tony K. Stewart, *Religions of India*, 579-80.
132. Gopendrakrishna Basu, *Bānglār Loukik Devatā*, 219.
133. Tony K. Stewart, "Satya Pīr", *Religions of India*, 578.
134. Ahmad Sharif, *Madhyajuger Sahitye Samaj-o-sanskritir Rup* (Dhaka: 1977), 423.
135. Sukumar Sen, *Bānglā Sāhityer Itihāsa* vol. II, (Calcutta : 1398 BS), 399, 401, 406-8; Sukumar Sen, *Islāmi Bānglā Sāhitya*, 71.
136. Based on a performance of *Satya Pīrer Gān* by Bocā Faqir and his party from the village of Maheshpur under Thakurgaon police station at the village of Kasalgaon under Thakurgaon police station on 3 December, 1994 and an interview with Bocā Faqir at Maheshpur on 30 September, 1995.
137. Based on an interview with Bocā Faqir at Maheshpur village under Thakurgaon police station (district Thakurgaon) on September 30, 1995.
138. Gopendrakrishna Basu, *Bānglār Loukik Devatā*, 182.
139. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa* II, 408.

140. Gopendrakrishna Basu, *Bāṅglār Loukik Devatā*, 184.
141. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa* II, 408-409, 413.
142. Based on a performance of *Mānik Pīrer Jārī* given by Mohammad Sahar Ali Sardar and his troupe, from Akhrakhola village under Satkhira police station and district and an interview with Mohammad Sahar Ali Sardar, at the village of Kasimpur under Satkhira police station and district, on 23 October, 1995.
143. Based on a text of *Mānik Yātrā* (along with a report on it) published in *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan: 61*, ed. Muhammad Saydur (Dhaka: 1993), vii-viii. xiii -xv, 33-83.
144. Based on a performance of *Mā Māi Campār Kicchā-kāhini Jārī*, given by Mohammad Akhtar Hosain and an interview with him at his village home in Kasimpur under the police station and district of Satkhira, on 23 October, 1995.
145. Muhammad Saydur, *Bangla Academy Folklore Shankalon 51 : Bera Bhasan Utsab* (Dhaka: 1991), 4-5.
146. *Ibid.*, 21, 22, 24.
147. *Ibid.*, 1.
148. *Ibid.*, 72-74.
149. *Ibid.*, 109-120.
150. *Ibid.*, 74.
151. Based on an interview with Mohammad Kafūluddin, the *gāyak* of a *Pāillyā Yātrā* troupe, from Rajapur village, under Bogra police station and district, at Rajapur, on 18 November, 1995.
152. Based on interviews with Abul Khayer, a *bavāti* of a *Kaḍcā* troupe, from Kalna village, Lohagara police station, Narail district and Mohammad Mustafa, head-master of a primary school, Lohagara Bazar, Lohagara, Narail.
153. Based on a performance of *Ṣuthi Pāṭh (Kitāb-paḍā)* by Mohammad Alekh Sheikh from Kamthana village under Lohagara police station in Narail, and an interview with him at Lohagara, Narail, on 28 October, 1995.
154. Based on interviews with Mohammad Alekh Sheikh (aged 63) from Kamthana village, Lohagara police station, Narail, a farmer and a performer of *Ṣuthi Pāṭh* and Mohammad Mustafa (aged 48), head-master of a primary school of Lohagara, Narail, both of whom have witnessed *Sawāl Jawāb* performances.
155. Zia Hydar, "Yātrār Upasthāpanā Paddhati", *Jātiya Yātrā Utsav* (Dhaka: 1979), pages not numbered.

156. Based on *Yātrā* performances of *Mānabī Devī* by Shabuj Opera on 25 March, 1995, *Rakta Diye Kinlām* by Agragami Natya Sangstha on 27 March, 1995, *Faqir Bidrohī Musā Khān* by Janata Yatra Unit on 29 March, 1983, all at Dhaka, *Madhusūdan* by Charanik Natya Gosthi at Melandaha (Jamalpur) on 17 March, 1983, *Jānoār* by Charanik Natya Gosthi at Bandar (Narayanganj) on 25 March, 1983 and *Zālim Simher Māth* by Pratima Opera at Dhaka on 19 January, 1993; and interviews with Jyotsnā Biswās, a renowned *Yātrā* actress, on 4 July, 1996, Dharendra Kumār Bāgci and Pareś Majumdār, proprietor and manager respectively of Dipali Opera on 23rd March, 1995 at Gopalganj (greater Faridpur) and Śabarī Dāsgupta, proprietress and actress of Tushar Opera on 7 January, 1995 at Dhaka.
157. Based on performances of *Nāchimaner Banabās* witnessed at Madan Hat village in Natore, on 28 December, 1994, *Kājal-Rekhā* at Narillya Bazar, Madhupur, Tangail, on 13 November, 1995, *Sāgar Bhāsā*, *Kamalār Banabās*, *Rahim Bādsā O Rūpbān Kamvā*, *Āpan-Dulāl* and *Gunāi Bibi* at the Shilpakala Academy, Dhaka from 30 June to 4 July 1995; also based on an interview with Mohammad Jafar Mollah at Dighapatia, Natore, on 15 September, 1995.
158. Muhammad Saydur, "Lokasangeet Samikshan" *Bangladesher Lokasangeet Samiksha: Kendua Anchal*; Shamsuzzaman Khan, ed. (Dhaka: 1993), 63-64.
159. Based on performances of *Pālū Gān* by Muhammad Kuddus Bayāti (*Mahū Sundarī*), from Kendua, Netrokona at Shilpakala Academy, Dhaka, on 15 April, 1993; Asmat Ali Bayāti (*Sonāhar Bādsā*), from Jaydevpur, at GSS training centre, Mūpur, Dhaka on 16 March, 1994; Islamuddin Bayāti (*Kamalā Rānī*), from Noabad village, Karimganj police station, Kishoreganj district on 31 December 1994, at Baliakandi village, Bajitpur police station, in Kishoreganj district and interviews with Mozamunel Huq Bayāti from Kasharer-char, Mahinanda union, Kishoreganj police station and district on 26 November, 1995, Alauddin Bayāti from Khunihati village under Kendua police station in Netrokona district on 2 December, 1995, Kuddus Bayāti, on 11 November, 1995 and Islamuddin Bayāti on 31 December, 1994.
160. Dusan Zbavitel, *Bengali Folk-ballads from Mymensingh and the Problem of their Authenticity* (Calcutta : 1963), 136-137.
161. *Ibid.*, 209-211.
162. *Ibid.*, 202.
163. *Ibid.*, 211.
164. *Ibid.*, 5.
165. Muhammad Saydur (ed.), *Lokosahitya Sankalan 41* (Dhaka: 1985), "ekuś" (xxi).
166. The latter has been published by Bangla Academy, Muhammad Saydur (ed.), *Lokosahitya Sankalan 41*, 89-144.
167. Muhammad Saydur (ed.), *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 61*, 115-221.

156. Based on *Yātrā* performances of *Mānabī Devī* by Shabuj Opera on 25 March, 1995, *Rakta Diye Kinlām* by Agragami Natya Sangstha on 27 March, 1995, *Faqir Bidrohī Musā Khān* by Janata Yatra Unit on 29 March, 1983, all at Dhaka, *Madhusūdan* by Charanik Natya Gosthi at Melandaha (Jamalpur) on 17 March, 1983, *Jāmoār* by Charanik Natya Gosthi at Bandar (Narayanganj) on 25 March, 1983 and *Zālim Sindhēr Māth* by Pratima Opera at Dhaka on 19 January, 1993; and interviews with Jyotsnā Biswās, a renowned *Yātrā* actress, on 4 July, 1996, Dharendra Kumār Bāgci and Pareś Majumdār, proprietor and manager respectively of Dipali Opera on 23rd March, 1995 at Gopalganj (greater Faridpur) and Śabarī Dāsgupta, proprietress and actress of Tushar Opera on 7 January, 1995 at Dhaka.
157. Based on performances of *Nāchimaner Banabās* witnessed at Madan Hat village in Natore, on 28 December, 1994. *Kājal-Rekhā* at Narillya Bazar, Madhupur, Tangail, on 13 November, 1995, *Sāgar Bhāsā*, *Kamalār Banabās*, *Rahim Bādsā O Rūpbān Kanyā*, *Āpan-Dulāl* and *Gunāi Bibi* at the Shilpakala Academy, Dhaka from 30 June to 4 July 1995; also based on an interview with Mohammad Jafar Mollah at Dighapatia, Natore, on 15 September, 1995.
158. Muhammad Saydur, "Lokasangeet Samikshan" *Bangladesher Lokasangeet Samiksha: Kendua Anchal*: Shamsuzzaman Khan, cd. (Dhaka: 1993), 63-64.
159. Based on performances of *Pālā Gān* by Muhammad Kuddus Bayāti (*Maluā Sundarī*), from Kendua, Netrokona at Shilpakala Academy, Dhaka, on 15 April, 1993; Asmat Ali Bayāti (*Sonāhar Bādsā*), from Jaydevpur, at GSS training centre, Mirpur, Dhaka on 16 March, 1994; Islamuddin Bayāti (*Kamalā Rānī*), from Noabad village, Karimganj police station, Kishoreganj district on 31 December 1994, at Baliakandi village, Bajitpur police station, in Kishoreganj district and interviews with Mozamunel Huq Bayāti from Kasharer-char, Mahinanda union, Kishoreganj police station and district on 26 November, 1995, Alauddin Bayāti from Khunihati village under Kendua police station in Netrokona district on 2 December, 1995, Kuddus Bayāti, on 11 November, 1995 and Islamuddin Bayāti on 31 December, 1994.
160. Dusan Zbavitel, *Bengali Folk-ballads from Mymensingh and the Problem of their Authenticity* (Calcutta : 1963), 136-137.
161. *Ibid.*, 209-211.
162. *Ibid.*, 202.
163. *Ibid.*, 211.
164. *Ibid.*, 5.
165. Muhammad Saydur (ed.), *Lokosahitya Sankalan 41* (Dhaka: 1985), "ekus" (xxi).
166. The latter has been published by Bangla Academy, Muhammad Saydur (ed.), *Lokosahitya Sankalan 41*, 89-144.
167. Muhammad Saydur (ed.), *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 61*, 115-221.

168. Muhammad Saydur and Mohammad Ishaque Ali (ed.), *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 63* (Dhaka: 1994), 7-56.
169. Based on interviews with Abdul Hekim Bayāti from Aima village under Atpara police station in Netrokona district and Santos̄ Kumār Sūtradhar from Mohinanda Bhadrpara village under Kishoreganj police station and district, at their residences on 20 November, 1995 and 12 November, 1995, respectively.
170. Based on an interview with Mohammad Gaffar, the *gāyen* of a *Pālā Gān* troupe from Karnapura village in Bogra (police station and district) on 12 November, 1995.
171. Based on a performance of *Kecchā Kāhini*, given by Abdul Matin and his party from Arail village under Durgapur police station in Rajshahi, on 31 January, 1995 at Kismat Maria village under Durgapur police station, Rajshahi and interview with Abdul Matin on 16 September, 1995 at Kismat Maria village.
172. Based on an interview with Premsindhu Rāy, a musician of a troupe of *Kecchā-bandī Gān* from Phul-khan Chakla village under Rajarhat police station, Kurigram district, at Phul-khan Chakla village on 2 October, 1995.
173. Based on an interview with Munibur Hasan Quddus, a spectator of *Śāstra* from Char Durlavdia, Pangsha, Rajbari and Muhammad Khorshed, a performer of *Śāstra*, from Hajra-para, Pangsha, Rajbari at Pangsha, on 14 July, 1996.
174. Based on interviews with Subodh Candra Tarafdār, the *sarkār* of a *Dhak Yātrā* troupe, from Banshgram village (Kalia police station, Narail district) and Tārāprasād Cakrabartī, the music "master" of the same troupe, from Mollah Danga village (Kalia police station, Narail district) on 18 October, 1995.
175. Based on an interview with Shyamaprasad Bhattacharya, Assistant Professor, Department of Bāṅglā, Srikail College, Srikail, Comilla at Srikail, on 12 July, 1996.
176. Mohammad Sirajuddin Kasimpuri, "Loka-sāhitye 'Gāḍu' Gān", *Bāṅglā Academy Patrikā*, vol. V, no. 2 (1368 BS), 61 and Wakil Ahmed, *Banglar Loka-sanskriti* (Dhaka: 1974), 107.
177. Abdul Quadir, *Banglar Lokayata Sahitya* (Dhaka: 1985), 29-40.
178. *Ibid.*, 29.
179. *Ibid.*, 28.
180. Based on a performance of *Ghāṭu Gān* given by Hasan Ali and his party from Radha-krishnapur village under Madhupur police station in Tangail district, at Narillya Bazar, Madhupur, on 21 March, 1995 and interview with Abul Kalam, a *Ghāṭu sarkār*, from Magur Jora village under Trishal police station in Mymensingh.
181. M.S. Kasimpuri, "'Gāḍu' Gān", *Bāṅglā Academy Patrikā*, vol. 5, no. 2, 28.
182. *Ibid.*, 73.
183. Abdul Hafiz, *Loukik Sanskar O Manabsamaj*, 310.



184. Sisir Majumdar has published a *Raṅg P̄ācālī* text, collected by him, in his *Uttarbanger Loknatya* (Calcutta: 1990).
185. Based on performances of *Raṅg P̄ācālī* titled *Śantibālā-Jhānu Faterā* performed by Jitendranāth Rāy and his party (from Kosalgaon village, Ruhia, Thakurgaon) and also of *Kāmār-Kāmārñī* and *Bekār Ajlā* at Kosalgaon, Ruhia, Thakurgaon, on 3 December, 1994; interviews with Lipirām Barman, a *Raṅg P̄ācālī* playwright and a UP member from Mandaladam village, Ruhia, Thakurgaon and Mohammad Ainul Huq, *Raṅg P̄ācālī* playwright, director and UP member from Kosalgaon, Ruhia, Thakurgaon, at Ruhia on 30 September, 1995.
186. Based on a performance of *Śāstriya P̄ācālī* titled *Śeṣ Bicār* performed by Rabīndranāth Thākur and his party from Kosalgaon village under the police station and district of Thakurgaon, at Kosalgaon on December 3, 1995; and interviews with Rabīndranāth Thākur, Lipirām Barman (playwright and UP member from Mandaladam village, Thakurgaon) and Ainul Huq, (playwright, director and UP member from Kosalgaon village, Thakurgaon) on 30 September, 1995, at Ruhia, Thakurgaon.
187. Tasaddak Ahmad, *Nowabganj Zillar Loko-sangit: Gambhira* (Dhaka: 1994), 57.
188. Mobarak Hossain Khan. "Bangladesher Loka-sāngit", *Bangladesher Lokoitihya*, ed. Shamsuzzaman Khan (Dhaka: 1985), 109.
189. Tasaddak Ahmad, *Gambhira*, 59-60.
190. Based on a performance of *Gambhīrā Gān* by Mahbubul Alam and party at Shilpakala Academy, Dhaka, on 17 April 1993.
191. Shaifur Rahman Chowdhury, *Bangladesher Loksangit* (Dhaka: 1994), 133.
192. Based on an interview with Nazrul Islam (aged 48) from Nandi village under Durgapur police station (an ex-Gram Sarkar and a trader and farmer by profession who performed in *Gambhīrā Yātrā* in his late teens), on 18 September, 1995, at Kismat Maria village under Durgapur police station, Rajshahi.
193. Muhammad Saydur (ed.), *Lokosahitya Sankalan 41*, 1-18; Muhammad Saydur (ed.), *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 61*, 1-30; Mohbub Elias, *Nawabganjer Alkap Gan* (Dhaka: 1995).
194. Based on a performance of *Ālkāp Gān* by Aizuddin, Siddiqur Rahman and party (from Belgharia village, Durgapur police station, Rajshahi) on 1 February, 1995, at Kismat Maria village, Durgapur police station, Rajshahi and an interview with Siddiqur Rahman on 17 September, 1995 at Kismat Maria village.
195. Shafiqur Rahman Chowdhury (ed.), *Bangladesher Loksangit*, 141.
196. Based on the above-mentioned performance of Aizuddin, Siddiqur Rahman and party and also interview with Siddiqur Rahman.
197. Mohbub Elias, *Nawabganjer Alkap Gan*, v-vii.

198. Prodyot Ghosh. *Gambhira*. 86-89.
199. Mohammad Abu Talib, "Lokanṛtya: Gambhīrā O Ālkāp", *Bangladesher Lokoshilpa* (Sonargaon: 1983), 91.
200. Syed Mustafa Shiraj, *Muslim Chitrakalar Adiparba and Others* (Calcutta: 1400 BS), 48-49.
201. Based on an interview with Tulu Ali Gazi, the *kaviyāl* of *Tāḍi Gān* at Bara Kalia under Kalia police station, Narail district, on 28 October, 1995.
202. Based on an interview with Shyamaprasad Bhattacharya, Assistant Professor, Department of Bāṅglā, Srikail College, Srikail, Comilla, who has extensively attended *Ṗācālī* performances.
203. Based on "Santhal Nṛ-goṣṭhī Nāṭya" by Rashid Harun. *Theatre Studies*, vol. 2, June 1994, 153-157 and interview with Birām Biśrā, a *Jāher* performer and ex-UP member, Jagdal village, Dhamairhat police station, Naogaon district, on 7 December, 1996.
204. Based on a performance of *Kavi Gān* given by Kālīpada Sarkār (Kotalipara, Gopalganj) and Cintāmaṇi Sarkār, Jessore and their troupes, on 27 October, 1995, at Bagerhat and also an interview with Matilāl Sarkār (Chandkathi village, Swarupkathi police station, Pirojpur district), a *sarkār* of *Kavi Gān* troupe, on 27 October, 1995, at Badhal Bazar, Bagerhat.
205. Jatin Sarkar, *Bangladesher Kavigan* (Dhaka: 1985), 24-25.
206. Lutful Haydar Chowdhury, "Bicār, Tarjā o Kavi Gān", *Pākistāner Loka-gīti*, 74-75, cited by Abdul Hafiz. *Loukik Sanskar O Manabsamaj*, 326-27.
207. Jatin Sarkar, *Bangladesher Kavigan*, 32.
208. Abdul Hafiz, *Loukik Sanskar O Manabsamaj*, 348.
209. Based on *Putul Nāc* performances witnessed at fairs held at Nababpur in Rajbari district on 12 November, 1992, Orakandi in Gopalganj district on 20 March, 1993 and Madhabpur in Maulavibazar district on 7 November, 1995; also interviews with Nazrul Islam, puppeteer, Campā Putul Nāc Company, Shabujbag, Brahmanbaria, Helu Mian (Helaluddin), puppeteer, and Mahjush, musician of *Vāṅvīṅa Putul Nāc* Company, Brahmanbaria on 7 September, 1995, 26 October, 1995 and 7 November, 1995 respectively.
210. Muhammad Saydur (ed.) *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 49*, illustration between pages 32-33; Samiul Islam, *Uttar Banglar Lokosahitya*, 79-80.
211. Based on a performance of *Lāthi-khelā* witnessed at the village of Fatepur under Bagerhat police station and district, on 9 April, 1995, in which groups from Bishnupur, Choto Bishnupur, Chomra and Fatepur participated and also interviews with Afzal Hossain (age 55), the leader of Bishnupur group, on 10 April, 1995 and 26 October, 1995.

212. Syed Mahmudul Hasan. "Rural Arts and Crafts", *History of Bangladesh: 1704-1971*, vol. 3, ed. Sirajul Islam (Dhaka : 1992), 245.
213. Syed Mahmudul Hasan. "Rural Arts", *History of Bangladesh: 1704-1971*, vol. 3, ed. Sirajul Islam (Dhaka : 1992), 245; Gurusaday Dutt, *Patua Sangit* (Calcutta : 1939), xii.
214. Rajatananda Dasgupta. "Bhāratīya Upamahādese Paṭacitrakalā", *Bangladesher Lokoshilpa*, ed. Syed Mahmudul Hasan (Sonargaon: 1983), 66, plates 6 *ka, kha, ga*.
215. Baridbaran Ghosh. *Pat Patua Patageeti* (Calcutta: 1992), 30-71. Ghosh has collected texts with following titles: *Kṛṣṇer Avatār*, *Kṛṣṇa Līlā* (four texts), *Dāna-khaṇḍa*, *Rāma-avatār* (two texts), *Sindhu Vadh*, *Bhagavatīr Saṁkha Parāno Pālā*, *Gaurāṅga-avatār*, *Gopālan*, *Pañcakalyānī* and *Manasā Paṭa-gīt*.
216. *Ibid.*, 10.
217. Based on a performance of *Paṭuā Gān (Gāzīr Paṭ)* given by Durjan Ali and party of 12 September, 1995, at Hajipur, Narsingdi.
218. Khogeskiron Talukdar, *Bangladesher Lokayato Shilpokala* (Dhaka: 1987), 75.
219. Rajatananda Dasgupta, "Bhāratīya", *Bangladesher Lokoshilpa*. 66.
220. Baridbaran Ghosh. *Pat Patua Patageeti*. 20.
221. Wakil Ahmed. "Folk Literature", *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971* vol. 3, ed. Sirajul Islam (Dhaka: 1992), 602; Benoy Ghosh. *Traditional Arts and Crafts of West Bengal* (Calcutta: 1981), 76-77; Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Banglar Loka Sahitya* vol. 1 (Calcutta: 1962), 174.
222. Khogeskiron Talukdar, *Bangladesher Lokayato Shilpokala*, 75.
223. Interview with Durjan Ali on 12 Sept., 1995, at Hajipur, Narsingdi.

## Chapter Four : *History of Indigenous Theatre of Bangladesh*

### 4.1 Ancient Period (c. 300 AD - c. 1200 AD)

The theatre of ancient period was directly patronied by the court, as in the case of classical Sanskrit theatre and its derivatives, indirectly by the same, as in the case of Buddhist theatre and by the people as in the cases of Nātha cult, Dharma cult and popular Kṛṣṇa cult and also in those of secular and supra-personae genres.

#### 4.1.1 *Classical Sanskrit Theatre and Its Derivatives*

As Niharranjan Roy shows, with the annexation of greater portion of Bengal into Gupta empire by 4th century AD, Aryan culture of north India literally engulfed the region.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it would be but logical to assume that in the flourishing centres of regional administration, such as the city of Puṇḍra (Mahāsthān, situated near modern Bogra in Bangladesh), performances of classical Sanskrit theatre would be a common affair. During the reign of Śaśānka, the state mechanism was similar to the Gupta period.<sup>1</sup> It is therefore possible to assume that the tradition of classical Sanskrit court-theatre continued under his reign. And because his kingdom was annexed by Harṣavardhana, who, it has already been noted, was a renowned Buddhist playwright, it may be assumed that play-texts such as *Nāgānanda* would also have been performed in the urban centres of Bengal. During the next hundred yeas of political turmoil, the region (of Bengal) passed from Bhāskaravarmāṇ of Kāmṛūp, to Yaśovarmāṇ of Kānyakujva and finally to Lalitāditya of Kashmir. It is noteworthy that Bhavabhūti, the author of *Mālatīmādhava*, was the court-poet of Yaśovarmāṇ.<sup>2</sup> Thus Bengal appears to have continued to remain within the periphery of mainstream Sanskrit theatre. But possibly the most interesting account of performance is recorded by the Kashmiri poet Kalhan in his *Rājatarānginī*. According to him, Jaypīḍa, the grandson of Lalitāditya, witnessed a performance given by a highly skilled danseuse named Kamalā in the temple of Kārtikeya in the city of Puṇḍra in ancient Gauḍa (Puṇḍra-wardhana).<sup>3</sup> The performance was given in accordance with Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Even Jayanta, the King of Puṇḍra-wardhana, is believed to have been a scholar well-versed in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.<sup>4</sup> As mentioned earlier, Gita Sengupta believes that the performance space of the temple of Kārtikeya was circular.

A few scholars have also attempted to show that the playwrights Bhaṭṭanārāyaṇa, Murāri, Viśākhadatta, Kṛṣṇamiśra and Kṣemīśvara were all from the region of Bengal.<sup>5</sup> Roy also believes that Kṣemīśvara could have been from the region of Bengal.<sup>6</sup> But there is also a firm evidence that there did exist Sanskrit court-theatre under the Pālas and it is *Nāṭakalakṣaṇaratnakoṣa*, a critical work on Sanskrit drama by a Buddhist scholar named

Sāgaranandin (end 10th - early 11th century according to Siddheswar Chattopadhyaya).<sup>7</sup> Sukumar Sen points out that the following play-texts cited in the *Ratnakoṣa* are based on the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas*: *Mārīca-vañcitak*, *Kekayī-Bharata*, *Kṛtṭya-Rāvaṇa*, *Vālī Vadh*, *Kīcāk-Bhīma*, *Śarmiṣṭha-pariṇaya*, *Utkanṭhita-Mādhava*, *Revatī-pariṇaya*, *Kali-raivatak*, *Uṣāharaṇa*, *Rādhā*, *Satyabhāmā* etc.<sup>8</sup> Bijit Kumar Dutta shows that *Māyā-Madālasā*, also cited in the *Ratnakoṣa*, is composed on the same story of Madālasā as the Nepalese text titled *Lalita-kūvalayāśva Nāṭaka* and *Mudita-kūvalayāśva Nāṭaka* but the emphasis in the former is on Madālasā's abduction.<sup>9</sup> References to play-texts, similarity of one of them to the Nepalese court-theatre texts and the existence of a critical work on dramaturgy definitely point to the continuation of court-theatre during the Pāla reign in Bengal.

The Senas, with their strong Brahminical bias and distinct south Indian background, appear to have extended widespread patronry to performance derived from Sanskrit tradition. King Vijay Sena (c. 1096-1159) and Bhaṭṭa Bhavadeva (minister of King Hari Varmān and a noted scholar) both claim to have provided for innumerable *deva-dasīs* in the temples established by them. Another king of Sena dynasty, possibly Lakṣmaṇa Sena, is also credited to have made similar arrangement.<sup>10</sup> Sukumar Sen, citing a poem by Lakṣmaṇa Sena's court-poet Dhoyī, also confirms the existence of *deva-dasīs* in the temples of Śiva and Viṣṇu.<sup>11</sup> Highly skilled in song, dance and music in the classical Sanskrit tradition as formulated in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the *deva-dasīs* gave public performances in the temples and also private performances at royal courts. There also exist, as Roy points out, a substantial number of reference from various religious tracts of the period in which *naṭa* (actor) has been cited as a separate class in the society.<sup>12</sup> The existence of *naṭa* (actors) and *nartakī* (danseuse) in the Sena court is confirmed by Halāyūdhā Miśra's *Sekasubhodaya*, a historical *kāvya* written in Sanskrit (prose and verse), believed have been composed in 14th or 15th century.<sup>13</sup> The text cites various incidents related to Gāngo, an actor attached to the royal court (chapter xix), Jaya, another actor and Gāngo's son (chapter xxv), Vidyatprabhā, a danseuse of the court and Jaya's wife (chapters i, xiii, xvi, xxv) and Śāsikalā, another court-danseuse (chapters xii, xvi). As Sukumar Sen shows, Gāngo, beside being the chief actor of Lakṣmaṇa Sena's court, was also an accomplished poet.<sup>14</sup> Jayadeva Miśra, the renowned composer of *Gītagovinda*, and his wife Padmāvatī have been mentioned in chapters xiii and xvi as accomplished vocal musicians of King Lakṣmaṇa Sena's court.

Vidyapāti's *Puruṣ Parīkṣā* also refers to an actor, named Gandharva (same as Gāngo?), in the court of King Lakṣmaṇa Sena. The following incident, related in *Puruṣ Parīkṣā*, of interest to this study.

One day, as Lakṣmaṇa Sena and his minister Umāpati Dhar sat resting at the end of business of the day, there arrived Gandharva with a mark of sandal-paste on his forehead. On being ridiculed by Umāpati Dhar, Gandharva retaliated intelligently which caused the minister to be enraged. The former challenged him to perform an act of Bhavabhūti's *Uttararāmacarita* to prove his intelligence. The actor agreed and the King provided make-up, costume and necessary accessories. The performance commenced at the appointed hour and Gandharva began to dance (i.e., act) in the role of Rāma. At one point during his performance, he was overcome with grief on failing to touch absent Sītā. Moved with intense emotion, Gandharva fell unconscious and passed away.<sup>15</sup>

Prevalence of classical Sanskrit theatre in the Sena court can also be inferred from Govardhana Ācāryā's poetic work titled *Ārya-saptaśatī*. Contemporary of Jayadeva, Govardhana has been praised by the former for deft handling of erotic theme. *Śloka* 174 of *Ārya-saptaśatī* relates:

When Kṛṣṇa embraced a milkmaid, the cowherds began to laugh and sought to inform the elders regarding the amorous action. Thereupon, one of the maids in favour of Kṛṣṇa attempted to refrain the enthusiastic cowherds by explaining that Kṛṣṇa was merely acting out how he slayed the *daiṭya* (demon) named Ariṣṭa.

Again, in *śloka* no. 538, a *nāvikā* (heroine) has been compared to a *naṭī* (actress) who is initially hesitant when the curtain (*yavani*) is removed but gradually abandons hesitations to entertain spectators as *rasa* is generated in her.<sup>16</sup> Both the *ślokas* clearly refer to acting, curtain and actress, which obviously imply the existence of theatre in the court of Sena rulers.

Also important for this study is *Rāgatarāṅgīnī*, a critical work on music composed in 1160 by Locan Paṇḍit, during the reign of Ballāla Sena. Locan Paṇḍit cites reference to an earlier text titled *Tambaru-nāṭaka*. Although no extant text by the title has yet been discovered, Niharranjan Roy believes that it could have been a critical work on dramaturgy. Locan Paṇḍit quotes from *Tambaru-nāṭaka* where specific reference to *raṅgabhūmi* (performance space) has been made.<sup>17</sup> It can be easily inferred from the above that the text of *Tambaru-nāṭaka* was a critical work on theatre which was well known in the court of Sena dynasty.

Perhaps the most important material for study of theatre during this period is *Gītagovinda* (c. 1200 AD) by Jayadeva, because it is the earliest extant performance-text from the

region of Bengal. Composed in Sanskrit by the court-poet of Lakṣmaṇa Sena, *Gītagovinda* has been classified as *citrarāga-kāvya* (by Tarlekar),<sup>18</sup> "libretto of an opera" where poetry, music and dance are fused into integral synthesis (by Alphonso-Karkala),<sup>19</sup> "lyrical drama" (by Arthur A. Macdonell),<sup>20</sup> *gīti-nāṭya* (lyrical drama by Sukumar Sen)<sup>21</sup> and also "*gīti-nāṭya*" (by Gaurishankar Bhattacharya).<sup>22</sup> What is important in the views of these scholars is the agreement about the predominance of song and dance and the acceptance of character enactment in the *Gītagovinda*. It is possible that Jayadeva synthesized the popular and the elite. He blended the existing popular tale of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa with one of the *uparūpakas* of the classical Sanskrit tradition and set a new trend which was to be echoed in the centuries that followed.

There is ample evidence to show that *Gītagovinda* is indeed a performance-text. Consider for example the following inscription located on the door-way of Jagannāth Temple at Puri, Orissa, dated 1499, which in English reads:

The dancing group of the Elder Lord, the female dancers of Lord Kapileśvara, and the ancient dancing group of Talangana will all learn no song other than the *Gītagovinda* from the Elder Lord. *Aum*. They will sing no other song. No other dance should be performed before the great God. In addition to the dancing, there will be four singers who will sing only the *Gītagovinda*.(.....) Any temple official who knowingly allows any other song or dance to be performed is hostile to Jagannātha.<sup>23</sup>

According to Oriya tradition, nightly performance of *Gītagovinda* in the temple of Jagannāth has been continuous for more than seven hundred years.<sup>24</sup> Miller reminds us that the performance of the text is an essential aspect of Odissi dance.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, a text of *Gītagovinda* from Tanjore (South India), edited by K. Vasudeva Sastri, shows that the *deva-dasīs* performed the text with accompaniment of gestures (*āṅgika abhinaya*). Every word of the first seventeen songs have been annotated with accompanying gestures. Sastri has termed the above performance of the *Gītagovinda* by Tanjore *deva-dasīs* as "drama with *abhinaya*".<sup>26</sup> The text has also been performed in the regions where Śākta influence dominates, such as Nepal and Bihar (north India). Possibly the earliest known manuscript of the text exists in Kathmandu, Nepal, dated c. 1447 and c. 1496. And in Kathmandu in 1898, Sylvan Levi witnessed a performance based on *Gītagovinda* by popular players.<sup>27</sup> But the most important reference is found in the poetic work titled *Jayadeva* by Rāmasarasvatī (a 16th century court-poet from Coach-bihar), where it is mentioned that Jayadeva sings Kṛṣṇa's praise and in front of him Padmāvatī dances with gestures.<sup>27a</sup> The above is similar in character to the performance of *deva-dasīs* in the temple of Jagannāth at Puri. Clearly, Tarlekar is quite right in describing *Gītagovinda* as a *citrarāga-kāvya*.

According to Adya Rangacharya, with the rise of Bhakti cult after Śaṅkārācārya (c. 700-750 AD), the whole of Indian sub-continent witnessed a phenomenal rise of temples to which *deva-dasīs* and singers were attached to give performances such as the one described by Rāmasarasvatī.<sup>28</sup> When one is reminded of the popular tradition according to which Padmāvati was a *deva-dasī* at the temple of Jagannāth at Puri where she met Jayadeva,<sup>29</sup> another tradition according to which Jayadeva was the conductor and vocal singer of a troupe in which Padmāvati was a dancer<sup>30</sup> and also the testimony borne by *Sekaśubhodāya* that Padmāvati and Jayadeva were both dexterous in matters related to music,<sup>31</sup> there can hardly be any doubt that the two did perform *Gītagovinda*, possibly in temple (the legacy of which still continues at Puri) and in royal court. Therefore, one can only agree totally with Sukumar Sen who states that *Gītagovinda* was performed<sup>32</sup> and with Niharranjan Roy who believes that *Gītagovinda* and *Ārya-saptaśatī* bear evidence that in the court of Lakṣmaṇa Sena, the love theme of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, performed by courtesans, was indeed a regular feature.<sup>33</sup>

The text of (*Gītagovinda*) is composed in twelve parts and features three characters (Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā and Sakhi). The characters may be performed by three dancers as in the case of *Maṇipurī Rās Nr̥tya* (which features Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa and Vṛndā along with a host of choral dancers) or it may be performed by a single dancer, as it was possibly the case with Jayadeva and Padmāvati. The dancers are required to sing their lines simultaneously as they dance with mimetic gestures of *āṅgika abhinaya*. In between the songs, the *sūtradhāra* is required to render narrations in verse, in which he describes part of the action, comments on the same and sometimes also introduces the characters and describes their mental states.

The structure of performance follows the general pattern of Sanskrit theatre and is composed of *pūrva-rāga*, main body of performance and *bharata-vākya*. Gaurishankar Bhattacharya has produced an interesting analysis of *Gītagovinda*, in which he shows a possible structure of performance.<sup>34</sup> Clearly, the text bears remarkable similarity with *saṅgīt-nāṭaks* of the Nepalese court, specially those cited as operatic texts (in section 2.3.3). As it shall be seen later, Jayadeva's text stood out as the model, to be emulated by the later poets in vernacular during the course of the following centuries. Unfortunately, Sanskrit theatre received a serious setback towards the beginning of 13th century as Turkish (Muslim) invasion wrested a part of the region of Bengal from the Senas.

#### 4.1.2 *Buddhist Theatre*

It is not known when the earliest Buddhist contact with Bengal was established. That it was firmly entrenched during the rule of Candra Gupta II (375-415) is clearly evinced from Fa-



Hien's descriptions made during his sojourn at Tāmralipti (modern Tamluk, Medinipur).<sup>35</sup> Hiuen-Tsiang makes it clear that both the Mahāyānists as well as the Hinayānists were flourishing in Bengal (Puṇḍra-varḍhana, Karṇa-suvarṇa, Samataṭa and Tāmralipti) during his visit to India from 629 to 645 AD.<sup>36</sup> However, by the time the Pāla dynasty came to power, the Mahāyānists were already dominating in Bengal. And it was during the rule of the Senas as well as the later dynasties of the Devas and the Candras that the Mahāyāna school was transformed into Tantric Buddhism (Vajrayāna, Kalacakrayāna and Sahajayāna). Sometime in 9th c. AD, there developed in Bengal the Nātha cult. The rise of the Senas saw the final assimilation of Buddhism into Brahminical folds. But the Nātha cult survived through further amalgamation with Śaivism. With the advent of Turkish Muslims in early 13th century, all outward manifestation of Buddhism practically ceased to exist. But the ancient ghosts die not and in this case of Buddhism in Bengal, the ghosts lingered in the Dharma cult.

During the span of predominantly Buddhist influence and practice in Bengal, it was Tantric Buddhism, specially 8th century onward, that was most active. A large number of Buddhist monks from Bengal are known to have composed extensively on the subject, copies of which, often lost in Bengal, are still extant in Tibetan language. Mention may be made of Candragomin (6th c.), Śīlabhadra (d. 654), Śāntarakṣit (705-762), Śāntideva (between 648 and 816), Atīś Dipaṅkar (980-1053), Kamalaśīla (713-?), Putuli (?), Kumārvajra (end 10th-mid 11th c.), Jetāri (10th c.), Dibākar Candra (1st half, 11th c.) among a sizeable number of others. Of those mentioned above, Candragomin, resident scholar of Nālanda monastery, is known to have composed 36 treatises on Tantrism, all of which have been translated into Tibetan language.<sup>37</sup> Śāntarakṣit, the chief *ācāryā* of Nālandā monastery, was invited by the Tibetan monarch to Tibet and established a monastery there to preach till death; he and his disciple Kamalaśīla participated in the famous Council of Samye mentioned earlier, by representing Indian (Tantric) Buddhism; Atīś Dipaṅkar, also invited to Tibet by its monarch, and who preached there for 13 years till his death in 1053, is said to have composed 168 treatises on Tantric Buddhism and is considered to have firmly established it as the dominant Buddhist creed in Tibet.<sup>38</sup> In the 9th century, Tibetan monarch Ralpa-chan had invited a large number of Buddhist scholars from Bengal to his capital, many of whom translated a large number of Buddhist texts into Tibetan language. Śaratcandra Dās mentions the names of 70 scholars, important of whom, beside those mentioned earlier, are Dānaśrī, Vimala Mitra, Jina Mitra, Mukti Mitra, Sugataśrī, Danaśīl, Samvoga Vajra, Viracana, Mañju Ghoṣ etc.<sup>39</sup> Besides, Kumāracandra from the Vikrapura monastery, Haribhadra from the Traikutaka monastery, Bodhibhadra from the

Somapura monastery and Prajñā Varma of the Kapatya monastery are also known to have composed Tantric texts, translation of which in the Tibetan language are still extant.<sup>40</sup> The Paṇḍita monastery in Chittagong is mentioned in *dPag-bSam-iJon-bZan* (1747) by Sumpa-mKhan-po and was also renowned for its Tantric scholarship and is believed to have dispatched a mission to Tibet.<sup>41</sup>

It is of special interest to note that both Indian and Tibetan sources recognise 84 *siddhās* (Tantric Buddhist masters of miraculous power), who are accepted by most of the modern scholars to have existed between 8th and 12th centuries AD.<sup>42</sup> Of them, Kānhapā, Vīnāpā, Tilopā, Kukkurīpā, Bhusukupā, Kambalapā, Sarahapā, Dombīpā, Śavarīpā, Śāntipā, Dharamapā and Tāntipā are the composers of most of the Buddhist mystic songs (*dohā* and *caryā*) compiled in Hara Prasāda Śāstrī's *Baudha Gān O Dohā* (also known as *Caryā Gīti*) which were 'discovered' from the Royal Library in Nepal. These songs, the earliest extant evidence of Bangla literature at its very nascent stage, also exist in Tibetan translation. In 1956, Rāhul Sāmkṛtyāyan published a further collection of twenty *caryā* songs, titled *Dohā-koṣa*. Later Shashibhushan Dasgupta also published another collection of ninety-eight songs, composed between 10th and 15th century (or slightly after), in an edition titled *Navacaryāpada*. These discoveries and a further list of eleven compilations credited to Sarahapā, one to Śavarīpā, one to Luipā, four to Virūpā and one to Kambalapā by Tibetan historians raises the possibility that the *siddhās* had composed a larger number of *dohās* and *caryās* than what has been discovered.<sup>43</sup>

Most of the *siddhās* mentioned above are also known to have composed a large number of Tantric Buddhist texts, translations of which exist in Tibetan language. Besides six of Kukkurīpā's texts, Tibetan translations of which are extant, he is also believed to have visited Tibet.<sup>44</sup> Similar Tibetan translations of Tantric Buddhist texts have been authored by Gorakṣanātha, another of the 84 *siddhās* mentioned above.<sup>45</sup> Scholars also believe that at least some of them were residents of monasteries: Kānhapā and Virūpā at the Somapura monastery, Śāntipā at the Vikramśīla monastery, Bhusukupā at the Nālandā monastery, Mekhalapā (a nun) in the Devīkoṭ monastery (north Bengal), Tilopā, Luipā and Śavarīpā at the Paṇḍita monastery (Chittagong).<sup>46</sup>

Today, there remains no living example of Buddhist theatre in Bengal, other than relatively obscure performances seen in the south-eastern hills of Chittagong. But the evidence cited above should be thorough enough to prove that there existed a close link between Buddhism of Bengal and that of Tibet from the 8th to the 12th centuries. Therefore we shall begin with the assumption that there could have existed a Buddhist theatre in Bengal similar to the Tibetan, prior to the rule of the Sena dynasty. Following the Tibetan pattern,

supported by corroborating evidence from literature and archaeological remains in Bengal and also by remaining close of the characteristic design which has emerged from the study of Buddhist theatre in south Asia, we shall endeavour to reconstruct a possible model of similar practice in ancient Bengal. We shall then proceed to substantiate the model with the help of theatrical practice, literary evidence and religious architecture of later Tantric Buddhist derivative cults of Bengal. Thereby, perhaps, the dead can be called back to life.

### 1. Literary References:

A number of scattered literary references to theatre strongly suggests the possible existence of Buddhist theatre tradition in Bengal during the Pāla period. Consider for example the case of Candragomin (6th c.), a reputed Buddhist grammarian from Bengal who is known to have composed a Sanskrit play titled *Lokānanda* structured in four acts with a prologue. The play is believed to have been based on a Jātaka tale.<sup>47</sup> I-Tsing also credits a play to Candragomin:

Mahāsattva Kandra (Candragomin), a learned man from eastern India, composed a poetical song about prince Visvantara, hitherto known as Sudāna, and people all sing and dance to it throughout the five countries of India.<sup>48</sup>

Winternitz believes that I-Tsing is referring to the *Lokānanda*. Unfortunately the only extant version of the play exists in Tibetan language.<sup>49</sup>

Also from Bengal of the Buddhist Pala dynasty period there exists the *Nāṭakalakṣanaratnakoṣa* by the Buddhist scholar Sāgaranandin. Of the play-texts cited in the *Ratnakoṣa*, a few like *Grameyī*, *Mayākāpālik*, *Mayāmadalasā* and *Nāga-varma* appear not to have been based on Brahminical mythologies and may have been based on Buddhist tales.<sup>50</sup> Nothing more can be deduced with certainty but the very existence of a critical work on drama by a Buddhist scholar presupposes the existence of dramatic texts as well as performance, which is all the more a possibility under the patronry of a Buddhist monarchy (i.e., the Pālas). The above possibility is immensely strengthened because of the following account provided by Tāranātha. "In the city (of Vikrampurī) he (Ācārya Anupamasāgara) witnessed a grand dramatic performance that formed part of seasonal festival. As result he attained the *samādhi* and saw everything as *māyā*."<sup>51</sup> Elsewhere, Tāranātha places the *ācārya* in the period of Naya Pāla who ascended the throne shortly before Atīś Dipaṅkar left for Tibet (c. 1040 AD).

That performances were a common feature of the Pāla society in general and the Tantric Buddhist monks in particular is clearly hinted in the *Caryā Gīti*. Examples can be seen in the song composed by Kānhapā (text no. 10), which contains the words "dancing" (নাচা)

and "the profession of acting" (নৃত্যশিল্পী) as well as in the concluding two lines of another song composed by Vināpā (text no. 17) which contains the words "dancing" (নাচন্তি), "singing" (গায়ন্তি) and "Buddhist drama" (বুদ্ধ নাটক).<sup>52</sup> Reference to dance is also to be noted in the *caryā* songs compiled in the *Navacaryāpada*, composed by Abadhūta Kānha ("নাচই অবধূত বজ্র সংযোগে" lit. tr., "Abadhūta dances in conjunction with Vajra", line 3) and Karṇapā ("উর্ধ্ব রক্ত পিঙ্গল কেশা/নাচই হেরুঅ উন্মত্ত বেশা" lit. tr., "Heraku dances wildly with blood-red hair above").<sup>53</sup> Sukumar Sen, noting the ankle-bells as part of the general attire of the yogī mendicants described by Kānhapā (*Caryā Gīti*, text no. 10) believes that at least a section of the *siddhās* and their followers (the Kāpālik yogīs) were usually attired as performers.<sup>54</sup> Sketches of the *siddhās* from Tibetan Buddhist monasteries have depicted a few of them with musical instrument (Vināpā and Sarahapā), others in dancing posture (Mānapā, Dombipā and Jālandharipā).<sup>55</sup> It should also be noted that the *dohā* and the *caryā* songs have been widely popular in medieval India and have also been referred to in the Sanskrit treatises in Indian music (composed between 12th to 17th centuries) as "songs dealing with religious mysticism and generally sung by a class of Yogins".<sup>56</sup>

Tāranātha, in his *History of Buddhism in India*, relates an interesting incident which shows how the above mentioned mystic songs were rendered by the *siddhās*. There lived in Aravanti (Avanti ?) in Mālvā an aged old weaver, says Tāranātha, who, because of his incapability to work, was forced to reside alone in a hut built at a corner of his eldest son's garden. He was later blessed by Siddhā Jālandharipā and soon attained mystic power through intense meditation. One evening a maid heard "the sound of song and music and she (...) peeped through the door, saw the body of the old man radiating in lustre and twelve gods and goddesses worshipping him with offering."<sup>57</sup> Obviously Tāranātha's account has been coloured by a need to elevate the *siddhās*. But the central image is clear: the *siddhā*, along with a few other men and women were performing a ritualistic ceremony which also included song and dance. Tāranātha has another incident to recount. This time about Ācārya Vāgīsvarkīrti attending a consecration ceremony of a temple in Nepal. At the end of the ceremony he is said to have entered the temple with two consorts, one of whom was a "voluptuous dancing girl". The king, wondering as to what was transpiring inside, "peeped through the door and saw sixty-two deities (...) sitting there and enjoying the provisions (...). In the same place also sat the ācārya who had attained rainbow body".<sup>58</sup>

That the Tantric Buddhist in Bengal engaged in rituals which included dancing possibly with the accompaniment of music and song, can be clearly seen in sections 15 to 18 of *Guhya Samagha*, a text which enumerates many secret cult practices of Tantric Buddhism in eastern India.<sup>59</sup> An account of a song-and-dance mystic performance can also be seen

in a similar text titled *Hevajratantra*, according to which, an ascetic attired in tiger-skin, bone necklace, sacred earrings, bracelets and a girdle, meditates

at night beneath a lonely tree or in a cemetery, or in the mother's house (place where there are statues of seven mother goddesses) or in some unfrequented spot. When some heat (power from meditation) has been developed (.....) then upon this course one should proceed. Take a girl from the Vajra family (or any other girl consecrated and enlightened ...) and with her the practice should be performed. (...). If in joy songs are sung, let them be the excellent Vajra-songs and if one dances when joy has arisen, let it be done with release as its object. Then the *yogin*, self-collected, performs the dance of the *Vajrapada* (postures associated with *Hevajra*).<sup>60</sup>

## 2. The Visvantara Jātaka: A Performance Text

It has already been noted that Winternitz believes in the possibility of the Jātakas to have been rendered as songs accompanied by string instrument. But he was unable to trace any evidence that these were also given as performances in which action and imitation were brought into play. But a close examination of the *Nan-sa* text as produced by Waddell clearly proves that the narrative texts of the Jātakas could easily have been performed. Consider, for example, the following excerpt from the *Visvantara Jātaka* which is comprised of narrative in prose as well as verse:

From the city of Jetuttara, the mountains named Suvannagiritala is five leagues distant; from thence the river Kontimara is five leagues away, and five leagues more to Mount Aranjaragiri, (...) thus from Jetuttara the journey was thirty leagues. The gods shortened the journey, so that in one day they came to his uncle's city. Thus it is said:

"The Yakkhas made the journey short, pitying the children's plight,  
And so to Ceta kingdom they arrived before the night."

(*The Jātaka*, Book XXII, 514)<sup>61</sup>

During a performance the prose text can be spoken by a narrator, and the verse, rendered as a song. This form of performance is followed by the non-clerical troupes in itinerant performers in the "Sacred" and the Popular (Folk) theatre of Tibet as well as in the indigenous theatre of Bengal today. The text cited above is strikingly similar in construction to the following excerpt from the text of *Nan-sa*:

The young prince, unable to bear separation from his mother, stole into the room after the tragedy and found her lying dead. Rushing to his father with the dreadful news, his father in alarm, ran to her prostrate figure, but thinking that *Nan-sa* was merely shamming, he exclaimed, "O! fair *Nan-sa*, rise! The starry heavens betimes is obscured by clouds (...) but your time has not yet come; so, pray arise!" But the corpse lay still, for its spirit had long fled.

(Act III, *Nan-sa*)<sup>62</sup>

The *Visvantara Jātaka* also contains prose dialogue inserted within the narrative and also dialogue in verse :

Then Maddi thought, "Why I wonder does Vessantara (Visvantara) say such a thing to me?" And she asked him, "My lord, why do you say to me what you ought not to say?" The great Being replied, "Lady, the people of Sivi, angry with me for the gift of the elephant, are banishing me from the realm (...) and the next day I depart from the city." And he said:

"Tomorrow to a forest dreary, beset with beasts of prey,  
I go: and whether I can live within it, who can say?"

(*The Jātaka* Book XXII, 495)

Similar construction is also to be seen in *Nan-sa*:

Now, there arrived at that place the devotee Dor-grags-Ras-pa, and his servant, and the devotee addressed Nan-sa thus, -

"Om! Salutation to our spiritual father, the Lama!

O! Nan-sa! You are like the rainbow on the eastern mead, the rainbow beautiful and pleasing to see, but quickly vanishing.

Now the time for devoting yourself to religion has arrived." (...)

On hearing this speech Nan-sa was overpowered with grief. And as she had nothing to offer the holy man as alms (...) she, with faltering voice said: "Though I am anxious to offer you whatever alms you need, yet I am possessed of nothing, but pray go to that house over there, where you will find Ani with a sleek face, and seek alms from her."

(*Nan-sa*, Act. II)

The text of *Visvantara Jātaka* also contains dialogue set in verse :

and then he (Visvantara) turned to his mother, asking her permission to leave the world with these words:

"Mother, I take my leave of you: a banished man I stand.

For wrong I did my people, giving bounty from my hand,

By all the people's sentences I go banished from the land. ( ..... )

In reply Phusati said

"I give leave to go my son, and take my blessings too:

Leave Maddi and the boys behind, for she will never do;

Fair rounded limbs and slender waist, why need she go with you?"

Vessantara (Visvantara) said :

"Even a slave against her will I would not take away:

But if she wishes, let her come; if not then let her stay."

(*The Jātaka*, XXII, 505-506)

The text of *Nan-sa* also contains similar passage set in verse:

"O! Nan-sa, brilliant above a hundred thousand lights!

Listen! *Lah-se!* Listen to king Yama, the master of Death! (.....)

No one can ever escape visiting this my bar of Justice.

But you, O Nan-sa! are not sinful person (.....)

So stay no longer here, but return to the human world, and recover your old body!  
*Lah-se!* Be a 'death-returned person', and benefit the animal beings!"

(*Nan-sa*, Act III)

Thus, it can be clearly seen that the original Pali text of the *Visvantara* and other *Jātakas* are structured in a form similar to the Tibetan performance texts, which, to remind ourselves again, is "somewhat like the narration of a novel with the conversational part acted", according to Waddell.

It is also possible to perform the *Jātaka* texts entirely in narrative form, as seen in the *Buddha Kīrtan (Pālā Gān)* performances in south-eastern Bangladesh today. Therefore, there can be little doubt that these texts could also have been given in ancient Bengal as narrative performance.

### 3. Monastic Practice :

The memoirs of the Chinese Buddhist monk Hiuen Tsiang informs us that *śilpasthāna-vidyā* (arts and crafts) was one of the five branches of knowledge in which the Buddhist monks underwent training. Architecture, sculpture and painting are mentioned as parts of the *śilpasthāna-vidyā*. Apart from innumerable palm-leaf miniatures which were produced in the monasteries during the rule of the Pālas, a particular wooden manuscript cover, in which scenes from the *Visvantara Jātaka* have been depicted,<sup>63</sup> proves the popularity of the tale in Bengal as well. Although music and dance have not been mentioned by Hiuen Tsiang in the list of subjects studied under *śilpasthāna-vidyā*, the very popularity of the poetical song of *Visvantara* by Candragomin (mentioned earlier) implies the practice of music and dance in the monasteries. That most of the composers of the *caryā* songs were resident scholars of eastern Indian monasteries and that these monasteries were also seats of Tantric practice (which involves song and dance) make it extremely probable that the arts of singing and dancing were not uncommon among the Buddhist monks residing in these monasteries.

Two ceremonies of regular monastic life may prove valuable in our study. One is the bathing of images of the Buddha, conducted during the forenoon. A jewelled canopy would usually be stretched over the courtyard where the image would be bathed as a band of girls played music.<sup>64</sup> The other is the evening assembly, related by I-Tsing. The monks would gather in the assembly hall, where, led by a reciter, they would sing hymns selected from the *Service In Three Parts* by *Aśvaghōṣa*.<sup>65</sup>

#### 4. Festivals and Processions

The 'festival' and 'performance' referred to earlier in the incident related to Ācārya Anupamasāgara is not an isolated one. From the description provided by Fa-Hien during his visit to India from 399 to 414 AD, it is known that on the 8th day of the second month, which is roughly on the last week of May, a highly popular Buddhist religious festival used to be held in which a number of well-decorated chariots (*ratha*) with the image of the Buddha and other deities installed within, were drawn through the streets of Pāṭaliputra and were accompanied by "singers and skillful musicians".<sup>66</sup> Hiuen Tsiang witnessed a similar festival at Kanauj. He writes that King Harṣavardhana himself led the yearly royal procession carrying a golden image of the Buddha through the roads with "highly decorated pavilions, and places where musicians were stationed, who raised the sound of their various instruments".<sup>67</sup> After the image was bathed in the river the procession returned with pompous ceremonies. Each day of the festival, extending from the 1st to the 21st of Caitra, opened with lavish performances of dance and music, vocal and instrumental. It is believed that "Emperor Harṣa himself played the part of Indra, and his friend, Bhāskaravarmāṇ (Kumāradeva), the king of Kāmṛūp (Assam), appeared disguised as Brahma".<sup>68</sup> Hiuen-Tsiang witnessed another festival (of charity) in 643 AD, this time at Allahabad. In this festival too, provisions were made for entertainment with dance and music.<sup>69</sup> Apart from the performances given during these festivals, Sarkar also notes that "it was the established custom among the Buddhist votaries to amuse themselves (...) by appearing in the masks of Hindu gods and goddesses."<sup>70</sup> It is possible that the Hindu deities, subservient to the Buddha, gradually made their appearance with the rise of Tantric influence during the Pāla rule.

I-Tsing also mentions the custom of taking out processions on the morning of the last day of summer retreat when the lay devotees and the priests would "all go out round villages and towns and worship all the Kaityas (Caityas) with sincere mind. They (would) bring storied carriages, images in sedan chairs, drums and other music resounding in the sky, banners and canopies hoisted high in regular order, flattering (sic.) and covering the sun; this is called Sa-ma-kin-li (Sāmagrī), which is translated as 'concord' or 'thronging together'. (...) At the beginning of the fore-noon (9 am to 11 am) they came back to the monastery ....."<sup>71</sup> Scholars believe that during the reign of Aśoka, it was the custom to bring out processions with scenes depicting the ascent of the saints to the heavens, the torment of the sinners in the flames of hell, other miraculous events and images of various deities on multi-storeyed chariots and decorated elephants.<sup>72</sup> I-Tsing's description makes it plausible



that something near Aśokan practice was current in eastern India of 7th century. The plausibility is further enhanced when one is reminded of the Nepalese *Yātrās*, specially, the *Āḍhā Yātrā* and the *Devī Yātrā*. If it can be assumed that the Śākta deities of *Devī Yātrā* are but later day adaptations of what were once Tantric Buddhist goddesses, it becomes clear to see that the Nepalese *Yātrās* are but a continuation of the ancient practice of the Buddhists.

But the most important of all Buddhist festivals, which is still celebrated with due solemnity and grandeur in Bangladesh is that of *Bauddha Purṇimā*, held on the full-moon of Baiśākh. It is the celebration of the birth, the enlightenment, and the final emancipation (*Parinirvāṇa*) of Gautama Buddha in which the followers of the faith render songs in praise of the Buddha as well as present narrative performances (*Buddha Kīrtan* or *Pālā Gān*) on his life and that of his disciples.<sup>73</sup> The festival is an ancient one which has been prevalent in Bengal since 7th century, if not earlier.<sup>74</sup>

#### 4. Buddhist Archaeological Sites

Of the major ruins of Buddhist monasteries discovered in Bangladesh, four are definitely known to have been with a central shrine each, built within the monastery enclosure. These are the Ānanda, the Śālban, the Somapura and the Rāmkoṭ monasteries. But there have been others, the Śītākoṭ, the Vāsu and the twin monasteries in its vicinity and that at the Rūpbān complex, all of which were built with the temple outside the monastery compound, leaving the latter as a flat, paved and open-air space bound by the monastery cells on all four sides.

##### 4.A. Rectangular Courtyard of the Monasteries

The Śītākoṭ Monastery situated about 3 miles east of Charkhai-Birampur railway station in greater Dinajpur district, was built around a paved square courtyard measuring 139'x136'. The Vāsu Monastery (near Mahāsthān in Bogra) which awaits full excavation, was built around a large central courtyard, rectangular in shape. Partially excavated ruins of a Buddhist complex, dating from the 10th or the 11th c. AD and comprised of two monastery buildings as well as a temple, is situated one mile north of the Vāsu Monastery. Of the two, the slightly larger building is situated on the northern part of the complex measuring 184'x161' externally and was built around an internal courtyard measuring 107'x84' (approx.), with the centre of the northern arm projecting into the yard. The smaller monastery, situated on the west, measures 162'x152' externally, was also built around an internal courtyard (measuring 82'x80' in this case), with the centre of the

western arm projecting into the yard. The courtyard, situated inside the small monastery at the Rūpbān Complex (in Mainamati, Comilla) measures 47x-6"x18'-0".

#### 4B. Halls of Pavilions in Buddhist Temples

The common feature of both Somapura and Śālban monasteries (situated at Paharpur, greater Rajshahi and Mainamati, Comilla, respectively) is that the main temple is located in the centre of the inner courtyard. Ruins of pillared pavilions can still be seen at the central shrine of the Śālban Monastery. Opposite the cella existed a pillared pavilion measuring 21-3" a side, with three pillars in each of the four corners, surrounded on all sides by an ambulatory passage six feet wide. North of the above (twelve pillared) pavilion, across a vestibule, there exist ruins of a square entrance hall measuring 26'-9"x26'-4" with a pillared pavilion measuring 12'-6"x12'-6". Each of the cellas inside the cruciform shaped main temple of the Somapura Monastery, faces a nearly square hall measuring 27'-0" x 24'-6". Approximately 400 yards east of the Somapura Monastery is situated the ruined temple of the Buddhist goddess Tārā. Inside the temple, opposite the sanctum, is a pillared pavilion measuring 18'x10', surrounded on all sides by an ambulatory passage six to seven feet in width, the whole enclosed within four walls of a hall.<sup>75</sup>

#### 4C. Terra-cotta Plaques

Performance is clearly one of the dominant themes of terra-cotta plaques discovered in the Somapura Monastery.<sup>76</sup> Consider for example, two female dancing figures shown in illustration numbers 19 and 20, two male drummers in illustration numbers 21 and 22 (one of whom is clearly playing a *ḍamaru* drum), an interesting figure with a mask in illustration no. 24 and another with a bird-like costume in illustration no. 23 (all from the publication cited above). It is hard to believe that the above plaques could be placed on the basement of the central shrine of the monastery without these being related to the life of resident monks. Terra-cotta plaques of musicians are also to be seen at the Buddhist archaeological sites in Mainamati, Comilla.<sup>77</sup>

### 5. Reconstruction of Buddhist Theatre in Ancient Bengal

So far, the study of Buddhism in Bengal has revealed the following :

1. Close contact between the followers of Tantric Buddhism in Bengal and Tibet during the rule of Pāla dynasty and earlier.
2. References to play-texts such as *Lokānanda*, possibly based on *Viśvantara Jātaka*, as well as extant critical texts such as the *Nāṭakalakṣanaratnakoṣa*.

3. References to performance provided by Tibetan historian, Chinese travellers, Tantric texts and *caryā* songs.
4. Practice of fine arts in monastic life.
5. Buddhist festivals which included performance of song, dance and music.
6. Processions which included various forms of representation.
7. Ruins of Buddhist monasteries with rectangular courtyards similar to those in Tibet and temples with pavilions similar to those in other parts of India.
8. Close parallel in the structure of existing Jātaka texts and the play-texts of popular Tibetan theatre.
9. Probable performance of Jātaka texts in Bengal in a manner similar to the Sacred Drama in Tibet.
10. Existence of narrative performance (*Buddha kīrtan*), dialogic performance (*Jyā*) and mask dance (*Bulu*) among the Buddhists of Bangladesh today (as noted in Chapter 3).

On comparison of the above with the study of Buddhist theatre in the neighbouring regions of Bangladesh (conducted in Chapter 2), it is clear that existing literary, archaeological and performance evidence of Buddhist theatre in Bengal follow similar pattern (as that of the neighboring regions) in all aspects except that of adaptation of pre-Buddhist rituals. Furthermore, there also appears to have existed close association of Bengal and Tibet in matters related to the practice of Tantric Buddhism. Therefore, it would be logical to assume that parallel to the Buddhist theatre in the regions around Bengal, there could also have existed similar theatre in Bengal during the rule of the Pāla dynasty. A probable model of such a theatre will now be constructed following the pattern stated above, with special emphasis given to the Tibetan practice because of religious affinity.

(i) Ritualistic Performances :

Highly esoteric in nature, the Tantric ritualistic performances were conducted in secluded spots at night ("beneath a lonely tree or in a cemetery" according to *Hevajratāntra*) or in temples ("mother's house", *Hevajratāntra*). Usually performed by a male ascetic with his female partner (a consecrated or enlightened woman), it consisted of song and dance, involved sexual action and aimed at spiritual liberation, similar to the Chöd rite of Tibet. The *dohās* and *caryās* composed by the *siddhās* referred to earlier were sung by fellow ascetics during the performance. The dance postures, referred to as *Vajrapada* by the *Hevajratāntra*, were possibly similar to those depicted in Tibetan illustrations of the

*siddhās*. These illustrations are visual renditions of open-air ritualistic performances given by Luipā, Mīnapā, Vīnāpā, Dombīpā and Jālandharipā, where the female counterparts have been portrayed symbolically as tigress, snake and the like. Ritualistic performances were also given in the halls and pillared pavilions of the central temple at the Somapura and the Śālban monasteries and at the temple of Tārā adjacent to the Somapura monastery referred to earlier. Tāranātha's account of Ācārya Vāgīsvarkīrti's miracle was possibly such a performance given in a hall adjoining the cella. Moreover, the presence of Kānhapā, Virūpā and other *siddhās* (who are known for their *caryā* songs as well as Tantric practices) in Somapura and other monasteries, along with pictorial evidence provided by the terra-cotta plaques (of dancing male and female figures), would further establish that the halls and pillared pavilions inside the central and adjoining shrines of various monasteries served as the space for these ritualistic performances late at night. If *Buddhanāṭaka* (Buddhist drama) is that performance which shows the attainment of *Bodhisattva* through renunciation of material life and not merely the life of Buddha, then it is possible to propose that Vīnāpā in his famous song (text 17, *Caryā Gīti*) is actually describing a Tantric ritualistic performance involving an act of sexual communion. It is such a performance that Kāṇapā is also referring to in his song cited earlier. A visual glimpse of similar performance can be seen in "A Form of Hevajra", a Tantric icon at Pemiantse Monastery, Sikkim, composed of awe-inspiring masked figures of a male and a female engaged in an act of sexual communion.<sup>77a</sup>

(ii) Dialogic and Processional Performances :

There exists striking similarity between the central courtyard seen in some of the monasteries of ancient Bengal and the performance space used in the monastic religious performances in Tibet, and Sri Lanka (the *Kolam*) as well as those at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa (India) and Anuradhapura (Sri Lanka). The existence of a play-text based on the Jātaka legend of Visvantara composed by Candragomin, the composition of the Jātaka in a form which easily lends itself to a narrative-cum-dialogic style of performance and the performance of plays based on the *Visvantara Jātaka* in Tibet as well as Myanmar are other examples of close similarity. Again, song, dance and music as elements of performance are common in the tradition of theatre in Bengal. Moreover, narrative as well as dialogic performances based on the Jātaka tales can still be seen in the south eastern hills (Chittagong) in Bangladesh.

Also striking is the existence of Hariścandra legend as a material for performance within the fold of Dharma cult. Based on the ground that the Cult was strongly influenced by

Tantric Buddhism, the existence of Hariścandra legend can be treated as circumstantial evidence that *Viśvantara Jātaka* was also performed by the Buddhists in Bengal. Moreover, the recurring theme of childless parents blessed with children by Dharma Ṭhākur in the *Dharma-maṅgala* literature obviously runs parallel to the *Sokari* of Sri Lanka as well as other performances in Nepal and Tibet. The matter of *Dharmer Gājan* is also fascinating, for a festival culminating on the full-moon night of Baiśākh cannot fail to be a derivative of the celebration of birth and *Parinirvāṇa* of Gautama Buddha. The bathing of stone images of Dharma Ṭhākur as seen in *Dharmer Gājan* is also, in all probability, another derivative of Buddhist ritual, i.e., bathing of Buddha's image as witnessed by Hiuen Tsiang at Kanauj. It is also possible that the *saṅg* is but a natural development of Harṣavardhana and Kumāradeva's appearance as Indra and Brahma in the festival of Kanauj and the procession witnessed in *Dharmer Gājan*, a continuation of the *Sa-ma-kin-li* witnessed by I-Tsing. Therefore, one cannot but agree with B.K. Sarkar's statement that "the *Gājan* of Dharma, as instituted by Rāmāi, was probably an imitation of Buddhist festivities witnessed by Hiuen-Tsiang".<sup>78</sup> Later, as Dharma cult lost ground to Tantric Hinduism (Śaivism), the processional performances were also adopted by the latter. *Saṅgā Bhikṣā* seen in the annual festival in honour of Del Ṭhākur in Tangail, *Aṣṭak Gān* procession also held in honour of Del Ṭhākur in greater Jessore, processional performances held in honour of Del Ṭhākur in Manikganj etc. are but remnant derivatives of an ancient tradition. Therefore, seeking circumstantial evidence related to performance from Dharma cult appears well justified and it would be only fair to conclude that processions with elements of performance was very much prevalent among the Buddhists in Bengal during the Pāla rule. A special point to be noted is the absence of female performers in both *Dharmer Gājan* and *Śrīver Gājan*, which could also mean that the Buddhist theatre, other than ritualistic performances, was entirely a domain of male performers. The conclusion is not only supported by Tibetan Buddhist theatre, but also by the fact that the Buddhist monasteries, for the most part, housed very few female monks.

Based on all the evidences cited above, it can easily be argued that Tāranātha's account of Ācārya Anupamasāgara clearly refers to a religious performance given during a Buddhist festival. These festivals would begin with processions taken out from the monasteries, in a manner similar to those of Aśoka, Harṣavardhana, those described by I-Tsing and the Nepalese *Yātrās*, displaying decorated chariots with images of deities and tableaux representing scenes of heaven, hell and miraculous events and accompanied by music, song, dance as well as live representations of various deities. Going around a village or a city, the processions would return to the monastery, where dialogic performances would be

given. The most popular of these performances would be that of *Visvantara Jātaka* and the performance texts followed the original narratives of the Jātakas. The narrative sections would be sung, chanted or spoken by a narrator with choral and musical accompaniment and the conversational parts enacted by performers. All these performances, both the dialogic at the monasteries as well as those in the processions, would be enacted by the monks. (Perhaps one needs to be reminded that prior to 17th century, performances based on Jātaka tales were also common in Tibetan monasteries.) This, then, is the origin of *Yātrā* (or *Jātrā*, lit., "act of setting out on a journey").

If the masked dance of *Gambhīrā* festival was originally an ancient shamanistic or spirit cult practice prevalent among the Coach community, then it could be argued, following the pattern of Buddhist assimilation of masked dance of the Bon religion in Tibet, devil dance in Sri Lanka and spirit cult practice in Myanmar, that in Bengal they (Buddhists) assimilated the masked dance of the Coach community to evolve their own form of masked dance. Perhaps terra-cotta plaques at Somapura Monastery bear witness to Buddhist masked performances in ancient Bengal. With the absorption of the Coach people into Śaivite fold, the festival of *Gambhīrā* was transformed with into a Śaivite festival. But traces of ancient shamanistic and Tantric Buddhist practices still remain. As a result, Śaivism seen in the *Gambhīrā* festival has acquired "popular" character. It is also interesting to note that the masked performances of *Mukho Nācā* exist only in the region of greater Rajshahi, in areas adjacent to Paharpur monastery and *Kālī Kāc* is performed in Manikganj, adjacent to Savar and Dhamrai, both of which are believed to have been Buddhist sites. Therefore, it would appear logical to believe that a form of masked dance was also performed in the Buddhist monasteries during religious festivals, very much like the Tibetan and the Nepalese practice.

The spectators witnessing these performances would be seated on three sides of central courtyard of the monasteries, including the bordering "wall" (one foot high and four feet wide seen at the *Sītakoṭ* Monastery), the chief priest on the raised pillared pavilion in front of the main temple (located in the centre of the fourth side) and the performance would be given in the arena enclosed by spectators on all sides. An ideal example of such a "theatre" is the *Sītakoṭ* Monastery. Similar arrangement could also have been made in other monasteries as well. As we shall see in section 4.1.3, similar performance space was also used in the theatre of Nātha cult.

(iii) Narrative Performances :

Based on Sukumar Sen's observation that the Kāpālik *yogīs* donned performers' attire, the fact that *caryā* songs were composed to be sung in particular musical modes (*rāga*), the picture of the *siddhās* with musical instruments as well as in dancing posture as seen in the Tibetan portrayals and the fact that itinerant story-tellers and minstrels still perform in the Himalayan region as well as in Bangladesh, perhaps one could assume that by 10th century there evolved a form of narrative performance in Bengal, in which Tantric Buddhist mendicants expounded their religious doctrine to the lay populace with the help of song, music and dance, in a manner similar to the Bāul mendicants still to be seen in parts of Bangladesh and West Bengal, India. These narrative performances would also include rendition of Jātaka tales, as seen in south-eastern parts of Bangladesh even today (*Buddha Kīrtan*). Adya Rangacharya also shows that such practice was common all over the Indian sub-continent during this period.<sup>79</sup> The narrative performance seen in the festivals of Dharma cult would certainly substantiate the above mentioned view as circumstantial evidence.

**4.1.3 Theatre of the People**

Outside the purview of theatre patronied by the state, there exist evidence that theatre was also performed under the patronry of the people. To be examined in this section are theatrical performances of the Nātha cult, the Śaiva cult and the Dharma cult, which were supported entirely by the people. Beside a brief note on popular Kṛṣṇa cult, the section will also examine secular performances and two supra-personae genres (*Putul Nāc* and *Paṭuā Gān*).

**1. The Nātha Cult**

The following examination of theatre under the Nātha cult includes discussion on relevant aspects of its literature, evidence and nature of performance and its temples (*gofā*).

The Natha Literature

Till the publication of George Grierson's now-famous and oft-quoted transcription of *Mānikcandra Rājar Gān* in 1878, most of Nātha literary texts existed in oral form, predominantly among the Muslim peasantry of north Bengal, unknown and unacknowledged by elite literary circles of Bengal. Although none of the extant texts discovered so far date beyond 16th century (17th century according to Sukumar Sen),<sup>80</sup>

all are agreed that the original root of these texts have been derived from earlier oral versions.

The Nātha literary texts can be classified into two distinct groups: (i) those dealing with the origin of the Nātha *siddhās* and the subsequent rescue of Mīnanātha by his disciple Gorakṣanātha from the enticement of worldly pleasure as portrayed in *Gorakṣa-vijay* (a play-text by Vidyāpati c.1403), *Mīnacetan* (a narrative by Śyama Dāsa Sen), *Gorakṣa-vijay* (also a narrative by Sheikh Faizullah, 16th century) and *Gorkha-vijay* (another narrative by Bhimsen Rāy); and (ii) those dealing with the exploits of Queen Maināmatī and her son King Govindacandra (or Gopīcandra), the disciple of Hādīpā as portrayed in *Mānikcandra Rājar Gān* (an oral narrative by an anonymous poet, published by George Grierson in 1878), *Gopīcandrer Gān* (also an oral narrative collected by Bisvesvar Bhatācārya in 1910/11), *Gopīcandrer Pācālī* (a narrative by Bhavanī Dāsa, c. 16th c.), *Gopīcandrer Saṁvās* (another narrative by Shukur Mamud, c. 18th c.), *Govindacandrer Gīt* (a narrative by Durlabh Mallik, 17th c.) and *Gopīcandra Nāṭaka* (a play-text from 17th c. Nepalese royal court). Other than the two play-texts and *Gopīcandrer Pācālī* cited above, all other texts have been described as belonging to a hybrid genre created out of admixture of what is strictly classified as legend and ballad. According to Asutosh Bhattacharyya and B.K. Sarkar, the original oral narrative based on the Maināmatī-Gopīcandra legend was possibly created sometime immediately after 11th century.<sup>81</sup> On the other hand, the Gorakṣanātha-Mīnanātha legend is more difficult to date. On the assumption that the Nātha cult evolved sometime in 9th century, it is possible to place the original oral narrative on Gorakṣanātha-Mīnanātha legend in 10th or 11th century AD.

Of the two groups of texts mentioned above, those based on the Maināmatī-Gopīcandra legend appears to have gained wider popularity with the elite (as in Nepal where the Cult has enjoyed special privilege) as well as the common people. The Gorakṣanātha-Mīnanātha legend, on the other hand, owing to strict adherence to the philosophy of the creed, was restricted to its followers and peculiarly enough, among the Muslim peasantry of north Bengal. Variants of both the groups of narratives are still popular in northern and western India. Turbaned minstrels are still to be seen in parts of Punjab and Maharashtra rendering the Song of Gopīcandra. Translations of the narratives also exist in Tibetan language.<sup>82</sup>

Although some of the texts cited above end with re-entrenchment of the central character in worldly life (as in *Gopīcandrer Gān* and *Gopīcandra Nāṭaka*) most of the others stress renunciation, a theme common to all Buddhist performances. Another thematic element common to all Nātha literature is the emphasis laid on celibacy, which is shown as the ultimate means of nurturing innate strength in human beings for those who endeavour in



obtaining supernatural power; clearly, this too is an equivalent of the life of the Buddha and all Buddhist monks. Totally refraining from eulogizing the deities (a feature common to all *Maṅgala* literature), the Nātha literature can also be viewed as the portrayal of Man in quest of eternal life and godhood, which again runs parallel to Buddhist *nirvāṇa*. Furthermore, as Sukumar Sen points out, all of Nātha literature is based on odd reversals of accepted human practice: in the first group, it is the disciple Gorakṣa who imparts wisdom to his preceptor Mīnanātha and in the second, it is the mother Maināmatī who imbibes the spirit of renunciation of temporal life in her progeny Gopīcandra.<sup>83</sup>

Mention should also be made of a third group of texts, little known in the main-stream Bānglā literary circles, which can be termed as 'instructive literature'. Four of these, published by Panchanan Mandal, are titled *Yogīr Gān*, *Yugī Kāc*, *Gorkha Saṁhitā* and *Yoga-cintāmaṇi*.<sup>84</sup> Of these, the first two have already been referred to in Chapter 3.5 for their similarity with the performance texts of *Yogīr Gān* and *Yugī Parva*. *Gorkha Saṁhitā* is essentially a rhymed dialogue between Gorakṣa, the disciple and Mīnanātha, his preceptor. The text attempts to explain the mystery of life as comprehended by the Nātha cult, in a language pregnant with riddles. Scholars point out that similar dialogue in riddles also exist in the Jātakas.<sup>85</sup>

#### Evidence of Performance in the Nātha Cult

That there did exist a long tradition of performance in the Nātha cult can be evinced from the following sources: (i) existence of song-and-dance type of performance such as *Yogīr Gān* and *Yugī Parva* in Bangladesh today, (ii) Gorakṣa's performance in the presence of Mīnanātha as referred in *Gorakṣa-vijay* (Faizullah), *Gorkha-vijay* (Bhimsen), *Mīnacetan* (Śyama Dāsa) and *Gorakṣa-vijay* (Vidyāpati), (iii) Grierson's brief description of narrative performance in *Mānikcandra Rājār Gān*, (iv) *saṁgīt-nāṭak* texts such as *Gorakṣa-vijay* and *Gopīcandra Nāṭaka* from Mithilā and the Nepalese royal courts and (v) the *Matsyendranātha Yātrā* of Nepal.

It has already been shown in Chapter 3 that there exists *Yogīr Gān* and *Yugī Parva* in Bangladesh today. Textual excerpts from another performance titled *Yogī Kāc* as cited by Sukumar Sen<sup>86</sup> clearly shows that it is similar to the two performances mentioned above. That they are performed long after the Nātha cult has been assimilated within the Brahminical fold is indicative of their wide popularity among people when the Cult was an active force in medieval and ancient periods. Since the episode of Gorakṣa's performance is integral to the plot and since it has been included in four texts, it can be concluded with fair amount of certainty that the episode was very much a part of the original legend. A closer

examination of the texts reveals that Gorakṣanātha identifies himself as an actress in the court of Mīnanātha, proposes to perform song-and-dance, beats on her (his) drum, and finally presents a performance to the rhythm of the drum and ankle-bells. Gorakṣa's dexterity is proved by the fact that she (he) can dance in the air as well as on a plate over water. Moreover, gestures of the body and the rhythm of the drum appears to be codified in an intricate system, reminiscent of Sanskrit dramaturgy prevalent in court theatre of ancient India. Although no song is sung, the description implies that vocal silence is intentional as Gorakṣa does not wish to reveal his identity in hostile environment. Thus the performance appears to be a firm evidence that there did exist song-and-dance type of performance within the fold of Nātha cult. It is possible that such performance was current during the life-time of the Nātha *siddhyās*, i.e., 9th or 10th century AD.

Sukumar Sen points out that the name of Gorakhpur city situated in north India and the existence of the Gorkhā people in Nepal are indicative of wide prevalence of Gorakṣa's followers in Mithilā and Nepal. He also notes that even today, one of the main religious festivals in Nepal is the *Matsyendranātha Yātrā*.<sup>87</sup> No wonder it is in this region that two *saṅgīt-nāṭak* texts, *Gorakṣa-vijay* by Vidyāpati (c. 1403) and *Gopīcandra Nāṭaka* by Dvija Rāmabhadra (mid 17th century), were composed and performed. The evidence borne by these two texts imply that the legend of the Nātha *siddhyās* and King Govindacandra (Gopīcandra) were popular enough in Mithilā and Nepal in the medieval period to call for performance under court patrony. Thus, it would be only logical to assume that these legends were also given in similar (song-and-dance) type of performance under the patrony of the people, in ancient Bengal where the Cult and the legends originated. It was from these that *Yogīr Gān* and *Yogī Parva* possibly arose, albeit at a later period.

There also appears enough evidence to believe that there did also exist a narrative form of performance within the folds of the Nātha cult in ancient Bengal. The exploits of Govindacandra, Maināmatī and Hāḍipā, as recounted in *Mānikcandra Rājār Gān*, *Gopīcandrer Gān*, *Gopīcandrer Pācālī*, *Gopīcandrer Saṅnyās* and *Govindacandrer Gīt* were all performed in the narrative form till recently in Bangladesh. Grierson's brief note on the performance of *Mānikcandra Rājār Gān* allows us to visualise it, as it was performed in the second half of 19th century.

The song is usually sung by four men, - and in parts, not in unison. (.....) This is sung chant-like, so as to go once to each line, but leaving the last three notes without words. To these last three notes, the words "Hē! Rājā!", "Hē! Maynā!", "Hē! Yama!" or some such apostrophe which depends on the person whose adventures are being immediately narrated are sung as a sort of burden.

Thus, Grierson shows, the first line of verse six would be sung by one of the four performers ("Mānikcandra rājā Baṅga baḍa sañī") and would be followed by a choral burden of the rest who would sing "Hē! Rājā!".<sup>88</sup> On the other hand, the exploits of Nātha *siddhyās* as recounted in *Mīnacetan*, *Gorakṣa-vijay* and *Gorkha-vijay* also bear evidence of performance in the narrative style as they are composed in *payār* and *tripadī* metres followed by all other performance-texts of the narrative style discussed in Chapter 3. Furthermore, Panchanan Mandal believes that all the three above mentioned texts were composed by the same anonymous poet; Śyama Dāsa, Sheikh Faizullah and Bhimsen Rāy were but performers who added their names to the original text.<sup>89</sup> Since the three texts are believed to have been "composed" in 16th century and after, it would be well justified to believe that the original oral narrative was composed much earlier. As already mentioned, Asutosh Bhattacharyya dates the original oral narrative of Gopīcandra legend sometime immediately after 11th century and that on the Nātha *siddhyās* possibly in 10th or 11th century. D.C. Sen also believes, *Gorakṣa-vijay* existed in 12th c. Bengal as an oral narrative.<sup>90</sup> Thus, it is possible to conclude with fair amount of certainty that by 11th and 12th centuries, there did exist narrative genres of performance within the fold of Nātha cult.

Sukumar Sen reminds us that the legend of Gopīcandra gained wide currency all over north India in the form of song-and-dance as well as narrative performances. In West Bengal (India), the popularity of these performances subsided with the rise of Caitanya's Bhakti movement in 16th century.<sup>91</sup> Since popularity can spread only after inception, the above view goes to reinforce the conclusion that the two types of performance were popular during a period prior to 16th century, i.e., early medieval period and the same could be reasonably believed to have evolved during the ancient period. Furthermore, there exist evidence that in the ancient period, Nātha *yogīs* and *ḍākinīs* were associated with performance. Consider, for example, Maināmatī (a *ḍākinī*), who, in *Gopīcandrer Gān*, is shown as dancing the Kheṃtā, the Ḍomnā, the Kaoḍā and the Notan when her son Gopīcandra orders her to be boiled alive in a cauldron full of oil.<sup>92</sup> As already mentioned, Sukumar Sen also points out the implied practice of dance among a section of *yogīs* (i.e., the Kāpāliks) who donned ankle-bells and carried *ḍamaru* drum.<sup>93</sup> Similar *yogīs* have also been referred to in a *caryā* song by Kānhapā (text no. 11) as well. These can only be inferred as supporting evidences for strengthening the conclusion drawn above. It is possible that the followers of the Cult, in the ancient period, propagated their faith among lay populace with the help of these performances.

### The Nātha Gofā

The text of Shukur Mamud's *Gopīcandrer Sannyās* makes quite a few references to *gofā*, i.e., Nātha temples.<sup>94</sup> Nalinikanta Bhattashali notes that in the hillock named Mainamātīr Tillā in the Lalmai range of Comilla, a *gofā* consisting of five small chambers was excavated in 1923/4.<sup>95</sup> Similar *gofās* still exist in Bangladesh ("Yogīr Bhaban", Bogra, "Yogī-ghopā", Naogaon and "Gor-ķui", Dinajpur)<sup>96</sup> and in India ("Yogī-gumphā" Birbhūm-Bīrnagar and "Yogī-gofā", Goalpara).<sup>97</sup> These references would not have been so striking had not Tibetan Buddhist monasteries were also named similarly, i.e., *gompa*, which, in turn, is strangely reminiscent of *Gambhīrā*. Is it possible that the Nātha *gofā*, Tibetan *gompa* and Śaivite *Gambhīrā* are in inter-related? M. Mosharraf Hossain reports the existence of "Śib-bāḍī" (located in Gochahar village in Chirir-bandar, Dinajpur), a temple of the Nātha community built in 18th century. Constructed around an open air compound with the sanctum on the northern arm, entrance in the centre of the southern arm and other chambers in the eastern, the western and the southern arms, the building measures 16.0m x 14.90m. externally.<sup>98</sup> The plan of Śib-bāḍī is strikingly similar to Śītākoṭ monastery. It should also be noted that till recently, performances (including *Yogī Kāc*) were given in the precincts of the *gofās* in Bangladesh, mentioned above. The spectators were usually seated on all four sides of the open-air temple precincts and the performance was given in the centre, all too similar to the Tibetan practice. The evidences not only corroborate the conclusion that theatre was performed in the courtyards of Buddhist monasteries but also raises the possibility that the courtyard of Nātha temples were used as the performance space during ancient period.

### 2. Dharma Cult

It has already been shown in Chapter 1 that scholars such as Muhammad Shahidullah, Asutosh Bhattacharyya and Benoy Kumar Sarkar are of the opinion that, by 12th century, there did exist the cult of Dharma Ṭhākur. Although none of the extant literary and liturgical texts of the Cult can be dated beyond 17th century, Muhammad Shahidullah has shown that the earliest poet of *Dharma-maṅgala* texts was Mayūr Bhatta from 12th century.<sup>99</sup> A number of 17th century composers of *Dharma-maṅgala* texts, such as Rūparāma, Mānikrāma Gānguli, Ghanarāma Cakravartī, Govindarāma Bandopādhyāya and Sītārāma Dāsa have all acknowledged the existence of Mayūr Bhatta as the original composer.<sup>100</sup> Therefore, it would be not unreasonable to assume that prior to the extant texts which were written from 17th century onwards, it is very much possible that by 12th century there did exist some oral text which was the original nucleus on which the later

texts were built. It has also been suggested that the legend of Hariścandra formed the original nucleus mentioned above.<sup>101</sup> As shown in Chapter 2.11, celebrations related to Dharma cult includes narrative performance of *Dharma-maṅgala*. It is possible that the celebration of ancient period included narrative performance of orally composed original nucleus.

As pointed out in Chapter 2.11, Rūparāma Cakravartī has referred to *Kālikā-pātā* dance of the devotees in his *Dharma-maṅgala* (1649-59). Sukumar Sen believes that *Kālikā-pātā* is the same as *Kālī Kāc* and was part of Dharma cult festivals of ancient period.<sup>102</sup> But it appears unlikely that Dharma cult festivals and performances of the period included masked dance of Kālī and it is more likely that the dance developed when Dharma cult began to be assimilated by Tantric Hinduism towards the end of early medieval period. Rūparāma is probably referring to one such performance of 15th and 16th centuries. Masked dance in Dharma cult in the ancient period could have been based on Ādyā, which was possibly adapted from Buddhist masked dance.

Beside narrative performance and masked dance mentioned above, celebrations related to Dharma cult would also include processional performance. The processions would be led by "the sandal of Dharma (placed) on a golden palanquin", followed by music (played on *dhāk*, *dhhol*, *sānāi*, *kāsi*, conch-shell, bell, lyre, flute, *kāḍā*, *pūtā*, *turi* or bugle and *veri* or kettle-drum), song and dance of the devotees. The processions also included *saṅg*, i.e., devotees with painted faces (or wearing masks) and dressed as mythical characters, who are seen even today in *Dharmer Gājan* processions (discussed in Chapter 2.11). The *saṅg* of ancient *Dharmer Gājan* processions would possibly depict brief sketches based on legends, with the help of mimetic dance. In all probability, these performances would begin from the temples of Dharma Ṭhākur, circumambulate neighbouring habitations and end at the temple again. The ancient processions of *Dharmer Gājan* were directly carried over from Buddhist processions.

The performance of the Māndāi community, *Saṅg Yātrā*, *Kālī Kāc* and *Aṣṭak Gān*, all related to Del Ṭhākur, call for special attention. Devotees of each of the above genres have explained Del Ṭhākur as Śiva. A few scholars are of the opinion that the word 'Del' is a derivative of 'Deul', i.e., 'Temple'. But Asutosh Bhattacharyya rejects this view and believes that Del Ṭhākur has been derived from a separate cultural source. He also points out that the rituals related to Del Ṭhākur bear similarity with *Ādyer Gājan*. The latter, he adds, is similar to *Dharmer Gājan* and *Śiver Gājan* and is prevalent in regions influenced by popular Buddhist cults such as Malda (West Bengal, India).<sup>103</sup> Kshetra Gupta has shown that in the annual celebration and ritualised worship of Nīl (i.e., Śiva), devotees carry on

their heads what is known as *Nīler Pāṭā* (a piece of log with a bent end, on which a few pieces of cane are tied and smeared with vermilion). Processions taken out during the celebration of *Nīl* are similar to those of *Gājan*, and includes song and dance. A few devotees are dressed as Śiva, Pārvaṭī and Nārada and they enact an oral text based on a tale of Śiva and Pārvaṭī.<sup>104</sup> When one is reminded that *Ḍheki Maṅgala* and *Ḍheki Cūmāna* rituals are performed in *Dharmer Gājan* and *Gambhīrā* respectively, one can immediately associate Del Ṭhākur and *Nīler Pāṭā* with Dharma cult : the similarity of Del Ṭhākur with the shape of a *ḍheki* (husking pedal) is indeed striking. Again, as noted in a foregoing paragraph of this section, processions of *Dharmer Gājan* of ancient period were possibly led by "sandal of Dharma (placed) on a golden palanquin". When one is reminded that Māndāi community call the piece of deified log "Deil Pāṭ", in Faridpur it is called "Pāṭ Ṭhākur", and in the rituals of *Nīl*, the same is called "*Nīler Pāṭā*", and when one is also reminded that the Bāṅglā word "pāṭ" denotes "a seat" or "a throne" (and if one can assume that "pāṭā" is a derivative of "pāṭ"), then it becomes possible to see that the "pāṭ" is but a derivative of the ancient "palanquin". It is the same palanquin that the devotees carry in *Śiver Gājan*. Again, "*Nīler Pāṭā*" as depicted by Kshetra Gupta, appears to be a stylized impression of a sandal, which again appears similar to the "sandal of Dharma" mentioned above. Perhaps it is not required to draw attention to the fact that all the deities, Del, Pāṭ and Dharma, are suffixed with 'Ṭhākur'. Thus it could be conjectured with fair amount of certainty that very much like *Buḍo-rājā* of Jamalpur (discussed in Chapter 2.11), Del Ṭhākur is also the result of Śaivite assimilation of Dharma Ṭhākur, which possibly took place sometime in early medieval period.

Although Dharma cult is restricted to southern parts of West Bengal, Gopal Halder points out that at some earlier period, it could have been prevalent in northern Bengal as well.<sup>105</sup> Evidence from performance (Chapter 3.4) shows that celebrations related to Del Ṭhākur, Pāṭ Ṭhākur and Deil Pāṭ exist in Tangail, greater Faridpur and greater Jessore. Therefore the region of Dharma cult's influence could have existed in Tangail which was not cut off from north Bengal by the wide gulf Jamuna river today is and in Dhamrai-Savar belt which is only as little as 45 km from Tangail. It could also have been prevalent in greater Jessore and Faridpur districts which are only about 90 km from the eastern limit of what is Dharma cult region today.

The conclusions drawn above makes it possible to believe that the performance of the Māndāi originated from ancient magico-religious masked dance of the Coach people which was possibly celebrated by the ancestors of the Māndāi community when they inhabited an unidentified part of north Bengal as a part of the Coach people. It was first assimilated by

Buddhism and then by Dharma cult (when it came to be known as *Āḍyer Gājan*). In early medieval period, the festival was assimilated by Tantric Hinduism. In 16th century, when the Māndāi community migrated south to Tangail, they carried the Hindu Tantric version of *Āḍyer Gājan*, which is what they perform today. On the other hand, the earliest versions of *Saṅg Yātrā*, *Aṣṭak Gān* and *Kālī Kāc* possibly originated as Buddhist performances which could very well have been given in temples and monasteries in Tangail and Dhamrai-Savar belts respectively.<sup>106</sup> As Buddhism decayed, these performances were taken over by Dharma cult by 12th century and were converted into masked dance of *Ādyā*.

### 3. Śalva Cult

It is interesting to note that *Śiver Gājān* and *Gambhīrā*, two Śaiva cult festivals, are distinct from each other in the following aspects: the former is seen in various parts of what today is West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh but the latter is restricted to northern parts of West Bengal and Bangladesh only. The rituals associated with the above two are also quite dissimilar. The reasons for the dissimilarities can be explained if one accepts the following hypothesis: that both the festivals and the performances related to *Śiver Gājān* and *Gambhīrā* originated as year-ending festivals (with masked dance) and fertility cult practice of the Coah; that the above festival and cult practice was assimilated by Tantric Buddhism, by 8th c. AD, in a manner similar to the cases of indigenous performances of Tibet, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and other regions, and they added the element of procession to it; with the rise of Dharma cult in 12th century, it partly imitated the decaying performances of the Buddhist and evolved *Dharmer Gājān* which they spread to all parts of Bengal; but the performance of the Buddhist itself was assimilated by Tantric Hinduism (Śaivism) sometime towards the end of 12th century. Buddhist masked dance was probably transformed into Śaivite (Tantric) performance to give rise to the *Gambhīrā* festival. *Gamīrā Nāc* and *Mukho Nācā* as they are still seen in Bangladesh today, are the result of same Śaivite assimilation of Buddhist performance.

Performances related to Tantric Śaivism in 12th century Bengal can be conjectured to have been composed of the following: (i) Processional, in which the votaries sang and danced to music played on drums and cymbals; (ii) Ritualistic (Tantric), in which the votaries danced with decapitated human heads and other parts of the body; (iii) Masked dance, in which the votaries dressed as various deities (Śiva, Pārvaī, Durgā, Cāmuṇḍā), mythical heroes (Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Hanumāna), birds and animals (tiger, horse, vulture) and supernatural beings (fairies, ghosts, goblins) enacted brief episodes, the text of which were orally

composed. These performances were possibly given as a year-ending celebration. It would begin with processions taken out from Śaivite temples, which would circumambulate neighbouring habitations and end again at the point of origin. Ritualistic and masked dances would be given at temple precincts in the evening and continue through the night.

On the other hand, it is also possible that in ancient Bengal there existed a popular cult of Śiva, built around a deity who was more of a farmer than a god, as depicted in texts titled *Śiva-maṅgala* and *Śiva-saṅkīrtana* composed in 17th and 18th centuries. As it has been suggested in Chapter 1, the agrarian Śiva possibly arose out of admixture of an earlier fertility cult of the Coah, Buddhist-Dharma-Nātha cults and Brahminical lore of the *Purāṇas*. It is possible that some form of annual harvesting festival was observed in honour of the god in which narrative performance based on his exploits (which later gave rise to *Śiva-maṅgala* and *Śiva-saṅkīrtana*) and dialogic performance based on agrarian customs and rituals (which later gave rise to *Śiver Cāṣ*) were given. This annual harvesting festival was possibly merged with *Dharmer Gājān* to give rise to *Śiver Gājān* in early medieval period when Śaivism assimilated Dharma cult.

#### 4. Popular Kṛṣṇa Cult

The composition of Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda* in the court of Lakṣmaṇa Sena implies that tales of Kṛṣṇa as a pastoral hero were well known among the people. The existence of terra-cotta plaques (believed to be from 9th century) depicting legends associated with Kṛṣṇa at Somapura Monastery substantiates the view mentioned above. Scholars such as Sukumar Sen state that Jayadeva merely refined already existing popular material for elite spectators. He also believes that the legend of Kṛṣṇa is the most ancient material in Bāṅglā literature and has been partly derived from popular source.<sup>108</sup> These arguments appear to justify the belief that some form of song-and-dance performance, based on the legend of Kṛṣṇa, did exist among the people of ancient Bengal.

#### 5. Secular Genres

Vṛndāvana Dāsa's biography of Caitanya titled *Caitanya Bhāgavat* (1548) makes a passing reference to the popularity of, what is cited as, "Yogī Pāl Bhogī Pāl Mahī Pāler Gīt."<sup>109</sup> D.C. Sen believes that the above passage refers to narratives based on the exploits of Pāla monarch named Mahī Pāla (ruled 978-1030 AD). Interestingly, there exists a narrative text titled *Mahī Pāler Gīt* which recounts the abduction of a maiden named Līlā by Mahī Pāla.<sup>110</sup> Roy also notes the existence of popular proverb "Dhān bhānte Mahīpāler Gīt" ("ধান ডানতে মহীপালের গীত") and states that the proverb points to the existence of lyrical compositions which glorified Pāla monarch named Mahī Pāla.<sup>111</sup> Although there appears



no record of Pāla monarchs with the names of Yogī Pāla or Bhogī Pāla, it is possible that these are popular names of other kings from the same dynasty. Since narrative genre of performances in Bangladesh today are usually suffixed with the title "Gān" which literally implies the same as "Gīt" (i.e., "lay" or "minstrel's song"), it is possible to believe that the cited passage by Vṛndāvana Dāsa refers to oral texts which were rendered in narrative form of performance. It is also possible that the genre was extant in 12th century, by which time the exploits of Pāla monarchs could easily have attained legendary stature for oral narratives to be composed.

Dineshchandra Sen has also shown that a large number of orally composed folk tales which still prevail among Muslim as well as Hindu communities, date back to the ancient period when the ancestors of those from the Muslim community were Hindus or Buddhists. Although the language and content may have evolved through subsequent centuries, the core of these tales speak distinctly of ancient past. Some of these are :

1. Madhurnālār Kecchā
2. Mālañcakanyār Kecchā
3. Kāñcanamālā
4. Sakhisonā
5. Śīt-Basanta
6. Mālatikusumamālā<sup>116</sup>

Characteristically, all the tales are secular in content. It was only since the first half of 20th century that they have been scribed and published in editions such as Dakṣiṇārañjan Mitra Majumdār's *Ṭhākurmār Jhuli* and *Ṭhākurdādār Jhuli*. Satindramohan Chattopadhyaya also believes that the tales collected in the above anthologies date back to a period beyond 12th century.<sup>113</sup> It is remarkable that some of the above tales are still performed in Bangladesh in the genres known as *Pālā Gān* (eastern Mymensingh) and *Kecchā Kāhini*. Moreover, narratives performed in *Ḍhak Yātrā* and *Kecchā-bandī Gān* are strikingly similar in nature. Sukumar Sen also acknowledges the existence of secular tales in the region of Bengal during the period 9th to 11th centuries. He also cites the existence of a few terra-cotta plaques discovered in the temple of Somapura Monastery which depict Sanskrit *Pañcatantra* stories.<sup>114</sup> It has already been shown that ancient Bengal was familiar with classical Sanskrit theatre and Buddhist theatre. It is reasonable to believe that for a predominantly non-literate audience, stories would be told rather than read, and the most expedient way to commit a story to memory is to have it composed in verse. Therefore it could be reasonably argued that the secular tales of ancient period were orally composed in rhymed metrical verse and rendered as a narrative performance. It is to these that D.C. Sen refers to when he shows that the above tales were told by professional story-tellers (usually old women), with choral accompaniment.<sup>114a</sup> These performances were precursors of *Pālā Gān*, *Ḍhak Yātrā*, *Kecchā-bandī Gān* and *Kecchā Kāhini*.

## 6. Supra-personae Genres

Richard Pischel originated the theory that Sanskrit theatre evolved from string-puppet performances, which Sukumar Sen takes up in his *Naṭ Nāṭya Nāṭak* to build a history of theatre in eastern India. Although Dr. Sen's argument hardly holds ground, it is generally accepted that puppetry is indeed an ancient practice in the Indian sub-continent, which has existed even prior to the reign of Emperor Aśoka (273-232 BC).<sup>115</sup> Therefore, it appears tenable that string-puppets did exist in the region of Bengal since the commencement of Gupta annexation if not earlier. Since no specific record of such performance is seen in any religious tract, literature or documents from Bengal during this period and since the history of the people goes unrecorded by scholars who function under elite patrony, it may be assumed that *Putul Nāc* (string-puppets) as a genre of performance existed entirely under the patrony of the people.

On the other hand, Asutosh Bhattacharyya traces the origin of *Paṭuā Gān* in the region of Bengal back to 7th century AD.<sup>116</sup> There exists independent source to confirm that in 7th century Bengal, a type of *Paṭuā Gān* was indeed extant. Known as *Yama-paṭṭaka*, the performance was based on scroll-paintings of Yama (King of the Under-world) meting out horrific punishment to sinners. Evidence in support of the above is provided by Bāṇa (the court-poet of Harṣavardhana) in his *Harṣa-carita*.<sup>117</sup> Since a portion of Bengal was part of Harṣavardhana's empire, it would be only reasonable to believe that Asutosh Bhattacharyya's view is not inaccurate.

Benoy Ghosh shows that scroll painting, in the region of West Bengal (India), originated from the Santhal tribals. Some of the scrolls painted by them represent the origin of life (*Ko Rāek Kāthā*) and the passage of the dead from the mortal world to the life beyond (*Cakṣudān Paṭ*).<sup>118</sup> If Benoy Ghosh's argument can be accepted as valid, then the Santhal connection with *Paṭuā Gān* is indeed a pointer to the ancient times.

### 4.2 Early Medieval Period (c. 1200 AD - c. 1500 AD)

The theatre in early medieval period was patronied by the court (Muslim as well as Hindu) and the people. The new ruling class who were in power during the first half of the period, were Muslims by faith, Turks by descent and Persian by culture. They changed the character of court theatre, relegating the Sanskrit tradition into negligible role. But the bulk of patrony for theatre was taken over by the people. In the latter, i.e., the theatre of the people, a new stream was added (that of Śākta cult). The flickering flame of Buddhist theatre continued possibly in the kingdoms of Paṭṭikerā and Ārākān.

The literature produced during early medieval period is best represented by the following texts:

1. *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan* (c.1400) by Baḍu Caṇḍidāsa (c.1370-1433)<sup>119</sup>
2. *Yusuf-Zulekhā* (c.1390-1410) by Shah Muhammad Sagir<sup>120</sup>
3. *Rāmāyaṇa* (1415-1433) by Kṛttivāsa<sup>121</sup>
4. *Rasul Vijay* (1474) by Zainuddin<sup>122</sup>
5. *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Vijay* (1473-1480) by Mālādhār Basu<sup>123</sup>
6. *Mahābhārata Pācālī* (1493-1519) by Kavīndra Paramesvar and Śrīkar Nandī<sup>124</sup>
7. *Padmā-purāṇ* (1494) by Vijay Gupta<sup>125</sup>
8. *Manasā Vijay* (1495-1496) by Vipradāsa Pipilāi.<sup>126</sup>

#### 4.2.1 Derivatives of Classical Sanskrit Theatre

For about half of century after the annexation of north-western region of Bengal by the Muslims, there existed the kingdom of the Senas in the eastern and southern regions. Approximately the same region was later ruled by the Devas during the latter half of 13th century.<sup>127</sup> Till the annexation of greater Mymensingh and Sylhet towards the beginning of 13th century, there also existed powerful Hindu rulers and petty chiefs known as the *bāra bhūyāns* in these areas.<sup>128</sup> The rise of King Gaṇeśa in 1414 is another reminder that the nobility was not restricted to the Muslims and that the Hindu nobles were dominant enough to seize power.<sup>129</sup> Enamul Haque also agrees that most of the nobles within the Muslim Sultanate of Bengal were Hindus.<sup>130</sup> Moreover, there existed powerful Hindu kingdoms of Tripurā in the east, Kāmtā and Kāmṛūp in the north, Bhātgaon, Pātan, Kathmandu (Nepal) and Mithilā in the north-west and Orissa in the south-west where derivatives of classical Sanskrit theatre was very much in practice. Therefore it is possible to believe that vestige of the classical tradition was also extant during this period under the patronry of Hindu nobles, independent and semi-independent rulers of Bengal. The above view gains support from the fact that quite a few scholars and playwrights are known to have migrated to the neighbouring Hindu kingdoms with the fall of north-western Bengal to the Muslims. Consider, for example, the case of Madana, an outstanding poet from Gauḍa, who composed the play *Pārijātamāñjarī* (also called *Vijayśrī*) in Sanskrit, at the court of Arjunavarman (1210-1218), the King of Mālava.<sup>131</sup> As Nanīgopāl Bandopādhyāya believes, even in 18th century Bengali poets have composed performance-texts in the Nepalese kingdoms.<sup>132</sup> As we shall see in the next period, there exist Sanskrit

performance-texts composed by two kings of Bhulūā (greater Noakhali of Bangladesh today), towards the end of 16th and beginning of 17th centuries. These playwrights could never have appeared if the tradition of Sanskrit theatre was completely dead in Bengal. It is also important to remember that non-existence of texts from a period does not imply the absence of theatre; it may only mean, nothing was composed during the period which was deemed worthwhile to preserve by succeeding generations. In the Hindu courts of kings and nobles of Bengal during early medieval period, compositions such as *Gītagovinda* could have been the primary performance-text. The existence of *nāṭ-mandirs* attached to temples of Orissa as well as performance in them suggest similar temple-based performances could also have been known particularly in south-west Bengal (Rāḍha) which adjoins Orissa, as this part (of Bengal) was dominated by powerful Hindu feudal lords. The above hypothesis is further strengthened when one is reminded that there exists at least one architectural monument, a 16th century temple of Śiva at Haṭṭanagara, Medinipore, (a district in West Bengal adjoining Orissa), which clearly reflects architectural characteristics of Orissan temples and also includes a *nāṭ-mandir*.<sup>133</sup> The temple raises the possibility that other temples with *nāṭ-mandirs* could have existed in this area during early medieval period. Thus it would be reasonable to believe that Sanskrit theatre, albeit feeble, continued in this period.

#### 4.2.2 *Buddhist Theatre*

- . The publication of *Dohā-koṣa* by Rāhul Saṁkṛtyāyan and *Nāvacāryapada* by Shashibhushan Dasgupta have revealed to scholars that the tradition of *caryā* songs continued from 13th to 15th centuries and after.<sup>134</sup> Since these songs have been composed in (early) Bāṅglā language, it is not impossible that they were current among remnant Buddhist mendicants of medieval Bengal, who performed them in the same narrative style as mentioned in Chapter 4.1.1.<sup>135</sup>

It is important to remember as well that the kingdoms of Paṭṭikerā (which included greater Comilla) and Ārākān (parts of greater Chittagong and the Hill Tract areas), were ruled by kings who were generous in extending patronry to Buddhist monasteries and temples.<sup>136</sup> The existence of archaeological ruins of quite a few of these at Mainamati, Comilla, would appear to confirm the above view. Moreover, as Bhikkhu Sunithananda has shown, the Hills of Chittagong became the last resort for the Buddhists in Bengal.<sup>137</sup> The existence of performances such as *Jyā*, *Bulu* and *Buddha Kīrtan* in the Hills of Chittagong all add up to raise the possibility that in early medieval period, traces of Buddhist theatre existed in the kingdoms of Paṭṭikerā and Ārākān. However, performance in the former must have died

soon after 13th century but those in the latter continued right through to the modern age, during the process of which these evolved to what is today known as *Jyā. Bulu* and *Buddha Kīrtan*. The existence of *Āṅgā Yātrā* in Nepal also makes it possible to believe that Buddhist performances in the above regions were accompanied by processions.

#### 4.2.3 Theatre of the People

Apart from some of the songs published in *Navacāryapada*, there appears little literary evidence from Bengal from c. 1200 till c.1400. But there did exist performances during 13th and 14th centuries, other than those mentioned in the previous two sections, which were based on oral texts and were patronised by the people. Sukumar Sen, Gopal Halder and Anisuzzaman all agree that these texts featured tales of Dharma, Manasā, Caṇḍī, Śiva, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa.<sup>138</sup> Evidence can be cited from *Caitanya Bhāgavat* in support of performances based on Manasā, Caṇḍī and Śiva.<sup>139</sup> Sukumar Sen also believes that these performances, known as *nāt-gīt*, were given by a narrator (*gāven*) who carried a *cāmar* (whisk), donned ankle-bells (*nūpur*) and hollow bangles with beads (*toḍā*). He partly recited and partly sang a rhymed metrical (oral) text, accompanied by an orchestra-cum-chorus (*dohār* or '*pāli*', i.e., *pāil*) who played music and sang choral refrain. He adds that the lyrical passages were accompanied by dance performed by a dancer. Dr. Sen also believes that dance lost importance by 16th century under the influence of *kīrtan* and cites in support of his argument a 19th century description of a performance (based on the *Rāmāyaṇa*) in which dance is absent.<sup>140</sup> On the other hand, Gopal Halder believes that there were two types of performances during early medieval period. One was the narrative (which he terms as *ṣācālī*), in which the *gāven* partly recited and partly sang a rhymed metrical (oral) text, assisted by the *dohārs*, who employed musical instruments (*mṛdaṅga* and *mandirā*) and sang choral passages. The *gāven* carried a *cāmar* and occasionally danced as well. The second type of performance was the song-and-dance (*nāt-gīt*), which was performed in lyrical dialogue, accompanied by dance.<sup>141</sup> Sukumar Sen provides no argument as why what he terms *nāt-gīt* was influenced by *kīrtan* to abandon dance. Rather, Gopal Halder's view appears more plausible, because the narrative genres being simpler in form, must have evolved earlier than the song-and dance. Moreover, the narrative texts which have been written from 15th century onwards are entirely different in terms of structure, from song-and-dance texts also written from 15th century onwards. In the former, speech is rendered in third person, whereas in the song-and-dance texts, most of it is in first person. Historically, it also appears possible that the song-and-dance texts were continuation of Jayadeva's *Gītāgovinda*; the narratives texts, that of the *caryā*, the Nātha cult, the popular Kṛṣṇa cult and the secular tradition discussed in Chapter 4.1. A

third type of performance, the processional, also demands our attention. It was mostly under the influence of Dharma cult which was very much in ascendance during early medieval period, that this ancient Buddhist practice continued in Bengal.

The oral tradition of 13th and 14th centuries was transformed into literary tradition during 15th century. At the same time, the three types of performances noted in 13th and 14th centuries, also continued in the 15th. It is important to remember, as Sukumar Sen points out, that early Bāṅglā literature is dependent on lyric.<sup>142</sup> Adya Rangacharya holds similar view and states that till 19th century, all literary compositions were rhymed metrical texts and since ancient time, theatre of the people was primarily *gīti-nāṭya* (lyrical theatre).<sup>143</sup> Therefore, literary compositions of the period under study will be held as performance-texts, not merely pages of reading material valid only for literary analysis. Typically, every narrative text is composed in rhymed metrical verse, sections of which are in couplets (known as "payār" or "śikali") which were recited by the *gayen*, alternated by sections in *tripadī* or triplet (known as "nācāḍi") which were rendered in lyric.

In the following pages, theatre of the people under the cults of Nātha, Dharma, Śaiva, the Aryan Pantheon, Śākta as well as those which were secular in nature, will be examined in further detail.

### 1. Śaiva Cult and Dharma Cult

As shown in Chapter 2.11.4, Vaiṣṇavite texts such as *Caitanya Bhāgavat* (1535-36) and *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* (1560-80) testify the existence of *Śiver Gān* in 16th century as a performance of narrative text in praise of Śiva, executed by a lone performer who danced and played *ḍamaru* drum as he sang. The performance space, non-elevated and circular, was located in a courtyard. It may very well be that the text was based on the same narrative as that of *Śiva-maṅgala* and *Śiva-saṅkīrtāna*, and was orally composed. The existence of a popular proverb "Dhān bhānte Śiver Gīt" ("ধান ভানতে শিবের গীত") raises the possibility that *Śiver Gīt* (lit. Lay of Śiva) or *Śiver Gān* was a popular genre of performance with a history which may very well go back to the early medieval period. Asutosh Bhattacharyya also cites a few doggerel rhymes on Śiva which still prevail among the people of various parts of Bangladesh.<sup>144</sup> The origin of these rhymes may also go back to the early medieval period. Sushil Kumar De categorically states that "in early Bengali literature prior to Caitanya no doubt there prevailed songs relating to Śaiva and Śākta cults; ....."<sup>145</sup> It is therefore suggested that narrative performance based on the exploits of a popular (agrarian) Śiva was in existence among the agrarian community prior to 16th century, in early medieval Bengal. The text of the performance was orally

composed. It is also possible that parts of the narrative were performed in a dialogic form during the year-ending celebration of Caitra Saṅkṛāntī, which later on came to be known as Śīver Cāṣ. As Tantric Śaivism assimilated Dharma cult in early medieval period, the agrarian festival of popular Śīva was merged with *Dharmer Gājan* to give rise to *Śīver Gājan*. The festival gained enough importance by 17th century to have the narratives given in it compiled in written form, commonly known as *Śīvāyana*, *Śīva-maṅgala* and *Śīva-saṅkīrtāna*.

The process of assimilation of Dharma cult by Tantric Hinduism possibly began in the early medieval period. As a result, Dharma cult adopted tales of Śīva and incorporated these into the *Dharma-purāṇa*. Thus, as Dharma cult moved closer to Tantric Hinduism, the performances of the former also began to move into the latter. And as Dharma cult lost its vigour, many of its performances lived in the celebrations related to Śīva. The process of acculturation described above must have led to the transformation of *Āḍyer Gājan* into the Śaivite performance of the Māndāi sometime in 14th century or slightly after, as Āḍyā of Dharma cult was remodelled into Caṇḍī (Kālī) of Tantric Hinduism. Similarly, Dharma cult version of *Kālī Kāc* (possibly masked dance based on Āḍyā), which was inherited by the Cult from Buddhism, was transformed into a Śaiva cult performance sometime in 14th or 15th century. The transformed version possibly contained nearly every element seen today in *Kālī Kāc* except that of Kṛṣṇa. Likewise, transformation was also effected in the case of *Saṅg Yātrā*. Praise songs in honour of Śīva's eight super-natural faculties were also added in *Aṣṭak Gān* processions. In all probability, these transformations were completed by the end of 15th century. All these performances were based on orally composed texts.

As the process of acculturation of Dharma cult gained momentum in 15th century, most of *Dharmer Gājan* celebrations were being transformed into *Śīver Gājan* in all parts of Bengal except Rāḍha in the south-west which was the original home of the Cult and hence its strongest ground. On their part, the Śaivites changed their *Gājan* celebrations from the full-moon of Caitra, Baiśākh, Jaiṣṭhya or Āṣāḍh to their year-ending celebration at the end of Caitra. It also continued with its processional performances, ritualistic performances and masked dances of the *Gambhīrā* festival in the region of Malda, *Gamīrā Nāc* in the region of Dinajpur and *Mukho Nācā* in that of Rajshahi.

As for Dharma cult, it continued in the region of Rāḍha with *Dharmer Gājan* in which narrative performance (*Dharma-maṅgala Gān*), processional performance (with music, song, dance and brief sketches depicted by *saṅg*) as well as some form of masked dance were given. Evidently the Cult and its performances were popular in the "lower" rung of

society, since, even in 17th century, these were looked down upon by high caste Brahmins.<sup>146</sup>

## 2. Nātha Cult

Narrative performance on the legend of Gorakṣanātha-Mūlanātha and that of Maināmatī-Gopīcandra as well as song-and-dance performances which were the precursors of *Yogīr Gān* and *Yugī Parva*, continued to be given during this period. Although the narrative of Maināmatī-Gopīcandra gained wider acceptance, nevertheless, the Nātha cult performances were generally restricted within the "lower" rung of society. This also explains why no written texts of the Nātha performances were composed in the region of Bengal in early medieval period.

## 3. Cults of Kṛṣṇa and Rāma

The composition of *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan* in c.1400 and translation of the *Bhāgavata* into *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Vijay* in 1473-80 indicates that performances based on popular Kṛṣṇa cult on the one hand and the *Gītagovinda* on the other continued in the early medieval period. Of the two cited above, *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Vijay* is a narrative text and it testifies the gradual rise of narrative performances (termed *ṭācālī* by Gopal Haldar) right from the beginning of early medieval period. The translation of Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* in the first half of 15th century also presupposes the existence of narrative performances based on oral texts on the exploits of Rāmācandra in 13th and 14th centuries (or 14th and 15th centuries according to Sukumar Sen).<sup>147</sup> Such performances still continue in Bangladesh today as *Lakṣmīr Gān*. That the performers (of *Lakṣmīr Gān*) are Muslims and that the lead narrator is venerated by the Hindus are also indicative of early medieval origin when their (performers') ancestors had not yet been converted by Islam. On the other hand, *Rāmāyaṇa Gān* (based on Kṛttivāsa's *Rāmāyaṇa*) was possibly created in 15th century when the text was composed.

Baḍu Caṇḍīdāsa's *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan* arouses added interest for it has been cited as *gītināṭya* (lyrical theatre) by Gaurishankar Bhattacharya.<sup>148</sup> According to Kapila Vatsayana,

In Bengal appeared works of Baḍu Caṇḍīdāsa which closely followed the musical tradition of *Gītagovinda*. *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan* draws freely upon the *Śrīmad Bhāgavat Purāṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* for its content but the story is presented through musical dialogues of three characters, namely Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā and an old lady Baḍāi. The trio pattern is a dramatic composition and almost becomes standard in medieval writing and theatrical presentation.<sup>149</sup>



Gaurishankar Bhattacharya is also in agreement with the above view.<sup>150</sup> The composition of *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan* by c.1400 makes it possible to believe that by the beginning of 13th century, there existed among the people a type of performance which has been cited as 'song-and-dance' in this study and *nāṭ-gīt* by Gopal Haldar. The performance was given in lyrical dialogue, featured three characters (as seen in *Gītagovinda*), was based on oral texts and in it, characters danced as they sang their lines. Like *Gītagovinda*, these performances could be given by a single performer who would enact all the three characters or by three performers who would enact the characters separately. A passage from Kavi-Kaṅkan Mukundarām's *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* (episode of "Cursing Mālādhara") shows how these performances were given: Mālādhara (a male dancer from the heavenly court of Indra) dances in the role of Kṛṣṇa in a performance based on the suppression of mythical serpent Kālīya, accompanied by Nārada's lyrical rendition of the narrative and music played by Gaṇeśa, Nandī and Bhṛngī.<sup>151</sup> Although *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* was composed in mid-16th century, the above description can be accepted as having been prevalent in 15th century as well because similar reference to song-and-dance performance by Aniruddha and Uṣā can also be gleaned from Vijay Gupta's *Padmā-purāṇ* (1494).<sup>152</sup> Interestingly, the performance described in *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* is strikingly similar to Jayadeva-Padmāvatī's performance of *Gītagovinda* described in Chapter 4.1.3.

Mukundarām also refers to the space in which a performance takes place on the occasion of Nīlāmvara's return home. It (the performance space) is a temporary construction in the courtyard of Śacī's (Indra's wife's) dwelling place, has an awning on top (possibly supported by four corner posts of banana plants), inside which a pitcher has been installed to signify the presence of deity.<sup>153</sup> Sukumar Sen confirms that the practice of installation of pitchers in the performance space was common during this period. He also adds that these performances were given in rural festivals or during ritualised worship of deities in temples.<sup>154</sup>

The extant text of *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan* is incomplete (four pages from the beginning, some in the middle and unknown number at the end are missing). Even the original title of the text is unknown. The extant text is divided into thirteen episodes. There are:

- (i) *Janma-khaṇḍa* or the episode of birth of Kṛṣṇa
- (ii) *Tāmbula-khaṇḍa* or the episode of betel-leaf
- (iii) *Dāna-khaṇḍa* or the episode of toll
- (iv) *Naukā-khaṇḍa* or the episode of the ferry
- (v) *Bhār-khaṇḍa* or the episode of the carrying (Rādhā's) ware

- (vi) *Chatra-khaṇḍa* or the episode of the umbrella
- (vii) *Vṛndāvana-khaṇḍa* or the episode of Vṛndāvana
- (viii) *Kālīyādaman-khaṇḍa*, or the episode of suppression of the serpent Kālīya
- (ix) *Vāstraharaṇ-khaṇḍa* or the episode of robbing of garments
- (x) *Hāra-khaṇḍa* or the episode of Rādhā's necklace
- (xi) *Vāṇa-khaṇḍa* or the episode of the arrow
- (xii) *Vamśī-khaṇḍa* or the episode of flute
- (xiii) *Rādhā-viraha* or the episode on Rādhā's separation from Kṛṣṇa.<sup>155</sup>

It is important to note that only a small part of Baḍu Caṇḍīdāsa's text (the episodes of Kṛṣṇa's birth, the suppression of Kālīya and the core of Vṛndāvana) has been drawn from liturgical texts such as *Bhāgavata*, *Harivaṁsa*, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and *Mahābhārata*. The rest of the narrative and the character of Rādhā, are the creations of the people of this land.<sup>156</sup> It is also important to note that scholars believe there was possibly another episode at the end of *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan*, on (Rādhā's) journey of Mathurā.<sup>157</sup> The text is strikingly erotic in nature and the characters effuse none of the devotional flavour which is characteristic of Vaiṣṇavite (Gauḍīya) literature of late medieval period.

Sukumar Sen strives to show that the Sanskrit *ślokas* of the text indicate that it was meant to be performed with puppets.<sup>158</sup> But, as Gaurishankar Bhattacharya points out, it is unreasonable to expect non-literate puppeteers to comprehend the meaning the Sanskrit *ślokas*.<sup>159</sup> Moreover, it also appears unnecessarily burdensome to communicate stage-directions to stagehands in Sanskrit. On the other hand, it has already been seen in Chapter 3 that *Maṇipurī Rās Nṛtya* performance includes Sanskrit *ślokas*, some of which are also rendered as narration. Similarly, the *ślokas* of *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan* can also be sung by the *sūtradhāra* and the entire text can be performed in the manner similar to *Maṇipurī Rās Nṛtya*, with *sūtradhāra* and the three characters of the work.

*Caitanya Bhāgavat* (1535-36) records a performance by *Caitanya* at Navadvīp in 1509 (details of which have been discussed in the next section). The record is important for it clearly shows that the characters also rendered dialogue in improvised prose, although in all other respect the performance falls within the category of song-and-dance type. Therefore, it would be reasonable to believe that *Caitanya* and his disciples were imitating contemporary theatre practice, which in their case was of song-and-dance genre. Since their performance in 1509 shows the use of improvised prose dialogue, it would be reasonable to believe that the element was already beginning to make its way in song-and-dance type of performances in 14th century.

Compared to the widespread popularity of tales of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, it is indeed curious that the *Mahābhārata*, specially the battle of Pāṇdavas and Kauravas, appear to have hardly generated any interest in Bengal, even though Kṛṣṇa is very much involved in the epic. Although a narrative based on the *Mahābhārata*, titled *Mahābhārata Pācālī*, was composed in late 15th or early 16th century, these have always been restricted to recitations rendered sitting, as Sukumar Sen points out, in royal courts and religious ceremonies.<sup>160</sup> Interestingly, the mode of performance appears similar to that of *Ṣūthi Pāth* discussed in Chapter 3.

There appears to have existed in early medieval Bengal an interesting and curious performance convention, similar to present-day *Rāma Līlā* of north India, which can be best termed as 'environmental'. Although there is no textual evidence from the period, Salim al-Deen draws attention to references of environmental performance from the first half of 16th century, as described in *Caitanya Bhāgavat*.<sup>161</sup> Part I, Chapter 8 of *Bhāgavat* gives a detailed account of Nityānanda (a close associate of Caitanya) and the games he played with his friends in his childhood. What is interesting about the description is that the games appear to have been performances given in specific environs created for each locale. For instance, the children are shown to have created a court of the gods as their first locale and then travelled to the river-side for the second locale. The children also enacted the marriage of Vāsudeva and Daivakī at home, late at night, where Kṛṣṇa's birth is also shown. They also created the environs of Gokul (village where Kṛṣṇa was brought up), in which they performed the slaying of Pūtanā (a mythical ogress). They created serpents with leaves and carried these to tanks or rivers to enact Puranic episodes. Vṛndāvana was also created to enact various episodes on Kṛṣṇa's childhood.

The text indicates children in make-up (নীরদ কাছরে দাড়ি নিয়া, lit., "in the role of Nārada with beard on"), costume (অক্রুরের বেশে, lit., "dressed up as Akurur") and separate environs (কংস স্থানে, lit., "at Kaṁsa's place").<sup>162</sup> It also indicates that the children enacted the slaying of Bakāsura, Aghāsura, Vatsāsura, Cāṅūr, Muṣṭik and Kaṁsa. These references would make one believe that Vṛndāvana Dāsa is referring to various episodes of a performance-text based on the popular portrayal of Kṛṣṇa.

The children also engaged themselves in creating environs such as the bridge to Laṅka for enacting episodes from *Rāmāyaṇa*. Interesting is a detailed description of Nityānanda's enactment of Lakṣmaṇa, in which he was struck by the *śakti-śel* (mythological missile launched by Rāvaṇa) substituted by a lotus. His performance was so true to life that he appeared dead to his friends. Even the elders, including his parents were struck by the

child's act. At this point Vṛndāvana Dāsa draws parallel with an actor of yore who had lost his life out of grief for Rāma while performing the role of Daśāratha, obviously referring to Gandharva of Vidvāpati's *Puruṣ Parīkṣā*. (Although the reference is inaccurate, it is striking for it implies that the death of Gandharva was well known even in 16th century.) A few elders joined Nityānanda's game and suggested the same remedy as that described in *Rāmāyaṇa*, i.e., sending of Hanumāna to fetch herbal plant for medication. The other children immediately recalled that Nityānanda had indeed asked them to do the same when struck by the "missile" and so they set themselves to enacting Hanumāna's journey. On the way Hanumāna meets an ascetic (a child dressed as one) who offers him fruits. He requests Hanumāna to stay in his hermitage, but the latter declines for he has an important mission to perform. On being requested to bathe and eat, Hanumāna agrees. When he goes to a lake to bathe, another child, in the role of a crocodile, attempts to drown him in the water. All these, Vṛndāvana Dāsa reminds us, were previously rehearsed by Nityānanda. In the performance, Hanumāna battles with children in the role of *rākṣasas* (অসুর এক স্তম্ভ ধরি রক্ষসর রুহ) and *gandharvas* (গন্ধর্বের বেশ ধরি শিজগণ) and finally fetches the herbal plant necessary to revive Lakṣmaṇa. A child in the role of a physician holds the plant in front of Nityānanda's nostrils and instantly the latter is revived.

These descriptions raise the possibility that Nityānanda and his friends were recreating in their games what appears to have been a well-known mode of performance in the medieval period. Since *Caitanya Bhāgavat* was composed in 1535-36, the period of childhood referred to in the text is approximately the end of previous century. Therefore, the environmental performances which the children were imitating could have been current at the popular level at least during 14th and 15th centuries if not earlier. In all probability, the texts of these performances were orally composed and were based on tales of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa as recounted in the *Purāṇas*.

Scholars also believed there existed sometimes in medieval period a genre of performance in question-and-answer format, which was known as *Jhumur Gān*.<sup>163</sup> Based on *Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa līlā*, a performance of *Jhumur Gān* was given by two groups, one of which took the side of Kṛṣṇa, the other, that of Rādhā. The Rādhā group danced and at the same time posed questions to the other group in lyric. In turn, Kṛṣṇa group also danced and replied to the question, also in lyric. All the lyrical passages were pre-composed. The performance was highly erotic in nature and was devoid of any devotional aspect. As *Jhumur Gān* appears to contain no influence of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, it would be logical to believe that the genre was in existence during early medieval period.

#### 4. Śākta Cult

Satindramohan Chattopadhyaya has shown, in 14th century Śākta cult gained prominence in Bengal through wide dissemination of *Kūlikā-purāṇ*.<sup>164</sup> It is possible that around the same period, the Cult began to assimilate various indigenous goddesses and Buddhist Tantric deities by declaring them to be various manifestations of the primordial feminine principle. And thus, Buddhist (Tantric) goddess Vajra-tārā, Vajra-dhatvisvarī and Hārīti were assimilated as Maṅgala-caṇḍī, Vāsulī and Śītalā respectively.<sup>165</sup> Manasā, who is believed to be related to Dharma cult, but originated from indigenous cult worship prior to association with the latter, was also included in Śākta fold.<sup>166</sup>

Scholars agree that narrative performances eulogising Śākta goddesses such as Manasā and Caṇḍī were prevalent in Bengal during 13th and 14th centuries.<sup>167</sup> Based on oral texts, these performances are believed to have been extremely popular among the people. There is also a clear indication in Vijay Gupta's *Padmā-purāṇ* (1494) that narrative performance on the serpent goddess Manasā was very much in existence prior to the composition of Vijay Gupta's text. A passage in the above text ("Svapnadhaya Pālā", v. 27-28) acknowledges the existence of the first poet of the eulogy of Manasā as the blind Hari Datta, who had composed the earliest oral version of *Padmā-purāṇ*. The oral texts of 13th to 15th centuries must have acquired enough popularity and social recognition to call for two extant written versions, those of Vijay Gupta and Vipradāsa Pipilāi, by the end of 15th century.

As shown in Chapter 3, Vijay Gupta's *Padmā-purāṇ* is still performed in southern parts of Bangladesh today, as *Ravānī Gān*. One is tempted to believe that the female narrators who are prompted by a *sarkār* as seen in *Ravānī Gān*, represent the very manner in which Vijay Gupta also had his text performed: he prompted by standing behind female narrators who were possibly attendants of the serpent goddess at her temples. The installation of a pitcher to signify the presence of the goddess in the performance space of *Ravānī Gān* and also the manner in which the performance space is constructed, appear to be strikingly similar to Mukundarām's description in *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* discussed earlier.

References in *Caitanya Bhāgavat* (Part I, Chapter 2 & 13) indicate the existence of *Maṅgala Caṇḍīr Gīt* (narrative performance based on eulogies of Maṅgala Caṇḍī, the text of which is basically the same as *Caṇḍī-maṅgala*), in the first half of 16th century. This implies that the genre was in existence at least in 15th century if not earlier. The above receives confirmation from Mukundarām, who in his *Caṇḍī-maṅgala*, has paid tribute to an earlier poet named Mānik Datta. Asutosh Bhattacharyya believes that the cited Mānik

Datta is the earliest poet of *Caṇḍī-maṅgala*, who was alive sometime in early medieval period. Interestingly, there does exist a written text of *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* (scribed in 1785), credited also to Mānik Datta. According to Bhattacharyya, the above text is possibly based on a skeletal version of Mānik Datta which was adapted by some late-18th century poet after Mukundarām.<sup>168</sup>

Mānik Datta's text is interesting for it confirms that *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* was very much performed in early medieval period. It describes the formation of a troupe (comprising of Mānik Datta as *gāyen*, one Raghu as *dohār* and another named Śrīkanta Paṇḍit as *mṛdaṅga* player) which gave song-and dance performances of *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* in various homesteads of Kāliṅga (Orissa). A little later the text also describes that the troupe was so successful that a spy, sent by the king to fetch information, was himself engrossed in the performance and forgot his mission.<sup>169</sup>

The text ascribed to Mānik Datta (1785) is known to have been performed in Malda, northern Bengal, as *Maṅgala Caṇḍīr Gān*, even in early 20th century. The use of mask in a performance of the above described in a report of 1320 BS (1913/14)<sup>170</sup> is reminiscent of Rūparāma's reference to masked performance in *Dharma-maṅgala*.

The performance of *Maṅgala Caṇḍīr Gān* described in the above report appears to be similar to a performance by the same name which was prevalent in the district of Natore till recently. It is also reported to be performed in Sunamganj district of greater Sylhet region, but without mask. In the latter, the performers are seated in the centre and the spectators all around, leaving an intermediate circle free for the performance. The *gāyen* renders part of the text in the narrative form accompanied by choral and musical support of the *dohārs* and the latter also render part of it in the dialogic form by playing particular characters in costume and make-up.<sup>171</sup> It is possible that the Malda performance was also produced similarly. If the use of mask can be taken as an indication of ancient and early medieval practice, then the Malda performance described above (and similar performance from Natore) possibly point to the form in which *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* was performed in early medieval period.

Possibly around 14th century, Śākta cult was beginning to incorporate processional performances into its fold. *Kālikā-purāṇ* specifies that the celebration in honour of Kālī (in her manifestation as Durgā, the slayer of Mahiṣāsura) is to culminate on the 10th day with a procession for immersion of the idol (*visarjana*). The procession is to be comprised of virgins and courtesans well-versed in music, performers (*nāṭa*) and musicians who are to play *śamkha*, *tūri*, *mṛdaṅga* and *dhāk*. Others are to carry colourful flags, scatter fluffed

rise (*khoi*), flower, dust and mud. It is also prescribed that erotic conduct is to prevail in absolute carnivalesque abandon which is to be enjoyed by all in order to please the goddess.<sup>172</sup> Perhaps it need not be pointed out that the procession (save the carnivalesque abandon) is strikingly reminiscent of *Dharmer Gājan*. Furthermore, the existence of *Yātrās* in honour of Śākta deities in Nepal raises the possibility of existence of processional performances within the fold of Śākta cult. Perhaps these processional performances, linked with the masked enactment as reported in Malda, were the earliest form of what later came to be known as *Caṇḍī Yātrā*, which Sushil Kumar De believes existed prior to Caitanya.<sup>172a</sup>

So far this much is certain: that by the end of 15th century, there existed within the folds of Sakta cult (i) narrative performances on Manasā and Caṇḍī, (ii) dialogic performances with masks, on Caṇḍī and (iii) processional performances in honour of Kālī/Durgā.

### 5. Secular Genres

Sukumar Sen is of the opinion that there is ample reason to believe there did exist rhymes and songs of entirely secular nature during early medieval period.<sup>173</sup> As already noted the Chapter 4.1, *Caitanya Bhāgavat* testifies the existence of secular narrative performances known as *Yogī Pāler Gīt*, *Bhogī Pāler Gīt* and *Mahī Pāler Gīt*. Furthermore, following D.C. Sen (as noted the Chapter 4.1.3) there remains little doubt that secular narrative performances based on folk and fairy tales (precursors of *Pālā Gān*, *Dhak Yātrā*, *Kecchā Kāhinī* and *Kecchā-bandī Gān*) continued in early medieval period.

Scholars agree that in 13th and 14th centuries song-and-dance type of performance was prevalent in Bengal. The composition of *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan* around 1400 further indicates that by the end of 14th century, song-and-dance type of performance must have been highly popular. Therefore, it could be safely assumed that narrative performances of secular tales prevalent in early-medieval period, could have been adapted to song-and-dance type of performances by the end of 14th century. As a result, precursors of what today is known as *Māṭṭyā Tāmsā* (eastern Mymensingh), and *Pālā Gān* (Bogra) could have evolved as song-and-dance performances (*sans* dialogue and narration in prose). On the other hand, *Raṅg Pācālī* structured entirely in lyrical and verse dialogue, calls for special attention. Presence of lyrical dialogue (as in *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan*) and absence of prose dialogue (which was present in *Caitanya's* performance, discussed later) makes it possible to believe that *Raṅg Pācālī* evolved after *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan* and before *Caitanya's* performance, i.e., sometime in 15th century. But the element of verse dialogue and the word 'pācālī' suffixed to its name is curious. *Pācālī*, as scholars have said, implies narrative

performance, but *Raṅg Pācālī* is entirely dialogic. Dialogue in verse is also a rare element in the indigenous theatre of Bangladesh. The only probable explanation is that the genre first appeared as a narrative performance and by 15th century, it adapted itself to the highly popular song-and-dance mode.

#### 6. Supra-personae Genres

A couplet in *Yusuf-Zulekhā* (139 -1410)<sup>174</sup> bears evidence that puppet theatre (*Putul Nāc*) was very much in existence during the period under review. As signified there, these performances were given with the help of string puppets. It is possible that orally composed tales of gods and goddesses, such as those of Kṛṣṇa, Rāma, Manasā etc., were produced in these performances. It is also not impossible that tales which were secular in nature as well as those which were related to legendary heroes were also performed.

#### 4.2.4 Court-theatre of Muslim Rulers

As already mentioned, the first half of early medieval period (1204-1352) was torn by strife and tumult for any serious attempt to be initiated by the Muslim rulers in the field of arts and literature. But, with the rise of Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah in 1352 and independence of Bengal from the sultanate of Delhi, there gradually emerged enough political stability for the rulers to concentrate in the arts and literature. As a result, Bāṅglā language, overlooked by the Senas for their bias towards Sanskrit, received royal patronry and encouragement to flourish.

Examples of texts written directly under court patronry of the Muslims are *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Vijay*, *Mahābhārata Pācālī*, *Yusuf-Zulekhā* and *Rasul Vijay*.<sup>175</sup> These texts not only point to interest and favourable disposal of the Muslim court, but also to performance. It has already been noted in the previous section (4.2.3) that all literary texts composed during early medieval period imply that they were sung and not read. Therefore, it can be concluded with fair amount of certainty the texts mentioned above were also rendered in similar manner by the poets themselves. The most obvious and probable form of performance is the recitation of *Mahābhārata Pācālī* by a seated poet<sup>176</sup> in a manner similar to *Kathakathā* still seen in Bangladesh today. The beginning of these recitative performances in early medieval Muslim court of Bengal is possibly the origin of current *Pūthi Pāṭh* tradition in Bangladesh.

It is also possible that narrative performances were also not unknown in the Muslim court of Bengal. Consider, for example, the well-known story that Caṇḍīdāsa and his consort Rāmī visited the court of Sultan to perform.<sup>177</sup> The story may or may not be the result of



fertile imagination. Nevertheless, much of imagination is based on real-life practice, which, in the above mentioned story, may well confirm the view that occasional narrative performances were indeed given by non-Muslim performers in the court of Muslim rulers.

One is on more firm ground when the accounts of Chinese travellers are considered. The so called account Ma Huan recorded in *Ying Yai Sheng Lan* (actually compiled by Kuo Ch'ung Li, possibly between 1408-1411),<sup>178</sup> records the following:

There are people who wear a shirt with black and white patterns and held by a scarf with a fringe round their waist of coral and amber coloured beads and with bracelets of beads fastened on their wrists. They are good singers and dancers to enliven drinking and feasting.<sup>179</sup>

Based on Chinese and Muslim accounts, scholars and pointed out that

there is an indirect reference to the fact that sometimes the Sultans sat in assembly with nobles in which games, music and dances were common features. Actresses and dancing girls attired in glittering dresses and ornaments and with decoration of flowers took part in these court shows.<sup>180</sup>

Furthermore, the Chinese source also inform us that the singers and dancers were from the "lower" rung of the society. When one is reminded by Ahmad Sharif that maintenance of courtesans was considered to be a sign of aristocracy in medieval Bengal and they were the singers, dancers and actresses,<sup>181</sup> it becomes easy to comprehend who the actresses and dancers referred to by the foreign visitors were. That performance was very much a part of court-based culture, is also evident from literary work by Muslim poets from medieval Bengal. That they performed in festivals held in royal courts and also accompanied the royalty in their journeys (along with scholars and astrologers) is testified by *Sāiful Muḥuk-Badiujamāl* composed in rhymed metrical verse by Dona Gazi in second half of 16th century.<sup>182</sup> In another text (also in rhymed metrical verse) titled *Lālmātī-Sāiful Mulk* by Abdul Hakim, an extremely popular poet from 17th c. Bengal, royal courtesans perform song and dance for the entertainment of soldiers.<sup>183</sup> Again in another excerpt, this time from an 18th century rhymed metrical text titled *Gul-e-Bakāwalī* by Nawajish, one encounters a description of a song-and-dance performance at a royal court.<sup>184</sup> On careful examination, the above description appears to ring familiar note, for it is strangely reminiscent of Jayadeva-Padmāvatī performance. Such familiar notes are also struck in *Dharma-maṅgala* texts, such as in *Anādi-maṅgala* (1662).<sup>185</sup> The court of Gauḍesvar (i.e., the Lord of Gauḍa) appears to be a queer mixture of Hindu and Muslim courts. But reference to *darbār* (i.e., court in Muslim parlance) and a courtier named Māhud (possibly derived from Mahunud, a Muslim name) makes it possible to believe that Rāmadāsa Ādak, writing in mid-17th century, has based his text on oral versions dating from early medieval

period, which in turn attempted to portray Hindu court of ancient period but unconsciously betrayed contemporary culture of Muslim courts.

In order to allay skepticism that these excerpts have been drawn from texts composed in late medieval period, one can cite excerpts from *Yusuf-Zulekhā* where references abound about dance of courtesans, their performance at royal camps and in royal festivities and performances in general as a part of upper-class culture.<sup>186</sup> Therefore, one can conclude with fair amount of certainty that the Chinese account and medieval Bāṅglā literature testify to the existence of song-and dance performances in Muslim royal courts of early medieval Bengal specially from the second half of 14th century.

At this point it would be pertinent enough to ask, what could have happened to the innumerable *deva-dāsīs* who were attached to Hindu temples by the Senas, after Muslim conquest? Could it be possible that at least some of them, like *Hīrāvati* and *Hārāvati* of *Anādi-maṅgala*, remained to entertain the new rulers? Could it also be possible that, initially at least, they continued to perform the same text (which were in praise of Hindu deities) as before? The Mughals and the north Indian Muslim feudal lords had adapted a genre of performance based on the love theme of *Rādhā* and *Kṛṣṇa* to give shape to what today is known as *Kathak*.<sup>187</sup> Is it not possible that the same process was also adopted at the Muslim courts of Bengal, but for some unknown reason, the attempt never took off to the same height? Perhaps the dance of the courtesans in the Muslim courts of early medieval Bengal was the result of that process but was debased enough to earn the stigma which still lingers with dancers in general, in Bangladesh today.

#### 4.3 Late Medieval Period (c. 1500 AD - c. 1750 AD)

The theatre of late medieval period has been studied under the heads of (i) court-theatre of the Muslim rulers, (ii) court-theatre of the Hindu and the Buddhist rulers and (iii) the theatre of the people. The tradition of classical Sanskrit theatre was continued by a few independent and tributary Hindu kingdoms and that of the Buddhist theatre, by the Ārākānese court. The latter also played a significant role in extending patrony to Muslim poets. On the other hand, the Mughals, who had reduced Bengal into provincial status, played negligible role in the development of theatre. Hence, during this period the most dynamic role for theatre in the heart of Bengal was played by the Vaiṣṇavites and the syncretistic Sufis. Of course, the Vaiṣṇavites enjoyed patrony of kings (such as *Pratāparudra* of Orissa and also the royal dynasties of *Tripurā* and *Maṅipur*), tributary kings and feudal lords (*Vīr Hāmvīr* of *Viṣṇupur*, *Dibyasinha* of *Lāur*, *Sylhet* and others of north Bengal), affluent traders (specially of *Saptagrām*) and highly placed government

servants.<sup>188</sup> The Sufis also enjoyed protection and indirect patrony of the state, but the strength of their movement and performances lay in popular support.

#### 4.3.1 *Court-theatre of Muslim Rulers*

Both Alauddin Hussain Shah and Nusrat Shah are justifiably remembered for their patrony of the arts and literature. In a country which flourished in economic and political stability, theatre in general must have been exhibiting all signs of vitality and growth. *Vidyā-Sundar (Kālikā-maṅgala)* by Dvija Śrīdhara Kavirāj and a translation of the *Mahābhārata* were composed directly under court patrony. According to Sukumar Sen, *Vidyā-Sundar* is the first secular narrative in the history of Bāṅglā literature,<sup>189</sup> but Gopal Haldar points out, that the narrative of love as recounted in the text is contained within a religious frame (i.e., benediction of goddess Kālikā).<sup>190</sup>

Because Bengal was politically destabilized from 1538 to 1612, nothing much can be expected from the royal court during these years. But far in the south-east corner lay the independent kingdom of Ārākān. Here, in a village on the bank of river Saṅkha and in the capital of one of Ārākānese northern provinces, we encounter two poets: Sabarid Khan (c. 1480-1550) who composed *Vidyā-Sundar*, *Rasul Vijay* and *Hānifā O Kairā Parī*, and Bahram Khan who composed *Lāilī-Majnu* (c. 1560-75).<sup>191</sup>

Sabarid Khan's *Rasul Vijay* is the continuation of a trend set by Zainuddin's text by the same title (composed in 1474). Undoubtedly the text mark the rising concern of Muslims to exert their identity by building a tradition of glory (albeit partly fictitious) which would stand up to *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Purāṇas*. Thus, the Prophet, accompanied by Ali, Hanifa and Amir Hamza, began to acquire super-human stature, whose glory was to be recounted in countless narratives of later generations. In *Hānifā O Kairā Parī*, we meet glorification of Hanifa, a Muslim legendary hero, for the first time. It fulfils the desire of romantic tale of love and adventure, not far removed from fairy-tale quality, mixed with the necessity for creating an invincible hero who can out-class Arjuna, Bhīma or Hanumāna. On the other hand, *Lāilī-Majnu* is a free-translation of a Persian poetic text by the same title, probably composed by Jami' and is also allegorical. Bahram Khan's text is important for it is one of those rare specimen of Bāṅglā literature which end in separation and pathos, marking a sharp departure from the norm of union and fulfilment of desire of central characters. Thus it becomes possible to see that the secular tale of love between Laili and Majnu which ends in the death of both, marks the beginning of an entirely new trend of pathetic lore, which continued through some of *Maimansīnha-gītikā* narratives such as *Mahuā* and *Mahuā*.

That all these texts were meant to be performed (as most of medieval poetic works were), is evident from the fact that *rāgas* and rhythms are specified to passages of *Lāilī-Majnu*. Also the fact that the narrative of *Lāilī-Majnu* is still performed in *Dhāng Yātrā* of Comilla in Bangladesh today, suggests that Bahram Khan's text was performed as well. Moreover, Sabarid Khan describes his *Vidyā-Sundar* as one of song-and-dance (*nāṭ-gīt*) genre.<sup>192</sup> The text also contains stage directions given in Sanskrit and parts of it (sections between Kumār and Mālini) are entirely dialogic.<sup>193</sup>

With the establishment of Mughal domination all over Bengal by 1612, the land was reduced to provincial status. The immediate impact of Mughal rule on Bāṅglā literature was severing of royal patrony. From hence, the responsibility was taken up at the grass-root level by village heads.<sup>194</sup> As a corollary of the above, the same stands true for theatre as well. The song-and-dance performances of the Sultani era was now reduced to erotic dance of courtesans. According to M.A. Rahim, who cites contemporary accounts recorded in *Baharistan-i-Gayabi* and *Siyar al-Mutakhkherin*, "it was the practice of *subādārs* and *nawābs* to maintain many songstresses and dancing girls". It was common to hold connival parties with these performers. Musicians and troupes of dancing girls would be brought even from Agra for marriage festivities.<sup>195</sup> In *Baharistan*, Mīrza Nathan mentions that "musicians and singers of lovely faces and sweet voices" entertained Mughal soldiers during their military campaign.<sup>196</sup> These information indicate that song-and-dance performances prevalent in the court of *subādārs* and *nawābs* were intended for erotic appeal and had no narrative content.

The Mughal *subādārs* and the semi-independent *nawābs* of Bengal appear to have been more interested in processions and fanfares. Two of these which are important for this study are related to the celebrations of Muharram and Beḍā. M.A. Rahim points out that Shia influence in Bengal began to be felt from 16th century, during the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan (1628-58), particularly under the vice-royalty of Prince Muhammad Shuja (1639-59). Although the Mughals were Sunni by faith, the *nawābs* of Murshidabad were Shias and as a result, there was an influx of Shia population during their rule and Murshidabad, Hugli and Jahangirnagar (Dhaka) developed into influential centres of Shia culture.<sup>197</sup> There exists no contemporary record to illustrate how Muharram was celebrated in late medieval period but that *Imāmbādās* (congregational houses of the Shias where mourning celebration of Muharram are held) were constructed in the cities of Dhaka, Murshidabad and Hugli from 1600 onwards, are fair indications that the celebration enjoyed patrony of the elite.<sup>198</sup> Scholars believe that the *nawābs* participated in the processions brought out during the festival which was funded by the state.<sup>199</sup>

The festival of Beḍā or Beḍā Bhāsan is still observed in Bangladesh. Although the origin of the festival is uncertain but clearly, it was prevalent in this land prior to Mughal conquest.<sup>200</sup> At least one Mughal *subādār* and a few *nawābs* are known to have observed it. Murshid Quli Khan's celebration included a large raft (300 cubits in length) made of banana plants and bamboo, on which imitation mosques were constructed with paper. Gorgeously decorated and illuminated, the raft was set adrift on the Bhagirathi, accompanied by festive display of fire-works and amusements. Siraj-ud-daula also floated hundreds of rafts on the Bhagirathi in commemoration of the festival.<sup>201</sup> Although the sources referred to above make no mention of narrative performances associated with Khwāj Khizir (such as *Khwāj Khizirer Jārī*), it would not be unreasonable to assume that these were also performed as a part of the celebration.

#### 4.3.2 Court-theatre of Hindu and Buddhist Rulers

With the advent of the Mughals, when court-patrony to performance was significantly reduced, a number of independent and semi-independent kingdoms and dependencies played significant role in extending patrony to literature and the arts. These were Coach-bihar in the north, Navadvīp in the south-west, Maṇipur in the east and Bhulūā and Ārākān in the south-east. The composition of a large number of literary texts as noted below is important for two reasons: (i) they imply their rendition as performance in the court and (ii) dissemination of some of these among the people implies revitalisation of popular idiom.

##### 1. Coach-bihar

The court of Coach-bihar extended patrony to Bangla literature from mid-16th century to 18th century. The most significant of literary endeavour under its patrony was *Mahābhārata Pācālī* (a narrative text in rhymed metrical verse on the *Mahābhārata*) by Aniruddha Rāmasarasvatī, the court-poet of King Naranārāyaṇa (1538-1587 ?). The text gained wide currency in north Bengal.<sup>202</sup>

##### 2. Bhulūā

In the small tributary kingdom of Bhulūā, situated approximately in what today is the region of greater Noakhali, a few Sanskrit play-texts are known to have been composed by two of its monarchs and a scholar of the court. King Lakṣmaṇa Māṇikya, who ruled Bhulūā in late 16th century, composed two plays titled *Vikhyāta-vijay* and *Kuvalayāśva-carita*. His son, Amara Māṇikya is known to have composed a play titled *Vaikuntha-vijay*. A *prahasana* titled *Kautaka-ratnākara* was also composed in the royal court of Bhulūā, by

a Sanskrit scholar, Kavi Kārtika.<sup>203</sup> The existence of these texts prove that Sanskrit theatre, albeit feeble, was very much in existence in late medieval Bengal.

The court of Bhulūā is also known to have extended patronage to narrative texts in Bangla, as in the case of Dvija Bhavānī Dāsa who was supported by King Jagat Mānikya to produce *Śrī Rāma Pācālī*.<sup>204</sup>

### 3. Navadvīp

Kṛṣṇacandra Rāy (1728-1782), the tributary king of Navadvīp and a Tantric devotee, was a renowned patron of the arts. It was in his court that Bharat Candra Rāy (1707-1760) composed his famous *Annadā-maṅgala* (1753). The latter is a *Maṅgala-kāvya* in three parts strung together with the thread of goddess Annadā or Annapurnā's (i.e., Durgā's) grace on her devotee Bhavanandā (forefather of Kṛṣṇacandra) which earned her widespread worship among the mortals. The three constituent parts are: (i) "Annadā-maṅgala", which is on Śiva and Annapūrṇā and how her worship is introduced among the mortals, (ii) "Kālikā-maṅgala", a romantic narrative which recounts how Sundar, the prince of Kanci, wins Vidyā, the princess of Burdwan, with the blessing of Kālī and (iii) "Annapūrṇā-maṅgala", on the battle of Mānsingh and Pratāpāditya, followed by Emperor Jahangir's proclamation of Bhavananda as a tributary king which is achieved because of Annadā's blessing. Of the three, "Kālikā-maṅgala", better known as "Vidyā-Sundar", is important for our study because it was developed into a *Yātrā* performance towards the end of 18th century. Gopal Haldar notes that *Annadā-maṅgala* was first performed in the court of Kṛṣṇacandra.<sup>205</sup> (Details on the nature of the performances have been discussed later under *Caṇḍī-maṅgala*.)

Bharat Candra has also left an unfinished play titled *Caṇḍī* (1760) which was to be based on the mythological tale of "Mahiṣāsura Vadh" (the slaying of the buffalo shaped *asura*). Composed in Bāṅglā, but also using Sanskrit and Hindi languages, *Caṇḍī* displays remarkable influence of Sanskrit dramaturgy which is discernible from *sūtradhāra*'s song of benediction (*nāndī*) in the beginning, followed by *prastāvana* presented by *sūtradhāra* and *naṭī*. The dialogue is composed in rhymed verse, possibly intended to be sung. Although the play was never performed, the court of Kṛṣṇacandra is known to have produced another play of similar characteristics named *Citra-yajña* by Vidyānāth Vācaspati. Performed in 1777/78 on the occasion of the festival of Govinda, the play is composed in Bāṅglā, Sanskrit and Prakrit.<sup>206</sup> H.H. Wilson, in his *Theatre of the Hindus* (1900) makes the following comments on *Citra-yajña*.

It is so far valuable, as conveying a notion of the sort of attempts at dramatic composition made by the present race of Hindus in Bengal. The *Fatras* or *Jatras*, which are occasionally represented in Bengali Language, follow the plan of 'Chitra-yajna' with still less pretensions to literary character. They are precisely, the *impravista commedia* of the Italians, the business alone being sketched by the author, and the whole of the dialogue supplied by the actors. The dialogue is diversified by songs which are written and learnt by heart.<sup>207</sup>

Although we are well beyond late medieval period, *Caṇḍī* and *Citra-yajña* are important because they indicate that sometime before their composition, the earliest version of *Yātrā* performance may already have taken shape. But that we will deal with in the next section.

#### 4. Manipur

It has already been discussed in Chapter 3 that Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism exerted influence of sufficient consequence in the royal court of Manipur to have produced *Maṇipurī Rās Nṛtya* in the second half of 18th century, during the rule of King Bhāgya Candra (1764-99).

#### 5. Ārākān (Rosāng)

The primary source of royal patrony for the Muslim poets during Mughal rule lay not in the heart of Bengal or at any Muslim court but in the kingdom of Ārākān situated in south-eastern periphery of Bengal which was ruled by Buddhist monarchs of Burmese descent. The monarchy, which earned notoriety for itself among the people of Bengal as plunderers, was liberal enough to include Muslims as their courtiers. Scholars believe that the Muslim nobles who were forced to flee Tanda (the capital of the Karrani dynasty) on its fall at the hands of Mughals, found refuge at the Ārākān court.<sup>208</sup> They and their descendants occupied positions of chief ministers, commanders of the army and judges in Ārākān. Their position in the court offered them enough influence and grandeur to extend patrony to Muslim poets. The most notable of these poets were : (i) Daulat Kazi (c. 1600-1638), who composed *Satimainā-Lorcandrānī*; (ii) Mardan (c. 1600-1645), who composed *Nasira-nama* (*Nasib-nama?*); (iii) Magan Thakur (c. 1600-1660), the *mukhyapātra* (chief minister) of King Thado Mintari Sad Umangdar (1646-52), who composed *Candrāvātī*; (iv) Alaol (c.1607-1680), who composed *Padmāvātī* (1651), *Sāiful Muluk-Badiujjāmāl* (1659-69), the latter part of *Satimainā-Lorcandrānī* (*Ratan-kālikā*), *Sapta Paikar* and *Sikāndār-nāmā*.<sup>209</sup> The element common to all these texts is their secular and romantic character. All of them, save *Nasira-nama* and *Candrāvātī*, have also been drawn from non-local sources: *Lorecandrānī* and *Padmāvātī* from Hindi, *Sāiful Muluk*, *Sapta Paikar* and *Sikāndār-nāmā* from Persian.<sup>210</sup>

The corpus of texts cited above constitute the core group of Ārākānese-Muslim narratives. Their importance lie in the fact that they bring into flourish the nascent tradition of secular texts composed in written form. It has already been noted that secular texts in oral form have been known to the people of Bengal since ancient period. But the Ārākānese-Muslim narratives indicate that the secular trend had gained sufficient importance to merit acceptance in a court which was not even in the heart of Bengal. It is also important to note that like most of narratives (in rhymed metrical verse) composed in medieval period, the Ārākānese-Muslim texts were also intended to be rendered as recitative and narrative performances. The above conclusion is justified when one notes that passages of every text is marked by *rāga* and *tāla* in which they are to be sung. Moreover, Muslim courtiers such as Magan Thakur are also known to have maintained artists who performed in assemblies organised by them.<sup>211</sup> Alaol was an accomplished musician and music teacher, who is credited to have composed a work on music, titled *Rāga-mālā*. These evidences lead one to believe that the narratives were performed, often by the composers themselves, possibly in assemblies of elite spectators, artists and literateurs, under the patronry of Muslim courtiers of Ārākān.

The corpus of Ārākānese-Muslim texts did not remain confined to elite circle of the court but soon gained wide currency, specially among the Muslim population of Bengal, to be rendered by various popular performers. That these texts are still given in the region of greater Comilla as *Jārī Gān*, *Ṣūthi Pāṭh* and *Dhaṅg Yātrā* performances, vouch for their popularity among the people in late medieval and modern period.

Finally, the court of Ārākān is also important for this study because it saw to the continuation of Buddhist theatre in Bangladesh. As noted earlier, the last resort for the Buddhists in Bangladesh was Chittagong. It would only be logical to conclude that the Ārākānese monarchs, being Buddhists by faith, extended patronry to Buddhist monasteries of their kingdom. These monasteries, in turn, continued to perform dialogic and narrative performances as well as mask-dances, which were the precursors of what today is known as *Jya*, *Buddha Kīrtan* and *Bulu*.

### 4.3.3 Theatre of the People

#### 1. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism

An important social and religious movement which affected the life of many in late medieval period was Gauḍīya (Bengal) Vaiṣṇavism, initiated by Śrī-Kṛṣṇa Caitanya and his followers. Born in 1486 at Navadvīp (West Bengal), Caitanya (or Viśvambhar as he was named) was popularly known as Nīmāi and Gaurāṅga. Highly intelligent and meritorious,



Viśvambhar earned quite a name for himself for his irascible nature and his tendency to pick up scholarly disputes with Brahmin pundits. He had lost his father at the age of eleven or twelve and his elder brother Viśvarūpa had left home during Viśvambhar's childhood for ascetic life. Married at the age of fifteen or sixteen, he was soon renowned as a scholar and established his own school (*ṭol*) at the age of eighteen or nineteen. After about four or five years of married life, Viśvambhar's wife Lakṣmī died in an accident. At the request of his mother Śacī Devī, he married again, this time Viṣṇuprīyā. At the age of twenty-two, Viśvambhar went on a pilgrimage to Gayā. There he met Īśvarī Purī, an ascetic devoted to Kṛṣṇa, and he initiated the young pilgrim. The meeting was a turning point in his life as possibly the death of Lakṣmī and acceptance of ascetic life by Viśvarūpa had already made the deepest of impressions on him. For when he returned home towards the end of 1508, Viśvambhar was a transformed man, deeply engrossed in his devotional love for Kṛṣṇa. Very soon he had a sizeable following at Navadvīp but he left home towards the end of January, 1510 to be initiated as an ascetic by Keśav Bhārati. There he was renamed Śrī-Kṛṣṇa Caitanya (or Caitanya in brief). From then on, Caitanya based his ascetic life at Nīlācal (Puri). His first six years were spent in travelling to various parts of India: the first trip was to south India (1510-12), the second was intended for Vṛndāvana but aborted at Kānāi Nāt-śāl, Bihar (1513-14) and the third to Vṛndāvana (1514-15). In each of these trips, Caitanya's movement gained greater momentum and wider following. From 1515 onwards, he stayed at Puri.<sup>212</sup> The circumstances of his death in 1533 is uncertain. It is popularly believed that he jumped into the sea while in a state of trance.<sup>213</sup>

Initiated in 1509, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism had spread in Bengal by the first half of 17th century, by which time it had made its impression on socio-cultural life of the people. A movement of protest against existing social order, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism never sought to revolutionize existing social order but to reform it. In that it was quite successful. The effect of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism was (i) building of harmony among all castes of Hindu community which led to spiritual revitalization, (ii) making divinity accessible to all and (iii) building resistance against Islamization. Reduced to its essence, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism preached a simple yet inspiring faith that Love is God, which, interestingly, was influenced by Sufism. But more important for this study, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism successfully adapted and developed several genres of performance which were deemed to be vehicles of spiritual accomplishment. The genres are (i) processional, (ii) environmental (iii) song-and-dance, (iv) dialogic and (v) narrative.

(i) Processional Performance:

The primary vehicle chosen by Caitanya for promulgating his faith and generating devotional emotion among his followers was repetition of God's names accompanied by music and dance. Because,

it was thought that the mere repetition of the names of God (...) could effect salvation, that the surest, most expeditious way of man to contact God was through organized singing and dancing, and finally, that central theme of all religious endeavour should be love.<sup>214</sup>

Initially, from 1509 to 1510 (before accepting ascetic life), these organized singing and dancing sessions were held at residences and the courtyards of homesteads belonging to his followers.<sup>215</sup> Soon, Caitanya set out to mobilise mass support by organising processions accompanied by singing and dancing of devotees (*Samkīrtan*). The most famous of these processions, led by Caitanya to the residence of Navadvīp's Kazi (Muslim judge) for having imposed ban against euphoric display of mass excitement had mustered enough public support to force the Kazi to lift his ban.<sup>216</sup>

These processional performances further developed while Caitanya was residing at Puri. These were performed frequently in the morning and evening around Jagannāth Temple and in grand scale during the annual Ratha Yātrā celebration when the temple deities were ceremoniously paraded on chariots in the city. Almost each year from 1513 to 1533 devotees from Bengal flocked to Puri.<sup>217</sup> Caitanya divided them into seven groups, each led by a lead singer and containing a dancer, two *khol* players and five choral singers. These groups sang *Kīrtan* songs, danced and also recited verses in front, at the sides and behind the chariot of the gods. Caitanya himself danced as well. In the *Samkīrtan* of Navadvīp, music was played on *mṛdaṅga*, *kartāl*, *mandirā*, conch-shell, bell and *ḍhāk*. But at Puri, the music was more developed and refined and was played only on *mṛdaṅga* and *kartāl*.<sup>218</sup>

But processions were not unknown during the life-time of Caitanya or even earlier. Kṛṣṇa Yātrā processions in honour of Kṛṣṇa, were taken out during various Vaiṣṇavite festivals such a Candan Yātrā, Snān Yātrā, Ratha Yātrā, Rās Yātrā, Dol Yātrā, Janmāṣṭamī etc.<sup>219</sup> Even at Puri, Caitanya is cited as joining Kṛṣṇa-janma Yātrā (procession brought out during celebration of Kṛṣṇa's birth), not initiating it.

Raghunandan, a famous scholar of Hindu rituals and law books (*Smṛti*) from 15th-16th century, has ruled twelve *Yātrās* (processions) to be taken out in honour of Viṣṇu, in twelve months. These are :

Baiśākh - Candanī Yātrā	Kārtika - Utthānī Yātrā
Jaiṣṭhya - Snān Yātrā	Agrahāyana - Chādnī
Āṣādh - Rātha Yātrā	Pauṣ - Puṣyābhisek Yātrā
Śrāvaṇa - Śayanī Yātrā	Māgh - Śālyodanī Yātrā
Bhādra - Dakṣiṇparsvīyā Yātrā	Phālgun - Dol Yātrā
Āśvin - Bāmapārsvikā Yātrā	Caitra - Mandanavañjikā Yātrā. <sup>220</sup>

Raghunandan was not a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavite (i.e., not a follower of Caitanya). Therefore his dictates indicate a general practice of Vaiṣṇavism, which perhaps were not popular prior to Caitanya's movement. It was Caitanya and his followers who adapted and popularised processions in honour of Kṛṣṇa to a great extent. In all probability, the character of Kṛṣṇa Yātrā and Saṁkīrtan of Caitanya were quite close to each other. That is, all these were processions accompanied by music, song and dance of the devotees, very like processions in honours of Kālī discussed in Chapter 4.2.

The Vaiṣṇavite processions gradually drew more from processional performances of Dharma, Śaiva and Śākta cults, as the history of *Janmāṣṭamī Michil* in Dhaka testifies. In 1555, an ascetic is believed to have taken out a procession on Rādhāṣṭamī (celebration in honour of Rādhā) in Dhaka city. It consisted of boys and devotees attired in yellow dresses. The earliest *Janmāṣṭamī Michil* (of 1565) appears to have been similar to Caitanya's *Saṁkīrtan* processions, consisting of devotees singing, dancing and playing *khol* and *kartāl*. Around 1613, *sañg* was added. During this time, the procession also included idols of Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, Nanda and Yaśodā which were placed on a wooden platform (possibly on wheels). Some of the devotees would also be dressed as *gopas*. After c. 1638, more wheeled platforms appear to have been added. At the same time, devotees carrying flags and arms also began to accompany the procession. Gradually, the number of processions also increased. Since its inception in 1565, the *Janmāṣṭamī Michil* of Dhaka city appears to have been an annual event throughout late medieval period, save possibly one or two years.<sup>221</sup>

The Vaiṣṇavite processions were also linked to performance of Kṛṣṇa *līlas* as the *Naukā-vilās Michil* of Patrail shows. Given in natural locales specially adapted for a performance (referred in this study as 'environs') and processions linked to them are important for the development of the *Yātrā*.

The *Naukā-vilās Michil* of Patrail (Tangail) is also an interesting case showing of a number of assimilations. Hypothetically it is submitted that sometime in the late medieval period, there existed at Patrail a strong centre of Caṇḍī worship, which was in turn a

transformation of Buddhist-Dharma cult practice similar to Del Ṭhākur of the same region. As a centre of Caṇḍī worship, the temple of Caṇḍī at Patraīl attracted processions from neighbouring villages on annual festive day. The procession included tableaux and *saṅg* (as reported by local inhabitants and still seen in *Naukā-vilās Michil*). The tableaux of Kālī, Durgā and Manasā were exhibited in the temple precinct. It is possible that other performances were also included in the festival. In all probability, these processions were known as *Caṇḍī Yātrā* (lit., 'Procession of Caṇḍī'). The memory of these still lives among the inhabitants of the region. Therefore, it cannot be a long time (possibly 19th century) when Vaiṣṇavism transformed *Caṇḍī Yātrā* into *Naukā-vilās Michil*; as a Vaiṣṇavite performance, the Michil introduced the enactment of *Naukā-vilās līlā* of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in an environment (i.e., Lauhajang River). As discussed in previous section, environmental performances such as the above, were common among the followers of Kṛṣṇa and Rāma cults in early medieval period. The performance of *Naukā-vilās līlā* at Patraīl is but a continuation of the same tradition. Although it is called *Michil* and not *Gājan* or *Yātrā* (because it was assimilated in modern period), such was also the practice in late medieval period, when the Vaiṣṇavites called their processions Rās Yātrā (procession brought out during the festival of Rās commemorating the dance of Kṛṣṇa with Rādhā and her companions), Dol Yātrā (procession brought out during the festival of Dol commemorating the swinging of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa), Ratha Yātrā (procession brought out in honour of Jagannāth's bathing) etc. Mostly adapted from Buddhist practice (note the celebration on full moon night), these processions of the Vaiṣṇavites included performances as seen in *Naukā-vilās Michil*. Again, like the latter, none of the Vaiṣṇavite *Yātras* in late medieval period contained anything more than brief mimetic enactment of concerned *līlā* in a recreated environment, accompanied by rendition of *Kīrtan* songs.

(ii) Environmental Performance:

Nagendranāth Basu, a reputed scholar of late 19th and early 20th century Bengal, points out in his essay titled "Yātrā" in the *Viśva-koś* edited by him, that a genre of performance known as *Rās Yātrā* has been produced in Bengal from earlier times. Similar to *Rāma Līlā* still performed in north India, each act of *Rās Yātrā* would be performed in a separate environs and the spectators would follow the performers with the change of locale to a new environs. He also reports that *Rās Yātrā* was still performed at the time of his writing the essay (1911). Environs for scenes such as the *Rās* dance ("Rās-nṛtya"), boat-ride on Yamuna ("Yamunā-vihāra"), the slaying of the serpent Kālīya ("Kālīya-daman"), the soothing of Rādhā's huff by Kṛṣṇa ("Mān-bhañjan") etc. would be created for the performance. According to Basu, the performance of *Vidyā-Sundar* at Nabin Chandra

Basu's residence of Calcutta (1831) was but a continuation of the same tradition because separate environs for each locale were also created for the production.<sup>222</sup> Nagendranāth Basu's comment deserves attention because environmental performances by Nityānanda and his friends as described by Vṛndāvana Dāsa (Chapter 4.2) also appear to have been given in separate environs for each locale. It is also striking that *Naukā-vilās Michil* of Patrail (Tangail) includes procession of performers and spectators to an environ (the Lauhajang river) where the Naukā-vilās *līlā* is performed. Therefore it is very much possible that Nagendranāth Basu's *Rās Yātrā* belongs to the tradition of environmental performance of Bengal which has continued from early medieval period to the present.

The above conclusion is confirmed by two sources: (i) description of Caitanya's performance at Puri as described in *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* and (ii) a 19th century report of Vaiṣṇavite performance in late medieval period. In *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* (Part II, Chapter 15),<sup>223</sup> Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja elaborately describes how Caitanya and his disciples, dressed as *gopas* (cowherds) appeared at the celebration of Janmāṣṭanī (Kṛṣṇa's birth) in Puri. In a passage the poet specifically notes that two of his disciples were dressed as Nanda and Yaśodā. Caitanya arrived at the festival site with his disciples, danced merrily and also displayed his skill with *lāṭhi* (bamboo staff). In a separate festival, Caitanya and his disciples were dressed as Hanumāna and his army of monkeys. 'The castle of Lāṅka' appears to have been created in advance at the festival site, which he and his disciples ascended and destroyed as a part of their performance. These indicate that specific outdoor environs were created for Caitanya's performance. It is worth noting that the description cited above also mentions *Rās Yātrā* as a procession which was celebrated by Caitanya and his devotees. On the other hand, Sañjivacandra Cakravartī (a well known scholar from the second half of 19th century) has noted that a Vaiṣṇavite performance on Kālīya-daman *līlā* (the slaying of Kālīya serpent) was reported to have been produced on a pond, sometime after Caitanya's death "when the Vaiṣṇava community was in a flourishing state". In the centre of the pond, the serpent was shown with its hood spread, on top of which danced Kṛṣṇa as he played his flute. His dance is described to have reduced the serpent to a miserable state and his wives stood in the water, praying for Kṛṣṇa's mercy. They rendered their lines in lyric and prose speech. Nearby stood a platform erected over water, on which sat musicians (playing *mṛdaṅga*, *kartāl* and *khartāl*) and choral singers (rendering choral refrain).<sup>224</sup> The period referred to by Sañjivacandra Cakravartī is probably late 17th or early 18th century, when Vaiṣṇavism had gained widespread popularity.

When all the evidences cited above are added together, there remains little doubt that there did exist environmental performance in late medieval period. The basic characteristics of

these performances were (i) enactment of each scene in separate out-door environs specially created or adapted from natural sites and (ii) processions of spectators who accompanied the performers from an environ to another. Generally, these performances were given on special occasions such as religious celebrations. *Naukā-vilās Michil* of Patrañ is an excellent example. The origin and source of the environmental performances is uncertain but clearly the element of procession is a derivative of ancient Buddhist practice. It could be that the practice of performing in the monasteries and temple precincts, as was the case with Buddhism and Dharma cult, was transformed by Śākta cult and Rāma Kṛṣṇa cults sometime in early medieval period. Be that as it may, the name *Rās Yātrā* suggests that the processional-cum-environmental performances were generally known as *Yātrā* (for they involved procession i.e., *Yātrā*). This, then, is the intermediate stage between Buddhist procession and modern *Yātrās*.

(iii) Song-and-dance performance:

Sometimes in 1509, before leaving home as an ascetic, Caitanya and his disciples enacted a song-and-dance performance, which has been briefly mentioned in *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* (II, 10), elaborately described in *Caitanya Bhāgavat* (II, 18) and also illustrated in *Caitanya Candrodāya* (Act III). As described in *Caitanya Bhāgavat*, one day Caitanya announced to his disciples that he desires to enact a song-and-dance performance structured in act ("*añker bandhane*"). It is unclear as to what exactly is meant by "structured in act" but a later reference to the same performance as "*añkiya nṛtya*" (Añkiya Dance) immediately rings a note similar to *Añkiyā Nāṭ* of Assam. Caitanya makes elaborate preparation after his abrupt announcement: he directs Buddhimanta Khan, the feudal lord of Navadvīp, to arrange for costumes and performance space and distributes the roles (Gadādhara as Rukmiṇī, Brahmānanda as Rādhā's companion Suprabhā, Nityānanda as Baḍāi, Haridāsa as Kotoyāl, Śrīvāsa as Nārada, Śrīrama as Nārada's follower and an idol of Gopinātha, i.e., Kṛṣṇa as Kṛṣṇa). The performance takes place in the evening of the same day in which the announcement is made. What is striking is that there is no indication of rehearsal and is no reference to a text. Immediately after Caitanya announces his desire, the disciples appear to know which text was to be performed.

As directed, Buddhimanta Khan sets up the performance space by rigging up an awning of 'kathiār' (Nepalese blanket) in the courtyard of Candrasekhar Ācārya's homestead. In all probability, the *Bhāgavat* appears to be indicating that the performance space was non-elevated, the spectators sat all around it and the green-room was located at a distance. At least one source of lighting was torch, held by Śrīman (Śrīvāsa's brother) who possibly moved with the performers, as is the custom in *Kālī Kāc*. The characters were

immaculately costumed and made-up, so much so that the spectators, who were fellow devotees and near-relatives, failed to identify most of the performers. Once again it is important to note that it was possible for Buddhimanta Khan to provide the costume and make-up and also set up the performance space at a short notice, indicating that these materials were readily available at the feudal lord's disposal. This can only mean that performance which involved costume, make-up and setting up of performance space was quite well-known and frequently held, at least where the feudal lords were concerned.

The performance began with *Kīrtan*, indicating that choral singers and musicians were also present in the performance space. First to enter was Kotoyāl (Police Chief) of the celestial abode of Viṣṇu. He addressed the spectators directly and on being questioned by the latter, he revealed his identity. Next to enter was Nārada and his disciple. There followed an exchange of words between the *Vidūṣaka* (played by Advaita Ācārya) and Nārada. Suddenly we are confronted with Caitanya dressed as Rukmiṇī, described to be "indoor". It is not clear if he is "on stage" or "off stage", because the passage describing him and his state of trance, ends with

Thus spoke the Lord in the trance state of Rukmiṇī,  
(While) all the Vaiṣṇavites laughed and shed tears of love.

Immediately after another couplet, *Vṛndāvana Dāsa* shifts back to Kotoyāl and Nārada: the former called for attention and the latter danced. By now, the first *prahar* (measure of time equal to three hours) had passed. The second *prahar* began with Gadādhara in the role of Rādhā, accompanied by Nityānanda as Baḍāi and Brahmānanda as Suprabhā. After a brief exchange of dialogue and Rādhā's dance, Caitanya entered the performance space in the role of Ādyā-śakti (lit., Primordial Energy) accompanied by Nityānanda as Baḍāi. *Vṛndāvana Dāsa* does not explain who exactly Ādyā-śakti is, but as she is accompanied by Baḍāi, the role implies Rādhā. But what is more important is that the character denoted different identities to different spectators: Sītā, Lakṣmī, Pārvatī, Bhāgīrathī etc. It is also important to point out that Caitanya had warned prior to the performance that only those who had conquered their senses could attend, upon which quite a few were hesitant and reluctant. But Caitanya had reassured all that with his blessing, their senses would be conquered. Whereas the performance is not rehearsed, even the text is not named, why this insistence upon conquering of senses? It is interesting to note that the performance appears to have ended half-way in a fiasco as all the spectators, carried by their ecstasy, sang, danced and shed tears.

In a ten act *nāṭaka* in Sanskrit titled *Caitanya Candrodaya* composed on the life of Caitanya in 1572, Kavi Karṇapūra (Paramānanda Dāsa) has also illustrated the above

performance of Caitanya, this time as a play-within-play. In it, Caitanya's performance is titled *Dān-līlā*. The performers are Advaita Ācārya as Kṛṣṇa, Caitanya as Rādhā, Śrīvāsa as Nārada, Haridāsa as the *sūtradhāra*, Nityānanda as Yoga-māyā (i.e., Baḍāi) and a few others as supernumerary characters. A few singers are also indicated to have been present in the performance. After the preliminaries characteristic of Sanskrit performances, the main body commences with Kṛṣṇa and his companions entering a woodland of dalliance. They are soon followed by Baḍāi, Rādhā and a few of her companions. Kṛṣṇa demands his toll from Rādhā, for, he claims, the woodland belongs to him and makes erotic advances. A quarrel ensues which is climaxed by Kṛṣṇa trying to possess Rādhā, but he fails as Baḍāi disappears with her.

Composed about thirty-six years after Caitanya's death, *Candrodaya* is obviously less accurate a source of information than *Bhāgavat* composed some three years after. The plot of *Candrodaya* performance (*Dān-līlā*) is simple and clear, on the other hand, that the *Bhāgavat* is vague and riddled. But it is striking that both *Bhāgavat* and *Candrodaya* performances contain Tantric reference: Ādyā-śakti in the former and Yoga-māyā in the latter. And when we are reminded by Hiteshranjan Sanyal that Nityānanda was an Abadhūta (Tantric) ascetic,<sup>225</sup> we cannot fail to note his presence in both the performance: in the first as a companion of Ādyā-śakti and in the second, also as a companion but this time as a *yoginī* (female *yogī*). Thus, it appears possible to believe that Caitanya, under Nityānanda's influence, was actually enacting a Tantric ritualistic performance which involved worship of Primordial Energy (*Śakti*). Vṛndāvana Dāsa, a devotee of Nityānanda, could not fail to capture the essence and so recorded it faithfully. Kavi Kaṇapūra, on the other hand, appears to have glossed over the "irregularities" and what can appear as "non-Vaiṣṇavite" aspects. If the proposition of Tantric ritualistic performance is accepted, it becomes easy to see that the first part (*prahar*) was only a preparation and the ecstasy at the end was the desired climax. Therefore, Caitanya's insistence on conquering of the senses was very much necessary for the devotees to witness a performance which involved communion with a feminine image of Primordial Energy. Moreover, the performance would not require a text or rehearsal as its core was the dance of Ādyā-śakti, which was performed by Caitanya and Nityānanda.

The above is only a hypothetical explanation of the anomalies seen in the description by Vṛndāvana Dāsa. Nevertheless Caitanya's performance is important because it shows that character impersonation in immaculate costume and make-up was possible in early 16th century. It testifies that the characters would also speak impromptu lines in prose in the song-and-dance performances of the period. Moreover, it is also a record of the nature of



performance space, possible arrangement for lighting and location of green-room. At this point it would be important to remember that Śaṅkara Deva began to perform *Aṅkiyā Nāṭ* in Assam valley possibly a decade or so prior to Caitanya's performance of Kṛṣṇa's *līlā* discussed above. The occurrence of similar style of performance at two localities (Nadia and Assam) quite distant in terms of medieval communication can only mean that there existed a social and cultural infrastructure in which such performances (*Aṅkiyā Nāṭ* and Kṛṣṇa's *līlā*) could easily be organised. This further suggests that neither Śaṅkara Deva's nor Caitanya's performances were innovations but only continuation of earlier practice, i.e., song-and-dance performances or popular versions of *saṃgīt-nāṭak uparūpakas* which continued right through Mithilā and the Nepalese kingdoms. And when we are handed down operatic texts from the Nepalese court a century later, there can remain no doubt that song-and-dance performances were indeed a common form among the people of medieval Bengal.

It is quite striking that after the performance at Candrasekhar Ācārya's homestead, there is no reference of any other song-and-dance performance by Caitanya, his close associates or the six *gosvāmins*. All of them appear to have concentrated either on *Līlā Kīrtan* (narrative genre), processional performances or Sanskrit dramaturgy and its derivatives (dialogic genre). In the entire length of 16th century, there exist two references to song-and-dance performances within the folds of Vaiṣṇavism, none of which originate from the inner circle of *gosvāmins* or Caitanya's close associates. The first reference is from Sylhet, that of *Ghāṭu Gān*, which has already been noted in Chapter 3. Created in the first half of 16th century by dressing up young boys as companions of Rādhā and by training them to dance silently to songs of separation, *Ghāṭu Gān* soon developed into a genre with its distinct idiom by the second half of 16th century. As testified by *Laḍāk Ghāṭu* (contest between two troupes, discussed in Chapter 3), the genre could also have been influenced by *Jhumur Gān*. Curiously, *Ghāṭu Gān* appears to have been abandoned by the Vaiṣṇavites of Sylhet which at that time was one of the stronger centres of Vaiṣṇavism. And by the beginning of 17th century when the original creator and his disciple were both dead, it began to grow as a secular genre. The other reference to song-and-dance type of performance within the Vaiṣṇavite fold is derived from Vaiṣṇavite tradition, according to which Candrasekhar (disciple of Advaita Ācārya) composed a text titled *Hari-vilāsa*. Although the text is lost, Amūlyacaraṇ Vidyābhūṣaṇ, a renowned scholar of late 19th century, cites the following about *Śekhārī Yātrā* : It is believed to have been performed as, what was then called *Śekhārī Yātrā* (after the name of its originator). It is also believed that Candrasekhar's disciple Jagādanandā impersonated as Rāi (Rādhā) in its performance.<sup>226</sup> The *Śekhārī*

*Fātrā*, in all probability, was a song-and-dance type of performance, which, if Vaiṣṇavite tradition is to be credited, was performed in the second half of 16th century. Nothing further can be ascertained about the genre or its initiator. But that he was not imitated in 16th century, indicates that the venture was not well received by the Vaiṣṇavites.

Because of the inception of *Līlā Kīrtan* in c.1576, composition of quite a few Sanskrit plays by the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavites in 16th century and their Bāṅglā translation in 17th century (discussed later), conditions were ripe enough by the end of 17th century for the evolution of song-and-dance genre (*Pālā Kīrtan*) within the Vaiṣṇavite fold. Although there exists no conclusive evidence, the above explanation appears plausible enough when one takes into account the similarity of content of *Līlā Kīrtan* and *Pālā Kīrtan*. In the latter, a substantial number of *Padāvalī Kīrtan* lyrics are used as dialogue of characters (usually Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa, a companion, Yaśodā etc.). Instead of rendering these lyrical pieces as narratives by the *kīrtanīyā* (as it would be done in *Līlā Kīrtan*), they only have to be sung by performers impersonating as characters for a *Pālā Kīrtan* performance. In the latter case, the role of the *kīrtanīyā* would then be reduced to that of a narrator who would need to thread the events with brief narrations. Perhaps it need not be reminded that the tradition of song-and-dance performance as exemplified by *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan* was already about three centuries old by the end of 17th century. Thus, there is no reason why *Pālā Kīrtan* could not have evolved by same time.

(iv) Dialogic Performance :

As clearly indicated in *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, quite a few close associates and followers of Caitanya based themselves at Vṛndāvana where they created a corpus of texts in Sanskrit expostulating Caitanya's philosophy. The most prominent of the expatriate circle at Vṛndāvana (Sanātana, Rūpa, Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa, Raghunātha Dāsa, Gopāla Bhaṭṭa and Jīva) came to be known as the six *gosvāmins*. As a result of their work, Caitanya's philosophy gained strong theoretical base and his movement gained recognition all over Indian sub-continent. Their area of interest included theatre, as exemplified by three Sanskrit texts composed by Rūpa Gosvāmin. These are, *Bidagdha Mādhava*, *Lalita Mādhava* and *Dānkeli-kaumudī*. He is also known to have composed a critical work on Sanskrit dramaturgy, *Nāṭaka Candrikā*, where he discusses the Sanskrit *rūpaka* known as *nāṭaka* following Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*. At least three other Sanskrit texts were composed outside Vṛndāvana, possibly in Bengal and Orissa. One of these, *Jagannāthavallabha*, was by Rāmānanda Rāy, a close associate of Caitanya in Puri and another is *Caitanya Candrodaya* by Kavi Karṇapūra (Paramānandā Dāsa), the son of Caitanya's disciple

Śivānanda Sen. The third text, titled *Samgīt Mādhava* by Govinda Dāsa Kavirāja, is now lost. The following is a brief introduction of the six plays mentioned above.

1. *Bidagdha Mādhava* (1524), a *nāṭaka* in seven acts, based on *līlās* of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana.
2. *Lalita Mādhava* (1529), a *nāṭaka* in ten acts, in which Kṛṣṇa's *līlā* in Vṛndāvana (later part), Mathurā and Dvārakā are illustrated. Interestingly, the playwright attempts to establish Rādhā of Vṛndāvana as Satyabhāmā of Dvārakā.
3. *Dānkeli-kaumudī* (1549), a *bhāṅikā* (one act), based on a popular version of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa *līlā* of Dāna or Toll-collection.<sup>227</sup>
4. *Jagannāthavallabha* (sometime between 1510-1533), a *saṅgīt-nāṭak* (or *citrarāga-kāvya*) similar to *Gītāgovinda*. The dialogue is mostly in verse and lyric, interspersed with a few in prose. It is structured in five small acts (beside the *prastāvanā*) with 7 characters and contains 21 songs. The play depicts Rādhā's love for Kṛṣṇa, which is initially rejected by the latter, but culminates in their union.<sup>228</sup>
5. *Caitanya Candrodāya* (1572 according text, by 1547 according to Sukumar Sen), a *nāṭaka* in ten acts composed at the order of King Pratāparudra of Orissa. The characters of the play include a few personifications of abstract qualities such as Maitrī (Friendship), Bhakti (Devotion), Adharma (Vice) etc., therefore appears to have been influenced by Kṛṣṇamīśra's *Prabodhacandrodaya*. The text illustrates the life of Caitanya.<sup>229</sup>
6. *Samgīt Mādhava* (third quarter of 16th century) by Govinda Dāsa. Unfortunately the text is lost. Scholars believe its songs were composed in Vrajabuli and Sanskrit. It was possibly a *saṅgīt-nāṭak*.

Of the six texts noted above, the one which was possibly performed is *Jagannāthavallabha* by Rāmānanda Rāy. *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* (III, 5) describes him training two danseuse for the performance of a play. Therefore, it is possible that Rāmānanda Rāy was indeed active in theatrical performance. But the fate of *Caitanya Candrodāya*, finished after the death of Pratāparudra, does not appear to have been as favourable. Thus, it is almost certain that other than *Jagannāthavallabha*, all other plays were at best studied but never performed. The interest displayed by the Vaiṣṇavites in Sanskrit dramaturgy shows that they were keen to gain admittance in to scholarly circles and win patronry of upper-class Hindus. As a result, after Caitanya's death till the introduction of *Līlā Kīrtan* at the festival of Khetur (c.1576), little initiative appears to have been taken by them in the direction of popular theatre. Possibly as a result of the success of *Līlā Kīrtan*, the

Vaiṣṇavites renewed their interest in Bāṅglā and translated the fore-mentioned texts. The following is the chronological order of their appearance.

1. *Rādhākṛṣṇalīlā-rasakadamba* (tr. of *Bidagdha Mādhava*) by Jadunandana Dāsa, 17th century.
2. *Dānalīlā-candrāmṛta* (tr. of *Dānkeli-kaumudī*) by Jadunandana Dāsa, 17th century.
3. Translation of *Jagannāthavallabha* by Akiñcana Dāsa, 17th century.
4. *Caitanyacandrodaya-kaumudī* (tr. of *Caitanya Candrodāya*) by Prema Dāsa, 1712.
5. *Premakadamba* (tr. of *Lalita Mādhava*) by Svarūpacaraṇ Gosvāmin, 1787-88.<sup>230</sup>

It is not known if any of the above texts were ever performed. But they certainly paved the way for the introduction of *Pālā Kīrtan* by the end of 17th century. All these texts, in Sanskrit and Bāṅglā, are also important for they continued, however faintly, the tradition of Sanskrit dramaturgy and its derivatives.

(v) Narrative performance:

As already stated, *Līlā Kīrtan* had its formal inception at the festival of Khetur held on the birthday of Caitanya (full moon of Phālgun) in 1576 or slightly after. Organised by Narottama Dāsa, the festival was a historical event in the Vaiṣṇavite movement initiated by Caitanya because it united all the factions which rose after his death. Six pairs of images, five of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and one of Caitanya-Viṣṇupriyā, were also formally installed at the newly built temple at Khetur.<sup>231</sup>

Rendition of *Padāvalī Kīrtan* was current in Bengal during early medieval period. There are also numerous accounts of Caitanya's fondness for *Padāvalī Kīrtan*, specially when rendered by Mukunda. But these were brief lyrical pieces, devoid of narrative content. Narottama Dāsa, who is credited to have given formal structure to *Līlā Kīrtan*, contributed by stringing together disjointed *padāvalīs* so as to produce a coherent narrative based on a particular *līlā* of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. He synthesized indigenous musical tradition of Bengal with the north Indian classical tradition and arrived at the unique blend characteristic of *Līlā Kīrtan* and also introduced the practice of rendering *gaura-candra* as a salutation piece, prior to the main body of performance.<sup>232</sup> The performance structure of *Līlā Kīrtan* was arrived at by adapting the indigenous tradition of the narrative style (*Ṣācālī*). Similar to the latter, *Līlā Kīrtan* is also rendered by a narrator (*kīrtanīyā*) who sings, dances and mimetically enacts the narrative and gives explanatory comments in prose, accompanied by a group of choral singers and musicians.<sup>233</sup> The most important consequence of the festival of Khetur and inception of *Līlā Kīrtan* was revival of interest in popular theatre within the folds of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. From the third quarter of 16th

century to mid 18th century, the Vaiṣṇavites diligently developed the genre, as a result of which the movement gained immense popularity.

The style of rendering *Līlā Kīrtan* which was introduced by Narottama Dāsa at Khetur in c. 1576 came to be known as the *Garāṇhāṭī*. Slightly later developed the *Manoharsāhī* which gained wide popularity among the people. The style of *Reneṭī* was possibly introduced towards the beginning of 18th century. The *Jhāḍkhaṇḍī*, one of the lesser known styles, was possibly evolved towards the end of 16th or beginning of 17th century. Although it is not clear when the *Mandāriṇī* evolved, it certainly was in existence before 18th century.<sup>234</sup>

## 2. Cults of Aryan Pantheon

Outside the scope of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism as well as the Śaiva and Śākta cults, there lay in medieval period a sizeable population who were devotees of Viṣṇu and adhered to the religious code of orthodox Brahminism and *Smṛti* texts. The faith of these people found their expression in the exploits of Rāmacandra and Purāṇic Kṛṣṇa as narrated in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*.

Possibly the most important text in late medieval period, related to the Aryan pantheon (Rāmacandra and Kṛṣṇa), is the translation of the *Mahābhārata* by Kaśīrām Dās, which is believed to have been composed between 1602 to 1610. There are a number of other compositions from 16th and 17th centuries, totaling over thirty if partial texts are added.<sup>235</sup> Quite a few *Rāmāyaṇas* were also translated in the period, but none of these surpassed Kṛtīvāsa. Interestingly, there exists in the region of Mymensingh a poetic composition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* which is credited to Candrāvati. Although there exists no firm evidence, the composer is believed to be the first poetess of Bengal, who possibly lived sometime in 16th or the first half of 17th century.<sup>236</sup>

### (i) Recitative Performance:

Sizeable number of *Rāmāyaṇas* and *Mahābhāratas* composed in late medieval period speak of great popularity of these texts and their performance. Whereas *Rāmāyaṇa* was (and still is) mostly given in the narrative form (such as *Rāmāyaṇa Gān*), *Mahābhārata* was usually recited.<sup>237</sup> Known as *Kathakatā*, the recitative performance is given by only a narrator (*kathak-thākur*) who recites the text seated on a low stool and adds commentary and explanation as necessary. Possibly towards the end of late medieval period, the recitation was transformed into lyrical rendition by Gadādhara Śīromaṇi. As a result *Kathakatā* gained wider popularity. Gadādhara was famous for his performances of *Dakṣa-*

*yajña*, *Prahlāda-caritra*, *Dhruba-caritra*, *Bāmun Bhikṣā* etc., all drawn from the *Bhagavata Purāṇa*. *Kathakatā* performance of the *Rāmāyaṇa* were also not unknown.<sup>238</sup>

(ii) Narrative Performance:

As most of the composers of *Rāmāyaṇa* were performers as well, it would be logical to conclude that most of the texts composed during the period under review were performed in a manner similar to *Rāmāyaṇa Gān* (discussed in Chapter 3). Performances such as *Lakṣmīr Gān* which still exists in Bangladesh is obviously based on popular versions of *Rāmāyaṇa* such as the *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa* which was extremely popular in northern and eastern Bengal in 17th century and later.<sup>239</sup> Because most of these were written from 17th to 19th centuries and because *Lakṣmīr Gān* is based on oral narrative, it is possible that the genre was originally created sometime in 15th century when the popular versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* were composed as oral texts. Sometime in 16th century or slightly after, the genre began to incorporate dialogic element to arrive at the form it is performed today.

(iii) Processional and Environmental Performance:

Nitynanda's performances as described in *Caitanya Bhāgavat* and Caitanya's performance at Puri unequivocally indicate that by 15th century, there did exist in Bengal environmental performances based on tales of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Purāṇas*. These were possibly preceded and followed by processions, very much like *Naukā-vilās Michil* of Patrail. Raghunandan's prescription of the twelve *Yātrās* in honour of Viṣṇu could very well have been processions which were also followed by environmental performances. Perhaps these were the performances (processional and environmental) which were known as *Rāma Yātrā* in late medieval period. When scholars refer to *Rāma Yātrā* (of late medieval period), the above is what they are referring to.<sup>240</sup>

(iv) Song-and-dance Performance:

According to Sukumar Sen, song-and-dance performances based on the tales of Rāmacandra were already in existence during the lifetime of Caitanya (1st half of 16th century).<sup>241</sup> Although there appears to be no such performance extant today, it is possible that originally *Maheśā Khelā* belonged to this category. It appears to have evolved out of two sources: (i) *Lakṣmīr Gān*, which is also based on similar narrative and (ii) *Mukho Nācā*, which also incorporates masked dance of Kālī, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Hanumāna and Rāvaṇa as well as the calculation of the Astrologer. But that it is composed of dialogic performance in prose and lyric definitely points to the 1st half of 16th century, by when similar performances were also common in Bengal as vouched by that of Caitanya (c.

1609) described in *Caitanya Bhāgavat*. Interestingly, *Mahesā Khelā* is performed more for Śākta goddesses and is played by 'low' caste Hindus. Even if they were Tantric Buddhists in the ancient period who were assimilated within the Śākta fold in early-medieval period, it is paradoxical that they should be playing the legend of Rāmacandra. There should be some sociological factors involved but the performers belong to a suppressed community with no memory of the past. Perhaps, for some curious reason, they belong to the same faith which attempts at drawing parallel with Rāma and Śiva, and Sītā and Kālī as described in the tale of Rāvaṇa with Thousand Heads to be seen a few 18th - 19th century compilations of Kāśīrām Dās's *Mahābhārata*. Sukumar Sen points out that the tale originated as a popular version of the Rāma-Sītā tale which is also to be seen in a 17th century text titled *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa* by Nityānanda Ācārya.<sup>242</sup> Nevertheless, so much is certain that background information mentioned above are indicative of a tradition which goes back to distant past.

(v) Supra-narrative Performance:

The performance conventions, the mode of performance and the performance space of *Kuśān Gān* are similar to *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* (Rangpur). But the song and dance numbers of the former are not organic to the text and are rendered more as interludes between scenes, very much like the *Yātrā* today. Moreover, the text contains dialogic passages entirely in prose, composed by a company member which is prompted during performance. On the other hand, the narrative sections are close to Kṛttivāsa's text. As Gopal Haldar has pointed out, north Bengal was one of the main regions where substantial number of *Rāmāyaṇas* and *Mahābhāratas* (or parts thereof) were composed during 17th century. It is therefore possible that *Kuśān Gān* (also from Rangpur, north Bengal), was originally conceived as a supra-narrative genre during the heyday of *Rāmāyaṇa-Mahābhārata* compositions (17th century). At that time the genre followed closely the performance conventions, the mode of performance and the performance space of *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* which had already evolved as a supra narrative genre by then. (The evolution of *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* is discussed later in this section.) But *Kuśān Gān* gradually shifted more towards the dialogic mode and the form it is performed in currently, must have been arrived at sometime in early 20th century, at a time when erotic and secular song-and-dance numbers also began to feature in *Yātrā* performances.

The evolution of *Śāstriya Pācālī* also appears to be linked to the hey-day of *Rāmāyaṇa-Mahābhārata* compositions of north Bengal in 17th century. It has already been stated in Chapter 3 that the performers and the playwrights of *Śāstriya Pācālī* (Thakurgaon, north

Bengal) have reported that earlier, the genre featured solely those texts which were based on the *Śāstras* (i.e., *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*). A few examples cited by them (i.e., *Sāvīrī-Satyaṇ*, *Dātā Karṇa*, *Harīśoandra*) are all legends drawn from the two epics. It is quite possible that in 17th century, various episodes from the two epics were given in the narrative form (hence the suffix 'pācālī' attached to its name) but these were later transformed into dialogic texts in lyric and verse, as was the case also with *Raṅg Pācālī* from the same region. The above conclusion is justified by the fact that a few troupes still follow the conventions of *Raṅg Pācālī*. Like *Kuśān Gān*, *Śāstrīya Pācālī* also underwent transformation in the modern period to adopt prose dialogue instead of verse and performance convention of *Yātrā* instead of *Raṅg Pācālī*.

### 3. Śākta Cult

Gopal Halidar and Sushil Kumar De rightly remind us that however much we claim Caitanya to be the fountainhead of Bengali renaissance the truth of the matter is that his movement did not gain total acceptance of all sections of the society in his period or even later. The Hindu society of late medieval period was run by scholars (pundits) of the holy books (*Smṛti* texts) and it accepted without question the political rule of the Muslims. Although some elite of the society wrote in Persian and practised Sanskrit, but generally speaking it was *Maṅgala-kāvya* in Bāṅglā which had the widest currency among all sections.<sup>242a</sup>

#### (i) Narrative and Supra-narrative Performance :

Two important *Maṅgala-kāvya*s on *Manasā* were composed in late medieval period. These are by Nārāyaṇ Dev from Mymensingh region of eastern Bengal (1st half of 16th century) and by Ketakādāsa Kṣemānanda from southern part of western Bengal (17th century). Nārāyaṇ Dev's *Padmā-purāṇ* is still performed in greater Rangpur region. There are good reasons to believe that the form of performance seen today dates back to 16th century. Consider, for example, a few characteristic features of *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* such as (i) non-elevated and square-shaped performance space covered by an awning, (ii) performers mostly occupying a circular space in the centre, (iii) male performers in female roles, (iv) elaborate rituals prior to performance, including fasting by the lead narrator and (v) use of *kupā-bāśi* (flute) by the orchestra members. What is also important to recognise is that *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* (Rangpur) is not only comprised of narrative performance but also dialogic, both in prose as well as lyric. The prose dialogue is created by the company, based on the action described in the text. Thus we confront a hitherto unknown genre which is narrative to an extent but also incorporates dialogic characteristics. When we are



reminded that Caitanya's performance at Navadvīp (1509) also included improvised prose dialogue, it becomes possible to see that by the first half of 16th century, narrative genres were beginning to move towards the supra-narrative. *Padmā-purāṇ Gān*, which was possibly an *Ojā Pālī* type of narrative performance (discussed in Chapter 2.5) when originally conceived by Nārāyaṇ Dev in the first half of 16th century, gradually moved towards the supra-narrative as the century closed.

On the other hand, *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* from Natore is interesting because its text is composed by an anonymous poet. It contains two episodes (Padmā's amorous dalliance with Lakṣmīndar and the latter's setting up of a bazar) which are little known in the published versions of *Padmā-purāṇ*. Interestingly, the ferrying of Behulā by Lakṣmīndar appears to be an influence of *Dāna* or toll-collecting episode as illustrated in Baḍu Caṇḍīdāsa's *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan*. If 1509 or the first half of 16th century is accepted as a plausible period of time when improvised prose dialogue had already made its way into various narrative and song-and-dance genres, then it becomes clear that *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* (Natore) must have evolved in the first half of 16th century or slightly after. Since the narrative content points to pre-Caitanya period when the tale of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa was still an erotic pastoral devoid of devotional elements and since the rituals involved point to late medieval period of time, therefore it would be reasonable to assume that *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* evolved in the first half of 16th century, a transitional spell of time between early and late medieval periods.

But 16th century is better known as the era of *Maṅgala-kāvyas* on Caṇḍī, for it was in this century that these gained widest currency.<sup>243</sup> The most renowned of *Caṇḍī-maṅgalas* is that composed by Kavi-Kaṅkan Mukundarām in around 1555-56. Scholars have shown that *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* is usually performed in eight days, beginning on a Tuesday and ending on next Tuesday. This is also confirmed by the text itself.<sup>244</sup> On each day from the first to the seventh (save day two), two episodes are performed, one in the day time and another in the evening. Only one episode is performed on day two. The evening episode on day seven runs through the night and the text is completed on the morning of day eight.<sup>245</sup> Bits of information as to what exactly was the form of performance during Mukundarām's time is scattered in the text itself. His frequently used signature-piece (*bhanitā*) indicates that the poet himself performed *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* and parts of it were rendered in lyric.<sup>246</sup> On a few occasions his signature-pieces suggest that the poet was in company of skilled musicians (*kalanta*, lit., well-versed in classical music) and actors (*nāṭuā*).<sup>247</sup> Lest the word *nāṭuā* may create doubt as to its meaning, it would be well to cite the following excerpt for clarification.

মান কৰি নিলাম্বৰ ধৰে পূৰ্ব কলেবর  
নাটুয়া ফিৰায় যেন বেশ।

In the above, the poet describes Nilāmbara (son of Indra and Śacī) assuming his divine shape at the end of his cursed life as a mortal like a *nāṭuā* abandoning his guise. The *nāṭuā* therefore is none other than an actor. Another excerpt indicates that the performance was composed of *gīt* (song), *bāḍya* (music), *nāṭ* (acting) and dance<sup>249</sup> executed by the actors and skilled musicians. These indicators are strikingly similar to the performance of *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* of Rangpur. Thus, in all probability, *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* was given in supra-narrative form in late-medieval period.

(ii) Song-and-dance Performance:

A song-and-dance type of performance, *Beilyā Nācārī* bears close similarity with *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* (Natore) in terms of narrative content because the little known "Bazar" episode is common to both. There are a few peculiarities regarding *Beilyā Nācārī*. For one, it is called "Nācārī", which is medieval parlance denotes lyrical performance accompanied by dance. Again, it is performed by Muslims who appear to have all faith in the goddess and in the efficacy of the performance. *Beilyā Nācārī* also includes brief sections of dialogic performance in prose. These indicators possibly point to an ancient practice when the appeasement of Manasā was sought with rituals.

It is hypothetically submitted that sometime in early medieval period, when oral versions of *Manasā-maṅgala* were being shaped, *Beilyā Nācārī* evolved as a song-and-dance performance similar to *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan*. Sometime in 16th century, the genre began to incorporate brief passages of prose dialogue. In medieval period, the performers accepted Islam but they continued with their ancient practice. The similarity with the narrative of *Padmā-purāṇ Gān* (Natore) obviously indicates a period when the districts of Natore and Tangail were not separated by the wide channel Jamuna is today. Since Jamuna was transformed into a major course after 1787, *Beilyā Nācārī* definitely assumed its present form sometime prior to 18th century.

(iii) Processional Performances:

Quite a few scholars have stated that *Caṇḍī Yātrā* ( dialogic form of performance similar to *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā*) was in existence in late medieval period. Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay believes that Caitanya's appearance as Ādyā-śakti in his performance at Navadvīp indicates that *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* as well as *Caṇḍī Yātrā* were in existence by c.1509.<sup>250</sup> Sañjīvacandra Cakravartī has cited hearsay according to which *Caṇḍī Yātrā* was prevalent much before

the life-time of Caitanya.<sup>251</sup> The existence of Nepalese *Yātrās*, specially those in honour of Śākta deities, appear to confirm the view of the above scholars. But the only definite evidence of any *Yātrā* within the Śākta fold that could be traced is in *Bāmākeśvar-tantra* (possibly composed in late medieval period). The Tantric text specifies sixteen *Yātrās* (processions) are to be taken out annually in honour of goddess Bhagavatī. These are: Mañca *Yātrā* and Candana-guru *Yātrā* in the month of Baiśākh, Mahā-snān *Yātrā* in Jaiṣṭhya, Ratha *Yātrā* in Āṣāḍh, Jala *Yātrā* in Śrāvaṇa, Jhulan *Yātrā* in Bhādra, Mahā-pūjā in Āśvin, Dol *Yātrā* in Kārtika, Navānna in Agrahāyaṇa, Aṅgārga *Yātrā* in Pauṣ, Raṭanti-caturdaśī in Māgh, Dol-keli in Phālgun and Dūtī *Yātrā*, Rās *Yātrā*, Vāsanti *Yātrā* and Nīl *Yātrā* in Caitra.<sup>252</sup> The Mañca *Yātrā* possibly was a procession in honour of Manasā who was known as Mañca prior to begins Sanskritised by the Brahmin scholars in late 15th century.<sup>253</sup> Interestingly, the procession in honour of Śiva has been called Nīl *Yātrā* and not Nīler Gājan. The introduction of the word 'Yātrā' thus appears to be a contribution of Brahmin scholars, who must have sought to replace the popular word 'gājan' because of Dharma cult flavour. At least six of the above-mentioned *Yātrās* (i.e., Mahā-snān, Ratha, Jhulan, Dol, Dol-keli and Rās) appear to be Vaiṣṇavite practice; three others, i.e., Mahā-pūjā, Raṭanti-caturdaśī and Vāsanti are in honour of Kālī/Durgā. It has already been noted in the previous section that the procession in honour of Kālī/Durgā was already in vogue in early-medieval period. These processions gained further popularity in late medieval period. as the above rise in number signifies. It may very well be that the processions in honour of the Śākta goddesses were commonly referred to as a group by the name *Caṇḍī Yātrā*. *Naukā-vilās Michil* of Patrail, in its supposedly earlier form of procession in honour of Caṇḍī, shows the character of these *Yātrās*: devotees, accompanied by performers and musicians, along with decorated image of the deity, proceeded to the nearby temple where other groups also congregated; there they performed (possibly *Caṇḍī-maṅgala*) or displayed tableaux; finally they marched back home in the same manner as they went.

(iv) Performances-as-contest:

Performance of *Jhāpān Khelā* possibly arose at a time when *Manasā-maṅgala* as well as performance-as-contest were popular. This condition is met by the first half of 18th century, by which time not only were innumerable *Manasā-maṅgalas* composed (and therefore the story was well known and popular) but also performances such as *Kaḍcā* and *Kavi Gān* (discussed later in this section) were in the ascendance.

#### 4. Śaiva Cult

As already discussed in Chapter 4.2.3, the narrative genre known as *Śiver Gīt*, which was based on oral text, existed in early medieval period. These must have continued in 16th century, as *Caitanya Bhāgavat* and *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* testify. From mid-17th century, quite a few written texts, eulogies of Śiva, began to appear. The most important of these are *Śivāyana* by Rāmakṛṣṇa Rāy in mid-17th century, *Śiva-maṅgala* by Śaṅkar Kavindra in c.1680 and *Śivāyana* or *Śiva-saṅkīrtana* by Rāmeśvar Bhaṭṭācārya (earlier than 1763). But the most interesting of course is *Mṛgalubdha* by Rāma Rājā which clearly shows Śaivite assimilation of Buddhism. The *Śivāyana* texts were performed in the narrative style. Rāmakṛṣṇa Rāy's *Śivāyana* deserves special attention because the text contains brief prose narratives (*baṅanikā*) inserted between those in verse.<sup>254</sup> This shows that by mid-17th century, prose in popular usage (including performance) was deemed important enough to be included in texts hitherto composed only in verse.

On the other hand, Śaiva cult continued with performances such as *Gambhīrā*, *Śiver Gājan*, *Aṣṭak Gān*, *Kālī Kāc*, *Saṅg Yātrā* and the performance of the Māndāi. The curious infiltration of Kṛṣṇa into *Aṣṭak Gān* and *Kālī Kāc* could possibly have taken place some time in the first half of 18th century or slightly earlier when texts such as *Rādhātāntra* were composed. It depicts Kṛṣṇa as a devotee of Śakti and he attains divine grace (*siddhā*) through union with Rādhā.<sup>255</sup>

#### 5. Nātha Cult

From 16th century onwards, Nātha narratives on Mīnanātha-Gorakṣanātha and Maināmatī-Gopīcandra legends began to acquire orally composed form as they are known today. Although scholars are yet to resolve their dispute, Muhammad Shahidullah has placed *Gorakṣa-vijay* by Sheikh Faizullah in 1546 and Ahmad Sharif in 1575-76.<sup>256</sup> The other composers, Bhimsen and Śyāma Dāsa, are of uncertain origin but possibly not later than 18th century. As already mentioned, in Panchanan Mandal's opinion, all the three are but performers and not composers.<sup>257</sup> Thus, there appears to remain little doubt that *Gorakṣa-vijay* continued to be performed in the narrative style, in late medieval period. As regards Maināmatī-Gopīcandra legend, Asutosh Bhattacharyya has shown that Bhavānī Dāsa composed his version in 16th century, Durlabh Mallik in 17th century and Shukur Mamud in 18th century (1705 according to Ahmad Sharif).<sup>258</sup> The texts themselves are definite evidence that narrative performance of Maināmatī-Gopīcandra legend also continued to be performed in late medieval period.

Sukumar Sen believes that *Gopīcandra Nāṭaka* (1st half of 17th century, discovered in Nepalese court) is a composition of a Bengali poet.<sup>259</sup> What has been said earlier in Chapter 4.1.3 (Nāṭha Cult) is also applicable here: that the existence of a dialogic text in royal court raises the possibility that similar text could also have been prevalent as oral composition in Bengal where the tale originated. In this case, the possibility is even greater because the composer of *Gopīcandra Nāṭaka* was also from Bengal.

According to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavite tradition cited by H.H. Risley in the *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Nityānanda's son Vīrabhadra initiated Sahajiyā (Tantric) Buddhists into the folds of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. Scholars believe that these converts continued with their previous practice.<sup>260</sup> Similar conversion of followers of the Nāṭha cult is also very likely. If these conversions can be assumed to have taken place in late 16th and first half of 17th century, it is possible to believe that Vaiṣṇavite influence in *Yogīr Gān* and *Yugī Parva* took place sometime during the period mentioned above and was effected by the converts. *Yugī Parva* appears to have been further influenced by Islamic mysticism.

Given all the contributions of Nāṭha cult, it is important to remember that its performances in Bengal were mostly restricted to the non-elite section of society. As the Cult gradually lost ground to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, Tantric Śaivism and Islam, its performances also changed content and gradually began to decay. Only Maināmatī-Gopīcandra legend attracted wider interest and continued with comparatively greater vigour.

## 6. Dharma Cult

The most interesting feature of performances related to Dharma cult in late medieval period is that written texts begin to appear. More interestingly, most of the composers were Brahmins. Two of them, Rūparāma and Ghanarāma, were even patronised by feudal lords.<sup>261</sup> These are definite pointers that the Cult was gaining acceptance in the Brahminical society as it gradually lost ground to Tantric Hinduism (Śaivism). This is made explicit by poet Rāmakānta Rāy from the second half of 18th century who claims that he was ordered to compose his text by Dharma Ṭhākur (as usually is the case with all poets) who appeared before him in the guise of a Brahmin.<sup>262</sup> Dharma Ṭhākur in the poet's village was known as Buḍo Rāy, very much like Buḍo-rājā of Jamalpur (discussed in Chapter 2.11).

From around mid-17th century to mid-18th century, there appear at least ten poets of *Dharma-maṅgala*. They are :

1. Rūparāma Cakravartī, 1649-59 (1590 according to Asutosh Bhattacharyya)
2. Rāmadāsa Āḍak, 1662

3. Govindarāma Bandopādhyāya (1665 according to Asutosh Bhattacharyya)
4. Sītārāma Dāsa, 1698 (1597 according to A. Bhattacharyya)
5. Ghanarāma Cakravartī, 1711
6. Narasimha Basu, 1st half of 18th century
7. Rāma Candra, 1732-33
8. Prabhurāma Mukhopādhyāya, around the same time as above
9. Śaṅkara Cakravartī, around the same time as above
10. Śyām Pandit (1703 according to A. Bhattacharyya).

Besides, Khelārāma Cakravartī is also credited to have composed *Gauḍa-kāvya* in 1572, but the text is not extant.<sup>263</sup>

All the texts of poets mentioned in the above list were performed in the narrative style. Although they were mostly Brahmins, the performers continued to be from the 'lower' castes. Even in 1781 when Manikrāma, a Brahmin, is ordered by Dharma Ṭhākur to compose a text, the poet is aghast when the latter commands his younger brother to perform it.<sup>264</sup>

By the end of late medieval period, Dharma cult was fully assimilated by Tantric Hinduism (Śaivism) in all parts of Bengal except Rāḍha and as a result, its performances, both narrative and processional (*Gājan*) continued only in Rāḍha, that too heavily influenced by the latter. This is testified by the fact that all the composers of all extant texts are from the above mentioned region.

## 7. Islamic Genres

It has already been discussed that beginning with Zainuddin's *Rasul Vijay* (1474), the Muslims began to show interest in their distinct identity by attempting to create a tradition parallel to the Hindu *Purāṇas*. The attempt continued in 16th century with Sabarid Khan's *Rasul Vijay* and *Hanifā O Kairā Parī* (discussed in chapter 4.3.1). From the same century onwards, the interest appears to have burst into an urgency at the popular level and as a result, a large number of texts dealing with Islamic cosmogony and legends began to appear. Some of these focus particularly on the pathetic death of the two Imams (Hasan and Hosain) and their legendary half-brother Hanifa's revenge; others illustrate a vast area, often beginning with the creation of the world, running right through legends related to various prophets and ending with the life and accomplishment of the Prophet. While not all the texts feature entire gamut mentioned above, the general tendency in all of them is glorification of Islamic heritage. The most important of these are given below.

(a) Islamic cosmogony and legends of various prophets :

Composer	Life-span	Area of origin	Text
Sheikh Paran <sup>265</sup>	c. 1560-1615	Chittagong	<i>Nūr-nāmā</i>
Syed Sultan <sup>266</sup>	2nd half 16th c.	Chittagong	<i>Nabī-vamśa</i>
Sheikh Cand <sup>267</sup>	2nd half 16th c. - 1st qtr. 17th c.	Comilla	<i>Rasul Vijay</i>
Nasrullah Khan <sup>268</sup>	Around 1st qtr. 17th c.	Chittagong	<i>Jang-nāmā</i>
Meer Muhammad Safi <sup>269</sup>	c. 1565-1630	Chittagong	<i>Nūr-nāmā</i>
Abdul Hakim <sup>270</sup>	c. 1620-1690	Noakhali	<i>Nūr-nāmā</i>
Abdun Nabi <sup>271</sup>	2nd half 17th c.	Chittagong	<i>Āmīr Hāmzā</i>
Hayat Mamud <sup>272</sup>	1st half 18th c.	North Bengal	<i>Āmbiā-vānī</i>
Faqir Garibullah <sup>273</sup> & Syed Hamza	c. 1700-1780 c. 1733-1807	West Bengal Hawrah-Hugli	<i>Āmīr Hāmzā</i>

(b) Legends related to the deaths of the Imams and Hanifa's adventure:

Composer	Life-span	Area of origin	Text
Sheikh Faizullah <sup>274</sup>	2nd half 16th c.	North Bengal	<i>Jaynāber Cautiśā</i>
Muhammad Khan <sup>275</sup>	c. 1580-1650	Chittagong	<i>Hānifār Laḍāi</i> <i>Muktul Hosain</i> <i>Kāsemer Laḍāi</i>
Abdul Hakim	1620-1690	Noakhali	<i>Kārbālā</i>
Sheikh Serbaj Chowdhury <sup>276</sup>	End 17th or 1st half 18th c.	Chittagong	<i>Kāsemer Laḍāi</i>
Hayat Mamud <sup>277</sup>	1st half 18th c.	Rangpur	<i>Jang-nāmā</i>
Faqir Garibullah & Muhammad Yaqub	18th c.	West Bengal Hawrah-Hugli	<i>Jang-nāmā</i>

It is important to remember, most of the Muslim poets in Bengal were concentrated in four regions in late medieval period. These were Chittagong from 16th century, Sylhet from 17th century, north Bengal also from 17th century and Bhurṣuṭ (border of Hugli-Hawrah, West Bengal) in 18th century. Of these, the poets of Chittagong and north Bengal composed in contemporary Bānglā, Sylhet maintained contact with north Indian Hindi-speaking Muslims and composed in Sylhetī Nāgrī (Bānglā written in north-Indian Kaythi script) and Bhurṣuṭ in *dobhāṣī* (Bānglā interspersed with abundant Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu and Hindi words).<sup>278</sup> It would be incorrect to assume that the above table gives a complete picture of literary activities of all centres, because only a few texts important for this study have been picked up.

As for performance, the texts in table (a) were definitely recited in a manner similar to *Ṕuthi Pāth* today. Because *Āmīr Hāmzā* was performed in *Nāicer Jārī* (discussed in Chapter 3), it is possible to believe that the text was rendered in some form of narrative

performance in late medieval period as well. It has also been discussed in Chapter 3 that the texts performed in *Pāillyā Yātrā* include *Qāsāsul Āmbiā* and *Dastān-i-Šahīd-e-Kārbālā*. Interestingly, *Āmbiā-vānī* and *Jaṅg-nāmā*, which are similar in content to *Qāsāsul Āmbiā* and *Dastān-i-Šahīd-e-Kārbālā* respectively, have both been composed in north Bengal in the first half of 18th century. Thus it is very likely that *Pāillyā Yātrā* originated around the same time. It is curious that the genre should be suffixed with the word 'Yātrā'. It appears to be a later addition and the alternate name, *Pātilā Gān*, was in all probability the original name.

Meer Muhammad Safi's *Nūr-nāmā* arouses special interest for it recounts Islamic cosmogony in question-and-answer format, vaguely reminiscent of *Gorkha Saṁhitā* of Nātha cult (discussed in Chapter 4.1). A number of other texts, also in question-and-answer format, have been composed in the second half of 17th and the whole of 18th centuries. Some of these are *Musā-nāmā*, *Mallikār Hājār Sawāl* and *Abdullār Hājār Sawāl*.<sup>279</sup> The prevalence, and therefore the popularity of these texts indicate that the genres known as *Sawāl Jawāb* and *Kaḍcā* might also have been widely popular during the same period of time. Since the questions and answers in *Kaḍcā* are pre-composed, very much like *Kāvī Gān* prior to the end 18th century,<sup>280</sup> it is very likely that the former (*Kaḍcā*) was in existence in the first half of the same century. On the other hand, *Sawāl Jawāb*, in which questions and answers are composed in extempore, appears to have evolved later than *Kaḍcā*, sometime in the second half of 18th century.

Most of the texts given in table (b) are often referred to as 'Jaṅg-nāmā'. Derived from Persian, the name denotes 'account of battle'. Of course the battle here it that of Karbala. On the other hand, 'marsiya' (an Arabic word), denotes 'to lament' or 'to wail'. Prior to the event of Karbala, poetic compositions on the theme of lamentation and eulogy of the life and deeds of the deceased, usually fifteen to twenty couplets in length, were known as *marsiya*. But later, the implication changed and any poetic composition in praise of Imam Hosain and his companions martyred in the battle of Karbala came to be known as *marsiya*.<sup>281</sup> This type of literary compositions began to be composed in Bengal from 16th century, with Faizullah's *Jaynāber Cautisā*. It mourns the fate of Jaynab, a member of Imam Hosain's family, which befell her as a result of the battle of Karbala. Beside those mentioned in table (b), other poets who have also composed "Jaṅg-nāmā" type of texts are Hamid (*Sangram Husn*) and Zafar (*Šahīd-i-Kārbālā* and *Sakhinār Vilāp*).<sup>282</sup>

*Jaṅg-nāmā* and *marsiya* types of texts are still performed in *Jarī Gān* (northern Bangladesh) and *Jarī Gān* (south-western Bangladesh). Curiously, the region from which most of *Jaṅg-nāmā* type to texts have been discovered, i.e., Chittagong, hardly appears to



host *Jārī* performances today. The trend here is more of *Ṣūthi Pāth* of texts in both table (a) and (b). Of the two texts discovered in northern Bangladesh, Enamul Hoque believes that *Jaynāber Cautisā* belongs to the earlier version of what today is known as *Jārī Gān*.<sup>283</sup> It is possible that *Mocciyā Jārī* is the earliest, dating back to around 16th century, because the word 'mocciyā' is a derivative of *marṣiya*, texts of which began to appear from around the same period. Others, such as *Ṣhātā-kopā Jārī* (Rangpur) and *Jārī Gān* (Rajshahi) must have evolved in the first half of 18th century when Hayat Mamud's text was composed. Clearly, *Ṣhātā-kopā Jārī* and *Jārī Gān* were heavily influenced by performances such as *Raṅg Ṣācālī* (Thakurgaon).

As already noted in chapter 4.3.1, the celebration of Muharram was initiated by the Mughals in 17th century. It is possible that Muharram began to be celebrated from around the end of the same century by the people in the rural areas of Rangpur, where it could have spread from Ghoraghat, an important divisional centre of Mughal administration in Bengal. Processions must have been an important part of the celebration of the Muslims of this area as also were performances such as *Ṣhātā-kopā Jārī* and *Mocciyā Jārī*.

Beside the two groups of texts discussed above (which are based on legends of Perso-Arabic origin), there also evolved a third group of texts, the narratives of which were indigenous in origin. Based on various legends associated with a number of Muslim saints (*pīrs*), these can best termed as 'miracles of saints'. As already shown in Chapter 3, there exist in Bangladesh today miracles of six saints, one of whom is female. They are (i) Khizir Pīr, (ii) Mādār Pīr, (iii) Pīr Baḍa Khān Gāzī, (iv) Satya Pīr, (v) Mānik Pīr and (vi) Mā Māi Campā. Performances on all of them save Mā Māi Campā began in late medieval period.

#### (i) Khizir Pīr

The earliest Muslim saint whose miracles gained wide currency in the form of narrative performance appears to have been Khizir Pīr (or Khwāj Khizir). A popular saint of Arabic (mythological) origin, his cult was introduced in Bengal by the Sufi mystics of Adhami order established by the famous saint Ibrahim ibn Adham (d. 743 AD). It is unknown when the Khizirias (i.e., followers of Khwāj Khizir) began to infiltrate into Bengal. But that the saint was held in high esteem in medieval Bengal is testified by the existence of Khizirpur believed to have been named after him.<sup>284</sup> Located on the eastern bank of river Lakkhyā opposite Narayanganj in greater Dhaka, Khizirpur was in existence in 1610 as recorded in Mirza Nathan's *Baharistan-i-Gayabi*.<sup>285</sup> Because the Mughal *subādār* Mukarram Khan is known to have celebrated the ritual of *Bedā Bhāsān* in Dhaka in 1626-27, it is very much possible that the cult of Khwāj Khizir, along with rituals and

performances associated with him, must have been extremely popular in the first half of 17th century. Therefore it would be reasonable to believe that the Cult was introduced much earlier. Muhammad Saydur is quite correct in pointing out, because Bengal is a land of innumerable water-ways and devastating flood, it is quite natural for its inhabitants to seek to appease the unknown force in the form of a supernatural power. Therefore the prevalence of deities such as Pātāl Bhairavī and Ganges.<sup>286</sup> It would appear quite natural that in such a land, a divine figure in the guise of Khwāj Khizir introduced by the Sufis would immediately win devotion of the people. At some point, a form of compromise was reached between the Hindus and the Muslims: the former accepted Khwāj as the nephew of Ganges while the latter believe that desirous of wedding Khwāj, the goddess has remained a maiden and the two will be married on the Day of Judgement.<sup>287</sup> Interestingly, the decorated raft which is set adrift on river in *Beḍā Bhāsān* ritual is reminiscent of Behulā sailing on a raft with her dead husband. Even the word 'bhāsān' (lit. 'to set adrift') is common to both. These indicators clearly point to early medieval period as the time when the cult of Khwāj Khizir must have been introduced in Bengal. Therefore, c. 1500 appears to be a conservative estimate of time when the ritual of *Beḍā Bhāsān* as well as narrative performances based on oral text eulogising Khwāj Pīr can be taken to have begun to spread. The hey-day of the ritual and the performance must have been 17th and 18th centuries from which period of time we are left with historical accounts of observance of *Beḍā Bhāsān* festival.

(ii) *Mādār Pīr*

The Madaria order was established by Badr al-Din Shah-i-Madar from Syria, in 1315 AD. He lies buried at Makanpur in Kanpur district (north India) where he died in 1436 AD.<sup>288</sup> There is no evidence of his visit to Bengal but scholars believe that his disciple Shah Allah introduced Madaria order in Gauḍa. That his following was sizeable in Bengal is testified by the names of places such as Madaripur (in greater Faridpur district), Madarbadi and Madarsha (both in Chittagong district).<sup>289</sup> Scholars also believe that the Madaria order prospered specially in north Bengal and Balyadgi in greater Dinajpur was an important centre of Madaria ascetics.<sup>290</sup> In 1659, Prince Shuja the Mughal viceroy of Bengal, granted special privileges, including that of taking out processions in honour of the *pīr*, to one of the leading preceptors of the Order named Shah Sultan Hasani Madia Burhana.<sup>291</sup> In 18th century the Order exerted great authority over the people in Bengal and even earned disrepute for collecting *nāzrānā* (present or extra payment made to a superior at an interview) by force.<sup>292</sup>

The evidence cited above clearly suggests that performances related to Madaria order, i.e., *Mādār Bāsēr Gān* (*Mādāriā Michil*) and *Mādār Pīrer Gān*, must have evolved by 1600 (if not earlier) in order to have been popular and important enough by mid-17th century for Prince Shuja to grant the privileges. But the celebration in honour of Mādār Pīr on the full-moon of Māgh, accompanied by procession with bamboo poles and music played on *dhāk*, *ḍhol* and *kāsi*, is possibly of earlier origin, dating back to first half of 15th century when the order was first introduced in Bengal. That the Madaria order had incorporated "un-Islamic" yogic elements into its practice as pointed out by M.A. Rahim<sup>293</sup> suggests influence of cults related to Tantric Buddhism such as that of Dharma. For example, the element of the egg as recounted in the cosmogony of Madaria order is strikingly similar to that of Dharma cult. Furthermore, the practice of treading on burning charcoal as performed by Madaria *faqirs* appears to be an adaptation of *Phul-khelā* ritual performed in the annual *Gājan* of Dharma cult. Therefore, it appears very much possible that *Mādāriā Michil* was also influenced by Dharma cult. *Mādār Pīrer Gān* could have developed out of songs rendered in the procession. Based on the fact that *Mādār Pīrer Gān* and *Raṅg Pācālī* (both from north Bengal) bear similarities in terms of performance, it is possible to believe that the former borrowed heavily from the latter.

(iii) *Pīr Baḍa Khān Gāzī*

The Arabic word 'Gazi' denotes 'a warrior of the faith'. Therefore every preacher of Islam is in effect a Gazi.<sup>295</sup> But there appears to exist no evidence as to who Baḍa Khān Gāzī was. One contender of historical origin is Zafar Khan Gazi who lies buried at Triveni in Hugli district (West Bengal) with his sons Ugwan Khan and Bar Khan Gazi. According to the inscription on his tomb, Zafar Khan Gazi erected a couple of *madrāsahs* (school for secondary education) between 1291 and 1321 when he was a governor. According to the *Qursinama* of Zafar Khan Gazi, he came to Bengal with his nephew Shah Sufi with the objective of preaching Islam. He succeed in converting Rājā Mān Nṛpati but was killed in a battle against Rājā Bhūdev of Hugli. However, Ugwan Khan (his son) defeated the *rājā* and married the latter's daughter.<sup>296</sup> According to local legend, Zafar Khan and his nephew Shah Sufi were sent by Sultan Jalaluddin Firuz Khalji of Delhi on receipt of a petition from the Muslims of Bhūdev's kingdom who reportedly killed one of them for slaughtering a cow. Zafar Khan and Shah Sufi waged war against Bhūdev and were victorious.<sup>297</sup>

There was another Gazi, Shah Sultan by name, who according to biography of his titled *Risalat al-Shuhada*, was born at Mecca in the family of the Prophet. He arrived at

Lakhnauti during the reign of Sultan Rukunuddin Barbak Shah (1459-74) and soon proved himself to be a competent officer. He annexed the region of Mandaran (in southern West Bengal) from Gajapati, King of Orissa and also defeated Rājā Kāmesvara of Kāmrup. But he fell victim to palace intrigue and was put to death by the orders of the Sultan in 1474. His head lies buried at Kantaduar in Rangpur and his body in Mandaran.<sup>298</sup> The legend which soon grew out of Shah Sultan Gazi has been recounted in Sheikh Faizullah's *Gāzī-vijay* composed in the second half of 16th century.

Finally, as a brief reminder, Pīr Baḍa Khān Gāzī in *Gāzī Sāheber Gān* is the son of King Sikandar of Virāt. He renounces worldly life along with his adopted brother Kālu and arrives at Sundarban, where tigers, crocodiles and supernatural beings become his disciples. Later the brothers convert Śrīrama of Sāfāni and found a village named Sonāpur. Later still they battle against King Mukut Rāy of Brāhmaṇa Nagar who is a devout follower of Dakṣin Rāy, the Hindu god of tigers. Finally Gāzī wins Mukut Rāy's daughter Campā (Campāvatī) and after further adventures, they return to Virāt.

Common at all historical accounts and traditions is proselytization and annexation of Hindus and Hindu kingdoms. Zafar Khan Gazi's account as related in *Qursinama* is also similar to *Gāzī Sāheber Gān* in another aspect : both wage wars against two kings. Although Zafar Khan is killed in the battle against the second king (Rājā Bhūdev in *Qursinama*, parallel to Rājā Mukut Rāy in *Gāzī Sāheber Gān*), his son Ugwan Khan defeats Bhūdev and marries his (Bhūdev's) daughter (Campāvatī in *Gāzī Sāheber Gān*). Thus, the deeds of father and son were merged into one, the name of another son, Bar Khan Gazi was transformed into Baḍa Khān Gāzī and imposed on the merged account. To the above, bits and pieces of history (such as the account of Shah Ismail Gazi) and fairy tales were added to create what today is known as the legend of Pīr Baḍa Khān Gāzī.

In order to ascertain when the legend was given the shape of a narrative performance, we have to remember that the legend (of Gāzī) was created by the Muslims as the counterpart of Dakṣin Rāy, the Hindu god of tigers. In all the narratives of Dakṣin Rāy and Baḍa Khān Gāzī, the Hindu god and the Muslim pīr are shown to wage war against each other. In the narratives by Hindu poets, generally known as *Rāy-maṅgala*, the conflict ends with friendship between the two; but in those by Muslim poets, generally known as *Gāzī-maṅgala* or *Gāzīr Pācālī*, Dakṣin Rāy is shown to be vanquished by Gāzī.<sup>299</sup> Obviously there is sociological explanation of the above: forced acceptance of the Muslims by the Hindus and gratification inflated to gloating over the vanquished, by the Muslims.

The text composed by Faizullah (from north Bengal) titled *Gāzī-vijay* is on Shah Ismail Gazi. This obviously implies that the legend of Baḍa Khān Gāzī had not yet gained wide circulation at the time of its composition (second half of 16th century). On the other hand, one of the earliest *Rāy-maṅgala*s was composed by Kṛṣṇa Rāma in 1686-87, where Baḍa Khān Gāzī is featured. The poet acknowledges the existence of one Mādhava Ācārya who had previously composed a *Rāy-maṅgala*. Sukumar Sen shows that Dakṣin Rāy does not appear in Mukundarām's *Caṅḍī-maṅgala*, not even in the episode where Kālketu slays a tiger in the forest. Therefore, he argues, the cult of Dakṣin Rāy had not arisen at the time when *Caṅḍī-maṅgala* was composed.<sup>300</sup> Thus, the Cult (of Dakṣin Rāy) must have arisen between 1555-56 when *Caṅḍī-maṅgala* was composed and 1686-87, when *Rāy-maṅgala* was composed. If c.1600 is acceptable as the point when the cult of Dakṣin Rāy arose, it is possible to believe that the legend of Baḍa Khān Gāzī should also have arisen around the same time or shortly after and the earliest performance of *Gāzīr Gān* based on oral narrative, by mid-17th century. The performances of *Gāzīr Gān* which is seen today in Khulna-Jessore belt, is possibly based on the original performance created around the same time (mid-17th century).

(iv) *Satya Pīr*

The earliest reference to Satya Pīr in any extant literary text is in Kavi Kaṅka's *Vidyā-Sundar (Kālikā-maṅgala)* composed in 1502.<sup>301</sup> Since the text itself eulogises goddess Kālikā, one tends to agree with Muhammad Shahidullah that miraculous legends of the saint had not yet evolved at the time of its composition.<sup>302</sup> The earliest text on Satya Pīr is by Dvija Giridhara dated 1663. A substantial number of other poets follow: mostly from western and northern Bengal who composed in 18th and 1st half of 19th century.<sup>303</sup> Hence it would be reasonable to assume that legends of Satya Pīr had begun to be transformed into oral texts not before the first half of 16th century and these were rendered in *Satya Pīrer Gān* from after the same time. It was in 18th and 19th centuries that the performance gained wide currency. The conclusion drawn above is well supported by the mode of performance itself which is close of *Raṅg Pācālī* (Thakurgaon) which dates back to 15th century.

(v) *Mānik Pīr*

The lone Muslim saint whose name bears any semblance to that of Mānik Pīr is Sheikh Husam al-Din Manikpuri. A disciple of Nur Qutub Alam and grand-son of Maulana Jalal al-Din of Manikpur in Uttar Pradesh (India), Sheikh Husam al-Din was a renowned saint and a spiritual leader. He is believed to have died in 1449 or 1477.<sup>306</sup> If Mānik Pīr is

indeed Sheikh Husam al-Din, then it is possible that legends around him had developed by mid-16th century. It is also possible that Mānik Pīr's legendary status was coloured by a desire to counteract Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. The episode titled "Kānu Ghoṣer Pālā" appears to be a veiled attack on the latter and strives to prove the superiority of Mānik Pīr over Kṛṣṇa. Therefore it is possible to believe that *Mānik Pīrer Jārī* evolved sometime in 17th century (when Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism had attained wide-spread popularity) by adding colour to existing legends. Also the claim made by Sahar Ali Gayen (cited in Chapter 3) that he is the 10th generation of a direct lineage of *Mānik Pīrer Jārī* performers, points to over two centuries of history. Two extant texts on Mānik Pīr, as cited by Sukumar Sen, were composed earlier than 19th century. On the other hand Hayat Manud, in his *Āmbiā-vānī*, sings praise (*bandanā*) in honour of the saint, which can only mean that the cult of Mānik Pīr was very much in existence in the first half of 18th century. The evidences indicate that prior to the appearance of written text, performance of *Mānik Pīrer Jārī* could have been, as it still is today, based on oral texts. The name of the genre possibly began to be suffixed with the word 'Jārī' instead of 'Gān' sometime in 20th century, under the influence of *Jārī Gān* (south-western Bangladesh).

#### 8. *Secular Genres*

The composition of quite a few secular narratives in written form, as seen in the case of 17th century Ārākānese court, makes it possible to believe that oral narratives based on and influenced by Perso-Arabian-Hindi sources must have had begun to infiltrate into the repertoire of hitherto popular tales of indigenous origin and gained wide currency during this period.

As c.1500 can safely assumed to be the point by when improvised dialogue in prose began to make inroads into song-and-dance type of performances (cf. Caitanya's performance 1509) and mid-17th century to be the point when prose narration was also being introduced (cf. Rāmakṛṣṇa Rāy's *Śivāyana*, 4.3.3. Śaīva cult), then it is possible to believe that by the second half of 17th century, song-and-dance type of secular performances could have incorporated both prose dialogue as well as prose narration. Therefore, *Pālā Gān* of Bogra (which contains narrative as well as dialogic performance in lyric, dance and also narrative and dialogic performance in prose) appears to have originated sometime in the second half of 17th century. Since the genre contains fair amount of influence of Perso-Arabic-Hindi secular narratives of love and since the Muslim poets of Ārākānese court had already composed quite a few adaptations of secular narratives from the source mentioned above, therefore the conclusion drawn on the origin of *Pālā Gān* appears

justified. Likewise, genres such as *Kecchā-bandī Gān*, which also contains narrative performance in prose and a repertoire of tales of mixed origin, could also be assumed to have evolved in the second half of 17th century.

The matter of *Ālkāp Gān* presents a curious problem. On the one hand Syed Mustafa Shiraj points out that the origin of the genre lies in *Śīver Gājan* and that *Gambhīrā Gān* is a branch of *Ālkāp Gān*. His opinion appears acceptable because both *Ālkāp Gān* and *Gambhīrā Gān* bear similarity in terms of performance, with *Saṅg Yātrā*. When we are reminded that *Saṅg Yātrā* is also given as a secular performance, more by the Muslims and that *Gambhīrā Gān* was secularized by Muslim poets,<sup>309</sup> it becomes easy to see that the Muslims must also have been responsible for the secularization of *Ālkāp Gān*. But there appears to be no indication when the process began. It is unlikely to have taken place before 18th century because, till then, religious performances appear to have held greater sway over the people.

As already discussed earlier, performance in question-and-answer format was in existence in Bengal since early-medieval period. *Bolān* and *Gorkha Saṁhita* of the Nātha cult and *Jhumur* of popular Kṛṣṇa cult are but a few known examples. Scholars believe that in late medieval period, *Kavi Gān* evolved out of *Jhumur*. A few also believe that the formation of the genre (*Kavi Gān*) took place in the second half of 17th century.<sup>310</sup> But it is not till early 18th century that there is any firm existence of evidence. In *Karuṇānidhānavilāsa* by Jayanārāyaṇa Ghoṣāl (composed in 1813-15), the structure of *Kavi Gān* has been discussed with a few examples.<sup>311</sup> On January 13, 1837, an account of the genre was published in the *Englishman*.<sup>312</sup> These evidences clearly prove that *Kavi Gān* was definitely in existence in the first half of 18th century, and by inference, it could also be believed that genre evolved sometime in the second half of 17th century. Although nothing is known about 17th century performers, Īśvar Gupta's report in *Saṁvād Prabhākar* (1 Agrahāyaṇa, 1261 BS) speaks of Ğojlā Ğui, generally held to be the earliest preceptor of the genre. Nothing much is known about him, except that he and three of his disciples were the leading performers from around the beginning of 18th century till about the 70s of the same century.<sup>313</sup> It is also believed that the disciples of Ğojlā Ğui introduced *Kavi Gān* from Birbhum-Hugli region to Calcutta, possibly sometime in mid-18th century.<sup>314</sup> But it is important to remember, as Swarochish Sarkar points out, that it was Rāma Basu (1786-1828, another famous performer of *Kavi Gān* from early 19th century), who introduced the current practice of extempore debate.<sup>315</sup> Till his time, all the questions and answers were pre-composed: it was a particular performer's ingenuity and skill to choose from his repertoire and tender an apt reply or pose a difficult question.

Towards the beginning of 17th century, *Ghāṭu Gān* was also affected by secularization. It has already been noted earlier in this section that *Ghāṭu Gān* appears to have been abandoned by the Vaiṣṇavites after its creator and his disciple were both dead. Around the time mentioned above, the genre began to shed its devotional colour and was adopted by local feudal lords who transformed it into a secular form.

#### 9. *Supra-personae Genres*

There are quite a few references in texts composed in late medieval period which definitely point to the existence of puppet theatre during the said period. In Mukundarām's *Caṇḍī-maṅgala*, goddess Caṇḍī sums up human existence to Dhanapati with the following words:

বাদিয়া নাচায় জেন কাঠের পুতলী  
সেইরূপ সংসার নাচে, কৃষ্ণ করে বেশী ।<sup>316</sup>

Again, in *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, Rāmānanda Rāy speaks of Caitanya as one with omnipotent power, who can do as he desires:

ঈশ্বর তুমি যে চাহ করিতে  
কাঠের পুতলি তুমি পার নাচাইতে ।<sup>317</sup>

Unfortunately, there appears to be no reference as to what the content of these performances were. But judging by the popularity of the cults, it could be safely assumed that orally composed texts related to Kṛṣṇa, Rāma, Manasā, Caṇḍī and Caitanya could certainly have been among those which were more popular. It is possible that written texts of song-and-dance type of performances were also in use.

Regarding scroll-painting performances, scholars have noted that "stories of Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and Śrī Caitanya were also subjects of travelling picture-shows in which the painter and the narrator were often the same person."<sup>318</sup> When one considers the style in which the scroll of *Gāzīr Paṭ* is painted, it becomes evident that it belongs to a tradition which is indigenous and is devoid of any trace of European influence as seen in *Kālīghāt Paṭ*. Moreover, if the tradition on the origin of the *paṭuās*, as related by Gurusaday Dutt is to be credited at all, it certainly points to a period prior to the modern. These evidences appear reasonable enough to believe that *Paṭuā Gān* did exist in late medieval Bengal.

#### 4.4 Modern Period (c. 1750 AD - late 20th century)

The contact with European culture beginning in early 19th century resulted in the so-called Renaissance which rejuvenated all aspects of intellectual pursuit in Bengal. At the same time the Bengali scholars, having acquired Euro-centric faculty, generally rejected most of



indigenous scholarship and arts as decadent. The rise of proscenium theatre in Calcutta itself is a case to prove the point. Proscenium theatre and European dramaturgy was introduced in Bengal by the English traders in 1753. The first play in Bāṅglā language on a proscenium stage performed by a Bāṅglā-speaking cast was produced by a Russian musician-scholar named Gerasim S. Lebedeff in 1795. After a few stray attempts in the first half of 19th century, the proscenium theatre was considered fashionable enough to be sponsored by the affluent *zamindars* as private theatre in and around mid-19th century. The first public theatre was inaugurated in 1872. By the end of 19th century, a number of other theatres followed, for which a sizeable number of plays had also appeared, all adopting European dramaturgy, specially Shakespeare in tragedy. In 20th century Bangladesh today, theatre is to be seen in two distinct streams: the Euro-centric and its derivatives in the urban areas and the indigenous in the rural areas. Fed by elite intelligentsia based in the urban areas, the Euro-centric tradition has been dynamic, attempting to respond to the needs of its urban spectators. On the other hand, indigenous theatre, in the most cases, has failed to meet the demands of 20th century life in Bangladesh and as a result, a process of fossilization has already set in.

The above process of 'fossilization' of indigenous theatre can perhaps be best understood by comprehending the significant change that occurred in urban migration pattern in Bengal from the last quarter of 19th century to 1950's. Till the last quarter of 19th century, the tendency of most of urban dwellers was to live singly in the towns and return to their families in rural areas whenever holidays offered such a possibility. But as towns began to offer more services in the form of education, health, recreation and diverse vocations, it became accepted norm to live in the urban areas with family. From 1950's,

village was only for the unlettered and unenlightened and for those who had no means to live in the towns or who could not manage any job or trade in town. Village became the homes for the failures, for the unlettered peasants, peddlers, fishermen, small shopkeepers, and so on.<sup>319</sup>

For entirely different reason, the village also remained the seat of great *jotdārs*, grain and jute traders, who lived at the apex of rural power structure but sent their children in towns for education and professional careers.

The above tendency of urban migration was made possible because the urban areas are centres of administration, trade and industry and therefore offer greater economic prospect. It is but natural that the indigenous theatre in the rural areas will face decadence. Bereft of intellectual stimulus and economic patrony, the indigenous theatre has failed to grow and meet the demands of a new era and the most cases, has remained 'fossilized'.

It is in the above perspective that the development of indigenous theatre of Bangladesh in the modern period will be studied. With the advent of colonial rule, the court-theatres became virtually non-existent in Bengal, save for a few powerful *zamindars* (almost all of whom were Hindus) and a few protectorate states in the peripheral regions. Secluded and relatively undisturbed by the English, the tribal kings of Chittagong Hill Tracts continued to extend patronry to Buddhist monasteries, where Buddhist theatre survived. All of these have been studied briefly under the head of "Derivatives of Classical Sanskrit Theatre and Buddhist Theatre". But the majority of theatre were patronied by the people. These have been studied under the sub-heads of various cults. Secular theatre and supra-personae genres have been given separate sub-heads as before.

#### 4.4.1 *Derivatives of Classical Sanskrit Theatre and Buddhist Theatre*

Quite a few Sanskrit texts have been composed in the modern period which are believed to be by scholars of Bengal. A few examples of these are *Amara-maṅgala* by Pañcānan Tarkaratna (published in c. 1913), *Kaumudīsudhākara* by Candrakānta Tarkālarikāra, *Nal-Damayantiya* and *Syamantakoddhār* by Kālīpada Tarkācārya etc.<sup>320</sup> Translations of Sanskrit play-texts also continued in 19th century, but this time not of Vaiṣṇavite texts but those from main-stream classical Sanskrit theatre. A few of these are farces, such as *Hāsyārṇava*, translated by poet Jagadīś, followed by *Dhūrtanartaka* and *Dhūrtasamāgama* by unknown translators. Kṛṣṇamiśra's six-act play *Prabodha-candrodaya* was translated by Kāśīnāth Tarkapañcānan, Gadādhara Nyāyaratna and Rāmakīrka Śiromaṇi by the title *Ātmātattvakaumudī*. In 1828, Rāmacandra Tarkālarikāra translated Gopīnātha's *Kautuksarvasva*. *Abhijñāna-śakuntala* was translated by Rāmatāraka Bhaṭṭācārya in 1848, *Ratnāvalī* by Nīlamaṇi Pāl in 1849 and *Mahānāṭaka* by Rāmagati Nyāyaratna in 1951.<sup>321</sup> More translations of Sanskrit plays followed throughout the 19th century. In a few cases, the playwrights/translators also received patronry of the affluent *zamindars*. An important example of the above is Rāmanārāyaṇa Tarkaratna who was patronied by the Rājās of Pathuriaghata for the translation of *Ratnāvalī*.

With rising social consciousness and effects of Bengal Renaissance firmly entrenched, the conventions of Sanskrit theatre was no longer effective in portraying the social ethos of the period. Michael Madhusudan Dutta (1824-1873), the literary giant of this period, successfully bridged the transition to an urban theatre independent of Sanskrit influence by introducing techniques of European dramaturgy. From mid-19th century onwards, Sanskrit theatre and its derivatives ceased to be any effective force in the theatre of Bengal. All that remained of it was either confined in literary circles or caused indirect influence on the indigenous theatre.

On the other hand, Buddhist theatre continued in the Hill Tract region, the last sanctuary of Buddhism in Bengal. As noted in Chapter 3, performances such as *Jyā. Bulu* and *Buddha Kīrtan (Pālā Gān)* are still produced by the Mārma people.

#### 4.4.2 Theatre of the people

##### 1. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism

###### (i) Kālīya-daman Yātrā and Kṛṣṇa Yātrā:

As already shown in Chapter 4.3 Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism had developed processional performance in conjunction with environmental performance (known as *Yātrā*) sometime in late medieval period. By the second half of 18th century, professional performers began to produce various *līlās* of Kṛṣṇa, not in actual environs but in *nāṭ-maṇḍapas*, courtyards of rural homesteads and public grounds, that is in any "neutral" space designed for performance. More importantly, these performances began to be given not only on religious festivals but also on other days as desired by sponsor's. Scholars agree that the performances mentioned above were generally known as *Kālīya-daman Yātrā*.<sup>322</sup> There appears no conclusive evidence as to when exactly the transformation from the processional-environmental to the neutral performance space was effected and when exactly *Kālīya-daman Yātrā* came into existence. According to tradition current among *Yātrā* performers, Śīsurāma Adhikārī was the earliest exponent of the genre (*Kālīya-daman*) and he is placed in mid-18th century or slightly earlier. The above is also accepted, albeit tentatively, by scholars such as Harekrishna Mukhopadhyay and Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay.<sup>323</sup> But Rājā Rājendralāl Mitra, writing in mid-19th century points out, prior to Śīsurāma, a form of "corrupt Sanskrit theatre" was current among the people.<sup>324</sup> It is possible that Mitra is referring to performances such as *Citra-yajña* which was produced at the court of Navadvīp in 1777-78 (discussed in Chapter 4.3.2). Because earlier attempts in the same direction is also known to have been made (*Caṇḍī*, 1760), it is not impossible that Mitra's "corrupt Sanskrit theatre" may have been attempts made by court poets at producing refined version of dialogic forms of popular performance (such as *Kālīya-daman Yātrā*) which were beginning to be divorced from the processional-environmental type sometime prior to mid-18th century. Therefore, in all probability, Śīsurāma indeed was the first renowned professional performer of *Kālīya-daman Yātrā*.

According to Harekrishna Mukhopadhyay, *Kālīya-daman Yātrā* repertoire included the following episodes: (i) *Yugal-milan* (of which the *līlā* of Kṛṣṇa-Kālī was a part), (ii) *Kalaṅka-bhañjan*, (iii) *Mān-bhañjan* and (iv) *Māthur* (of which slaying of Kamsa was a part). Because *Yugal-milan* began with *Kālīya-daman līlā* and possibly attained great

degree of popularity, the performance of all Kṛṣṇa *līlās* were generally known as *Kālīya-daman Yātrā*.<sup>325</sup> The material for all *Kālīya-daman Yātrā* texts were drawn from *Bhāgavata Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, *Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa* and popular tales of Kṛṣṇa.<sup>326</sup> Because none of these texts are extant, all conclusions on *Kālīya-daman Yātrā* are strictly hypothetical.

As regards performance, *Kālīya-daman Yātrā* is believed to have been predominantly lyrical. It was composed of narration in prose, verse and lyric, and dialogue in verse and lyric along with bits and pieces of prose dialogue. Of all the characters, Vṛndā (a companion of Rādhā), Bāsadev (Vyāsa) and Muni Ğosāi (Nārada) played pivotal roles. Performed by the *adhikāri* (regisseur or proprietor of the troupe), Vṛndā or Muni Ğosāi often narrated parts of the action in improvised prose and pre-composed verse and lyric as *sūtradhāra* would; the other parts were rendered in dialogue between him/her and various characters, in which improvised prose dialogue played nominal role. Thus, Vṛndā (or Muni Ğosāi) guided the entire action and facilitated entries and exits of various characters. A performance would usually begin with *gaura-candra* (as in *Līlā Kīrtan*), followed by a comic interlude often played by Bāsadev. A song-and-dance piece by a group of young lads would be given next, at the end of which the main body of performance would begin with the entry of Vṛndā or Muni Ğosāi.<sup>327</sup> Dance featured as an essential part of performance and was executed by all characters regardless of age or background.<sup>328</sup> It should also be mentioned that all female roles were performed by male impersonators. It is believed that the use of make-up in *Kālīya-daman Yātrā* was minimal. Bāsadev and Muni Ğosāi wore beard and mustache made of raw jute. A few scholars believe that the use of costume was also simple. Śisūrāma's disciple Paramānanda Adhikāri, renowned for his performance of Dūtī (Vṛndā), is said to have borrowed *saris* and ornaments from sponsors which served as Dūtī's costume and accessories.<sup>329</sup> According to few other scholars, Kṛṣṇa would be dressed in yellow *dhoti* and wear a crown; Yaśomatī, Vṛndā, the *sakhīs* (Rādhā's companions) and the cowherds would all wear a kind of loose outer garment like *yashmak* suspended from shoulder or neck, with decoration of silver or golden embroidery on two sides in front.<sup>330</sup> Of musical instruments, *khol*, *kartāl* and violin were used. Sometime, as many as ten to twelve *khol*s are reported to have been played simultaneously during performance.<sup>331</sup>

As for performance space, *Kālīya-daman Yātra* bore vestige of environmental performance, at least in the formative years. Nagendranāth Basu notes that in days of yore, *Yātrā* troupes performing *Mān-bhañjan* episode would have Rādhā seated on a separate platform, decorated with creepers and flowers, at one side of the performance space

located in a courtyard while dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Vṛndā would be carried on at the centre or another side.<sup>332</sup> Basu's remark is reminiscent of Sañjīvacandra Cakravartī's citation of Kālīya-daman performance on a pond, discussed in chapter 4.3.3. But such arrangements possibly were not frequent; during second half of 18th and entire 19th century, it was usual to perform in *naṭ-maṇḍapas*.<sup>333</sup> If Sañjīvacandra Cakravartī's view is correct that eight to ten thousand spectators gathered to witness *Yātrā* performances in the second half of 18th century,<sup>334</sup> then it is possible to believe that these were given in public grounds, on raised platforms to facilitate visibility.

*Kālīya-daman Yātrā* lost currency after the 4th decade of 19th century and its place was occupied by what came to be known as *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā*.<sup>335</sup> Although both were based on *līlās* of Kṛṣṇa, the texts of the latter (*Kṛṣṇa Yātrā*) were entirely dialogic as opposed to partly narrated texts of *Kālīya-daman Yātrā*. Moreover, *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* texts increased emphasis on prose dialogue against those in lyric. One of the most famous exponents of *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* was Govinda Adhikārī (1794/95-1870/71) who is credited to have brought about the textual changes noted above. Drawing on Kṛṣṇa *līlās* as recounted in later *Purāṇas*, Vaiṣṇava *padāvalīs*, narrative texts in rhymed metrical verse on Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa *līlās* and pastoral tales prevalent among the people, Govinda Adhikārī composed quite a few *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* texts, of which the following may serve as examples: *Kalañka-bhañjan*, *Mān-bhañjan*, *Kālīya-daman*, *Māthur*, *Subal-milan*, *Nanī Curi*, *Goṣṭha Vihāra*, *Akrur-saṁvād*, *Nimāi Sannyās*, *Kṛṣṇa-Kālī* etc.<sup>336</sup> Another renowned composer-performer of *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā*, who was extremely popular in eastern Bengal, was Kṛṣṇakamala Gosvāmin (1810-1888). Some of his better-known texts are *Svapnavilāsa*, (1842), *Dibyanmāda* or *Rāi Unmādinī* (1842) and *Vicitravilāsa* (1856).<sup>337</sup> Of the three, the first two are noteworthy for they are composed mostly of dialogue in lyric and there is hardly any use of prose. Therefore, Kṛṣṇakamala's texts may be seen as attempts towards revival of lyrical characteristics seen in *Kālīya-daman Yātrā*.

There appears to have been no significant change in the stage technique of *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā*. But Nishikanta Chattopadhyaya makes a curious comment regarding a curtain. "The decoration of a Yatra Rangabhumi, or stage, consists of a single curtain drawn from one side to another by two chords, and which forms what we call Yavanika where the actors dress themselves."<sup>338</sup> *Yavanikā* implies curtain rather than one put behind as a decor. It is unclear if Chattopadhyaya implies that the curtain was hung immediately behind the performance space because no such device has been noted by any other scholar nor is it a current practice. Beside *naṭ-mandirs*, Chattopadhyaya also notes that *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* performances were given in the open-air under large awning or even beneath spreading

branches of Baṭ tree (*Ficus Indica*).<sup>339</sup> Performances were usually given in the day-time, from morning till evening, with at least one break in the middle when comic interludes (*saṅg*) would be given.<sup>340</sup> It appears that night-time performances may also have been occasionally given, specially in Calcutta city, as testified by an unidentified painting by a foreign artist, possibly executed at the beginning of 19th century, in which a night-time performance of *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* lit by burning torches has been depicted.<sup>341</sup>

The last renowned performer-composer of *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* was Nīlkanṭha Mukhopādhyāya (1842-1911), a disciple of Govinda Adhikārī, who flourished in late 19th and early 20th century. His texts, such as *Mān*, *Māthur*, *Kalaṅka-bhañjan*, *Prabhās Yajña*, are characterised by equal proportion of prose and lyric. The presence of Dūtī, performed by him, is also to be noticed in the above texts, through whom parts of the action is narrated in prose and lyric. A few properties, such as a pitcher, earthen pots etc., were used in *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* performances produced by him. It also appears that Nīlkanṭha Mukhopādhyāya performed at night and these stretched to a period of six to seven hours.<sup>342</sup>

Popularity of *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* began to dwindle after Nīlkanṭha Mukhopādhyāya. Performances of the genre currently seen in Bangladesh are predominantly lyrical which are rendered in *Kīrtan* tune. Because such was also a characteristic feature of performances produced by Kṛṣṇakamala Gosvāmin, it is possible that *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* of Bangladesh, particularly those of Gopalganj, Tangail, are derivatives of late 19th century performances popularised by him (Kṛṣṇakamala). On the other hand, *Sāj Kīrtan* appears to be a derivative of mythological *Yātrā* performances (discussed later under secular performances), which gained popularity in the second half of nineteenth century. Quite a few composers and performers from Narail, Faridpur, Jalakhathi and Mahilara (Barisal) attained fame in mythological *Yātrā*.<sup>343</sup> At the same time, absence of narrator and presence of Vivek in *Sāj Kīrtan* are pointers which suggest that *Sāj Kīrtan* developed sometime towards the end of nineteenth century.

#### (ii) Caitanya Yātrā and Rās Yatra :

Jayanārāyaṇa Ghoṣāl's *Karuṇānidhānavilāsa* (1813-15) testifies that beside *Kālīya-daman Yātrā*, *Rās Yātrā*, *Caitanya Yātrā* and *Caṇḍī Yātrā* were also popular at the time of its composition.<sup>344</sup> Although nothing further is noted about these genres, it is possible that *Rās Yātrā* was a continuation of late-medieval practice, in which devotees would bring out processions from temples of Kṛṣṇa and proceed to *rās-manca* (elevated platform constructed in the form of levels, ascending towards the centre) where *rās* dance of Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* would be performed. As discussed earlier in Chapter 4.3.3, Nagendranāth

Basu has noted the existence of *Rās Yātrā* in late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The existence of a *rās-mañca* (constructed in the middle of a large pond with a narrow strip connecting it to the bank) adjacent to the palace of Mahārājā of Natore testifies that *Rās Yātrā* was celebrated (on the full-moon of Kārtika) during the rule of the feudal lords of Natore (1st half of 18th to 1st half of 20th century).

On the other hand, *Caitanya Yātrā* was possibly similar to *Kālīya-daman Yātrā* in terms of performance. As the name implies, the narrative presented in it was drawn from the life of Caitanya. That the genre had lost popularity by 1830's is testified by a newspaper report dated 1832, which makes no mention of *Caitanya Yātrā* although it does mention *Kālīya-daman Yātrā*, *Rās Yātrā* and *Caṇḍī Yātrā*. It is possible that texts of the genre, such as *Nimāi Sannyās*, began to be included in *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* repertoire because those composed by Govinda Adhikārī includes one by the above name. Even today, *Nimāi Sannyās* is a part of *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* repertoire, as seen in the case of Govinda Opera Party, Gopalpur, Tangail.

(iii) Pālā Kīrtan, Līlā Kīrtan and Maṇipurī Rās Nr̥tya :

There appears to have been no further development of major proportion in *Pālā Kīrtan* and *Līlā Kīrtan*, both of which evolved in late medieval period. On the other hand, *Maṇipurī Rās Nr̥tya*, evolved in the Maṇipurī royal court in the second half of 18th century, has been performed at Bhanugachi since 1842 under the patronry of Maṇipurī community residing there.

## 2. Śākta Cult

There exists a belief among some scholars (as mentioned earlier) that *Yātrā* performances based on the narratives of Śākta cult were in existence in Bengal much before the life-time of Caitanya; but Amūlyacaraṇ Vidyābhūṣaṇ believes that *Caṇḍī Yātrā* (based on narratives on Caṇḍī) and *Kālīya-daman Yātrā* were contemporaneous and *Bhāsān Yātrā* evolved at a slightly later date. On the other hand, Asutosh Bhattacharyya acknowledges the existence of *Caṇḍī Yātrā* and *Bhāsān Yātrā* in 19th century but also believes that nothing can be hypothesized about probable existence of the same in medieval period.<sup>347</sup> All scholars, however, agree that both the genres mentioned above were in existence in 19th century. Going back to *Karuṇānidhānavilāsa* cited earlier in this section, it becomes possible to see that *Caṇḍī Yātrā* was extremely popular in early 19th century, hence by extension, it could very well have evolved in the second half of 18th century (because popularity is preceded by origin). In the light of argument placed in Chapter 4.4.3 (Śākta cult) that *Caṇḍī Yātrā* as a processional-cum-environmental performance possibly did exist in late medieval

period, it appears that *Caṇḍī Yātrā* as a dialogic performance evolved in a manner similar to *Kālīya-daman Yātrā*. Furthermore, court-poet Bharat Candra's unfinished work titled *Caṇḍī* (1760) clearly shows that dialogic texts on the deity were being attempted at the court and by inference, such texts composed orally could also have been known at the popular level. Therefore, it appears very possible that *Caṇḍī Yātrā* as a performance similar to *Kālīya-daman Yātrā* was in existence at popular level around mid-18th century. On the other hand, *Karuṇānidhānavilāsa* makes no mention of *Bhāsān Yātrā*. The genre is not mentioned either in the newspaper report of 1832 (cited earlier), which indicates the existence of three types of contemporary *Yātrā* : *Kālīya-daman*, *Rās* and *Caṇḍī*. This could only mean that even if *Bhāsān Yātrā* had evolved by that time, it was not very popular or had not attained enough importance. It could also be inferred from the above that the genre had evolved later than *Caṇḍī Yātrā*, i.e., early 19th century by liberal estimate, possibly influenced by the popularity of *Caṇḍī Yātrā* and *Kālīya-daman Yātrā*.

Scholars believe that the content of *Caṇḍī Yātrā* was drawn from *Caṇḍī-maṅgala*, specially the tales of Kālketu and Śrīmantā.<sup>348</sup> *Bhāsān Yātrā*, as it has already been shown in Chapter 3, focuses on the tale of Behulā and Lakṣmīndar, drawn from *Manasā-maṅgala* (*Padmā-purāṇ*). Because of their evolution at around the same time and by the same process or mutual influence on each other, it could be assumed that prior to mid-19th century, both *Caṇḍī Yātrā* and *Bhāsān Yātrā*, like *Kālīya-daman Yātrā*, were predominantly lyrical. And like the latter, the two Śākta cult genres were possibly also partly narrated. From around the second half of 19th century, the proportion of prose dialogue possibly increased and the narrative device was abandoned. Therefore, Nepal-dighi (Natore) troupe probably performs the earlier version of *Bhāsān Yātrā*, while Banshgram (Narail) troupe, that of mid-20th century. Unfortunately, no performance of *Caṇḍī Yātrā* could be located in Bangladesh today, but quite a few residents of Gopalganj in greater Faridpur district have reported that the genre was very much in existence even around mid-20th century in the villages of their region. These were performed in a manner similar to *Yātrā* of contemporary period and were based on the legend of Kālketu.

### 3. Cults of Aryan Pantheon

Asutosh Bhattacharyya believes that *Rāma Yātrā* troupes arose from *Rāmāyaṇa* performers (i.e., performers of *Rāmāyaṇa Gān*) in 19th century.<sup>349</sup> But Ajit Kumar Ghosh is of the opinion that *Rāma Yātrā* grew out of *Rāmāyaṇa* in the medieval period.<sup>350</sup> Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay takes a moderate course and states that in 18th



and 19th centuries, *Rāmāyaṇa* was also being given as a *Yātrā* (dialogic) performance along with *Kālīya-daman Yātrā*.<sup>351</sup> There are two reasons to believe in Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay's view that *Rāma Yātrā* is contemporaneous of *Kālīya-daman Yātrā*. One of these is the possible existence of *Rāma Yātrā* as a processional-environmental performance in the late medieval period (discussed in Chapter 4.3.3). This raises the probability that *Rāma Yātrā* evolved in a manner similar to *Kālīya-daman Yātrā*. The other reason is Nagendranāth Basu's comment that in earlier times, *Yātrā* troupes would perform *Rāma Yātrā* in the courtyards with *Sītā* (held captive in Laṅka) at a separate corner, seated on a platform decked with flowers and creepers.<sup>352</sup> The above arrangement for performance appears to be similar to *Kālīya-daman Yātrā* discussed earlier in this section and vestige of environmental performances given in late medieval period. Although Basu does not mention the period, he appears to be referring to the second half of 18th century. A third reason could also be added by showing that *Maheśā Khelā*, which possibly evolved in late medieval period as a dialogic genre, could easily have led to the development of *Rāma Yātrā*.

*Rāma Yātrā* performance witnessed at Bagerhat was entirely dialogic: some spoken in prose and others in lyric. Its preliminaries consists of "opening concert", patriotic song and "appear concert". All these elements date back to mid-20th century when similar elements began to be incorporated in *Yātrā* performances of the then East Bengal (Pakistan).

#### 4. Śaiva Cult

The only development of major significance that occurred in performances related to Śaiva cult during the modern period was the evolution of *Gambhīrā Gān* in Malda in early 20th century (discussed in Chapter 2.11) and *Gambhīrā Gān* of Rajshahi in mid-20th century (discussed in Chapter 3), both as secular performances.

#### 5. Nātha Cult

In north Bengal, there exists a genre of performance called *Monāi Yātrā*, which, according to Sukumar Sen, bears resemblance with *Yugī Kāc*.<sup>353</sup> A text with a similar plot, titled *Monāi-Tonāi*, was collected by Bangla Academy from greater Rangpur in 1963, and was published recently.<sup>354</sup> Unfortunately, it appears to be incomplete. But there is enough material to show that it is composed of narration in verse (to be rendered in lyric by the *gīdal* or lead-narrator) and dialogue in prose and verse (to be rendered in prose and lyric by various characters including *Nirañjan*, i.e., God, and *Jibiril*, i.e., Gabriel). The text includes passages of questions and answers between *Monāi* the disciple and his preceptor, which is reminiscent of *Yugīr Gān* and *Yugī Pārva*. But strikingly, as Sukumar Sen

reminds us,<sup>355</sup> comedy is totally absent in *Monāi Yātrā* as also in *Monāi-Tonāi*. Thematically, both the texts speak of renunciation of worldly life and the importance of Yogic discipline. Muhammad Saydur notes that although *Monāi-Tonāi* is currently performed in a manner similar to *Yātrā*, in earlier times its mode of performance was similar to *Ālkāp Gān*.<sup>356</sup> Based on all the observations cited above, it could be hypothesized with fair amount of certainty that *Monāi-Tonāi* is a performance text which originally was related to Nātha cult and was performed in the genre known as *Yogī Yātrā*. Sukumar Sen also reminds us that *Yogī Yātrā* (a dialogic form of performance based on the legends of the Nātha *śiddhās*) was popular in the northern parts of West Bengal and Bangladesh till recently.<sup>357</sup> It is very much possible that *Yogī Yātrā* was a derivative of the processional performances such as the *Matsyendranātha Yātrā* of Nepal. Because the mode of performance of *Yogīr Gān* and *Yugī Parva* on the one hand and *Yogī Yātrā* (*Monāi-Tonāi*) on the other appear to be close it is possible that the latter evolved from the former two. As for the time in which it possibly evolved, structural elements of *Monāi-Tonāi* (i.e., narration in verse and lyric by the *gīdal* and dialogue in prose, verse and lyric by various characters) point to first half of 19th century when *Kālīya-daman Yātrā* (with quite similar elements) was still in vogue.

Of the other genres related to Nātha cult, *Maināmatīr Gān* (or *Gopīcandrer Gān*) was extremely popular in 18th, 19th and the first half of 20th centuries, specially in north Bengal. What is known of its mode of performance has already been discussed in Chapter 4.1.3 as *Mūnikandra Rājār Gān*. Also in north Bengal, *Yugī Parva* and *Yugīr Gān* were extremely popular during the same period. But as the Cult had already lost its distinct identity, having been assimilated by Śaiva cult, the performances lived only in Muslim community and were popular strictly in the "lower" rung of social hierarchy.

## 6. Dharma Cult

A few more *Dharma-maṅgala* and *Śūnya Purāṇ* texts were composed in the second half of 18th century, which signals continuation of interest in the Cult during this time. But by early 19th century, Dharma cult was relegated to the position of an unimportant stream within Hinduism and its practice was restricted to the region of Rādhā (West Bengal). There appears to have been no further development of significant nature in the performances associated with Dharma cult in 19th or 20th century.

## 7. Islamic Genres

Characteristic of all texts composed by Muslim poets in the modern period is loss of vigour and irrelevant repetition of tradition out of tune with changing times. The Muslim

reform movements in the early 19th century aimed at purging all "Hindu" influences. When regeneration was initiated towards the end of 19th century, the elite, educated in Euro-centric world-view, began to reject traditional Islamic performances of Bengal, not caring to find ways and means for transforming them to suit changing times. Thus, the process of fossilization of Islamic performances, in most cases, began in early 20th century.

Important works of Islamic cosmogony and legends of various prophets composed during the period under review are two texts titled *Qāsāsul Āmbiā*: one by Muhammad Khater (1839-1889) from the region of Hawrah (West Bengal) and the other by Rezaullah, Amiruddin and Ashraf Ali, completed in c. 1861. Beside the above, Muhammad Khater is also credited with *Sawāl O Jawāb* and *Merāj-nāmā*, Syed Nuruddin (2nd half of 18th century) with *Musār Sawāl* and Enayetullah (from Rangpur region, north Bengal) with *Faqir Vilās* (1893). All these texts must have fed performances such as *Pāilyā Yātrā* and *Kaḍcā*. It is also probable that *Sawāl Jawāb*, a contest in extempore created possibly in the second half of 18th century, used these texts as their source of information.

No major work on the *Jaṅg-nāmā* tradition was composed in the modern period. Of course the above does not include what must have been countless imitation of works composed in late medieval period and those which followed Meer Musharraf Hussain's novel *Biṣād Sindhu* (1885-90). Popularity of *Jārī Gān* (northern Bengal) increased further, leading to diversification of content and giving rise to *Nāḍā Jārī* and *Dharma-sammandhīya Jārī* sometime in 19th century. These genres possibly used texts on Islamic cosmogony and legends of various prophets. *Jab Jārī*, *Cāli Jārī* and *Racanār Jārī*, all secular genres, probably arose in the first half of 20th century, when secular tales were also being dealt with in *Yātrā*. *Byāṅga Jārī*, which appears to be politically oriented, could have arisen after Tebhaga Movement (1946-49) had gained momentum among the peasants of north Bengal.

No *Jaṅg-nāmā* or *marsiya* type of text has been discovered from eastern Mymensingh which dates back to late medieval period. This reinforces the view stated earlier in Chapter 3 that *Jārī Gān* of eastern Mymensingh must have evolved in or shortly after 1836 at the initiative of Syed Abdul Karim, who reorganized his *lāṭhial* men for the performance. He could have borrowed necessary texts from Sylhet, a centre of Islamic literary activities since 17th century, where *marsiya* compositions from north India could have been available. It is possible that adaptations of these are still performed as *Jārī Gazal*. Because the texts from Sylhet, heavily influenced by north Indian culture, may have proved alien to popular taste, local poets began to adapt, first the *marsiya* texts from Sylhet and then Meer Musharraf

Hosain's *Biṣād Sindhu*. Hence the texts performed in *Jārī Gān* today could not have been created prior to 20th century.

In all probability, *Jārī Gān* of south-western Bangladesh evolved in early 19th century when both *Sawāl Jawāb* and *Kāvī Gān* were immensely popular in the region. That *Jārī Gān* was also very popular during the heyday of Faradi movement (1820s to 1860s) is clear from the injunction issued by Haji Shariatullah that the genre was anti-Islamic (discussed in Chapter 1). It is possible that in early 19th century *Jārī Gān* and *Sawāl Jawāb* were held to be distinct from each other on the basis of content: the former was based on *Jang-nāmā*, texts (and hence the name *Jārī Gān*) and the latter on *Nūr-nāmā*, *Āmbiā-vānī*, *Qāsāsul Āmbiā* etc. *Jārī Gān* bore the burnt of Faradi movement because it elevated Hasan and Hosain to quasi-deified status and therefore its popularity could have subsided from 1840's. But as the wave of Faradi movement subsided, *Jārī Gān* gradually regained its popularity, specially after 1947 when Pakistan was created.

Judging by the crusade lunched by Faradi movement against celebration of Muharram, it is apparent that the latter was quite popular in the rural parts of Bengal by early 19th century. Writing in the second half of 19th century, James Wise notes that in every Muslim village, *tāziyās* were constructed by the villagers and there existed an urge to excel those of other villages.<sup>358</sup> A newspaper report dated 1869 and an auto-biographical account (of Bipin Candra Pāl, b. 1858) clearly show that the celebration was immensely popular in the region of Sylhet around mid-19th century.<sup>359</sup> It was introduced in and around Ashtagram (eastern Mymensingh) by Syed Abdul Karim in 1836. At Gar-para, Manikganj, the celebration was introduced towards the end of 19th century by Mawlana Abdur Rahman.<sup>360</sup> Thus by the end of 19th century, celebration of Muharram, accompanied by processions, *Lāṭhi-khelā* and fairs had become extremely popular in various parts of Bengal despite resistance from Faradi movement.

Narrative performances on miracles of saints gained wider currency in all cases except *Mādār Pīr* and *Khwāj Khizir*. Following of *Mādār Pīr* possibly fell sharply after their rebellion failed in c. 1800. *Beḍā Bhāsān* festival of *Khwāj Khizir* also failed to resurrect after opposition from Faradi movement. A new genre, that of *Mā Māi Campā*, evolved, but the exact time remains uncertain. The legend of *Mā Māi Campā* was published in a journal from Satkhira named *Masjid* (vol. 1, no. 1 & 2, 1918).<sup>361</sup> The evidence is conclusive enough to suggest that the legend was well known in the region of Satkhira in early 20th century and therefore, it possibly evolved sometime in the second half of 19th century, as an oral narrative in rhymed metrical verse. But the legend narrated in the *Masjid* is strikingly different from that of Mohammad Akhtar Hosain (discussed in Chapter

3) in one respect: the latter relates *Māi Campā* to *Gāzī* which the former does not. This important difference gives rise to the suspicion that the two narratives are from two periods of time, separated by a time-span when *Mā Māi Campār Kicchā-kāhinī Jārī* had lost its popularity as a performance. It is suggested that the time in which the genre was revived again is after 1947, because Islamic partisanship current in early period of Pakistan regime is also voiced in *Mā Māi Campār Kicchā-kāhinī Jārī*.

*Mānik Yātrā*, as reported in the collector's note, was extremely popular over a hundred years ago.<sup>362</sup> Therefore, the genre must have risen in the second half of 19th century. Similarly, *Sātyā Pīrer Yātrā* also evolved around the same time because its performance, composed on elements such as prose dialogue, lyrical dialogue and song-and-dance numbers, appears to reflect similar structure in secular *Yātrā* performances of the same period. On the other hand, *Gāzī Yātrā* possibly arose slightly earlier because scattered bits of narration and dialogue in verse can still be seen in it.

## 8. Secular Genres

The first half of 19th century ushered in qualitative transformation in the social life of Bengalis belonging to Hindu community, specially in urban areas such as Calcutta. The essence of the change can be summed up as laying greater emphasis on the material as opposed to the spiritual, Euro-centricism as opposed to tradition-bound conservatism. This transformation can be seen as the result of a rising mercantile capital dominated by the Hindus and the reform movement of Brahmo Samaj. The rise of Neo-Hinduism in 1870's brought about a temporary reversal by reinstating non-material religious tradition. But the partition of Bengal (1905) raised the question of nationalism to the forefront, as a result of which social life in Bengal witnessed a surge of interest in the temporal affairs centered around the question of national identity. The latter caused irreversible schism between the Hindus and the Muslims contributing to the creation of Pakistan.

A section of indigenous theatre of Bengal responded the changing social condition described above. As a result, from *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* arose *Natun Yātrā* (lit., 'New Yātrā'), which was superseded by *Paurāṇik Yātrā* (Mythological *Yātrā*) in the fourth quarter of the same century, followed by *Aitihāsik Yātrā* and *Svadeśī Yātrā* ('Historical Yātrā' and 'Nationalist Yātrā') towards the beginning of 20th century. These appear to have followed the course of contemporary proscenium-based Calcutta theatre. But from the 20s onwards, *Yātrā* failed to respond to the rising heat in political arena and chose to dwell safely in the mythologies and the histories. From mid-20th century onwards, the tendency has been to reflect crises inherent in family life often in confrontation with the society. Popularly

known as *Sāmājīk Yātrā*, the above tendency did raise the question of national identity in the form of Hindu-Muslim relationship, but the approach was sentimental instead of analytical. Thus *Yātrā* is a spent force today, and its principle device to arouse public interest is erotic song-and-dance numbers.

On the other hand, there also arose in the second half of 19th century another form of secular performance which was a development of existing narrative and song-and-dance genres based on romance and adventure. Known as *Jhumur Yātrā*, it as well as other secular genres, failed to reflect the winds of change which were blowing over social life in Bengal/East Pakistan/Bangladesh. The following discussion attempts to trace the evolution of major tendencies described above.

(i) *Yātrā* :

A news item published in *Samācār Darpaṇa* dated 16 June 1821 reports the performance of *Viśvā-Sundar Yātrā*, which was based on a part of *Annadā-maṅgala* (i.e., "Kālikā-maṅgala") by Bharat Candra Rāy (discussed in Chapter 4.3.2). This is taken to be the earliest reference to secularized *Yātrā* performance. Further reports dated 18, 22, and 26 January, 1822 mention performance of *Yātrā* (cited as *Natun Yātrā*), in which characters drawn from various walks of life rendered comic entertainment. Although name of the text is not mentioned, scholars believe it was *Kālī-rājār Yātrā*. There follows further reports of *Kām-rūp Yātrā* (4 March, 1822), *Nalā-Damayanti* (6 July, 1822) and *Rājā Vikrāmadītya* (31 May, 1823).<sup>363</sup> Structured in a manner similar to *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā*, these secular performances generally referred to as *Natun Yātrā*, differed from its source (i.e., *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā*) in content and objective: whereas *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* sought to generate devotional urge among spectators by enacting *līlās* of Kṛṣṇa and emphasized the divine aspects, *Natun Yātrā* aimed at entirely secular entertainment by enacting pseudo-mythical narratives and emphasized the human aspects. The performances of *Natun Yātrā* were often produced by the affluent elite of Calcutta, hence it was also known as *Sakher Yātrā* or 'Amateur Yātrā'. The first of these *Sakher Yātrā* troupes is believed to have been created under the patronry of Rādhāramaṇ of Bou-bazar, Calcutta, in 1822.<sup>364</sup> But *Natun Yātrā* performances were also given by professional troupes the most famous of which was that of Gopāl Dāsa, popularly known as Gopāl Uḍe because he hailed from Orissa.

Beginning his career as a street vendor who sold ripe plantain in the streets of Calcutta, Gopāl Uḍe (1819-1859) found his way into Rādhāramaṇ's *Sakher Yātrā* troupe at the age of 18 or 19. He captured the heart of spectators on his very first appearance in the role of Mālīnī in *Viśvā-Sundar*. After the death of Rādhāramaṇ, he took over the management of

the troupe and turned it professional. Soon Gopāl Uḍe's *Vichyā-Sundar* shot up in popularity and his fame was firmly established.<sup>365</sup> One of the elements responsible for the popularity of *Vichyā-Sundar Yātrā* was Khemṭā dance. Highly erotic in nature, the dance is believed to have originated in Farashdanga, off Calcutta. One Mohan Mukhopādhyāya is believed to have introduced this among the prostitutes of Calcutta. A performer of Gopāl Uḍe's troupe, Keśe Mālinī by name, trained himself under Mohan Mukhopādhyāya and introduced Khemṭā dance in *Vichyā-Sundar*. The dance earned immense popularity among spectators and soon spread to other genres including *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā*.<sup>366</sup>

A performance of Gopāl Uḍe's *Vichyā-Sundar Yātrā* would open with a song-and-dance number full of erotic buffoonery, which was rendered by a *bhisti* (water-carrier), Kāluā the sweeper and a *methrānī* ( a female sweeper). The characters portraying these numbers came to be known as *saṅg*, although the term, in earlier times, denoted 'meticulous impersonation'. The opening song-and-dance number would be followed by a choral song in which the synopsis of the plot was given for the benefit of the spectators. The main body of performance would follow the choral song, to be punctuated by song-and-dance interludes of *saṅg*.<sup>367</sup> All female characters were portrayed by male performers and the performance would be given at night, beginning in the evening and ending at day-break.<sup>368</sup>

By mid-19th century, the sizzling sensation of *Vichyā-Sundar Yātrā* was beginning to wear out its appeal. There appeared urgent necessity for reform and it came from *Gītābhinay* which transformed textual construction and Madanmohan Chattopādhyāya who transformed production technique and management.

*Gītābhinay* was a hybrid genre which evolved in 1860s. As Asutosh Bhattacharyya puts in succinctly, the genre grew out of admixture of the lyrical element drawn from *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā*, the element of dance drawn from *Natun Yātrā* and dialogue from Euro-centric Bāṅglā theatre (the latter having risen in popularity among the educated elite of Calcutta by 1860s). He also adds, *Gītābhinay* projected a curious blend of various emotions: *bhakti* from *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā*, merriment from *Natun Yātrā* and pathos from Euro-centric Bāṅglā theatre.<sup>369</sup> Gradually *Gītābhinay* reduced emphasis on lyric and dance and in its place, prose dialogue began to play more dominant role. In terms of plot construction, it gradually began to assimilate the technique of building action based on conflict, also from Euro-centric Bāṅglā theatre. But its narrative continued to be drawn from Indian mythology.

In the second half of 19th century, Madanmohan Chattopādhyāya, a producer-manager cum playwright who ran a professional *Yātrā* troupe, instituted a number of reforms which gained popularity and were gradually accepted as the standard practice. One of these

Bengal, infusing unprecedented enthusiasm and fervour among the population. Frequently attacked by the police during performance, three of his plays (including *Mātr-pūjā*) prohibited by colonial government, imprisoned for three years, Mukunda Dāsa paved the way for socio-political awareness in *Yātrā*. But *Svadesī Yātrā* lost its popularity soon after his death.<sup>375</sup>

Throughout the first half of 20th century *Aitihāsik Yātrā*, which drew its narratives from semi-historical materials, ascended in popularity while that of *Paurāṇik Yātrā* gradually declined. In terms of dramaturgy, both of these were quite close except that importance of prose dialogue increased in *Aitihāsik Yātrā*, at the cost of those in lyric. From the end of 19th to the beginning of 20th century, quite a few innovations and changes were effected in organisation and performance. One of these was the convention of orchestral overture prior to the beginning of a performance, which was introduced towards the end of 19th century, obviously influenced by Euro-centric theatre.<sup>376</sup> Another was the introduction of *Vivek* (Conscience), seen for the first time in *Surath-uddhār* (end of 19th century) by Ahibhūṣaṇ Bhattācārya.<sup>377</sup> Similar to the personification of abstract attributes as seen in the Morality plays of medieval Europe, *Vivek* reflects the conscience of a character and helps portray moral conflict. As an impersonal character, he can appear at any time or place with a song, speak to the character concerned or comment on the action and depart from the performance space. From around mid-20th century, *Vivek* has been transformed into a real-life character, often in the guise of a *Bāul* mendicant or a deranged person. A third change involved the role of *adhikārī*, the producer-manager who ran the troupe. Until about the end of 19th century, the function of *adhikārī* usually included playwrighting and training the performers. During a performance, he would also prompt, direct the musicians and enact a character. By the beginning of 20th century, play-texts began to be written by playwrights not belonging to the troupe, from whom the *adhikārī* would either buy the text out-right or to whom he would pay royalty.<sup>378</sup>

*Yātrā* was totally secularised after mid-20th century. Before the above point of time when Pakistan was created (1947), *bandanā* used to be part of the preliminaries and was performed in two parts: (i) *bandanā* of gods and goddesses accompanied by dance and *ārati* (waving of lamp) and (ii) *bandanā* in honour of spectators. After the creation of Pakistan, the *bandanā* was gradually transformed into *deś-bandanā* ('salutation of the country') which was a patriotic song.<sup>379</sup>

From around mid-20th century, *Sāmājīk Yātrā* gradually ascended in popularity and that of *Aitihāsik Yātrā* declined. In terms of dramaturgy, the difference between the two is a further increment of emphasis on prose dialogue at the cost of those in lyric. The plots of



affected production technique. Replacing the indiscriminate mixture of contemporary costume with that of all other ages regardless of historical background of characters and text, attempts were made to move toward historical accuracy, although in most general term. The time duration of each song was reduced but the number was increased. Also, the predominance of classical *rāgas* gave way to popular tunes. Earlier, all characters would dance; henceforth, it was limited to only a few characters and for a much reduced number of times.<sup>370</sup> Female roles continued to be played by males but in order to increase the musical quality, the convention of singing by proxy (*judi*) was introduced. Under this convention, the portion of songs which were to be rendered in classical mode were to be sung by the proxy singers: those of male characters by mature male singers and those of female characters, by young lads. The rest of the song was to be sung by the performer himself.<sup>371</sup> Later, the convention was extended to include the whole song which meant that the performers were not required to sing at all for they relegated the task of lyrical rendition to the *judi*. All songs were accompanied by choral singers. The orchestra was also extended to include western instruments such as harmonium and clarinet.<sup>372</sup> Vocal interjections by the musicians, a standard practice of the earlier half, were also stopped. Another popular practice, that of collecting *pelā* (donation) from the spectators during performance, which was common in the first half of 19th century, was totally halted by Madanmohan Chattopādhyāya.<sup>373</sup>

During the last quarter of 19th century, when Neo-Hinduism exerted a great degree of influence over Hindu community in Bengal, demand for performances based on Hindu mythology sharply increased. *Natun Yātrā*, revitalised with the influence of *Gītābhinay* and reformation of Madanmohan Chattopādhyāya, responded to the demand of the society and thus *Paurāṇik* (Mythological) *Yātrā* evolved. Its narratives were generally drawn from *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Bhāgavata*, *Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa*, *Harivaṃsa* etc.

With the rise of nationalism in early 20th century, *Paurāṇik Yātrā* began to give way to *Aitihāsik Yātrā* and *Svadeśī Yātrā*. According to Nagendranāth Basu, the first performance of *Aitihāsik Yātrā* was on *Kālāpāhaḍ* (date of performance and name of text unknown) by Caye Pāglā.<sup>374</sup> But it was Mukunda Dāsa (1878-1934) and his *Svadeśī Yātrā* who and which effected qualitative change in *Paurāṇik Yātrā* by incorporating themes of contemporary relevance : colonial exploitation, patriotism, anti-colonial struggle, oppression of feudal and caste systems etc. His involvement in the movement for annulment of partition of Bengal (1905) began towards its inception with the composition of *Mātṛ-pūjā*. Some of his other plays which earned immense popularity are *Karma-kṣetra*, *Path*, *Pallī-sebā* etc. Mukunda Dāsa worked relentlessly, touring rural interiors of

Bengal, infusing unprecedented enthusiasm and fervour among the population. Frequently attacked by the police during performance, three of his plays (including *Mātr-pūjā*) prohibited by colonial government, imprisoned for three years, Mukunda Dāsa paved the way for socio-political awareness in *Yātrā*. But *Svadesī Yātrā* lost its popularity soon after his death.<sup>375</sup>

Throughout the first half of 20th century *Aitihāsik Yātrā*, which drew its narratives from semi-historical materials, ascended in popularity while that of *Paurāṇik Yātrā* gradually declined. In terms of dramaturgy, both of these were quite close except that importance of prose dialogue increased in *Aitihāsik Yātrā*, at the cost of those in lyric. From the end of 19th to the beginning of 20th century, quite a few innovations and changes were effected in organisation and performance. One of these was the convention of orchestral overture prior to the beginning of a performance, which was introduced towards the end of 19th century, obviously influenced by Euro-centric theatre.<sup>376</sup> Another was the introduction of *Vivek* (Conscience), seen for the first time in *Surath-uddhār* (end of 19th century) by *Ahibhūṣaṇ Bhattācārya*.<sup>377</sup> Similar to the personification of abstract attributes as seen in the Morality plays of medieval Europe, *Vivek* reflects the conscience of a character and helps portray moral conflict. As an impersonal character, he can appear at any time or place with a song, speak to the character concerned or comment on the action and depart from the performance space. From around mid-20th century, *Vivek* has been transformed into a real-life character, often in the guise of a *Bāul* mendicant or a deranged person. A third change involved the role of *adhikārī*, the producer-manager who ran the troupe. Until about the end of 19th century, the function of *adhikārī* usually included playwrighting and training the performers. During a performance, he would also prompt, direct the musicians and enact a character. By the beginning of 20th century, play-texts began to be written by playwrights not belonging to the troupe, from whom the *adhikārī* would either buy the text out-right or to whom he would pay royalty.<sup>378</sup>

*Yātrā* was totally secularised after mid-20th century. Before the above point of time when Pakistan was created (1947), *bandanā* used to be part of the preliminaries and was performed in two parts: (i) *bandanā* of gods and goddesses accompanied by dance and *ārati* (waving of lamp) and (ii) *bandanā* in honour of spectators. After the creation of Pakistan, the *bandanā* was gradually transformed into *deś-bandanā* ('salutation of the country') which was a patriotic song.<sup>379</sup>

From around mid-20th century, *Sāmājīk Yātrā* gradually ascended in popularity and that of *Aitihāsik Yātrā* declined. In terms of dramaturgy, the difference between the two is a further increment of emphasis on prose dialogue at the cost of those in lyric. The plots of

*Sāmājīk Yātrā* are fictional and the characters are typical representatives of contemporary society.

(ii) *Jhumur Yātrā* :

*Jhumur Yātrā*, as it is performed today in Natore and Madhupur, represents earlier version of the genre, because of absence of Vivek, performance of female characters by male impersonators and greater emphasis on lyrical rendition. Absence of Vivek in particular points to its origin at some time prior to the end of 19th century, when the character was introduced in *Yātrā*. On the other hand, if *Vidyā-Sundar Yātrā* can be accepted as a point of reference, it could be concluded that dialogic performances such as *Jhumur Yātrā*, which are based on secular narratives and are highly lyrical in character, must have evolved after 1830s when *Vidyā-Sundar Yātrā* had attained greater popularity and had begun to spread to areas outside Calcutta. Therefore 1850's or slightly after appears to be a reasonable time when *Jhumur Yātrā* could have evolved.

There also exists in Purulia (West Bengal) a genre of performance known as *Jhumur*, the origin of which may go back to early medieval period. Described as a *nāṭ-gīt* (song-and-dance) genre in which prose dialogue is totally absent. *Jhumur* is light-hearted and amorous in character. Sometimes popular tales of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are also rendered as a dialogue between two groups, each representing one of the two central characters. A few scholars also believe that *Gītagovinda* and *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan* are both influenced by *Jhumur*.<sup>380</sup> Interestingly, *Jhumur Yātrā* and *Jhumur* bear similarity in names. Even the content is not too dissimilar from each other. Perhaps it will not be too far-fetched to imagine that the origin of *Jhumur Yātrā* may lie in *Jhumur*.

(iii) Other Genres:

As already noted in Chapter 3, Dusan Zbavitel believes that the existing narratives of the *Gītikās* are of relatively late origin. Although he does not specify time and although the authenticity of the *Gītikā* narratives have been questioned, nevertheless it can be reasonably accepted that un-edited version of the *Gītikā* narratives existed by late 18th century. The origin of *Pālā Gān* can also be dated from around the same time. *Māṅṅyā Tāmsā*, which is a dialogic form based on same narratives, could not have evolved before the end of 19th century, by when *Yātrā* performances based on secular narratives were quite well-known. On the other hand, the features of *Ḍhaṅg Yātrā* which help in ascertaining its origin are as follows : (i) it begins with a "concert" (introduced in *Yātrā* at the end of 19th century), (ii) till recently, its repertoire used to be dominated by Hindu mythologies (prevalent in *Paurāṇīk Yātrā* during the last quarter of 19th and the first half of 20th century) and (iii) it

used to be patronised by affluent *zamindars* (who ceased to exist after 1947). These evidences suggest that the genre evolved sometime in early 20th century.

In the second half of 18th century and entire 19th century, there appear quite a few narratives in rhymed metrical verse, composed by Muslim poets. Some of these are *Gul-e-Bakāwālī* by Muhammad Muqim (Chittagong, 2nd half 18th c.), *Śāhā Parī-Mallik-zādā* by Muhammad Ali (Chittagong, 2nd half 18th c.), *Bānu Hosain-Bahram Gor* by Muhammad Jivan (Chittagong, last quarter 18th c.), *Hātim Tā'i* and *Gul O Sāmuār* by Muhammad Danish (Hawrah, last quarter 18th c.), *Lālmātī-Tājal Muluk* by Tamizi (Chittagong, between 1855-65), *Ajar Śāh-Saman Rokh* by Muhammad Chuhar (Chittagong, 1st half 19th c.), *Lāilī-Majnu*, *Gul O Harmuz* and *Śāhnama* by Muhammad Khater (Hawrah, 2nd half 19th c.).<sup>381</sup> Some of these titles, such as *Sāiful Muluk-Badnujamāl* and *Lāilī-Majnu*, also feature in the list of texts performed by *Gāzīr Gān* performers in Chittagong (discussed in Chapter Three). *Gul-e-Bakāwālī* is also given in Manikganj district by *Gāzīr Gān* performers and *Mānik Pīrer Jārī* performers of Satkhira district. Therefore it is possible to see that quite a few secular texts of Hindi-Perso-Arabic origin were performed in the narrative form by Muslim performers such as those of *Gāzīr Gān* and *Mānik Pīrer Jārī*.

The seven odd decades between 1760 to 1830 is specially note worthy because it was during this time that *Kāvī Gān* flourished most. Performer-poets (*kāvīyāls*) such as Rāsu (1734-1807), Nṛsinha (1738-1809 ?), Haru Ṭhākur (1738-1812), Nitāi Bairāgi (1751-1821) and Rāma Basu (1786-1828) belong to this 'golden age' and have acquired legendary status. From 1830 to 1880, *Kāvī Gān* continued to be highly popular but declined in quality. Some of the *kāvīyāls* from this period are Nīlu, Rāmaprasād Ṭhākur, Anthony (the domiciled Portuguese), Bholā Mayrā etc. <sup>382</sup> The genre still continues in Bangladesh today, but much emaciated in terms of quality as well as popularity.

As already noted in Chapter 3, secular performances are still being evolved in Bangladesh, although they are few in number. One of these is *Kecchā Kāhinī*. The other, *Ṭāḍī Gān*, is indeed interesting for it has adapted popular mode of performance to communicate matters of contemporary relevance.

## 9. Supra-personae Genres

Existence of evidence from late medieval period and prevalence of *Putul Nāc* in Bangladesh today should be sufficient to conclude that the genre was in existence in Bengal throughout the modern period. It is possible that great degree of popularity of *Kālīyadaman Yātrā*, *Rāma Yātrā*, *Caṇḍī Yātrā* and *Bhāsān Yātrā* led to the performance of texts

similar to those above in *Putul Nāc* as well. It is also possible to believe that *Vidyā-Sundar Yātrā* set the trend for secular and erotic performances of *Putul Nāc* currently seen in Bangladesh.

As for *Paṭuā Gān*, none of the extant scrolls date beyond mid-19th century.<sup>383</sup> But their existence in ancient and medieval period clearly prove that *Paṭuā Gān* continued through late 18th and early 19th century as well. Various types of *Paṭuā Gān* performances existed in Bengal. Some of these are *Caṇḍī-paṭ*, *Manasā-paṭ*, *Śakti-paṭ*, *Dasāvātara-paṭ*, *Rāslīlā-paṭ*, *Kṛṣṇalīlā-paṭ*, *Yama-paṭ*, *Gāzīr-paṭ*, *Pañcakalyānī-paṭ*, *Śiva-paṭ*, *Gaur-paṭ*, *Bhagavatī-paṭ* etc.<sup>384</sup> Some of these can still be seen in Bangladesh today.

End-notes : Chapter Four

1. Niharranjan Roy, *Bāṅgālīr Itihās*, 363-64.
2. B.K. Sarkar, *Folk Element*, 186.
3. Dineshchandra Sen, *Bṛhat Baṅga*, vol. I (Calcutta: 1993), 224.
4. Roy, *Bāṅgālīr Itihās*, 450.
5. Sureshchandra Bandopadhyaya, *Sanskṛita Sāhitye Bāṅgālīr Dān* (Calcutta : 1369 BS), 120.
6. Roy, *Bāṅgālīr Itihās*, 584.
7. Sāgaranandin, *Nāṭakalakṣaṇaratnakōṣa*, (tr.) Siddheswar Chattopadhyaya, introduction, p. 'ga'.
8. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa I*, 37.
9. Bijit Kumar Dutta, *Bāṅgālā-Maithilī Nāṭaka*, xc-xcvi.
10. Roy, *Bāṅgālīr Itihās*, 424.
11. Sukumar Sen, *Prācin Bāṅglā O Bāṅgālī* (Calcutta: 1353 BS), 48.
12. Roy, *Bāṅgālīr Itihās*, 26, 228, 254, 268, 287, 450.
13. Halāyūdhā Miśra, *Sekāsubhodaya*, ed. Sukumar Sen (Calcutta: 1963).
14. Sukumar Sen, *Naṭ Nāṭya Nāṭak*, 29.
15. *Ibid.*, 30-31.
16. Jānhavīkumār Cakravartī, *Ārya-saptaśatī O Gauḍa-vaṅga*, quoted by Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, *Baṅgālā Sahityer Itivṛitta* vol. 4 (Calcutta : 1985), 377-78.
17. Roy, *Bāṅgālīr Itihās*, 639-41.
18. Tarlekar, *Studies*, 42.
19. John B. Alphonso-Karkala (ed.) *An Anthology of Indian Literature* (Harmondsworth: 1971), 503.
20. Arthur A. Macdonell, *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (London : 1917), 290.
21. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa I*, 34.
22. Gaurishankar Bhattacharya, *Lokanāṭya Samikṣā*, 138.
23. Barbara Stoler Miller (ed. & tr.), *Gītagovinda of Jayadeva: Love Song of the Dark Lord* (Delhi : 1984).
24. *Ibid.*, 6-7.
25. *Ibid.*, x.
26. K. Vasudeva Śāstrī, *Gītagovinda with Abhinaya* (Tanjore: 1950), cited by Miller, *Gītagovinda*, xii and Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, *Itivṛitta* 4, 381.

27. Norvin Hein, *The Miracle Plays of Muthura* (New Haven: 1972), 267-71, quoted by Miller, *Gītagovinda*, xi.
- 27a. Benoy Ghosh, *Paschim Banger Sanskriti* (Calcutta: 1957), 144.
28. Adya Rangacharya, *Bharatīya Theatre*, 97.
29. Rameswar Shaw, *Sanskrita O Prakrita Sahitya, Samaj Chetana O Mullāyan* (Calcutta: 1390 BS), 255.
30. Gayatri Chattopadhyaya, *Bharater Nrīttakala* (Calcutta: 1385 BS), 54.
31. Halāyūdhā Misra, *Sekaśubhodāya*, 196-98.
32. Sukumar Sen, *Naṭ Nāṭya Nāṭak*, 97.
33. Roy, *Bāṅgālīr Itihās*, 626.
34. Gaurishankar Bhattacharya, *Lokanāṭya Samīkṣā*, 130-38.
35. James Legge, *Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*, (Oxford: 1886), 100.
36. Samuel Beal, *The Life of Hiuen-Tsiang* (New Delhi: 1973), 131-133; Thomas Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India AD 629-645* (New Delhi: 1973), 184-93; Kanai Lal Hazra, *Buddhism In India As Described By Chinese Pilgrims AD 399-689* (New Delhi: 1983), 102-3.
37. Sukomal Chowdhury, *Bangladeshe Bauddha Dharma O Saṁskṛti* (Calcutta: 1974), 4,7,8.
38. Sureshchandra Bandopadhyaya, *Sanskrita Sāhitye*, 303-11.
39. Dineshchandra Sen, *Bṛhat Baṅga I*, 318.
40. Shashibhushan Das Gupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, 12; Sureshchandra Bandopadhyaya, *Sanskrita Sāhitye*, 310-11.
41. Sukomal Chowdhury, *Bangladeshe*, 4,7,8; Gupta, *Obscure*, 12.
42. L.M. Joshi, *Studies In The Buddhistic Culture Of India During 7th and 8th c. AD* (Delhi: 1977), 270; Shahidullah, *Bāṅglā Sāhityer Kathā I*, 17-20, 51-72.
43. Tāranātha, *History of Buddhism in India*, tr. from Tibetan by Lama Chimpa and Alaka Chattopadhyaya, ed. Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya (Calcutta: 1980), 382-408; Gupta, *Obscure*, 6.
44. Sukomal Chowdhury, *Bangladeshe*, 4-5, 7-8.
45. Sureshchandra Bandopadhyaya, *Sanskrita Sāhitye*, 310-11.
46. Shahidullah, *Bāṅglā Sāhityer Kathā I*, 40, 55, 63, 69; Sukomal Chowdhury, *Bangladeshe*, 8; Gupta, *Obscure*, 12.
47. Tāranātha, *History*, 402; Sureshchandra Bandopadhyaya, *Sanskrita Sāhitye*, 121.
48. I-Tsing, *Record of the Buddhist Religion*, tr. J. Takakusu (New Delhi: 1982), 164.
49. Winternitz, "Buddhist", *Literary History*, 221.

50. Siddheswar Chattopadhyaya's commentary on Sāgaranandin. *Nāṭakalakṣaṇaratnakōṣa*, 'ga' and 331-35.
51. Tāranātha, *History*, 308.
52. Muhammad Abdul Hai and Anwar Pasha ed., *Caryā Gīṭikā* (Dhaka: 1989), 85, 106-7; Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa* I, 64.
53. Anisuzzaman, "Bāmlā Bhāṣā O Sahityer Anānya Nidarśan", *Bāmlā Sāhityer Itihās*, vol. 1, ed. Anisuzzaman (Dhaka: 1987), 454-55.
54. Sukumar Sen. "Nāth-panther Sāhityik Aitijhya", *Gorkha-vijay*, lxxxiv.
55. Syed Ali Ahsan, illustrations from "Caryā Gīṭikār Padakartāgaṇa" reproduced in Nandikeśvara, *Abhinaya Darpana*, tr. Salim al-Deen (Dhaka: 1989), 119.
56. Gupta, *Obscure*, 7.
57. Tāranātha, *History*, 250
58. *Ibid.*, 289-90.
59. Rajendralal Mitra, *The Sanskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal* (Calcutta: 1971), 259.
60. D.L. Snellgrove, *The Hevajra Tantra: A Critical Study* (London: 1959), 63-64.
61. E.B. Cowell (ed.), *The Jātaka*, tr. from Pali by E.B. Cowell and W.H.D. Rouse (Delhi: 1978), 266. Further reference to the text are from the above edition.
62. A Waddell, *Buddhism*, 562. Waddell obtained the manuscript from a strolling company of Tibetan actors; the translation produced by him has only been curtailed at places.
63. A. K. Bhattacharya. "An Early Pala Manuscript Cover With Vessantara Jātaka Scene", *Rūpa-Lekhā*, vol. 34, 1965, 19.
64. Joshi, *Studies*, 84.
65. I-Tsing, *Record of Religion*, 152-154.
66. Legge, *A Record of Kingdoms*, 79.
67. Hiuen Tsiang, *Si-Yu-Ki: Buddhist Record of the Western World: Chinese Account of India* (Delhi: 1980), 242.
68. Benoy Kumar Sarkar, *Folk Element*, 237, 155, 13.
69. *Ibid.*, 156, 158.
70. *Ibid.*, 224.
71. I-Tsing, *Record of Religion*, 87. It should be noted here that I-Tsing recorded the practice of Aryamulasarvastivadanikaya school which was also prevalent in eastern India.
72. Caricandra Basu, Lalitamohan Kar and Sukumar Sen, quoted by Sanyal, *Bangali Sanskriti*, 37.
73. Sukomal Chowdhury, *Bangladeshe*, 65.



74. B.K. Sarkar, *Folk Element*. 151-52.
75. For details please see Abdul Kalam Muhamamad Zakaria. *Bangladesher Pratna Sampad* ( Dhaka: 1984), 197-201. 538-39; Mamtazur Rahman Tarafdar, "Paribrājaker Kaḍcā", *Uttarādhikār*, vol. 21. no. 3 (Jul-Sept. 1993). 72-73; M.A.A. Qadir, *Paharpur* (Dhaka: 1980), 7; A.K.M. Shamsul Alam, *Mainamati* (Dhaka: 1982), 38-39; Directorate of Archaeology, *An Album of Archaeological Relics in Bangladesh* (Dhaka: 1984), 34.
76. Syed Jamil Ahmed, "Buddhist Theatre in Ancient Bengal", *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh*, vol., 40, no. 1, (June 1995), 87-89, illustration nos. 19-24.
77. Shahanara Hussein, *Everyday Life in the Pala Empire* (Dacca: 1968), plate no. XL.
- 77a. Madanject Singh, *Himalayan Art*, 232.
78. B.K. Sarkar, *Folk Element*. 223.
79. Adya Rangacharya, *Bharatīya Theatre*, 89-92.
80. Sukumar Sen. *Itihāsa* II, 199.
81. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Gopīcandrer Gān* (Calcutta: 1959). xcix-cxii. B.K. Sarkar, *Folk Element*. 189. Interestingly, a Buddhist monarch from the Candra dynasty named Govinda Candra, ruled a part of eastern Bengal from 1020-55 AD.
82. Muhammad Shahidullah. *Bāṅglā Sāhityer Kathā* I. 22.
83. Sukumar Sen. "Nāth-panther". *Gorkha-vijay*. lxxvi.
84. Panchanan Mandal (ed.). *Gorkha-vijay*, 148-235.
85. Ruparama. *Dharma-mahāgala*, ed., Sukumar Sen and Panchanan Mandal (Burdwan : 1351 BS), xiv.
86. Sukumar Sen, "Nāth-panther", *Gorkha-vijay*. xcii.
87. *Ibid.*, lxvi.
88. G.A. Grierson, "The Song of Manikchandra", *The Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal* (Part I), no. III, vol. 47, 1878, 147.
89. Panchanan Mandal, introduction to *Gorkha-vijay*. v.
90. Dineshchandra Sen, *Bāṅgabhāṣā O Sāhitya*, vol. 1 (Calcutta: 1986), 66.
91. Sukumar Sen, "Nāth-panther", *Gorkha-vijay*. xcv.
92. Asutosh Bhattacharyya (ed.), *Gopīcandrer Gān*, 76.
93. Sukumar Sen, "Nāth-panther", *Gorkha-vijay*, lxxxiv.
94. Sukur Mamud, "Gopīcandra Sannyās", in *Gopīcandrer Gān* (ed.) Asutosh Bhattacharyya, episode titled 'Bibāha', 335.
95. N. K. Bhattachali, quoted by Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Gopīcandrer Gān*, 431.

96. M. Mosharraf Hossain. "Bangladesher Nāthayogī Darśana O Pratnatattva", *Bangladesh Asiatic Society Patrikā* (vol. XI, no. 1 & 2), June and December, 1993, 37, 40, 44.
97. Panchanan Mandal, introduction to *Gorkha-vijay*, liv.
98. M. Mosharraf Hossain, "Bangladesher Nāthayogī", 48-50.
99. Muhammad Shahidullah. *Bāṅglā Sāhityer Kathā* I. 131.
100. Asutosh Bhattacharyya. *Vangala-Mangal Kavyer Itihas*. 131.
101. *Ibid.*, 722.
102. Sukumar Sen, *Prācin Bāṅglā*, 48.
103. Asutosh Bhattacharyya. *Vangala-Mangal Kavyer Itihas*, 193-94.
104. Kshetra Gupta, "Gaṇa-saṅhyoga Evarṅ Loksamskṛti". *Loksamaskṛiti Gabeshana*. vol. 2, no. 4, 1398 BS, 121-23.
105. Gopal Haldar. *Rūpa-rekhā*, 119.
106. A.K.M. Zakaria points out that Baratirtha (situated 6·7 miles north of Madhupur police station, Tangail). Gupta-Vṛndāvana and Sāgar-dighi (situated 20 miles south-east of Ghatail police station, Tangail) are suspected Buddhist sites. He also notes that the following are Buddhist/Hindu suspected sites located in Tangail district : Jharakā, Hīngu Pāler Gaḍ and Hoḍ Rājār Baḍi. Kotbāḍi. Rājāsan and Rajbāḍi sites in Savar have been confirmed as Buddhist sites after excavation. Dhamrai was also Buddhist centre. For details, please see Abdul Kalam Muhammad Zakaria, *Bangladesher Pratna Sampad*. (Dhaka : 1984), 470-73, 410-13 and 435; Dilip K. Chakrabarti. *Ancient Bangladesh : A Study of the Archaeological Sources* (Dhaka : 1992), 138-141.
107. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vangala-Mangal Kavyer Itihas*. 183-89.
108. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa* I, 128, 151.
109. Vṛndāvana Dāsa, *Caitanya Bhāgavat*, ed. Sukumar Sen (New Delhi : 1982), 283.
110. Dineshchandra Sen. *Bṛhat Barāga* I. 262.
111. Roy, *Bāṅgālīr Itihās*. 391.
112. Dineshchandra Sen. *Bāṅgabhāsa O Sāhitya* vol. 1, 75-79.
113. Satindramohan Chattopadhyaya. *Itihāser Bhūmikā*, 35.
114. Sukumar Sen. *Itihāsa* I. 82-83.
- 114a. Dineshchandra Sen, *The Folk-Literature of Bengal* (Calcutta: 1920), 52-53, 80.
115. Arun Sanyal, *Bangali Sanskriti.*, 37.
116. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Bāṅglār Loka Sāhitya*, vol. 1, (Calcutta: 1962), 174.
117. Bāṇa, *Harṣa-carita*, (London: 1897) Chapter V, 136.
118. Benoy Ghosh, *Traditional Arts and Crafts of West Bengal* (Calcutta: 1981), 82.

119. Muhammad Shahidullah, *Bāṅglā Sāhityer Kathā* II, 52.
120. Muhammad Enamul Hoque, "Muslim Bāṅglā-sāhitya", *Rachanavali*, 224; Azhar Islam, *Madhyayuger Bangla Sahitye Muslim Kabi* (Dhaka: 1992), 16; Muhammad Shahidullah, *Sāhityer Kathā* II, 329.
121. Muhammad Shahidullah, *Sāhityer Kathā* II, 92-93.
122. Enamul Hoque, "Muslim Bāṅglā", *Rachanavali*, 225; Azhar Islam, *Muslim Kabi*, 23.
123. Enamul Hoque, "Muslim Bāṅglā", *Rachanavali*, 225.
124. Enamul Hoque, "Muslim Bāṅglā", *Rachanavali*, 226; Abdul Karim, *Banglar Itihash*, 442.
125. Enamul Hoque, "Muslim Bāṅglā", *Rachanavali*, 226.
126. Abdul Karim, *Banglar Itihash*, 442.
127. Dines Chandra Sirkar, *Pal-Sen*, 187.
128. Jadu-Nath Sarkar, "Muslim Conquest of Bengal" (section 2) and K.R. Qanungo, "Bengal under the House of Balban", *History of Bengal*, vol. II, 23 and 79.
129. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *Social and Cultural History* I, 252-53.
130. Enamul Hoque, "Muslim Bāṅglā", *Rachanavali*, 224.
131. R.C. Majumdar and D.C. Ganguly, "Bengalis Outside Bengal", *The History of Bengal*, vol. I, ed., R.C. Majumdar (Dhaka: 1943), 687.
132. Nanīgopāl Bandopādhyāya (ed.), *Nepāle Bāṅglā Nāṭak* (Calcutta: 1324 BS), iii.
133. Ramaranjan Das, *Paschimbanger Purakirti* (Calcutta : 1980), 129, 259.
134. Anisuzzaman, "Bāṅglā Bhāṣā", *Itihās*, I, 450-456.
135. Bhikkhu Sunithananda has shown that during 13th and 14th centuries. there existed Buddhist scholars in Bengal, such as Pundit Vijay Rakṣīt, Pundit Siddheswar Vanaratna and Poet Rāmacandra. *Bangladesher Bouddha Vihar O Bhikkhu Jiban* (Dhaka: 1995), 85-86.
136. Bhikkhu Sunithananda, *Bangladesher Bouddha Vihar*, 85, 95, 97; R.C. Majumdar has also shown that a Buddhist king named Madhu Sena was ruling in some obscure corner of southern or western Bengal in 1289 : R.C. Majumdar, *History of Bengal* I, 228.
137. Bhikkhu Sunithananda, *Bangladesher Bouddha Vihar*, 97.
138. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa* I, 82; Anisuzzaman, "Bāṅglā Bhāṣā", *Itihās* I, 455-56; Gopal Haldar, *Rūpa-rekhā*, 47.
139. Gopal Haldar, *Rūpa-rekhā*, 47.
140. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa* I, 103-104.
141. Gopal Haldar, *Rūpa-rekhā*, 47.

142. Kavi-Kaṅkan (Mukundarām Cakravartī), *Caṇḍī-maṅgala* (ed.); Sukumar Sen (New Delhi: 1993), 16.
143. Adya Rangacharya, *Bhāratīya Theatre*, 115.
144. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vaṅgala-Maṅgal Kavyer Itihas*, 198-202.
145. Sushil Kumar De, *Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century 1757-1857* (Calcutta: 1962), 408.
146. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa* II, 140-141.
147. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vaṅgala-Maṅgal Kavyer Itihas*, 468.
148. Gaurishankar Bhattacharya, *Lokanāṭya Samīkṣā*, 145.
149. Kapila Vatsayan, *Traditional Indian Theatre: Multiple Streams* (New Delhi: 1980), 139.
150. Gaurishankar Bhattacharya, *Lokanāṭya Samīkṣā*, 145.
151. Kavi-Kaṅkan, *Caṇḍī-maṅgala*, 175.
152. Vijay Gupta, *Padmā-purāṇ*, (ed.) Jayanta Kumar Dasgupta (Calcutta: 1962), 194.
153. Kavi-Kaṅkan, *Caṇḍī-maṅgala*, 109.
154. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa* I, 103, 82.
155. Baḍu Caṇḍīdāsa, *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan*, (ed.) Amitrasudan Bhattacharya (Calcutta: 1992).
156. Gopal Haldar, *Rūpa-rekhā*, 52.
157. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa* I, 145.
158. *Ibid.*, 128.
159. Gaurishankar Bhattacharya, *Lokanāṭya Samīkṣā*, 146.
160. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa* I, 208.
161. Salim al-Deen, "Śrī Caitanya Bhāgabate Nāṭya-prasanga", *Theatre Studies*, vol. 1, 1992, 14-18.
162. All excerpts have been drawn from Vṛndāvana Dāsa, *Caitanya Bhāgavat* (1982), 39-41.
163. Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, *Baṅgala Sahityer Itivṛitta*, 42-46.
164. Satindramohan Chattopadhyaya, *Itihāser Bhūmikā*, 146.
165. Caru Bandyopadhyaya, in his edition of Rāmāi Paṇḍit's *Śūnya Purāṇ* (1336 BS), 900, cited by Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vaṅgala-Maṅgal Kavyer Itihas*, 439-440; H.P. Śāstrī, "Discovery of Living Buddhism in Bengal", 20, cited by Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *ibid.*, p. 887. Bhattacharyya contests the view of Caru Bandyopadhyay and H.P. Śāstrī.

166. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vangala-Mangal Kavyer Itihas*, 263-66; Narendranath Bhattacharya, "Śāktadharmā O Tantra", *Madhyayuge i Bāṅglār Samāj O Samskr̥ti*, ed. Aniruddha Ray and Ratnavali Chattopadhyaya (Calcutta : 1992), 179.
167. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa I*, 82; Gopal Haldar, *Rūpa-rekhā*, 47.
168. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vangala-Mangal Kavyer Itihas*, 473.
169. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa I*, 450.
170. *Ibid.*, 457-58.
171. Information provided by Mridulkanti Chakravarti, Assistant Professor, Department of Theatre and Music, University of Dhaka, who hails from Sunamganj and has witnessed the performance a number of times.
172. Satindramohan Chattopadhyaya, *Itihāser Bhūmikā*, 163.
- 172a. Sushil Kumar De, *Bengali Literature*, 408.
173. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa I*, 82.
174. Ahmad Sharif, *Madhyajuger Sahitye*, 216.
175. Abdul Karim, *Banglar Itihash*, 438 and 442; Azhar Islam, *Muslim Kabi*, 16 and 22-23, Muhammad Shahidullah, *Bāṅglā Sāhityer Kathā II*, 92-93.
176. Abdul Karim, *Banglar Itihash*, 440.
177. Muhammad Shahidullah, *Bāṅglā Sāhityer Kathā II*, 54; Enamul Hoque, "Muslim Bāṅglā", *Rachanavali*, 225.
178. A.B.M. Samsuddin Ahmad, "Bengal Under the Rule of Early Ilyas Shahi Dynasty", an unpublished PhD dissertation (University of Dhaka, 1987), 278.
179. P.C. Bagchi, *Visva Bharati Annals*, Part I (Calcutta: 1945), reprinted in Wakil Ahmed's *Banglay Bideshi Parjatak* (Dhaka: 1990), 99.
180. A.B.M. Samsuddin Ahmad draws on *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi* by Sham-i-Siraj Afif and the Chinese Accounts from *Visva Bharati Annals*, 124, in his "Early Ilyas Shahi Dynasty", 310.
181. Ahmad Sharif, *Madhyajuger Sahitye*, 335.
182. Azhar Islam, *Muslim Kabi*, 75, Ahmed Sharif, *Madhyajuger Sahitye*, 335.
183. Ahmad Sharif, *Madhyajuger Sahitye*, 348.
184. *Ibid.*, 380.
185. Rāmadāsa Ādak, *Anādi-maṅgala* (Chapter 17), 158.
186. Ahmad Sharif, *Madhyajuger Sahitye*, 212, 213, 214, 217 & 219.
187. Gayatri Chattopadhyaya, *Bharater Nrittakala* (Calcutta : 1385 BS), 251-265.
188. Ramakanta Chakravarti, "Madhyayuge Bāṅglāy Vaiṣṇav Dharma Evarṅ Tār Prabhāb", *Madhyayuge Bāṅglār Samāj O Samskr̥ti*, 167-68.

189. Sukumar Sen, *Islāmi Bāṅglā Sāhitya*, 22.
190. Gopal Haldar, *Rūpa-rekhā*, 155.
191. Enamul Hoque, "Muslim Bāṅglā", *Rachanavali*, 263; Azhar Islam, *Muslim Kabi*, 32. Sabarid Khan was the grand-son of a courtier of an Ārākānese monarch and belonged to a Muslim aristocratic family although he was not attached to the court. On the other hand, Bahram Khan was the minister of finance of Nizam Shah, a provincial governor of Ārākān. Gopal Haldar, *Rūpa-rekhā*, 166; Azhar Islam, *Muslim Kabi*, 31, 40.
192. Sabarid Khan, "Vidyā-Sundar", *Sabarid Khan Granthavali* (ed.) Ahmed Sharif (Dhaka : 1966), 8.
193. *Ibid.*, 20-22.
194. Gopal Haldar, *Rūpa-rekhā*, 76 and 145.
195. Muhammad Abdur Rahim, *Social and Cultural History I*, 115-52, 154.
196. *Ibid.*, 262.
197. *Ibid.*, 255.
198. *Ibid.*, 256.
199. Muntasir Mamun, *Bangladesher Utsava*, 49.
200. Muhammad Saydur, *Bera Bhasan Utsab*, 4.
201. M.A. Rahim, *Social and Cultural History*, I, 259.
202. Gopal Haldar, *Rūpa-rekhā*, 150 and 142.
203. Sureshchandra Bandopadhyaya, *Sanskrita Sāhitye*, 128-31.
204. Gopal Haldar, *Rūpa-rekhā*, 144.
205. *Ibid.*, 209.
206. Arun Sanyal, *Bangali Sanskriti*, 64-65; Saccidananda Mukhopadhyay, *Bhāratīya Nāṭyaveda*, 397-98.
207. Arun Sanyal, *Bangali Sanskriti*, 66.
208. Gopal Haldar, *Rūpa-rekhā*, 153-54.
209. M.A. Rahim, *Social and Cultural History*, II, 333-35; Enamul Hoque, "Muslim Bāṅglā", *Rachanavali*, 359-66.
210. Azhar Islam, *Muslim Kabi*, 137-75.
211. *Ibid.*, 173.
212. Hiteshranjan Sanyal, *Bāṅglā Kīrtaner Itihās* (Calcutta: 1989), 31-32 and 63-64.
213. Gopal Haldar, *Rūpa-rekhā*, 65.
214. Faubion Bowers, *Theatre in the East*, 29.
215. Hiteshranjan Sanyal, *Bāṅglā Kīrtaner*, 39.

216. Vṛndāvana Dāsa, *Caitanya Bhāgavat* (1982), 215.
217. Hiteshranjan Sanyal, *Bāṅglā Kīrtaner*, 103.
218. *Ibid.*, 109.
219. Asit K. Bandyopadhyay, *Bangala Sahityer Itivritta*, 4, 405.
220. Nagendranāth Basu, *Viśva-koṣ*, vol. XV (Calcutta: 1911), 696-97.
221. Muntasir Mamun, *Utsava*, 69-71.
222. Nagendranāth Basu, "Yātrā: Utsa O Kramavikās", *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana* vol. 5, no. 4, 50-51, abridged version of Basu's article in *Viśva-koṣ*, vol. XV, 617-716.
223. Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, ed. Harekrishna Mukhopadhyaya and Subodh Chandra Majumdar (Calcutta: 1974), Part II, Chapter 15.
224. Sañjīvacandra Cakravartī, "Yātrā", *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana* vol. 5, no. 4, 90.
225. Hiteshranjan Sanyal, *Bāṅglā Kīrtaner*, 151.
226. Amūlyacaraṇ Vidyābhūṣaṇ, "Yātrā", *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana* vol. 5, no. 4, 117.
227. Sureshchandra Bandopadhyaya, *Sanskrita Sāhitye*, 122-25.
228. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa* I, 337-38; Bijit Kumar Dutta, *Prācin Bāṅgālā-Maithilī*, 1-iv.
229. Sureshchandra Bandopadhyaya, *Sanskrita Sāhitye*, 125-28.
230. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa* II, 50, 49, 337 and 325.
231. Hiteshranjan Sanyal, *Bāṅglā Kīrtaner*, 177-78.
232. *Ibid.*, 183.
233. *Ibid.*, 184.
234. *Ibid.*, 208-209.
235. Gopal Haldar, *Rūpa-rekhā*, 143.
236. *Ibid.*, 144.
237. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa* II, 104.
238. Karunamaya Goswami, *Sangeet Kosh*, 91.
239. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa* II, 100-102; N.K. Bhattashali cited in Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, *Itivritta* vol. 3, part 1, 435 and 442.
240. Arun Sanyal, *Bangali Sanskriti*, 49.
241. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa* I, 108.
242. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa* II, 99-106.
- 242a. Gopal Haldar, *Rūpa-rekhā*, 106-107; Sushil Kumar De, *Bengali Literature*, 407.
243. Gopal Haldar, *Rūpa-rekhā*, 109.

244. Kavi-Kaṅkan, *Caṅḍī-maṅgala*, 311.
245. Sukumar Sen, Preface, Kavi-Kaṅkan, *Caṅḍī-maṅgala*, 31.
246. Kavi-Kaṅkan, *Caṅḍī-maṅgala*, 123.
247. *Ibid.*, 83.
248. *Ibid.*, 109.
249. *Ibid.*, 4.
250. Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, *Itivritta* 4, 417.
251. Sañjīvacandra Cakravartī, "Yātrā", *Loksamaskṛiti Gabeshana*, vol. 5, no. 4, 90.
252. Nagendranāth Basu, *Viśva-koṣ*, vol. XV, 696-97.
253. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vaṅgala-Maṅgal Kavyer Itihas*, 273.
254. *Ibid.*, 218.
255. Sureshchandra Bandopadhyaya, *Sanskṛita Sāhitye*, 328.
256. Muhammad Shahidullah, *Bāṅglā Sāhityer Kathā* II, 105; Azhar Islam, *Muslim Kabi*, 48.
257. Panchanan Mandal, preface to *Gorkha-vijay*, v.
258. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Gopīcandrer Gān*, 394.
259. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa* vol. II, 213.
260. Ramakanta Chakravarti, "Madhyayuge Bāṅglāy Vaiṣṇav Dharma", 168-69.
261. Gopal Haldar, *Rūpa-rekhā*, 130 and 185.
262. *Ibid.*, 190.
263. Gopal Haldar, *Rūpa-rekhā*, 128-32, 185-86 and 190; Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Vaṅgala-Maṅgal Kavyer Itihas*, 741, 767, 745, 743 and 733.
264. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa*, vol. II, 164.
265. Azhar Islam, *Muslim Kabi*, 52.
266. *Ibid.*, 62.
267. *Ibid.*, 69.
268. *Ibid.*, 116.
269. Enamul Hoque, "Muslim Bāṅglā", *Rachanavali*, 335.
270. *Ibid.*, 336.
271. *Ibid.*, 345.
272. *Ibid.*, 353.
273. Azhar Islam, *Muslim Kabi*, 214, 224-25.
274. *Ibid.*, 47.
275. *Ibid.*, 98.



276. *Ibid.*, 191.
277. Enamul Hoque, "Muslim Bānglā", *Rachanavali*, 352.
278. Sukumar Sen, *Islāmi Bānglā*, 44.
279. Azhar Islam, *Muslim Kabi*, 184.
280. Swarochish Sarkar, "Bangladesher Kavi-gān: Uttarādhikār O Svatantra", *Bangla Academy Baishakhi Lok-utsab Prabandha 1400*, ed., Swarochish Sarkar (Dhaka: 1993), 36.
281. Golam Saklayen, *Banglay Marthiya Sahitya* (Dacca : 1969), 1.
282. Muhommad Abdul Jalil, *Shah Gareebullah O Janganama* (Dhaka : 1991), 40.
283. Enamul Hoque, "Muslim Bānglā", *Rachanavali*, 227.
284. *Ibid.*, 287.
285. Mīrza Nathan, *Baharistan-i-Gayabi*, vol. 1, tr. Khalequeddad Chowdhury (Dhaka: 1978), 68.
286. Muhammad Saydur, *Bera Bhasan Utsab*, 2 and 3.
287. *Ibid.*, 4.
288. M.A. Rahim, *Social and Cultural History I*, 128.
289. Enamul Hoque, "Muslim Bānglā", *Rachanavali*, 287.
290. M.A. Rahim, *Social and Cultural History II*, 345.
291. *Ibid.*
292. M.A. Rahim, *Social and Cultural History II*, 345.
293. *Ibid.*
294. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa II*, 118.
295. Momen Chowdhury, *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 66*, 76.
296. M.A. Rahim, *Social and Cultural History I*, 125.
297. *Ibid.*, 126.
298. *Ibid.*, 135-36.
299. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa II*, 472.
300. *Ibid.*, 261-62.
301. Enamul Hoque, "Muslim Bānglā", *Rachanavali*, 226.
302. Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah, *Sāhityer Kathā II*, 236-37.
303. *Ibid.*, 236-43.
304. Sukumar Sen, *Itihāsa II*, 408.
305. Gopendrakrishna Basu, *Bānglār Loukik Devatā*, 187-88.
306. M.A. Rahim, *Social and Cultural History I*, 124-25.

307. Syed Mustafa Shiraj, *Muslim Chitrakalar Adiparba*, 48
308. Prodyot Ghosh, *Gambhira*, 86.
309. *Ibid.*
310. Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, *Itivritta* 1, 45-47.
311. *Ibid.*, 47, 59-62.
312. *Ibid.*, 63-65.
313. *Ibid.*, 137-138; Sushil Kumar De, *Bengali Literature*, 309-10.
314. Swarochish Sarkar, "Bangladesher Kavi-gān", *Bangla Academy Baishakhi*, 35.
315. *Ibid.*, 35-36.
316. Kavi-Kaṅkan, *Caṇḍī-maṅgala*, 310.
317. Bijit Kumar Dutta, *Prācin Bāṅgālā-Maithilī*, liv.
318. Robert Skelton and Mark Francis (ed.) exhibition catalogue, *Arts of Bengal: The Heritage of Bangladesh and Eastern India* (London: 1979); Tofail Ahmad, "The Art of the Patuas", *Karushilpi Purashkar 1989* (Dhaka: 1989), 106. Cited by Parween Hasan, "Art and Architecture", *History of Bangladesh: 1704-1971*, vol. 3, (Dhaka: 1992), 686.
319. Sirajul Islam, Introduction, *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, vol. 3 (Dhaka : 1992), 33.
320. Sureshchandra Bandopadhyaya, *Sanskrita Sāhitve*, 133.
321. Saccidananda Mukhapadhyay, *Bharatīya Nāṭyaveda*, 400.
322. Nagendranāth Basu, "Yātrā", *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana*, vol. 5, no. 4, 50-51.
323. Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, *Itivritta* 4, 475.
324. *Ibid.*, 471.
325. *Ibid.*, 458.
326. *Ibid.*, 462-63.
327. *Ibid.*, 467.
328. *Ibid.*, 465, 468, 590; Amūlyacaran Vidyābhūṣaṇ, "Yātrā", *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana*, vol. 5, no. 4, 125.
329. Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, *Itivritta* 4, 466.
330. Nagendranāth Basu, "Yātrā", *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana*, vol. 5, no. 4, 54.
331. *Ibid.*
332. *Ibid.*, 52.
333. *Ibid.*
334. Sañjīvacandra Cakravartī, "Yātrā", *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana*, vol. 5, no. 4, 95.
335. Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, *Itivritta* 4, 480.

336. *Ibid.*, 492, 497-98 and 485.
337. *Ibid.*, 505.
338. Nishikanta Chattopadhyaya, *The Yatras or the Popular Dramas of Bengal* (London: Trubner & Co., 1882), reprinted in *Jatra: Banglar Jana Priya Natak*, ed. Sushanta Sarkar (Khulna: 1994), 101.
339. *Ibid.*, 101-102.
340. *Ibid.*, 70-71.
341. Bireswar Bandopadhyaya, *Yātrāgāner Itivṛtta* (Calcutta: 1384 BS), 45.
342. Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, *Itivṛtta* 4, 523-27.
343. Amūlyacaran Vidyābhūṣaṇ, "Yātrā" *Loksamaskṛiti Gabeshana*, vol. 5, no. 4, 123-25.
344. Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, *Itivṛtta* 4, 470.
345. *Ibid.* 460
346. Amūlyacaran Vidyābhūṣaṇ, "Yātrā", *Loksamaskṛiti Gabeshana*, vol. 5, no. 4, 117.
347. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, "Yātrā", *Loksamaskṛiti Gabeshana* vol. 5, no. 4, 142.
348. Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, *Itivṛtta*, 4, 463.
349. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, "Yātrā", *Loksamaskṛiti Gabeshana*, vol. 5, no. 4, 142.
350. Ajit Kumar Ghosh, "Yātrā: Sekāl O Ekāl", *Loksamaskṛiti Gabeshana*, vol. 5, no. 4, 155.
351. Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, *Itivṛtta* 4, 462.
352. Nagendranāth Basu, "Yātrā", *Loksamaskṛiti Gabeshana*, vol. 5, no. 4, 52.
353. Sukumar Sen, *Islāmi Bāṅglā*, 140-42.
354. Muhammad Saydur (ed.), *Lokosahitya Sankalan* 41.
355. Sukumar Sen, *Islāmi Bāṅglā*, 142.
356. Muhammad Saydur (ed.), *Lokosahitya Sankalan* 41, xx.
357. Sukumar Sen, "Nāth-panther Sāhityik Aitijhya", *Gorkha-vijay*, xcii.
358. Muntasir Mamun, *Utsava*, 50.
359. *Ibid.*, 50-51.
360. Muhammad Saydur, *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan* 49, 94.
361. Ahmad Sobhan (ed.), "Māi Campā" reprinted in *Īkṣaṇ*, vol. 5, Spring 1398, 1-10.
362. Muhammad Saydur, *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan* 61, viii.
363. Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, *Itivṛtta* 4, 540-43.
364. Karunamaya Goswami, *Bangla Ganer Bibartan*, Part I (Dhaka: 1993), 178.

365. Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, *Itivritta* 4, 562-67.
366. Karunamaya Goswami, *Bangla Ganer Bibartan* I, 178.
367. Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, *Itivritta* 4, 568-69, 541 and 574.
368. *Ibid.*, 557.
369. Asutosh Bhattacharyya, "Yātrā", *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana*, vol. 5, no. 4, 149.
370. Gaurishankar Bhattacharya, *Lokanāṭya Samikṣā*, 196-206.
371. Nagendranāth Basu, "Yātrā", *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana*, vol. 5, no. 4, 63.
372. Zia Hydar, "Yātrār Upasthāpanā Paddhati", *Jāṭiya Yātrā Utsav*, pages not numbered.
373. Nagendranāth Basu, "Yātrā", *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana*, vol. 5, no. 4, 63.
374. *Ibid.*, 70.
375. Karunamaya Goswami, *Sangit Kosh*, 580-83.
376. Gaurishankar Bhattacharya, *Lokanāṭya Samikṣā*, 202-203.
377. Brajendra Kumar De, "Yātrā Palā", *Jāṭiya Yātrā Utsav*, pages not numbered.
378. Gaurishankar Bhattacharya, *Lokanāṭya Samikṣā*, 192.
379. Zia Hydar, "Yātrār", *Jāṭiya Yātrā Utsav*.
380. Satyavati Giri, "Bharatīya Lokanāṭyadhārār Baicitre Jhumur O Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan", *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana* vol. 5, no. 4 (1991), 157-161, Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, *Itivritta* 4, 44-45.
381. Azhar Islam, *Muslim Kabi*, 249-271.
382. Sushil Kumar De, *Bengali Literature*, 315-46.
383. Baridbaran Ghosh, *Pat Patua Patageeti*, 4.
384. *Ibid.*, 5.

## Conclusion

Having completed the intended study on theatre in the neighbouring regions of Bangladesh, and various genres of indigenous theatre of the country and having attempted a reconstruction of historical development of indigenous theatre, it is now necessary to sum up the findings.

The study of classical Sanskrit theatre and the court-theatre of Mithilā, Orissa and the Nepalese kingdoms point towards a continuous tradition from around the beginning of the first millennium AD to 18th century AD. Characteristically, these are addressed to elite spectators and patronised mostly by the royal court. The ascendance of the *rūpakas* in 1st millennium gave way to the *uparūpakas* in the second millennium, the latter comprised mostly of *rāga-kāvya*s and *nṛttātmaka-prabandhas* (or grouped together as *saṃgīt-nāṭaks*). It is important to remember that the *rūpakas* recognise a wide variety of types, which include the *Bhāna* played by one performer only. Although song, dance and music are organic to both the *rūpakas* and the *uparūpakas*, song and music are predominant in the *rāga-kāvya* and song, music and dance are predominant in *nṛttātmaka-prabandhas*. The principle of *sandhi* and the theory of *rasa* are key to any analysis or appreciation of all the above types: the former rejects the concept of action based on conflict and opens the possibility of writing texts beginning with desire and ending with fulfilment of desire. These also negate the existence of tragedy. It is also important to remember that the performance of these plays are composed in a three-fold structure : (i) the orchestral overture and introduction to the play (*prastāvanā*), (ii) the main body of performance and (iii) the benediction. The performance is entirely non-illusionistic. The square, the rectangular and the circular performance space are also noteworthy. Finally, the case of *Aṅkiyā Nāṭ* provides an interesting example of a bridge from the court-based *saṃgīt-nāṭak* to a popular theatre (i.e., theatre of and for the people), and that of the Nepalese *Yātrās*, a bridge between the Buddhist and the popular theatres.

The study of Buddhist theatre in ancient India, Myanmar and Tibet reveals a pattern in which song, music and dance also feature as important elements of performance. These are given in both narrative as well as dialogic forms of performance, generally in quadrangular open-air arena. The texts are usually based on the life of the Buddha (and his disciples), often drawn from the Jātaka tales. In all the countries except India, Buddhism has also adapted pre-Buddhist devil dances and trance-dances, thereby evolving forms of performances which seek to show the superior spiritual force of Buddhism, by placing the spirits subordinate to the Buddha, but at the same time retaining the original objective of pre-Buddhist rituals. Awe-inspiring masks are organically entwined to these performances. Generally speaking, the performances of Buddhist theatre are of two types : (1) the

monastic, given in the monasteries by the monks during Buddhist festivals and (ii) the popular, given by itinerant bands of professionals in any open-air space, the occasion for performance of which is unrestricted. Finally, processions brought out during festivals are also characteristically Buddhist, in which song, dance music and representation stand out as striking features. The performances of the Dharma cult and the Śaiva cult are also important for they illuminate much of ancient and early medieval developments of the indigenous theatre of Bangladesh.

On the other hand, the study of over seventy-five genres of indigenous performances reveals the following characteristic features:

1. Background: All the performances related to Manasā (save *Biṣaharīr Gān*), Rāmācandra (save *Kusān Gān*), Kṛṣṇa, Śiva and Kālī (save *Saṅg Yātrā*), Buddhism and Nātha cult, the Muslim saints as well as *Ācālī*, *Paṭuā Gān*, Santhal performances and some *Jārī* performances of eastern Mymensingh and northern Bangladesh are integral to their respective religious faiths and cult practices. Therefore, these can be termed as religious performances. Of all the above, those related to Manasā, the Muslim saints and the Nātha cult generally enjoy popularity among both Hindus as well as Muslims. A few other performances, such as *Jaṅg Jārī*, *Imām Yātrā*, *Jārī Gān* of south-western Bangladesh, *Kaḍcā*, *Ācālī Pāṭh* and *Savāl Javāb* enjoy greater popularity among the Muslims because the narratives performed in them are generally those associated with the Muslim heroes. All the performances related to secular tales as well as *Kāvī Gān*, *Putul Nāc* and *Laṭhī-khelā* enjoy partial or full independence from religious faiths and cult practices. As for the performers, *Lakṣmīr Gān*, performances related to the Muslim saints and the Nātha cult are remarkable for not observing religious distinction and, as a result, are performed by both Muslims and Hindus. Such is never the case with performances such as *Līlā Kīrtan*, *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā*, *Maṅipurī Rās Nṛtya*, *Rāmāyaṇa Gān* etc. (where only Hindus perform) and also in *Jārī Gān* of eastern Mymensingh and northern Bangladesh (where only Muslims perform). It is also important to note that only one performance, i.e., *Yātrā*, enjoys national character, for it is performed all over the country and is witnessed by members of all communities. Moreover, fully professional companies exist only in the case of *Yātrā*. In a few other cases, such as some of the *kīrtanīyās* of *Līlā Kīrtan* and *Rāmāyaṇa Gān*, some of the *sarkārs* of *Kāvī Gān*, some of the *bayātīs* of *Jārī Gān* (south-western Bangladesh) and some of the *Jhumur Yātrā* troupes enjoy full-time status, while performance is part-time profession for most of the other performers. As for gender, male performers still dominate the scene and female impersonators are still to be seen. Female performers are mostly seen in south-western Bangladesh, in performances such as *Bhāsān Gān*, *Rayānī*

*Gān*, and *Jārī Gān* and in the Manipurī community, in the performance of *Rās Nr̥tya*. Interestingly, only the latter evolved at royal court, that too outside Bangladesh.

2. Performance Space: Two types of performance space are prevalent. These are: (a) temporary and (b) permanent. Temporary space are mostly (i) circular, often with the performers sitting in a smaller circle at the centre and the spectators sitting all around and (ii) square, where the performers sit in a circle at the centre, along one of the sides or on two opposite sides and the spectators sit on all four sides. Rectangular space is seen only in a few cases such as *Pālā Gān* (eastern Mymensingh), *Gāzīr Gān* and *Yātrā* (few cases). In all cases, the circular space is non-elevated. Both the square and the rectangular space can be elevated. Temporary performance space may be created at locations such as courtyard of rural homesteads, temple premises, boats or any public ground. Permanent performance space (*nāt-maṇḍapa*, *nāt-mandir* and the space at *dhām*) are always located in front of temple sanctums. Therefore, none of the performances based on Muslim saints and legendary heroes are given in these. The performance spaces of the *dhām* are interesting for they are elevated with earth and trees form their corner posts. Perhaps the most interesting performance space is that of *Manipurī Rās Nr̥tya*, not only for its beauty but also for its shape, i.e., a circle within a square. Because the performance evolved at a medieval (Hindu) royal court, it can be reasonably argued that it (the performance space of *Rās Nr̥tya*) represents that of royal court-theatres of Hindu rulers in eastern India of medieval times. The argument is strengthened when one is reminded that Saradatanaya has noted the existence of circular performance space.<sup>1</sup> It is also possible that the temporary type of performance space noted above (circular and square with performers sitting of the centre in a circle) are derivatives of the type seen in *Manipurī Rās Nr̥tya*. A few genres which are not performed in any of the above-mentioned performance space are *Putul Nāc* and the *Michils* (processions).

3. Text: The use of rhymed metrical verse and prose in dialogic and narrative forms is to be seen in all the texts, albeit in varying degree. Texts are composed as a cycle in the following cases: most performances related to Manasā (save *Biṣaharīr Gān* and *Ĵhāpān Khelā*) and the Muslim saints and legendary heroes (save a few on Hasan and Hosain such as *Jaynāber Cautisā*) and some related to Kṛṣṇa (such as *Līlā Kīrtan* and *Pālā Kīrtan*) and Rāmacandra (such as *Rāmāyaṇa Gān*). Texts of *Saṅg Yātrā*, the performance of the *Māṇḍāi*, *Mukho Nācā*, *Kālī Kāc*, *Gambhīrā Gān* and *Ālkāp Gān* are episodic and disjointed. All the texts of performances based on secular tales, *Jāher* (of the Santhals), *Putul Nāc*, *Ĵācālī*, *Paṭuā Gān* and a few on Imam Hasan and Imam Hosain (such as *Jaynāber Cautisā*) are composed as independent and self-contained pieces. All the texts,

save a few of *Pālā Gān* (such as *Mahuā*), a few on Imam Hasan and Hosain (such as *Jaynāber Cautisā*), a few romantic narratives by Muslim poets (such as *Lāilī-Majnu*) and most of *Ghāṭu Gān*, end in the fulfilment of the desire of the central characters. The case of *Yātrā* is slightly complex. In quite a few social and historical texts, even if the central character's meet's fatal end, his/her cause is upheld at the end with an indication of fulfilment in future and the antagonist is shown to accept moral defeat. The action of all texts (independent or cycle), except a few of *Pālā Gān*, Imam Hasan and Imam Hosain and romantic narratives by Muslim poets and most of *Ghāṭu Gān* and *Yātrā* are structured on a principle which begins with the birth of desire and ends with fulfilment but the journey from the beginning to the end passes through a series of three successive stages a number of times. These three stages may be termed as (i) Effort, (ii) Possibility of Attainment and (iii) Suppression of Success. The following schematic diagram may help illustrate the matter.

1 → (2 → 3 → 4) → (2 → 3 → 4) → (2 → 3 → 4) → (2 → 3 → 4) ..... → 5

In the above diagram, 1 represents Birth of Desire, 2 represents Effort (undertaken by the central character), 3 represents Possibility of Attainment, 4 represents Suppression of Success and 5 represents Fulfilment of Desire. In all these texts, the desire of the central character is always regenerated (by divine intervention or other means) whenever it is suppressed or threatened with extinction. Also, varied subsidiary plots (minor incidents or major episodes) are also built into the main line of action to produce a piece of work comparable to the intricate needle-work of *nakṣī-kāthā* (embroidered quilt) Bangladesh is famous for. Texts such as *Mahuā*, *Jaynāber Cautisā*, *Lāilī-Majnu* and most of *Ghāṭu Gān* begin with the first stage but end in the fourth. But most of *Yātrā* and *Śastrīya Pācālī* texts are built on the principle of conflict derived from European dramaturgy: exposition-inciting incident-rising conflict-climax-denouement. Interestingly, there is a marked absence of tragedy. Instead, most of the texts except those built on European dramaturgy, attempt to infuse in the spectators with various emotions: those related to goddess Manasā predominate in the Pathetic (*Karuṇa*), those related to Kṛṣṇa predominate in the Devotional (*Bhakti*) or Pleasant (*Madhur*), those related to Rāmacandra predominate in the Heroic (*Vīra*) and the Pathetic (*Karuṇa*), those related to Śiva and Kālī predominate in the Comic (*Hāsyā*) and the Furious (*Raudra*), those related to the secular tales predominate in the Erotic (*Śṛṅgāra*), Pathetic (*Karuṇa*) and the Comic (*Hāsyā*), those related to the Karbala legend (such as *Jāri*) predominate in the Heroic (*Vīra*) and Pathetic (*Karuṇa*), those related to the Muslim saints predominate in the Devotional (*Bhakti*) and the Erotic (*Śṛṅgāra*), those related to the Nātha cult predominate in the Comic (*Hāsyā*) and the



Peaceful (*Śānta*) and *Jyā* in the Peaceful (*Śānta*). The others, in various emotions such as the Heroic, the Erotic and the Devotional. Of all the performances, *Gambhīrā Gān* and *Ṭāḍi Gān* are noteworthy for their critique of social conditions. In most of others the central characters are either presented as ideals to be emulated (as in texts related Manasā, Kṛṣṇa, Rāmacandra, Buddhism and Nātha cult, Muslim saints and legendary heroes, and some of performances on secular tales) or criticized for their non-conformation to the ideal (as in *Saṅg Yātrā*, *Mukho Nācā*, *Ālkāp Gān* etc.). There is no narrative content in *Kavi Gān* and very little in *Lāṭhi-khelā*. But these, along with *Kaḍcā*, *Sawāl Jawāb*, *Ṣhāpān Khelā* and the *Jārī Gān* of south-western Bangladesh, are interesting for their format of contest between two rival groups of performers. Thus, these performances may be viewed to be closer to games and sports. On the other hand, the texts built on European dramaturgy are quite similar to the form commonly referred to as 'Melodrama'. Finally, it should also be noted that two performances, *Līlā Kīrtan* and *Maṇipurī Rās Nr̥tya*, are based on extensive critical and aesthetic formulations.

4. Performance: Table I shows all the genres discussed in this study categorised under the heads of (i) the Narrative type, (ii) the Supra-narrative type, (iii) the Dialogic type, (iv) the Song-and-dance type, (v) the Processional type, (vi) the Supra-personae type, (vii) the Performance-as-contest type and (viii) the Recitative type. Characteristic features of each genre has been summarised in Table II.

All the performances discussed in this study are non-illusionistic and aim at direct communion with the spectators. It is also important to see that almost all the performances are composed of three-fold structure: (i) *bandanā*, (ii) the main body and (iii) concluding passage in verse or lyric. Although the third does not appear to be compulsory in all cases, it is possible that the absence is the result decay but were very much obligatory at earlier times. Also, the absence of *bandanā* in *Putul Nāc* is striking. This too could be the result of decadence.

In all cases, the use of visual elements to locate a scene is strikingly absent. Interestingly, no masks are used in performances related to Kṛṣṇa and Caitanya, although these appear to be integrally related to performances of Śaiva and Śākta cults (i.e., *Mukho Nācā*, *Kālī Kāc*, *Gamīrā Nāc*) and those of Buddhism (*Bulu*). Judging by the way these are made in *Mukho Nācā*, the tradition appears to be very old. On the other hand, male make-up in *Saṅg Yātrā* appears to be mask-like, not far from the south Indian and the Chinese practice (although not as developed). In most of the other cases, make-up is generally used for female impersonation. An interesting exception is that of *Ravānī Gān*, in which the female narrators use decorative pattern on the face. Another striking case is the make-up of *Yogīr*

*Gān* and *Yugī Pārva*, in which circular motifs cover the hands and the legs. Far removed from these cases is the make-up of *Yātrā*, which attempts not to be far from reality. Regarding costume, there appears little regard for realism or historical accuracy. *Yātrā*, *Jhumur Yātrā* and *Śāstriya Pācālī*, which are closer to the above, follow typed conventions; in most of the others, its use is extremely fluid and more necessary for female impersonation. Use of *dhotis*, even in some of the Islamic performances, suggest syncretistic tendency. In most of the miracle of saints, the lead-narrator often presents himself as the *pīr* as he is popularly conceived to be (as in *Mādār Pīrer Gān* and *Satya Pīrer Gān*) but in quite a few *Gāzīr Gān* and *Gāzīr Yātrā* performances his costume tends to infuse comedy as he plays *Kālu*. But of course, the most intricately and methodically worked out costume can be seen in *Manipurī Rās Nr̥tya*, which is not surprising since it was born at a royal court.

A comparison of the indigenous theatre of Bangladesh (except those built on European dramaturgy) and the classical Sanskrit theatre shows remarkable similarity. Briefly, they are as follows:

1. Text : Except a few, such as *Mahuā* and *Lālī-Majnu*, all texts follow variations of the principles of *avasthā*, *arthaprakṛti* and *sandhi*. The same is also true for the theory of aesthetic experience (*rasa-tattva*).
2. Performance : Of the eight types of performance shown in Table I, the Supra-narrative and the Song-and-dance types appear close to the *saṅgīt-nāṭak* (*rāga-kāvya* and *nṛtātṃaka-prabandha*) *uparūpakas*, the Dialogic, close to the *pāṭhya-rūpaka* and the Narrative, not far from the *Bhāna rūpaka*.
3. Performance space : The rectangular and the square types of classical Sanskrit theatres appear close to the *nāṭ-maṇḍapas*, except that the former is walled and the latter is not and of course, the internal arrangement is different. But if Adya Rangacharya is correct in his assumption, perhaps the square type of performance space used in the indigenous theatre of Bangladesh is quite the same as the square type of the classical Sanskrit tradition. Moreover, the circle-within-square type of space, specially that of *Manipurī Rās Nr̥tya*, could possibly be the circular theatre Śāradātanaya writes about.
4. Performers and performance conventions: The *sūtradhāra* of classical Sanskrit theatre is present as the *pada-kartā* in *Kṛṣṇa Yātra*, the *gāyen* in *Beilyā Nācārī*, the *gīdāl* in *Padmā-purāṇ Gān*, the *mūl* in *Kuśān Gān* and others. Apart from the non-illusionistic character of all the genres, the use of *āṅgika abhinaya* as in *Manipurī Rās Nr̥tya* and the use of circular movement to denote journey in quite a few genres, also reflect the classical

Sanskrit tradition. It is possible that *āṅgika abhinaya* was very much in use in other genres (such as *Līlā Kīrtan*) but decadence has caused their disappearance.

The above similarities are not pointed out to imply that the indigenous theatre of Bangladesh has grown out or has been heavily influenced by the classical Sanskrit tradition. But if the latter can be taken to be the highest form of refinement of what existed among the people, it becomes clear to see that the classical Sanskrit tradition has been the general ideal sought by the court culture of Nepalese kingdoms, Mithilā, Orissa and Bengal.

As for the historical development, two major streams appear to have existed in the earlier centuries of the ancient period. These were (i) classical Sanskrit theatre in the major urban centres and (ii) dialogic and processional performances along with masked dances during Buddhist festivals. By 9th or 10th century, song-and-dance performances based on Nātha and Kṛṣṇa legends and narrative performances of secular tales also came to exist. These were followed shortly after by narrative performances of the Jātaka tales and the Nātha legends. By 12th century, the Buddhist performances were being assimilated into the fold of Dharma cult to give rise to the *Gājan* of Dharma and *Ādyā, Aṣṭak Gān* (procession), *Saṅg Yātrā* and *Kālī Kāc* and into Śaiva cult to give rise to *Gambhīrā* festival, *Mukho Nāca* and *Gamīrā Nāc*. In the *Gambhīra* festival, the ancient cult practice of the Coach people must have been present as well. Some form of annual harvesting festival in honour of agrarian Śiva was also celebrated by the people during the latter part of the period in which narrative performance on various exploits of the deity was also given. Classical Sanskrit theatre continued right through the Pālas where both *rūpakas* and *uparūpakas* were performed, to the Senas where *uparūpakas (saṅgīt-nāṭaks)* appear to have gained dominance to culminate in the *Gītāgovinda*. It is also possible that *Putul Nāc* and *Paṭuā Gān* existed among the people during ancient period.

With the advent of the Muslims, at the beginning of early medieval period, the classical Sanskrit tradition faced a major reversal but still continued among the independent Hindu kings and the Hindu feudal lords of the Muslim court. The period witnessed gradual decay of Buddhist performances as well, specially the ritualistic and the processional, although the narrative the dialogic and the masked dance performances managed to keep their flickering flames alive in south-eastern Bengal (Chittagong Hills) right to the present, in the form of *Buddha Kīrtan*, *Jyā* and *Bulu*. On the other hand, the Muslim rulers, specially after mid-14th century, began to extend patronry to Hindu as well as Muslim poets and their performances. As a result, recitative, narrative and song-and-dance types of performances continued to grow among the royalty and the aristocracy. While among the people, the process of assimilation of Dharma cult by Śaiva cult began, as a result of which *Kālī Kāc*,

*Aṣṭak Gān* and *Saṅg Yātrā* were transformed into performances of the latter. *Dharmer Gājan* was also converted into various forms of *Śiver Gājan* in all parts of Bengal except Rāḍha. Song-and-dance type of performance of the Nātha cult (precursor of *Yogīr Gān* and *Yugī Parva*), developed during the same period. Within the folds of the cults of Kṛṣṇa and Rāmacandra, there existed recitative performance based on *Mahābhārata Pācālī* and narrative performances based on *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Vijay* and *Rāmāyaṇa*. From the latter, performances such as *Rāmāyaṇa Gān* and *Lakṣmīr Gān* still continue in Bangladesh today. Song-and-dance performance based on *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan* also developed which followed the tradition of *Gītagovinda*. During the same period, there also existed environmental performances based on Kṛṣṇa *līlā* and *Rāmāyaṇa* (as described in *Caitanya Bhāgavat*) and contestual performance (*Jhumur Gān*). Within the folds of Śakta cult, there arose narrative performance based on *Padmā-purāṇ* (*Rayānī Gān*) and song-and-dance performance based on *Caṇḍī-maṅgala*. The Cult had developed processional performance as well, which was the precursor of *Caṇḍī Yātrā* of late medieval period. Narrative performances of secular tales were also being converted into song-and-dance type of give rise to genres such as *Raṅg Pācālī*. Puppet theatre too was prevalent during this period.

The late medieval period saw a significant reduction of court patrony under the Mughals but the Muslim poets in the court of Arakan composed a number of secular narratives which fed recitative and narrative performances and also brought in vitality with fresh tales from Persian-Arabic-Hindī source. On the other hand, a number of independent and semi-independent Hindu kingdoms played quite an important role in extending patrony to narrative performance as in Coach-bihar, dialogic (Sanskrit) and narrative performances as in Bhulūā and narrative (*Annadā-maṅgala*) and dialogic (*Caṇḍī* and *Citra-yajñā*) performances as in Navadvīp. But the major support for theatre during this period came from the people. Within the folds of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, processional (such as *Janmāṣṭamī Michil*), environmental (*Rās Yātrā*), song-and-dance (*Ghātu Gān*, *Śekhārī Yātrā* and *Pālā Kīrtan*) and narrative performances (such as *Līlā Kīrtan*) developed. It also helped the continuation of Sanskrit tradition by composing quite a few Sanskrit texts and also translating the same into Bāṅglā. The cults of Rāmacandra and Kṛṣṇa promoted recitative (*Kathakatā*), processional-cum-environmental (*Rāma Yātrā*), song-and-dance (*Mahesā Khelā*) and supra-narrative (*Kuśān Gān*) performances. Within the folds of Śakta cult arose narrative (*Padmā-purāṇ Gān*, Natore), supra-narrative (*Padmā-purāṇ Gān*, Rangpur), song-and-dance (*Beilyā Nācārī*), processional (*Caṇḍī Yātrā*) and contestual (*Jhāpān Khelā*) performances. Within Śaiva cult, the *Śivāyanas* began to appear (to be given as narrative performances). But the most significant change was the infiltration of

Kṛṣṇa cult into *Aṣṭak Gān* and *Kālī Kāc*. In the Nātha fold, Islamic and Vaiṣṇavite influences caused alteration in song-and dance performance of the former which produced what today is known as *Yugī Parva* and *Yogīr Gān*. No development of major dimension was effected in the Dharma cult, which was nearly spent force by the end of the period. As for the Islamic performances under the patronry of the people, recitative genres such as *Ṣūthi Pāṭh*, contestual such as *Paillyā Yātrā*, processional such as *Mādāriā Michil* (*Mādār Bāsēr Gān*), *Muhārrāmer Michil* and *Beḍā Bhāsān* and narrative such as *Jārī Gān* (northern Bangladesh), *Mādār Pīrer Gān*, *Gāzīr Gān*, *Satya Pīrer Gān* and *Mānik Pīrer Jārī* evolved during late medieval period. Quite a few secular genres also developed during the same period, such as *Kecchā-bandī Gān* and *Kavi Gān*. *Ghāṭu Gān* was also secularized during the period under review. *Paṭuā Gān* and *Putul Nāc*, the two supra-personae genres, also appear to have flourished and possibly quite a few cults adopted the latter.

The development of most significant consequence in the modern period occurred towards the very beginning of the period. Possibly beginning with *līlās* of Kṛṣṇa, professional performers began to give processional-cum-environmental performances (such as *Rās Yātrā*) not as a part of a procession or in actual environs but in "neutral" space designed for performance, as was the custom with narrative, song-and-dance and other genres. Moreover, these began to be given not as part of religious festivals only, but on any day the sponsor desired. As a result, there arose *Kālīya-daman Yātrā* (later *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā*) and *Caitanya Yātrā* (later amalgamated with *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā*). Sometime around mid-19th century came *Bhāsān Yātrā* which adapted *Padmā-purāṇ* (*Manasā-māṅgala*). The Nātha cult, developed *Yogī Yātrā* from *Yogīr Gān* and *Yugī Parva* sometime around mid-19th century, because of great popularity *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* had acquired by that time. Among the Islamic performances, *Jārī Gān* (eastern Mymensingh) developed around 1836 but the texts performed today were not composed prior to 20th century. *Jārī Gān* (south-western Bangladesh) evolved in early 19th century; *Mā Māi Campār Kicchā-kāhini Jārī* originally evolved sometime in the second half of 19th century and was revived again after 1947. Dialogic genres also evolved in the Islamic fold, such as *Mānik Yātrā* and *Satya Pīrer Yātrā* some time in the second half of 19th century, and *Gāzīr Yātrā* slightly earlier.

As a result of social transformations in the first half of 19th century, in urban areas such as Calcutta, there arose the secular genre known as *Natun Yātrā* (the most popular performance of which was *Vidyā-Sundar*), which was superseded by *Paurāṇik Yātrā* in the fourth quarter of the same century, followed by *Aitihāsik Yātrā* and *Svadeśī Yātrā* towards the beginning of 20th century and *Sāmājīk Yātrā* around mid-20th century. In

strictly rural milieu, the above development helped generate the secular form known as *Jhumur Yātrā*, sometime in the second half of 19th century, *Pālā Gān* possibly originated by late 18th century, from which *Māitṭya Tāmsā* appears to have grown sometime towards the end of 19th century. *Dhañg Yātrā* shows signs of being early 20th century product. On the other hand, *Paurāṇik Yātrā* and *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* appears to have promoted the creation on *Sāj Kīrtan* at around the same time. As for supra-personae genres, *Putul Nāc* attained secular character sometime in the second half of 19th century, but *Paṭuā Gān*, to a large extent, has remained religious in character.

It is acknowledged that much of the historical development shown in this study is hypothetical, but it is built on performances current in Bangladesh and is fully in agreement with the history of Bangla literature and development of theatre in the neighbouring regions. Much of performance history in general is hypothetical too, because performance itself is ephemeral and hardly leaves any written account behind as record.

It is important to draw attention to two characteristic features which can be seen in the historical development shown above. Firstly, there appears to be a strong tendency towards coexistence of various religio-philosophical world-views, which have influenced each other, are apparently syncretistic, but in fact tend towards multiple development or pluralism. As a result, each of the above world-views have developed their own narrative and song-and-dance, as well as dialogic, processional and other performances. Secondly, the strength of popular performances is such that these have defied reform movements of the orthodoxy, both Hindu as well as Muslim. This trend is best exemplified by the case of Islamic performances defying the Faraidi movement. Having said that, it is also true that most of the genres are facing extinction or are fossilized for reasons already explained. The crucial fact appears to be that, having existed for over one and a half millennium, they face a grim future in a world which seems to be obliterating cultural distinction with the help of electronic media, specially when they belong to the Third World. Indigenous theatre of Bangladesh needs to rise above the disjunction it faces and regenerate itself once again as a vital living force of the people, projecting their 'collective endeavour to live and come to terms with their total environment'. More specifically, it has to play a meaningful role in resolving the political and cultural crisis faced by the nation -- the crisis of religion-based and language-based nationalism. The role of the Islamic genres, unhindered by fundamentalist trends, has to be raised to that seen in the genres related to Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism, so as to capture the collective consciousness of the people in a socially and politically meaningful way. All conscious interest in the indigenous theatre of Bangladesh needs to be channelled in these directions.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Books :

- Abedin, Mohammad Jaynal . *Iṅṅ Nisān* (Book Mart: Narsingdi 1398 BS; first published in 1384 BS).
- Ādak. Rāmadāsa. *Anādi-maṅgala, or Dharma-purāṇa*, ed. Basanta Kumar Chattopadhyaya (Bangiya Sahitya Parishad: Calcutta, 1938).
- Adhikari. Subhadra. *Bharatīya Nṛtyakalā* (Karuna Prakashani : Calcutta, year of publication not mentioned).
- Ahmad, Kamruddin. *The Social History of East Pakistan* (Crescent Book: Dhaka, 1967).
- Ahmad, Tasaddak. *Nowabganj Zillar Loko-sangit: Gambhira* (Bangla Academy: Dhaka, 1994).
- Ahmad, Tofail. *Loka Shilper Bhubane* (Bangla Academy: Dhaka, 1994).
- Ahmad, Zaheda. "State and Education", *History of Bangladesh: 1704-1971*, vol. 3, ed. Sirajul Islam (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh: Dhaka, 1992).
- Ahmed, Syed Jamil. "Theatre Ki ?" *Sampratik Shilpabhabna*, ed. Ashok Karmakar (Sahitya Prakash : Dhaka, 1993).
- Ahmed, Syed Jamil. *Hajar Bachhar : Bangladesher Natak O Natyakala* (Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy: Dhaka, 1995).
- Ahmed, Wakil. *Banglar Loka-sanskriti* (Bangla Academy: Dhaka, 1974).
- Ahmed, Wakil. *Banglay Bideshi Parjatak* (Anisur Rahman: Dhaka, 1990; first published in 1968).
- Ahmed, Wakil. "Lokasāhitya", *Bangladesher Itihasa: 1704-1971*, vol. 3, ed. Sirajul Islam (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh: Dhaka, 1993).
- Ahmed, Wakil. "Folk Literature", *History of Bangladesh: 1704-1971*, vol. 3, ed. Sirajul Islam (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh: Dhaka, 1992).
- Ahsan, Syed Ali. Illustrations from "Caryā-gītikār Padakartāgaṇa", *Abhinayadarpaṇa* by Nandikeśvar, tr. Saḥim al-Deen (Katha Prakashan: Dhaka, 1989).
- Alan, A.K.M. Shamsul. *Mainamati* (Department of Archaeology, Bangladesh: Dhaka, 1982).
- Alan, Ohidul. *Chattagramer Lokosahitya* (Bangla Academy : Dhaka, 1985).

- Alaol. *Padmāvatī*, ed. Abdul Karim Sahityabisharad (Bangla Sahitya Samity : Chittagong, 1977).
- Alphonso-Karkala, John B. (ed.), *An Anthology of Indian Literature* (Penguin : Harmondsworth, 1971).
- Anisuzzaman. "Bāmlā Bhāṣā O Sāhityer Anyānya Nidarśan", *Bāmlā Sāhityer Itihās*, vol. 1, ed. Anisuzzaman (Bangla Academy: Dhaka, 1987).
- Anupcandra, Kamalnayan, Ketakā Dās, Gopīcandra, Govinda Dās, Jānakī Nāth et.al. *Bāīskabi Śrī Śrī Padmā-purāṇ*, ed. Beṇīmādhhab Śīl. (Akṣay Library: Calcutta, year of publication not mentioned).
- Ashgar, Saikat. *Manikganj Zillar Lok Sahitya*, (Sadar Upazilla Parishad : Manikganj, 1986).
- Awn, Peter J. "Sufism", *Encyclopedia of Religion* vol. 14, ed. Mircea Eliade (Macmillan : New York, 1987).
- Bāṇa, *Harṣa-carita*, tr. E.B. Cowell and F.W. Thomas (Royal Asiatic Society : London, 1897).
- Bandyopadhyay, Asit Kumar. *Bangala Sahityer Itivṛtta*, Vol. 3, Part 1 (Modern Book Agency : Calcutta, 1993; first published in 1966).
- Bandyopadhyay, Asit Kumar. *Bangala Sahityer Itivṛtta*, Vol. 4, (Modern Book Agency : Calcutta, 1985; first published in 1973).
- Bandopadhyaya, Bireswar. *Yātrāgāner Itivṛtta* (Asha Prakashani : Calcutta, 1384 BS).
- Bandopādhyāya, Narīgopāl (ed.). *Nepāle Bāṅgālā Nāṭak*, (Bangiya Sahitya Parishat: Calcutta, 1324 BS).
- Bandopadhyaya, Sureshchandra. *Sanskrita Sāhitye Bāṅgālīr Dān* (Sanskrita Pustak Bhandar : Calcutta, 1369 BS).
- Bareau, Andre. "Buddhism, Schools of: Hinayana Buddhism", *Encyclopedia of Religion* vol. 2, ed. Mircea Eliade (Macmillan : New York, 1987).
- Basu. Gopendrakrishna. *Bāṅglār Loukik Devatā* (Dey's Publishing : Calcutta, 1978; originally published in 1966).
- Basu, Nagendranāth (compiled by). *Viśva-koṣ*, vol. xv (Nagendranāth Basu : Calcutta, 1911).
- Beal, Samuel. *The Life of Hiuen-Tsiang by the Shaman Hwui Li with an introduction containing an account of the works of I-Tsing* (Munshiram Manoharlal: New Delhi, 1973, 2nd edition).



- Bentley, Eric. *The Theatre of Commitment and Other Essays on Drama in Our Society* (Methuen : London, 1968).
- Bharata-muni. *Nāṭyaśāstra (A Treatise on Hindu Dramaturgy and Histrionics)*, tr. Manomohan Ghosh (Manisha: Calcutta, 1967, 1st published in 1951).
- Bhatt, G.K. *Theatric Aspects of Sanskrit Drama* (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute : Poona, 1983).
- Bhattacharyya, Asutosh. *Gopīcandrī Gān* (University of Calcutta : Calcutta, 1959).
- Bhattacharyya, Asutosh. *Bāṅglār Loka Sāhitya* (Calcutta Book House: Calcutta, 1962).
- Bhattacharyya, Asutosh. *Banglar Lokosrutī* (Pustak Bipani: Calcutta, 1392 BS; first published in 1367 BS).
- Bhattacharyya, Asutosh. *Banglar Lokanrttya* (A. Mukharjee & Co. : Calcutta, 1973).
- Bhattacharyya, Asutosh. *Vangala-Mangal Kavyer Itihas* (A, Mukharjee & Co. : Calcutta 1989, 7th edition).
- Bhattacharya, Gaurishankar. *Bāṅglā Lokanāṭya Samīkṣā* (Rabindrabharati University : Calcutta, 1972).
- Bhattacharya, Narendranath. "Śāktadharmā O Tantra", *Madhyayuge Bāṅglār Samāj O Saṁskṛtī*, ed. Aniruddha Ray and Ratnavali Chattopadhyaya (K.P. Bagchi : Calcutta, 1992).
- Bowers, Faubion. *Theatre In the East: A Survey of Asian Drama* (Grove Press Inc. : New York, 1956).
- Brook, Peter. *Empty Space* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1972; originally published in 1968).
- Brown, Percy. *Indian Architecture: Buddhist and Hindu Period* (Taraporevala Sons: Bombay, 1976).
- Byrski, Christopher M. *Concept of Ancient Indian Theatre* (Munshiram Manoharlal: New Delhi, 1974).
- Cakravartī, Ghanarāma. *Dharma-maṅgala* (Naṭabar Cakravartī: Calcutta, 1911; 3rd ed.).
- Caṇḍīdāsa, Baḍu. *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan*, with preface and edited by Amitrasudan Bhattacharya (Dey's Publishing: Calcutta, 1992).
- Chakrabarti, Dilip K. *Ancient Bangladesh: A Study of Archaeological Sources* (University Press Limited : Dhaka, 1992).
- Chakravarti, Haripada. *Daśarathī O Tāhār Pācālī* (A Mukharjee & Co. : Calcutta, 1961).

- Chakravarti, Mridulkanti. *Bāṅglā Gāner Dhārā* (Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy: Dhaka, 1993).
- Chakravarti, Ramakanta. "Madhyayuge Bāṅglāy Vaiṣṇav Dharma Evaṁ Tār Prabhāb", *Madhyayuge Bāṅglār Samāj O Saṁskṛti*, ed. Aniruddha Ray and Ratnavali Chattopadhyaya (K.P. Bagchi : Calcutta, 1992).
- Chapman, Spencer F. *Lhasa the Holy City* (Chatto & Windus : London, 1938).
- Chattopadhyaya, Gayatri. *Bharater Nrittakala* (Navapatra: Calcutta, 1385 BS).
- Chattopadhyaya, Nishikanta. *The Yatras or the Popular Dramas of Bengal* (Trubner & Co. : London, 1882), reprinted in *Jatra: Banglar Jana Priya Natak*, ed. Sushanta Sarkar (Lokenattya O Sangskritik Unnayan Kendro: Khulna, 1994).
- Chattopadhyaya, Satindramohan. *Bāṅglār Sāmājīk Itihāser Bhūmikā 1100-1900* (Sahitya Samsad : Calcutta, 1974)
- Childers, Joseph and Hentzi, Gary. *Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism* (Columbia University Press : New York, 1995).
- Chowdhury, Abdul Huq. "Gāzīr Gān", *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 66: Gazir Gan*, ed. Khondaker Reajul Huq (Bangla Academy : Dhaka, 1995).
- Chowdhury, Momen (ed.). *Lokshahitya Sankalan 18 : Jari Gaan* (Bangla Academy: Dhaka, 1981).
- Chowdhury, Momen. "Gāzīr Gān", *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 66: Gazir Gan*, ed. Khondaker Reajul Huq (Bangla Academy : Dhaka, 1995).
- Chowdhury, Shafiqur Rahman. "Field-work Bhitik Ekti Samikṣan", *Bangladesher Lokasangeet: Kendua Anchal*, ed. Shamsuzzaman Khan (Bangla Academy: Dhaka, 1993).
- Chowdhury, Shafiqur Rahman. *Bangladesher Loksangit* (Bangla Academy : Dhaka, 1994).
- Chowdhury, Sukomal. *Bangladeshe Buddha Dharma O Saṁskṛti* (Saraswat Library : Calcutta, 1974).
- Cowell, E.B. (ed.). *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births* vol. 1-6, (Cosmo Publications : Delhi, 1978; first published in 1895-1907).
- Dandekar, R.N. "Vaiṣṇavism", *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 15, ed. Mircea Eliade (Macmillan : New York, 1987).
- Das, Ramaranjan. *Paschimbanger Purakirti* (Firma KLM : Calcutta, 1980).

- Dāsa, Jñānendramohan. *Baṅglā Bhāṣār Abhidhān* (The Indian Publishing House: Calcutta, 1937, 2nd edition).
- Dāsa, Kālīpada. *Nimāi Saṁvāsī* (M. Moksed Ali: Dhaka, 1988, 3rd ed.).
- Dāsa, Vṛndāvana. *Caitanya Bhāgavat* (Mrinal Kanti Ghosh: Calcutta, 440 Gaurābda, corresponding to 1926 AD; 4th edition).
- Dāsa, Vṛndāvana. *Caitanya Bhāgavat*, ed. Sukumar Sen (Sahitya Akademi : New Delhi, 1982).
- Dasgupta, Rajatananda. "Bhāratīya Upamahādeśe Paṭacitrakalā", *Bangladesher Lokoshilpa*, compiled and edited by Syed Mahmudul Hasan (Bangladesh Folk Art and Crafts Foundation: Sonargaon, 1983).
- Dasgupta, Shashi Bhushan. *An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism* (University of Calcutta: Calcutta, 1974, 3rd edition).
- Dasgupta, S.N. and De, S.K. *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (University of Calcutta : Calcutta, 1962).
- Davis, Richard H. "A Brief History of Religions in India", *Religions of India in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton University Press : Princeton, 1994).
- De, Sushil Kumar. *Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century 1757-1857* (Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay : Calcutta, 1962; first published in 1919).
- De, Sushil Kumar. *Studies in the History of Sanskrit Poetics* (Luzac : London, 1925).
- Dev, Nārāyaṇ and Nāth, Jānakī. *Padmā-purāṇ* (New Age Publications: Dhaka, 1382 BS; first edition in 1367 BS).
- Directorate of Archaeology, Bangladesh. *An Album of Archaeological Relics in Bangladesh* (Directorate of Archaeology, Bangladesh: Dhaka, 1984).
- Dowson, John. *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology* (Oriental Books: New Delhi, 1973).
- Dutt, Gurusaday. *Paṭuā Saṅgīt* (University of Calcutta: Calcutta, 1939).
- Dutt, R.C. *Cultural Heritage of Bengal* (Puthi Pustak: Calcutta, 1962; first ed. 1877).
- Dutta, Bijit Kumar. *Prācin Bāṅgālā-Maithilī Nāṭaka* (University of Burdwan: Burdwan, 1980).
- Eaton, Richard M. *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier 1204-1760* (Oxford University Press: Delhi, 1994).
- Elias, Mohubub. *Nawabganjer Alkap Gan* (Bangla Academy: Dhaka, 1995).

- Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Śaivism" and "Shaktism" (vol. 10), "Natha" (vol. 8), "Tantra" (vol. 11) and "Tantric Hinduism" (vol. 11), (Encyclopaedia Britannia Inc. : Chicago, 1974, 15th edition; reprint, 1994).
- Evans-Wentz, W.Y. (ed.). *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* (Oxford University Press: London, 1958).
- Gangopadhyaya, Bhairavnath. *Tājmahal* (Ratan Book House : Dhaka).
- Gangopadhyaya, Bhairavnath. *Ekti Paisā* (Chowdhury and Sons : Dhaka).
- Gangopadhyaya, Bhairavnath. *Mā Māṭi Māmuṣ* (Sudhir Chowdhury : Dhaka).
- Gāṅgūlī, Mānikrāma. *Dharma-maṅgala*, ed. Bijit Kumar Dutt and Sunanda Dutt (University of Calcutta : Calcutta, 1960).
- Gazi, Dona. *Sāifulmuluk-Badiujjamāl*, ed. Ahmad Sharif (Bangla Academy: Dhaka, 1975).
- Ghosh, Baridbaran. *Pat Patua Patageeti* (Jigyasa Agencies: Calcutta, 1992).
- Ghosh, Benoy. *Paschim Banger Sanskriti* (Pustaka Prakash : Calcutta, 1957).
- Ghosh, Benoy. *Banglar Lokasanskritir Samaj-tattva* (Aruna Prakashani: Calcutta, 1386 BS).
- Ghosh, Benoy. *Traditional Arts and Crafts of West Bengal : A Sociological Survey* (Papyrus : Calcutta, 1981).
- Ghoṣ, Īṣāṅ Candra (tr. and ed.). *Jātaka* vol. 1-6 (Karuna Prakashani: Calcutta, 1381 BS; first published in 1323 BS).
- Ghosh, Prodyot. *Loka Samskriti: Gambhira* (Pustak Bipani : Calcutta, 1982).
- Gomez, Luis O. "Buddhism: Buddhism in India", *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 2, ed. Mircea Eliade (Macmillan : New York, 1987).
- Goswami, Hemchandra (ed.). *Asamiya Sahityar Chaneki*, vol. II, part 1 (University of Calcutta: Calcutta, 1924).
- Goswami, Karunamaya. *Sangeet Kosh* (Bangla Academy: Dhaka, 1985).
- Goswami, Karunamaya. *Bangla Ganer Bibartan*, Part 1 (Bangla Academy : Dhaka, 1993).
- Government of Bangladesh (Ministry of Finance). *Bangladesh Economic Survey 1992-93* (Dhaka: 1993).
- Guha-Thakurta, P. *The Bengali Drama : Its Origin and Development* (Kegan Paul, Trench. Trubner : London, 1930).

- Gunawardana, A.J. *Theatre In Sri Lanka* (Department of Cultural Affairs, Sri Lanka : Colombo, 1976).
- Gupta, Shashibhushan Das. *Obscure Religious Cults* (Firma KLM: Calcutta, 1976).
- Gupta, Vijay. *Padmā-purāṇ*, ed. Jayanta Kumār Dāsgupta (University of Calcutta : Calcutta, 1962).
- Hafiz, Abdul. *Loukik Sanskar O Munabsamaj* (Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy: Dhaka, 1994).
- Hai, Muhammad Abdul and Pasha, Anwar (ed.). *Caryā Gitikā* (Student Ways: Dhaka, 1989, 4th edition).
- Hai, Muhammad Abdul and Pasha, Anwar (ed.). *Baru Chandidasher Kabya* (Student Ways : Dhaka, 1374 BS).
- Hajime, Nakamura. "Buddhism, Schools of: Mahāyāna Buddhism", *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 2, ed. Mircea Eliade (Macmillan : New York, 1987).
- Haldar, Gopal. *Bāṅglā Sahityer Rūpa-rekhā : Vol 1 : Pracīn O Madhyayug* (Aruna Prakashani: Calcutta, 1400 BS).
- Haque, A.K.M. Shahidul. *Gunāi Bibi* (Tajmahal Book Depot : Dhaka).
- Haque, Khondaker Reajul. *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 66: Gazir Gan* (Bangla Academy : Dhaka, 1995).
- Hasan, Parween, "Art and Architecture", *History of Bangladesh 1704-1971*, vol. 3, ed. Sirajul Islam (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh : Dhaka, 1992).
- Hasan, Syed Mahmudul. "Rural Arts and Crafts", *History of Bangladesh: 1704-1971*, vol. 3, ed. Sirajul Islam (Asiatic Society: Dhaka, 1992).
- Hazra, Kanai Lal. *Buddhism In India As Described By Chinese Pilgrims AD 399-689* (Munshiram Manoharlal : New Delhi, 1983).
- Hoque, Muhammad Enamul. "Muslim Bāṅglā-sāhitya", *Muhammad Enamul Hoque Rachanavali* vol. I, ed. Monsur Musa (Bangla Academy: Dhaka, 1991).
- Hosain, Master Makbul. *Bhasan Jatra* (Najir Hosain: Barisal, 1380 BS).
- Hosain, Master Makbul (ed.). *Śāh Jāhān O Tipu Sultān* (Najir Hosain : Barisal, 1387 BS).
- Hosain, Master Makbul (ed.). *Gahur Bādsā O Banechā Parī* (Sulabh Pustika : Barisal, 1384 BS, 3rd ed.).
- Huq, Mohammad Shamsul. *Kājal-Rekhā* (Salma Book Depot : Dhaka, 1989).

- Husain, Sayed Sajjad and the editors. "Bangladesh", *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (15th edition), volume 14 (Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc.: Chicago, 1974, reprint, 1994).
- Hussein, Shahanara. *Everyday Life in the Pala Empire* (Asiatic Society of Pakistan : Dacca, 1968).
- Hydar, Zia. *Natya Bishayak Nibandha* (Muktadhara : Dhaka, 1995; second edition).
- Islam, Azhar. *Madhyayuger Bangla Sahitye Muslim Kabi* (Bangla Academy : Dhaka, 1992).
- Islam, Samiul. *Uttar Banglar Lokosahitya* (Ayesha Islam: Belka, Rangpur, 1973).
- Islam, Samiul (ed.). *Lokosahitya Sankalan-44 Pala Jarigan* (Bangla Academy: Dhaka, 1985).
- Islam, Sirajul (ed.). Introduction, *History of Bangladesh: 1704-1971*, vol. 3 (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh : Dhaka, 1992).
- I-Tsing. *Record of the Buddhist Religion*, tr. J. Takakusu (Munshiram Manoharlal : New Delhi, 1982, 2nd edition).
- Jalil, Alamgir (ed.). *Loko-sahitya : 14* (Bangla Academy: Dhaka, 1976).
- Jalil, Muhammad Abdul. *Shah Gareebullah O Janganama* (Bangla Academy : Dhaka, 1991).
- Jin'an. Hu. "Tibetan Opera", *China's Minority Nationalities 1* (China Reconstructs : Beijing, 1984).
- Joshi, Lal Mani. *Studies In The Buddhistic Culture Of India During 7th and 8th c. AD* (Motilal Banarsidass: Delhi, 1977, 2nd edition).
- Karim, Abdul. *Banglar Itihash : Sultan Amal* (Bangla Academy: Dhaka, 1987, first published in 1977).
- Karim, Abdul. *Bara Bhuyan Pariciti*, a monograph published by Bangladesh Itihash Parishat : Dhaka, 1992.
- Kavindra, Rāmkrṣṇa. *Śivāyana*, ed. Dineschandra Bhattacharya and Asutosh Bhattacharya (Bangiya Sahitya Parishat : Calcutta, 1363 BS).
- Kavi-Kaṅkan (Mukundarām Cakravartī). *Caṇḍī-maṅgala*, ed. Sukumar Sen (Sahitya Akademi: New Delhi, 1993).
- Kavirāja, Kṛṣṇadāsa. *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, ed. Harekrishna Mukhopadhyay and Subodh Chandra Majumdar (Dev Sahitya Kutir : Calcutta, 1974).
- Khan, Daulat Wazir Bahram. *Lailee-Majnu*, ed. Ahmad Sharif (Bangla Academy: Dhaka, 1992).

- Khan, Mobarak Hossain. "Bangladesher Loka-saṅgīṭ", *Bangladesher Lokoitihya*, ed. Shamsuzzaman Khan (Bangla Academy : Dhaka, 1985).
- Khan, Muin-ud-Din Ahmad. "Religious Reform Movements of the Muslims", *History of Bangladesh: 1704-1971*, vol. 3, ed. Sirajul Islam (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh: Dhaka, 1992).
- Khan, Raisuddin K.M. *Bangladesher Itihās Parikramā* (Khan Brothers : Dhaka, 1986).
- Khan, Sabarid. *Sabarid Khan Granthavali*, ed. Ahmad Sharif (Bangla Academy : Dhaka, 1966).
- Khan, Shamsuzzaman. *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 64: Maimensingher Kavigan O Meyel Sangit* (Bangla Academy : Dhaka, 1994).
- Kṛtīvāsa. *Rāmāyana* (Dey's Publishing : Calcutta, 1991; first Dey's edition, 1986).
- Legge, James. *Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms; being an account by the Chinese monk Fa-Hien of his travels in India and Ceylon (AD 399-414) in search of the Buddhist Books of discipline* (Clarendon Press : Oxford, 1886).
- Levi, Sylvain. *The Theatre of India*, vol. 1, tr. Narayan Mukherjee (Writers Workshop Publication : Calcutta, 1978).
- Lewis, Pelly. *The Miracle Play of Hasan and Husain, collected from oral tradition* (Allen & Co.: London, 1879).
- Lutgendorf, Philip. *The Life of a Text: Performing of Ramacaritamanas of Tulsidas* (University of California Press : Berkeley, 1991).
- Macdonell, Arthur A. *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (William Heinemann: London, 1917, first edition in 1900).
- Majumdar, Ramesh Chandra. *Bangladesher Itihās*, vol. 2 (*Madhya Yug*) (General Printers and Publishers : Calcutta, 1385 BS, 3rd edition).
- Majumdar, R.C. and Ganguly, D.C. "Bengalis Outside Bengal", *The History of Bengal*, vol. I, ed. R.C. Majumdar (University of Dacca : Dacca, 1943).
- Majumdar, Sisir. *Uttarbaṅger Loknāṭya* (Mom : Calcutta, 1990).
- Mallik, Srikalyani. *Natha Sampradayer Itihasa, Darshan O Sadhan Pranali* (University of Calcutta : Calcutta, 1950).
- Mallik, Srisriharsa. *Prasanga Lokachitrakala* (Pustak Bipani : Calcutta, 1985).
- Mamud, Shukur. "Gopīcandrer Sannyās", *Gopīcandrer Gān*, ed. Asutosh Bhattacharyya (University of Calcutta : Calcutta, 1959)
- Mamun, Muntasir. *Bangladesher Utsava* (Bangla Academy : Dhaka, 1994).

- Mandal, Panchanan (ed.). *Gorkha-vijay* (Visva-bharati : Calcutta, 1356 BS).
- Mannan, Qazi Abdul. *The Emergence and Development of Dobhasi Literature in Bengal up to 1855* (Bangla Academy : Dacca, 1974; first published in 1966).
- Marshall, P.J. *East India Fortunes : The British in Bengal in the 18th Century* (Oxford : London, 1976).
- Mathur, J.C. *Drama in Rural India* (Asia Publishing House: Bombay, 1964).
- Mayūrbhatta. *Dharma-purāṇa*, ed. Basanta Kumar Chattopadhyaya (Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, 1930).
- McCutchion, David J. *Late Mediaeval Temples of Bengal: Origin and Classification* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1972).
- Miller, Barbara Stoler (tr. & ed.). *Gitagovinda of Jayadeva : Love Song of the Dark Lord* (Motilal Banarsidass: Delhi, 1984; originally published in 1977).
- Mishra, Hari Ram. *Theory of Rasa in Sanskrit Drama* (Vindhyachal Prakashan : Bhopal, 1964).
- Miśra, Halāyūdhā. *Sekasubhodaya*, ed. Sukumar Sen (The Asiatic Society : Calcutta, 1963).
- Mitra, K. *Kīrtan* (Visva-bharati : Calcutta, 1352 BS).
- Mitra, Priti Kumar. "Religious Reform Movements of the Hindus", *History of Bangladesh: 1704-1971*, vol. 3 (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh: Dhaka, 1992).
- Mitra, Rajendralal. *The Sanskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal* (Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar: Calcutta, 1971).
- Mukhopadhyay, Harekrishna. *Gaudabanga Samaskriti* (Jigyasa : Calcutta, 1972).
- Mukhopadhyay, Harekrishna. *Vaishnava Padavali* (Sahitya Samsad : Calcutta, 1980).
- Mukhopadhyay, Harekrishna. *Bangalar Kirtan O Kirtania* (West Bengal State Book Board: Calcutta, 1990).
- Mukhopadhyay, Saccidananda. *Bhāratīya Nāṭyaveda O Bānglā Nāṭaka* (Sahitya Niketan : Calcutta, 1974).
- Mukhopādhyāya, Nirmal. *Sonādāngār Bau* (Natun Baighar : Dhaka).
- Mukhopādhyāya, Nirmal. *Sindur Niyonā Muche* (Mudran Sangstha : Comilla).
- Mukhopadhyaya, Subhash. *Bāngālīr Itihās*, edited version of Niharranjan Roy's *Bāngālīr Itihās* (New Age : Calcutta, 1983; first New Age edition, 1960).



- Najimuddin, Master. *Gāzī Kālu Campāvati O Kāñcanmālā* (Sulabh Pustika : Barisal 1379 BS, 2nd edition).
- Nandikeśvara. *Abhinaya Darpaṇa*. tr. Salim al-Deen (Katha Prakashana : Dhaka: 1989).
- Nath, Kanailal, *Beimān Bidhātā* (Ratan Book House : Dhaka, 1986).
- Nathan, Mirza. *Baharistan-i-Gayabi*, vol. 1, tr. Khalequeddad Chowdhury (Bangla Academy: Dhaka : 1978).
- Padoux, Andre. "Hindu Tantrism", *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 14, ed. Mircea Eliade (Macmillan : New York, 1987).
- Paṇḍit, Rāmāi. *Dharmapūjā-vidhān*, ed. Nanīgopāl Bandopādhyāya (Bangiya Sahitya Parishat : Calcutta, 1916).
- Paṇḍit, Rāmāi. *Śūnya Purāṇ*, ed. Charuchandra Bandopadhyaya (Vasumati Sahitya Mandir: Calcutta, 1336 BS).
- Qadir, M.A.A. *Paharpur* (Department of Archaeology, Bangladesh : Dhaka, 1980).
- Qanungo, K.R. "Bengal under the House of Balban", *The History of Bengal*, vol. II, ed. Jadu-Nath Sarkar (University of Dacca : Dacca, 1948).
- Quadir, Abdul. *Banglar Lokayata Sahitya* (Bangla Academy: Dhaka, 1985).
- Rahim, Muhammad Abdur. *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*, vol. I (Pakistan Historical Society: Karachi, 1963).
- Rahim, Muhammad Abdur. *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*, vol. II (Pakistan Publishing House, Karachi, 1967).
- Rahman, Fazlur. *Islam* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson : London, 1966).
- Rahman, Fazlur. "Islam : An Overview", *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 7, ed. Mircea Eliade (Macmillan: New York, 1987).
- Rahman, Lutfur. *Bangladeshi Jari Gan* (Anwara Rahman : Dhaka, 1986).
- Rangacharya, Adya. *The Indian Theatre* (National Book Trust : New Delhi, 1971).
- Rangacharya, Adya. *Bhāratīya Theatre*, translation of *The Indian Theatre* by Arun Mitra (National Book Trust : New Delhi, 1975).
- Rao, Subba. "A Critical Survey of the Ancient Indian Theatre in Accordance with the Second Chapter of the Bharata Natyasastra", *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharatmuni, ed. M. Ramakrishna Kavi (Oriental Institute : Baroda, 1956).
- Reynolds, Frank E. and Hallisey, Charles. "Buddhism : An Overview", *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 2, ed. Mircea Elide (Macmillan : New York, 1987).

- Roy, Asim. *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (Academic Publishers : Dhaka; originally published in 1983).
- Roy, Atul Chandra. *History of Bengal: Mughal Period* (Nababharat Publishers : Calcutta 1968).
- Roy, Niharranjan. *Bāṅgālīr Itihās: Ādiparba* (Dey's Publishing: Calcutta, 1400 BS; first published in 1356 BS).
- Rūparāma. *Dharma-mahāgala*, ed. Sukumar Sen and Panchanan Mandal (Sahitya Sabha: Burdwan, 1351 BS).
- Sāgaranandin. *Nāṭakalakṣaṇaratnakoṣa*, tr. Siddheswar Chattopadhyaya (Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar : Calcutta, 1385 BS).
- Sagir, Shah Muhammad. *Yousuf-Zolekha*, ed. Muhammad Enamul Hoque (University of Dhaka : Dhaka, 1984).
- Saklayen, Golam. *Banglāy Marthiya Sahitya* (Pakistan Book Corporation: Dacca, 1969; second edition).
- Sanyal, Arun. *Bangali Sanskriti O Lebedeff* (Pratibha Prakashan : Calcutta, 1379 BS).
- Sanyal, Hiteshranjan. *Bāṅglā Kīrtaner Itihās* (Centre for Studies in Social Sciences: Calcutta, 1989).
- Saodagar, Mohammad Fazlul Huq (collected and edited by). *Rahim Bādsā O Rūpbān Kamvā* (Hadis Manzil Library : Dhaka, 1992, 13th ed.).
- Sarkar, Benoy Kumar. *The Folk Element in Hindu Culture* (Oriental Books : New Delhi, 1972; originally published in 1917).
- Sarkar, Jadu-Nath. "Muslim Conquest of Bengal", *The History of Bengal : Volume II : Muslim Period*, edited by Jadu-Nath Sarkar (University of Dhaka: Dhaka, 1948).
- Sarkar, Jatin. *Bangladesher Kavigan* (Bangla Academy : Dhaka, 1985).
- Sarkar, Rasamay. *Rāvaṇa Vadh* (Najir Hosain : Barisal, 1387 BS, 2nd edition).
- Sarkar, Swarochish. "Bangladesher Kavi-gān : Uttarādhikār O Svatantra", *Bangla Academy Baishakhi Lok-utsab Prabandha 1400* (Bangla Academy: Dhaka, 1993).
- Saydur, Muhammad (ed.). *Lokosahitya Sankalan 41: Lokanatyā* (Bangla Academy : Dhaka, 1985).
- Saydur, Muhammad (ed.). *Lokosahitya Sankalon 45 : Anushthanik Geet* (Bangla Academy: Dhaka, 1985).
- Saydur, Muhammad (survey report). *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 49: Muharram Amusthan* (Bangla Academy: Dhaka, 1988).

- Saydur, Muhammad (compiled by). *Bangla Academy Folklore Shankalon 51 : Bera Bhasan Utsab* (Bangla Academy: Dhaka, 1991).
- Saydur, Muhammad (ed.). *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 61 : Lokonatyā 2* (Bangla Academy : Dhaka, 1993).
- Saydur, Muhammad. "Lokasangeet Samikshan", *Bangladesher Lokasangeet Samiksha: Kendua Anchal*, ed. Shamsuzzaman Khan (Bangla Academy: Dhaka, 1993).
- Saydur, Muhammad and Ali, Mohammad Ishaque (ed.). *Bangla Academy Folklore Sankalan 63: Lokonatyā* (Bangla Academy: Dhaka, 1994).
- Schechner, Richard. *Performance Theory* (Routledge : New York, 1988).
- Sen, Dineshchandra. *Bāṅgabhāṣā O Sāhitya*, vol. 1&2, ed. Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay. (West Bengal State Book Board: Calcutta, 1986 : originally published in 1896).
- Sen, Dineshchandra. *The Folk-Literature of Bengal* (University of Calcutta : Calcutta, 1920).
- Sen, Dineshchandra (compiled by). *Maimansimha-gītikā (Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā*, vol. 1 no. 2), (University of Calcutta : Calcutta 1973: originally published in 1923).
- Sen, Dineshchandra. *Eastern Bengal Ballads*, vol. II, part 1 (University of Calcutta : Calcutta, 1926).
- Sen Dineshchandra. *Bṛhat Bāṅga*, vol. I & II (Dey's Publishing : Calcutta, 1993; first published in 1935).
- Sen, Dineshchandra and Ray, Basantaranjan. *Gopīcandrer Gān* (University of Calcutta : Calcutta, 1922).
- Sen, Sukumar. *Bāṅgālā Sāhityer Itihāsa*, vol. I (Ananda : Calcutta, 1991; first published in 1940).
- Sen, Sukumar. *Bāṅgālā Sāhityer Itihāsa*, vol. II (Ananda : Calcutta, 1398 BS; first published in 1940).
- Sen, Sukumar. *Prācīn Bāṅglā O Bāṅgālī* (Visva-bharati : Calcutta 1353 BS; first published in 1350 BS).
- Sen, Sukumar. "Nāth-panther Sāhityik Aitijhya", *Gorkha-vijay*, ed. Panchanan Mandal (Visva-bharati : Calcutta, 1356 BS).
- Sen, Sukumar. *Islāmi Bāṅglā Sāhitya* (Ananda: Calcutta, 1400 BS; first published in 1358 BS).
- Sen, Sukumar. *Naṭ Nāṭya Nāṭak* (Mitra and Ghosh : Calcutta, 1372 BS).
- Sengupta, Gita. *Viswarangalaya O Natak* (Jiggyasa : Calcutta, 1975).

- Sengupta, Promodbandhu. *Bharatiya Darshan.*, Part 1 (Bannerjee Publishers : Calcutta, 1986).
- Shahidullah, Muhammad. *Bānglā Sāhityer Kathā*, vol. 1 (Renaissance Printers : Dhaka, 1968; first published in 1953).
- Shahidullah, Muhammad. *Bānglā Sāhityer Kathā*, vol. II (Renaissance Printers : Dhaka, 1965).
- Sharif, Ahmad (ed.). *Sawal Sahitya* (Bangla Academy : Dhaka, 1976).
- Sharif, Ahmad. *Madhyajuger Sahitye Samaj-o-sanskritir Rup* (Muktadhara : Dhaka, 1977).
- Sharif, Ahmad. "Bānglār Samāje Sāhitye O Saṁskṛite Muslim Abadān", *Madhyayuge Bānglār Samāj O Saṁskṛti*, ed. Aniruddha Ray and Ratnavali Chattopadhyaya (K.P. Bagchi : Calcutta, 1992).
- Sharma, H.V. *The Theatre of the Buddhists* (Rajalakshmi Publishers : Delhi, 1987).
- Shastri, Surendra Nath. *The Laws and Practice of Sanskrit Drama*, vol. 1 (Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office: Varanasi, 1961).
- Shaw, Rameswar. *Sanskrita O Prakrita Sahitya, Samaj Chetana O Mullayan* (Sahityasree: Calcutta, 1390 BS).
- Shiraj, Syed Mustafa. *Muslim Chitrakalar Adiparba and Others* (Mitra and Ghosh: Calcutta, 1400 BS).
- Singh, Madanjeet. *Himalayan Art* (New York Graphic Society Ltd.: Greenwich, Conn., 1968).
- Sin̄ha, Rasamohan (ed.). *Mekhālī* (Maṇipurī Lalitakalā Academy: Madhabpur, 1992).
- Sirkar, Dines Chandra. *Pal-Sen Yuger Vamsamucharit* (Sahityalok: Calcutta, 1982).
- Snellgrove, D.L. *The Hevajra Tantra: A Critical Study* (Oxford University Press: London, 1959).
- Stewart, Tony K. "Satya Pir : Muslim Holy Man and Hindu God", *Religions of India in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez (Princeton University Press : Princeton, 1994).
- Sultan, Syed. *Nabibangsa* (vol. 1&2), ed. Ahmad Sharif (Bangla Academy: Dhaka, 1978).
- Sunithananda, Bhikkhu. *Bangladesher Bouddha Vihar O Bhikkhu Jiban* (Bangla Academy: Dhaka, 1995).
- Talib, Mohammad Abu. "Lokanṛtya : Gambhīrā O Ālkāp", *Bangladesher Lokoshilpa*, ed. Syed Mahmudul Hasan (Bangladesh Folk Art and Crafts Foundation : Sonargaon, 1983).

- Talukdar, Khogeskiron. *Bangladesher Lokayato Shilpokala* (Bangla Academy: Dhaka, 1987).
- Tāranātha. *History of Buddhism in India*, tr. from Tibetan by Lama Chimpa and Alaka Chattopadhyaya, ed. Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya (K.P. Bagchi : Calcutta, 1980).
- Tarlekar, G.H. *Studies in the Nāṭyaśāstra* (Motilal Banarsidass: Delhi, 1975).
- Thiong'O, Ngugi Wa. *Homecoming* (Heinemann: London, 1972).
- Tsiang, Hsien. *Si-Yu-Ki : Buddhist Record of the Western World : Chinese Account of India*, tr. from the Chinese by Samuel Beal (Bharatia Publishing House : Delhi, 1980).
- Tucci, Giuseppe. "Buddhism: Tantrism and related forms : Tibetan Buddhism" : *Encyclopaedia Britannica* vol. 3 (Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc. : Chicago, 1974, 15th edition, 1981 re-print).
- Uddin, Jasim. *Jarigaan* (Kendriya Bangla Unnayan Board: Dhaka, 1968).
- Vansina, Jan. *Oral Tradition as History* (James Currey : London, 1985).
- Varadpande, M.L. *Traditions of Indian Theatre* (Abhinav Publications : New Delhi, 1979).
- Vatsayan, Kapila. *The Square and the Circle of the Indian Art* (Roli Books International : New Delhi, 1978).
- Vatsayan, Kapila. *Traditional Indian Theatre : Multiple Streams* (National Book Trust : New Delhi, 1980).
- Waddell, L. Austine. *Buddhism and Lamaism in Tibet* (Heritage Publishers : New Delhi, 1979).
- Watters, Thomas. *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India AD 629-645*, ed. by T.W. Rhys Davids & S.W. Bushell (Munshiram Manoharlal : New Delhi, 1973; 2nd edition).
- Wayman, Alex. "Esoteric Buddhism", *The Encyclopedia of Religion* vol. 2, ed. Mircea Eliade (Macmillan : New York, 1987).
- Welbon, G.R. "Vaiṣṇavism", *The Encyclopedia of Religion* vol. 15, ed. Mircea Eliade (Macmillan: New York, 1987).
- Wells, Henry W. *The Classical Drama of India* (Asia Publishing House: Bombay, 1963).
- Winternitz, M. *A History of Indian Literature*, vol. III, part 1, tr. from the German by Subhadra Jha (Motilal Banarsidass : Delhi, 1977; first edition, Delhi, 1963).

- Winternitz, M. "Buddhist Drama", *Literary History of Sanskrit Buddhism*, J.K. Nariman (Motilal Banarsidass : Delhi, 1972, 2nd edition).
- Wylie, v. Turrell. "Arts of Central Asian Peoples : Performing Arts: Dance and Theatre", *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 3 (Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc. : Chicago, 1974, 15th edition, 1981 reprint).
- Yajnik, R.K. *The Indian Theatre : Its Origin and Its Later Developments Under European Influence* (Haskell House : New York, 1970).
- Zakaria, Abul Kalam Muhammad. *Bangladesher Pratna Sampad* (Shilpakala Academy : Dhaka, 1984).
- Zakaria, Abul Kalam Muhammad (ed.). *Gazi Kaloo-o-Champabati Upakkhan* (Bangla Academy: Dhaka, 1989).
- Zbavitel, Dusan. *Bengali Folk-ballads from Mymensingh and the Problem of their Authenticity* (University of Calcutta : Calcutta, 1963).
- Zurcher, Eric. "Buddhism, Schools of : An Overview", *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 2, ed. Mircea Eliade (Macmillan : New York, 1987).

**Unpublished Texts and Dissertations :**

- Ahmad, A.B.M. Samsuddin. "Bengal Under the Rule of Early Ilyas Shahi Dynasty", a PhD dissertation, University of Dhaka, 1987.
- Anonymous. *Mahārāvaṇa Vadh*, a *Rāma Yātrā* text from Bagherhat.
- Anonymous. *Nāchimaner Banabās*, a *Jhumur Yātrā* text from Madan Hat, Natore.
- Barman, Sunil Candra. *Kāmār-Kāmārnī*, a *Raṅg Pācālī* text from Thakurgaon.
- Cakravartī, Tārāprasād. *Mān-bhañjan* and *Rāi Unmādinī*, two *Līlā Kīrtan* texts from Banshgram, Narail.
- Farahnakianpoor, M.H. "A Survey of Dramatic Activity of Iran from 1850 to 1950", a PhD dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1977).
- Gupta, Vijay. *Padmā-purāṇ*, a performance text used by the Ravānī Gān troupe from Bishkhalī, Bagherhat.
- Jahan, Shahnaj Husne. "Gāzīr Paṭ : Upasthāpanā Rīti, Citraṅkan Saīlī O Utsa", a paper presented at the national seminar of Bangladesh Itihas Parishat held in Kushtia from 5 July to 7 July, 1996.
- Rāy, Jītendranāth. *Śāntibālā-Jhānu Faterā*, a *Raṅg Pācālī* text from Thakurgaon.
- Sūtradhar, Kṛṣṇavīhārī. *Nīmāi Sannyās*, a *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā* text performed by Govinda Opera Party, Tangail.

**Journals and Brochures :**

- Ahmad, Afsar. "Mārmā Jyā Ālaṁ-nabāha", *Theatre Studies*, vol. 2, June, 1994.
- Ahmad, Tofail. "Paṭ O Patuā Sudhir Ācārya", *Karushilpi Purashkar 1989* (Bangladesh Jatiya Karushilpa Parishad: Dhaka, 1989).
- Ahmed, Syed Jamil. "Buddhist Theatre in Ancient Bengal", *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh*, vol. 40, no. 1, (June, 1995).
- Ahsan, Sajjad. "Nṛ-gosṭhī Māndāi : Luptaprāy Saṁskṛtir Sandhāne", *Theatre Studies*, vol. 2, June, 1994.
- Basu, Nagendranāth. "Yātrā : Utsa O Kramavikās", *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana*, vol. 5, no. 4, (1994), abridged version of Basu's article in *Viśva-kos*, vol. xv.
- Bhattacharya, A.K. "An Early Pala Manuscript Cover With Vessantara Jātaka Scene", *Rūpa-Lekhā*, vol. 34, 1965.
- Bhattacharyya, Asutosh. "Yātrā", *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana*, vol. 5, no. 4, (1994).
- Cakravartī, Sañjīvacandra. "Yātrā", *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana*, vol. 5, no. 4 (1994).
- De, Brajendra Kumar, "Yātrā Pālā", *Jāṭīya Yātrā Utsav* (Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy : Dhaka, 1979).
- al-Deen, Salim. "Śrī Caitanya Bhāgabate Nāṭya-prasaṅga", *Theatre Studies*, vol. 1, 1992.
- al-Deen, Salim. Editorial, *Theatre Studies*, vol. 2, June, 1994.
- Ghosh, Ajit Kumar. "Yātrā : Sekāl O Ekāl", *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana*, vol. 5, no. 4 (1994).
- Giri, Satyavati. "Bhāratīya Lokanāṭyādhārār Baicitre Jhumur O Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kīrtan", *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana*, vol. 5, no. 4, (1994).
- Grierson, G.A. "The Song of Manikchandra" *The Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, part 1, no. III, vol. 47, 1878.
- Gupta, Kshetra. "Gaṇa-saṁyoga Evaṁ Loksaṁskṛti", *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana*, vol. 2, no. 4, (Śrāvaṇa-Āśvīn, 1398 BS).
- Gupta, Kshetra. "Matir Buke, Śikade-Gabhire", *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana* vol. 2, no. 4 (Śrāvaṇa-Āśvīn, 1398 BS).
- Harun, Rashid. "Santhal Nṛ-gosṭhī Nāṭya", *Theatre Studies*, vol. 2, June, 1994.
- Hossain, Muhamamad Mosharraf. "Bangladesher Nāṭhayogī Darśana O Pratnatattva", *Bangladesh Asiatic Society Patrikā*, vol. XI, no. 1&2, June & December, 1993.

- Hydar, Zia. "Yātrār Upasthāpanā Paddhati", *Jātiya Yātrā Utsav* (Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy: Dhaka, 1979).
- Ibrahim, Muhammad. "Prasaṅga: Kālāpāhāḍ", *Itihasa*, vol. 12, no. 1, (Baisakh-Sravana, 1395 BS).
- Kasimpuri, Mohammad Sirajuddin. "Loka-sāhitye 'Gāḍu' Gān", *Bangla Academy Patrika*, vol. V, no. 2 (1368 BS).
- Śāstrī, Hara Prasāda. "Buddhism in Bengal since the Muhammadan Conquest", *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. 64, part 1, 1895.
- Śāstrī, Hara Prasāda. "Śrī-dharma-maṅgala : A distant echo of Latitavistara", *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. 64, part 1, 1895.
- Sobhan, Ahmad (ed.). "Māi Campā", *Masjid* vol. 1, nos. 1-2, reprinted in *Īkṣaṇ* vol. 5 (Spring, 1398 BS).
- Tarafdar, Mamtazur Rahman. "Paribrājaker Kaḍcā" *Uttarādhikār*, vol. 21, no. 3 (July-Sept., 1993).
- Vidyābhūṣaṇ. Amūlyacaraṇ. "Yātrā", *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1994.



Table : 1

Type Content	Narrative	Supra- narrative	Dialogic	Song-and- dance	Processional	Supra-personae	Performance-as- contest	Recitative
Tales related to Manasā	Rayānī Gān Manasār Pācālī Padmā-purāṇ Gān (Natore) Bīṣaharīr Gān	Padmā-purāṇ Gān (Rangpur) Bhāsān Gān	Bhāsān Yātrā	Beilyā Nācārī			Bhāsān Pālā Gān Jhāpān Khelā	
Tales related to Kṛṣṇa and Caitanya	Līlā Kīrtan		Kṛṣṇa Yātrā Sāj Kīrtan	Pālā Kīrtan Maṇipurī Rās Nr̥tya	Janmāṣṭamī Michil Naukā-vilās Michil			
Tales related to Rāmacandra	Rāmāyaṇa Gān	Kusān Gān Lakṣmīr Gān	Rāma Yātrā			Maheśā Khelā		
Performances related to Śiva and Kālī	Gamīrā Nāc		Aṣṭak Yātrā Saṅg Yātrā Perf. of the Māndāi	Śiva-Gaurī Nāc Aṣṭak Gān	Nīler Gājan	Mukho Nācā Kālī Kāc	Aṣṭak Gān (Cāpān Gān)	
Performances related to Buddhism and Nātha Cult	Buddha Kīrtan (Pālā Gān)		Jyā	Yogīr Gān Yugī Parva		Bulu		

Type Content	Narrative	Supra-narrative	Dialogic	Song-and- dance	Processional	Supra- personae	Performance-as- contest	Recitative
Tales related to Muslim saints and legendary heroes	Jārī Gān (Eastern Mymensingh) Nāicer Jārī Bānglā Jārī Jārī Gān (Northern Bangladesh) Gāzīr Gān Mā Māi Campār Kicchā-kāhinī Jārī	Jaṅg Jārī Mādār Pīrer Gān Satya Pīrer Gān Mānik Pīrer Jārī	Imām Yātrā Gāzīr Yātrā Satya Pīrer Yātrā Mānik Yātrā		Muhārrāmer Michil Mādār Bāser Gān (Mādāriā Michil) Beḍā Bhasān	Paṭuā Gān (Gāzīr Pāṭ)	Jārī Gān (South-western Bangladesh) Pāillyā Yātrā Kaḍcā Sawāl Jawāb	Ṣūthi Pāṭh Jārī Gazāl
Secular tales	Pālā Gān (Eastern Mymensingh) Kecchā Kāhinī Kecchā-bandī Gān Ḍhak Yātrā Ḍhaṅg Yātrā Tāḍi Gān Śāstra (Hāstar Gān)	Pālā Gān (Bogra)	Yātrā Jhumur Yātrā Māiṭṭyā Tāmsā Raṅg Pācālī Śāstriyā Pācālī Gambhūrā Gān Ālkāp Gān Gambhūrā Yātrā	Ghāṭu Gān			Ghāṭu Gān (Laḍāk) Ālkāp Gān	Kecchā Gān (Eastern Mymensingh)
Tales related to other deities and hybrid performances	Performance of the Santhals (Jāher)					Putul Nāc Putul Yātrā Paṭuā Gān	Kavi Gān Lāṭhi-khelā	Ṣācālī

Table-2

Name of Genres	Performance Space						Position of pāi-dohār					Objective/ Religion				Text			Elements of Performance						Gender			Other									
	Square	Circle in square	Circle	Rectangle	Nāṭ-māṇḍapa	Sāj ghar	Procession	Centre in a circle	On the perimeter	Along one side	Along two sides	Along three sides	Stand & move	Devotional	Secular	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Oral	Written	Partly improvised	Narrative/Lyric	Narrative/Verse	Narrative/Prose	Dialogic/Lyric	Dialogic/Verse	Dialogic/Prose	Mimetic	Recitative	All male	All female	Both	Mask	Make-up	Donation	Song & dance number	
<b>Tales Related to Manasā</b>																																					
1 Padmā-purāṇ Gān (Rangpur)	✓					✓	✓						✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
2 Rayānī Gān	✓				✓					✓			✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
3 Manasār Pācālī	✓								✓				✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
4 Padmā-purāṇ Gān (Natore)	✓											✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
5 Bhāsān Gān			✓			✓		✓					✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
6 Bhāsān Pālā Gān	✓												✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
7 Bīṣaharī Gān	✓											✓	✓		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
8 Beihyā Nācārī	✓						✓						✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
9 Bhāsān Yātrā	✓				✓	✓			✓				✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
10 Jhāpān Khelā	✓									✓			✓						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
<b>Tales Related to Kṛṣṇa &amp; Caitanya</b>																																					
1 Līlā Kīrtan	✓				✓			✓					✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
2 Pālā Kīrtan	✓				✓			✓					✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
3 Kṛṣṇa Yātrā	✓				✓	✓			✓				✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
4 Sāj Kīrtan	✓				✓					✓			✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
5 Maṇḍapā Rās Nṛtya		✓			✓	✓		✓					✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
6 Janmāṣṭamī Michil													✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
7 Naukā-vilās Michil													✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
<b>Tales Related to Rāmacandra</b>																																					
1 Rāmāyana Gān	✓				✓			✓					✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
2 Kuśān Gān	✓						✓	✓					✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
3 Lakṣmīr Gān	✓											✓	✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
4 Rāma Yātrā	✓								✓	✓			✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
5 Maheśā Khelā	✓								✓	✓			✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											

Name of Genres	Performance Space						Position of pāi-dohār					Objective/ Religion				Text			Elements of Performance						Gender			Other								
	Square	Circle in square	Circle	Rectangle	Nāṭ-maṅḍapa	Sāj ghar	Procession	Centre in a circle	On the perimeter	Along one side	Along two sides	Along three sides	Stand & move	Devotional	Secular	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Oral	Written	Partly improvised	Narrative/Lyric	Narrative/Verse	Narrative/Prose	Dialogic/Lyric	Dialogic/Verse	Dialogic/Prose	Mimetic	Recitative	All male	All female	Both	Mask	Make-up	Donation	Song & dance number
<b>'Performances Related to Siva &amp; Kali</b>																																				
1			✓			✓		✓					✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓
2			✓			✓		✓					✓			✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓
3				✓		✓			✓				✓			✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓
4			✓			✓		✓					✓			✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓
5				✓		✓			✓				✓			✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓
6	✓					✓				✓			✓			✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓
7			✓			✓							✓			✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓
8				✓		✓			✓				✓			✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓
9				✓		✓			✓				✓			✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓
<b>Buddhism and Nātha cult</b>																																				
1	✓					✓							✓		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓										✓
2		✓				✓							✓		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓
3	✓					✓							✓		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓
4	✓					✓				✓			✓		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓
5						✓							✓		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓
<b>Tales Related to Muslim Saints and Legendary Heroes</b>																																				
1			✓									✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓
2			✓					✓					✓		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓
3			✓					✓					✓		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓
4			✓					✓					✓		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓
5	✓					✓				✓			✓		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓
6			✓			✓						✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓
7		✓				✓							✓		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓
8	✓					✓			✓				✓		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓
9	✓			✓		✓			✓	✓			✓		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓
10	✓					✓			✓				✓		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓
11	✓	✓				✓			✓				✓		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓

Name of Genres	Performance Space						Position of pāil-dohār					Objective/ Religion					Text			Elements of Performance						Gender			Other								
	Square	Circle in square	Circle	Rectangle	Nāt-maṇḍapa	Sāj ghar	Procession	Centre in a circle	On the perimeter	Along one side	Along two sides	Along three sides	Stand & move	Devotional	Secular	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Oral	Written	Partly improvised	Narrative/Lyric	Narrative/Verse	Narrative/Prose	Dialogic/Lyric	Dialogic/Verse	Dialogic/Prose	Mimetic	Recitative	All male	All female	Both	Mask	Make-up	Donation	Song & dance number	
12 Mādār Bāsher Gān (Mādāna Michil)						✓								✓		✓	✓		✓			✓							✓						✓		
13 Satya Pīrer Gān		✓					✓							✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓								✓					✓		
14 Satya Pīrer Yātrā		✓					✓							✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓														✓	
15 Mānik Pīrer Jārī	✓											✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓														✓	
16 Mānik Yātrā														✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓															
17 Beḍā Bhāsān														✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓															
18 Mā Māi Campār Kicchā-kāhinī Jārī	✓									✓				✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓															✓
19 Pāillyā Yātrā (Pātlā Gān)	✓								✓					✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓															
20 Kaḍcā	✓													✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓															
21 Pūthi Pāth					✓					✓				✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓															
22 Sawāl Jawāb	✓													✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓															
Secular Tales																																					
1 Yātrā	✓					✓								✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓															✓	
2 Jhumur Yātrā	✓					✓								✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓																
3 Pālā Gān (E. Mymensingh)					✓									✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓																
4 Kecchā Gān (E. Mymensingh)				✓										✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓																
5 Mānyā Tāmsā				✓		✓								✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓																
6 Pālā Gān (Bogra)		✓												✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓																
7 Kecchā Kāhinī	✓													✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓																
8 Śāstra (Hāstar Gān)		✓												✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓																
9 Kecchā-bandī Gān	✓													✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓																
10 Dhak Yātrā	✓													✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓																
11 Dhaṅg Yātrā				✓		✓								✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓																
12 Ghāṭu Gān		✓	✓											✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓																
13 Raṅg Pācālī	✓													✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓																
14 Śāstriya Pācālī	✓													✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓																
15 Gambhīra Gān					✓									✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓																
16 Gambhīra Yātrā	✓													✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓																
17 Ālkāp Gān	✓													✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓																

Name of Genres	Performance Space						Position of pāi-dohār						Objective/ Religion				Text			Elements of Performance						Gender			Other								
	Square	Circle in square	Circle	Rectangle	Nāi-māṅḍapa	Sāj ghar	Procession	Centre in a circle	On the perimeter	Along one side *	Along two sides	Along three sides	Stand & move	Devotional	Secular	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Oral	Written	Partly improvised	Narrative/Lyric	Narrative/Verse	Narrative/Prose	Dialogic/Lyric	Dialogic/ Verse	Dialogic/ Prose	Mimetic	Recitative	All male	All female	Both	Mask	Make-up	Donation	Song & dance number	
18 Tāḍi Gān	✓									✓					✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓					✓								
Other Deities & Hybrid																																					
1 Pācāñi			✓					✓						✓		✓			✓									✓	✓								
2 Performance of the Santhals (Jāher)	✓											✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓								✓					
3 Kavi Gān	✓									✓					✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓									✓	✓				
4 Putul Nāc															✓	✓	✓		✓		✓			✓		✓											✓
5 Lāṭhi-khelā				✓				✓	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓				✓		✓							✓	✓		✓
6 Patuā Gān				✓				✓	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓				✓								✓	✓		✓

## Glossary

### A. Musical Instruments:

*Bāsī*: A wind instrument, *bāsī* (flute or recorder) is usually made of a slender piece of bamboo. Of the varieties which exist, the most common ones are *saral bāsī* (plain flute) held straight and played like a whistle and *āḍ bāsī* held aslant.

*Bāyā-Tablā*: See *tablā*.

*Bīn-bāsī*: A kind of flute with two reeds, usually played by the snake-charmers.

*Cākī*: See *kartāl*.

*Caṭi* (also *Khaṭak-tārā*, *Prem-juḍi* or *Khañjarī*): A pair of rectangular percussion instrument with wooden body which produces jingling effect. This instrument is held by the thumb and the middle finger and played by striking one with the other.

*Cau-tārā*: An instrument with four strings, shaped like a *do-tārā*.

*Bāṅglā Ḍhol*: Larger in shape than the *ḍhol*, *bāṅglā ḍhol* is played in a manner similar to the *ḍhol*.

*Ḍamaru* (or *Ḍug-ḍugi*): A double-ended drum, small in size, the *ḍamaru* tapers in the middle. A string with a lead-ball tied in the centre strikes the ends when the instrument is swung by wrist movement.

*Ḍhāk*: An ancient percussion instrument, the *ḍhāk* is a large double-ended drum with wooden body. Both the ends are wide but one is covered with thicker hide than the other. It is usually hung at the back, over the shoulder and played with two sticks.

*Ḍhol*: Also a double-ended drum, the *ḍhol* is smaller in size than the *ḍhāk*. It is hung from the neck and is played with the palm of the left hand and a small stick held with the right hand.

*Ḍholak*: Similar to *ḍhol* but smaller in size. It is played with two hands.

*Do-tārā*: Although the name signifies a two-stringed instrument, a *do-tārā* is usually an instrument with four or five strings attached to a wooden body, about two and a half feet long and six inches wide. It is also known as *svarāj*.

*Ḍug-ḍugi*: See *ḍamaru*.

*Ḍugi-Tablā*: See *tablā*.

*Ek-tārā*: An instrument with one string made of iron or brass, with a body of calabash and bamboo-slips. It is also known as *gopī-yantra*.

*Jhāp-tāl* (or *Jhājh*) : Plate-shaped instrument made of brass which can be of medium and large size. A medium sized *jhāp-tāl* is made as a pair and is played by striking one with the other; the larger version is a single plate and it played by suspending the instrument and striking it with a stick.

*Juḍi*: See *mandirā*.

*Kāsa* (or *Kāsar* or *Kāsi*) : A dish of bell-metal, played with a stick by suspending it with one hand.

*Kartāl* (or *Cākī*) : Plate-shaped metallic instrument which is made in a pair and is played by striking one with the other.

*Khamak* : A string and a percussion instrument rolled into one, the *khamak* is shaped as a small drum with a loose string attached to it. Held under the arm-pit, the string is stretched with one hand and played with a striker by the other.

*Khañjani*: A circular shaped percussion instrument like the tambourine, the *khanjani* is covered with hide at one end but the other is open,. It is held by the left hand and played by striking it with the fingers of right hand. Sometimes circular metal plates are also attached to its wooden body to provide jingling effect.

*Khañjari*: See *caṭi*.

*Khol*: Same as *mṛdaṅga* except that the body is made of baked clay.

*Khatak-tārū* : See *caṭi*.

*Kupā-bāsi* : A type of flute held straight, one end of which (that held near the lips) is shaped like a flat disc.

*Mādal*: A double ended drum, both ends of which are equal in diameter, commonly used by the Santhals.

*Mandirā* (or *Juḍi*): A pair of small cup-shaped instrument made of bell-metal which is played by striking one with the other.

*Mṛdaṅga*: A double-ended drum less than three feet long with body made of wood, the *mṛdaṅga* tapers at the ends and one (end) is of double width than the other.

*Nākārū* : A semi-circular drum with body made of baked clay; it is suspended from the neck and played with one or two sticks.

*Pātil*: An earthen pot used as a percussion instrument.

*Prem-juḍi* : See *caṭi* or *khañjari*.

*Śākh* or *Śamkha* : A wind instrument made of conch shell.



*Sānāi* (or *Sehnāi*) : A kind of flute, *sānāi* is about 18" long and made of wood. The outer end is broad and made of brass.

*Sārindā*: With a body of wood, the *sārindā* is an instrument with three strings made of hide and is played with a bow.

*Svarāj*: See *do-tārā*.

*Tablā* (or *Bāyā-Tablā* or *Ḍugi-Tablā*) : A pair of single ended drums, the *tablā* is played with the fingers and the palm of two hands. The *bāyā* or the *ḍugi* is placed on the left and the *tablā* on the right.

*Thālā-bāḍya* : An earthen pot implanted in the ground with only its top edge showing, on which is placed a brass plate. The instrument is played with two sticks.

## B. Costume

*Āckān* : Loose outer garment of ankle or knee length.

*Ākhellā* : A long and loose gown of Muslim origin.

*Ālpi* : A kind of loose-fitting gown of ankle-length, worn by men.

*Cādar*: A sheet of cloth, usually of cotton, which is often slung around the neck or wrapped around the torso.

*Cogā* : Loose outer garment resembling a surplice.

*Dhoti*: Loin-cloth worn by males, one end of which is tucked at the waist.

*Gāmchā*: A napkin variously used by men.

*Ghāgrā*: A long skirt.

*Kāmiz*: A loose-fitting long shirt worn as an upper garment with a pair of *salwar* over which its bottom end hangs free.

*Khilkā* : An outer garment resembling *ackān*.

*Jobbā* : A long and loose-fitting outer garment worn by males.

*Lungi* : A loin-cloth worn by men, the lower end of which hangs near the ankles like a skirt.

*Nāmābalī cādar*: A *cādar* with names of deities printed on it.

*Pāgḍī* : Turban.

*Pāñjābi*: A kind of loose full-sleeved shirt worn by men as an upper garment.

*Pirān* : Loose shirt.

*Pājāmā*: Loose slacks, usually white, worn by men as a lower garment.

*Sari*: A piece of cloth usually about 6 metres long and worn by women, one end of which is wrapped like a loin-cloth while the other runs over the torso and hangs over the back or is used to cover the head.

*Sāhwār*: Loose slacks worn as a lower garment, usually with *kamiz*.

*Tāj*: Head-dress, a crown.

### C. Months of Bangla Calendar

Baiśākh	:	Mid April to mid May.
Jaiṣṭhya	:	Mid May to mid June.
Āṣāḍh	:	Mid June to mid July.
Śrāvaṇa	:	Mid July to mid August.
Bhādra	:	Mid August to mid September.
Āśvin	:	Mid September to mid October.
Kārtika	:	Mid October to mid November.
Agrahāyaṇa	:	Mid November to mid December.
Pauṣ	:	Mid December to mid January.
Māgh	:	Mid January to mid February.
Phālgun	:	Mid February to mid March.
Caitra	:	Mid March to mid April.

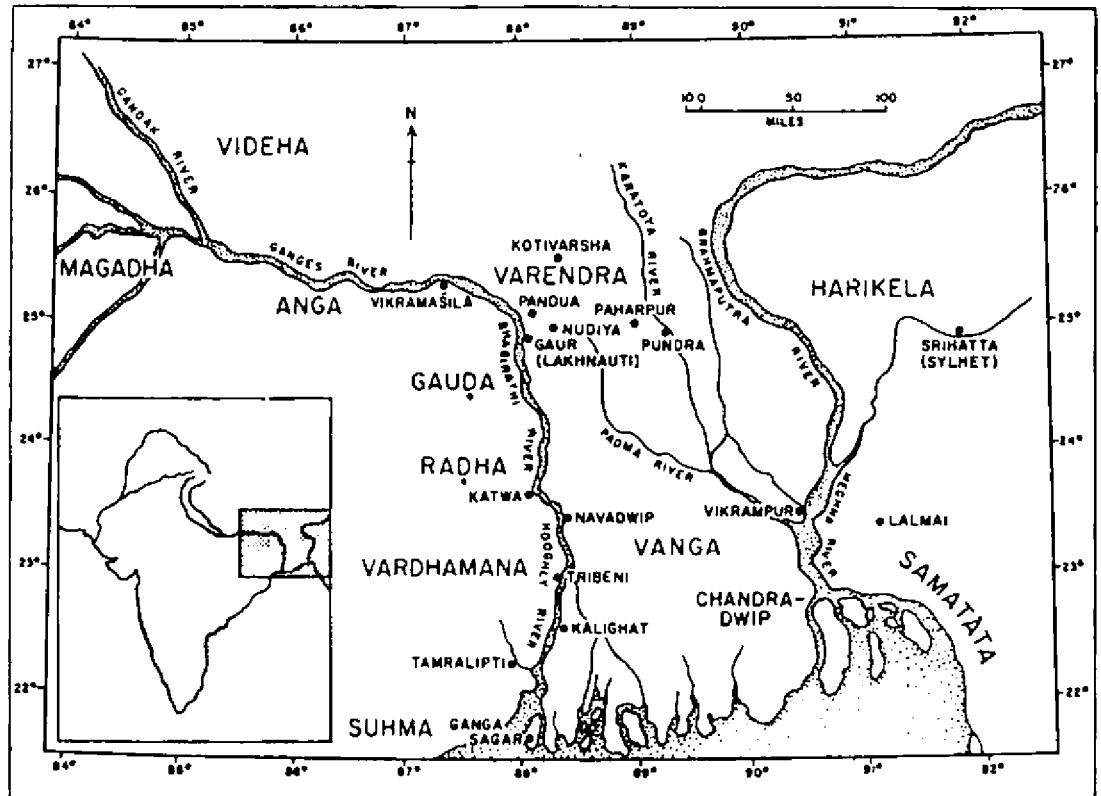


Fig 1 Various territorial units of ancient Bengal

Source : Eaton, *The Rise of Islam*

[Please note, Niharranjan Roy does not mention Vardhamana.]

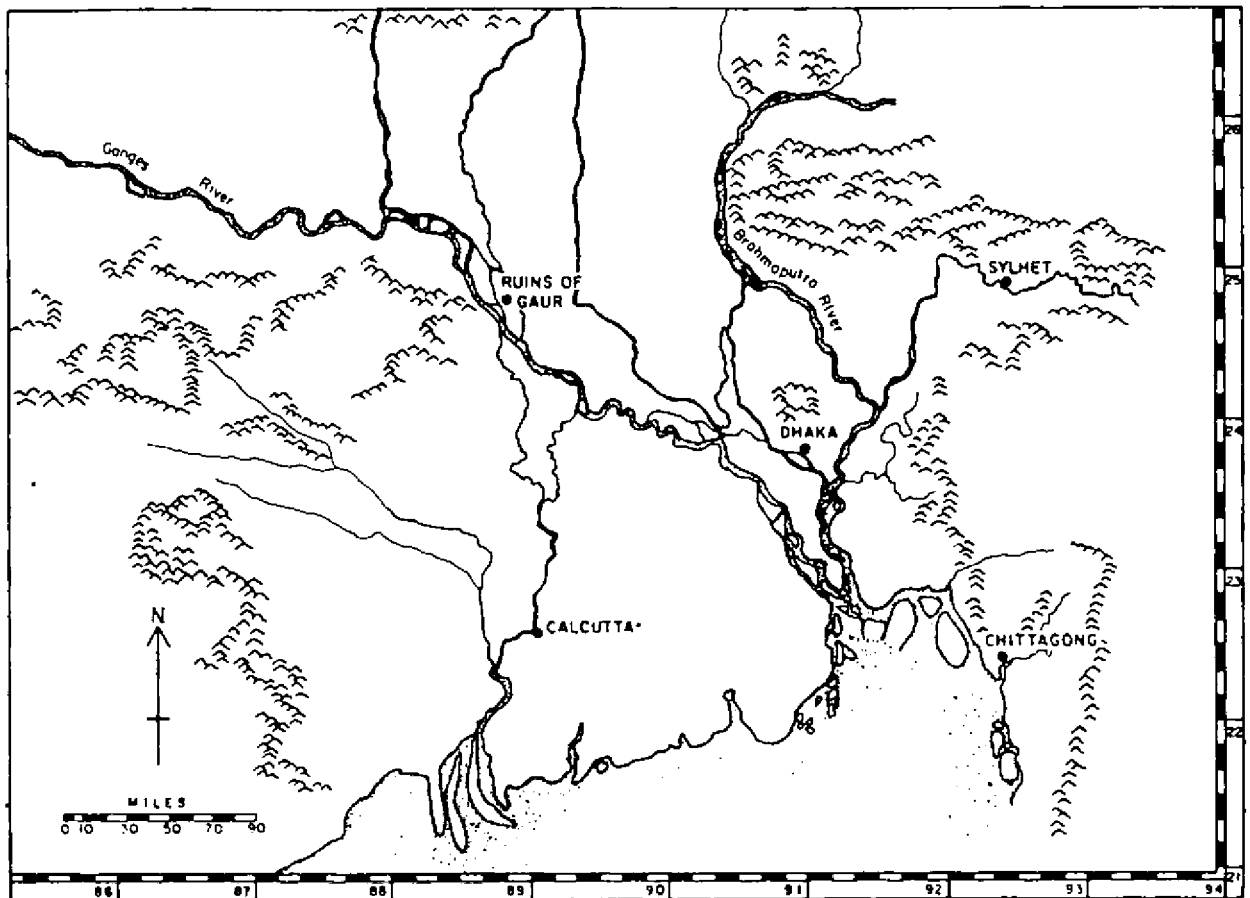


Fig 2 Rennell's map of Bengal (1779)

Source : Eaton, *The Rise of Islam*

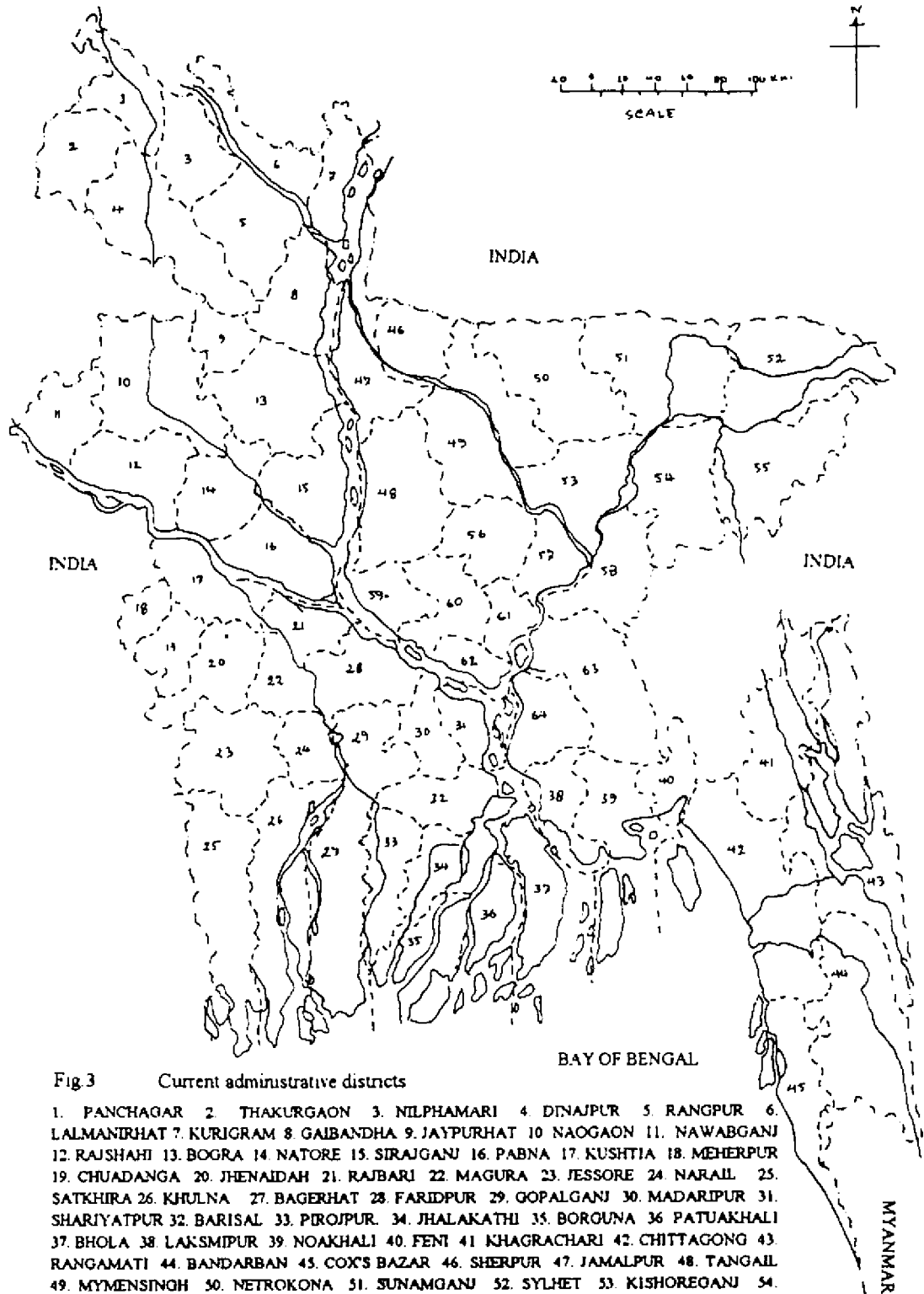


Fig.3 Current administrative districts

1. PANCHAGAR 2. THAKURGAON 3. NILPHAMARI 4. DINAJPUR 5. RANGPUR 6. LALMANIRHAT 7. KURIGRAM 8. GAIBANDHA 9. JAYPURHAT 10. NAOGAON 11. NAWABGANJ 12. RAJSHAHI 13. BOGRA 14. NATORE 15. SIRAJGANJ 16. PABNA 17. KUSHTIA 18. MEHERPUR 19. CHUADANGA 20. JHENAIDAH 21. RAJBARI 22. MAGURA 23. JESSORE 24. NARAIL 25. SATKHIRA 26. KHULNA 27. BAGERHAT 28. FARIDPUR 29. GOPALGANJ 30. MADARIPUR 31. SHARIYATPUR 32. BARISAL 33. PIROJPUR 34. JHALAKATHI 35. BORGUNA 36. PATUAKHALI 37. BHOLA 38. LAKSMIPUR 39. NOAKHALI 40. FENI 41. KHAGRACHARI 42. CHITTAGONG 43. RANGAMATI 44. BANDARBAN 45. COX'S BAZAR 46. SHERPUR 47. JAMALPUR 48. TANGAIL 49. MYMENSINGH 50. NETROKONA 51. SUNAMGANJ 52. SYLHET 53. KISHOREGANJ 54. HOBIGANJ 55. MAULAVIBAZAR 56. GAZIPUR 57. NARSINGDI 58. BRAHMANBARIA 59. MANIKGANJ 60. DHAKA 61. NARAYANGANJ 62. MUNSHIGANJ 63. COMILLA 64. CHANDPUR

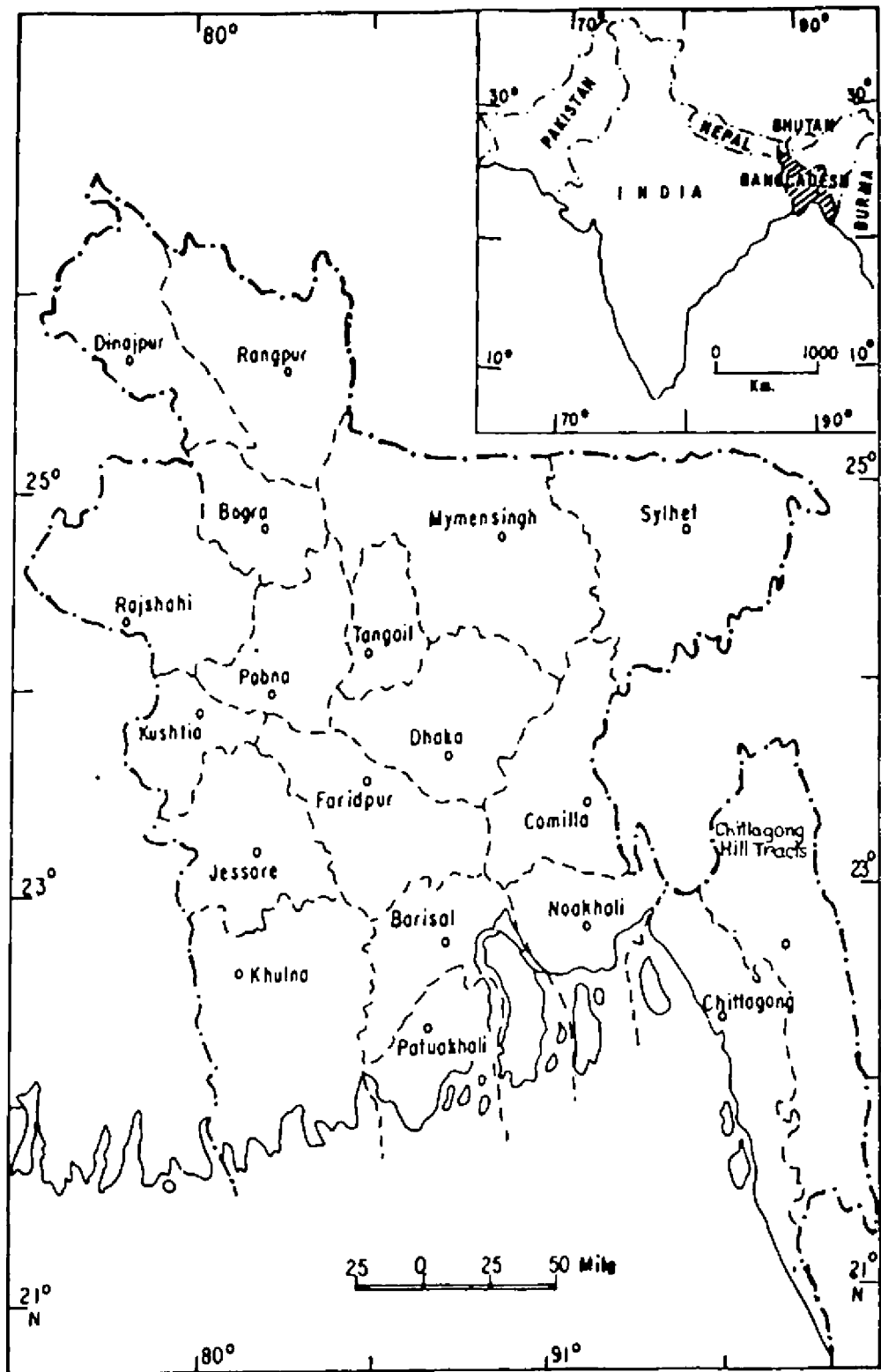


Fig 4 Erstwhile districts, referred to as "greater districts"

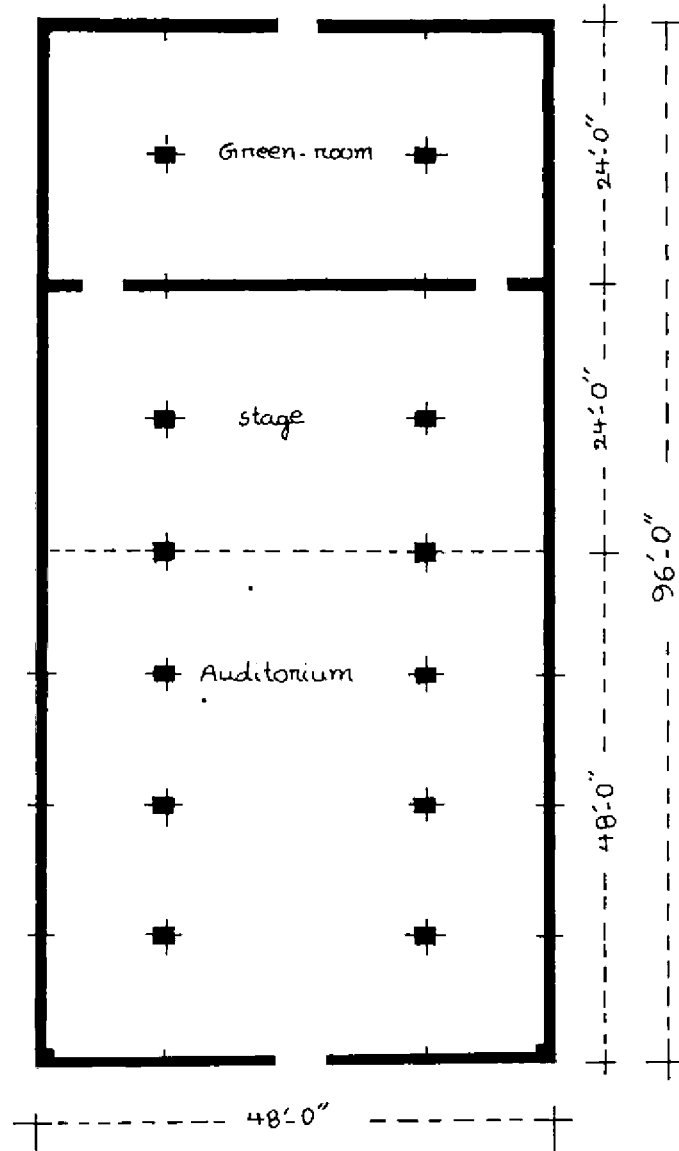


Fig.5 Sanskrit Theatre : The Medium Rectangle

Source : Rao. "A Critical Survey", *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

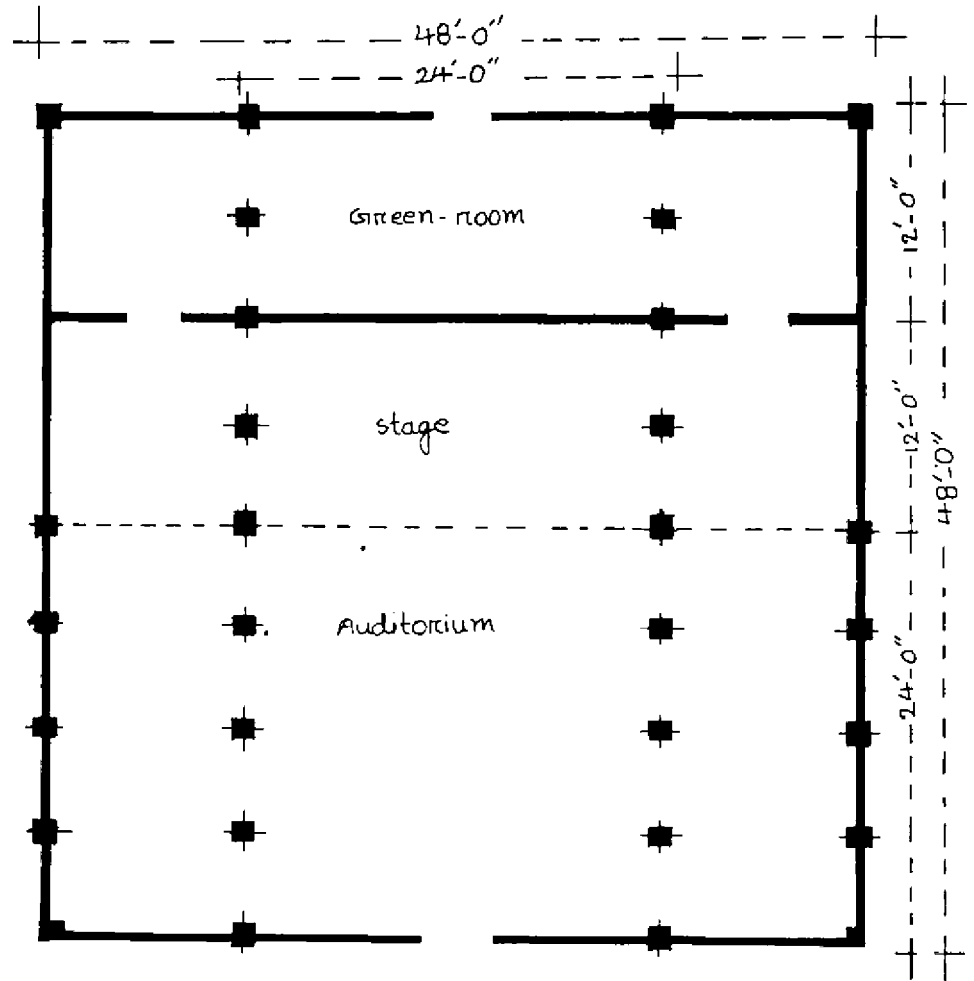


Fig.6 Sanskrit Theatre : The Small Square

Source : Rao. "A Critical Survey", *Nāṭyaśāstra*.



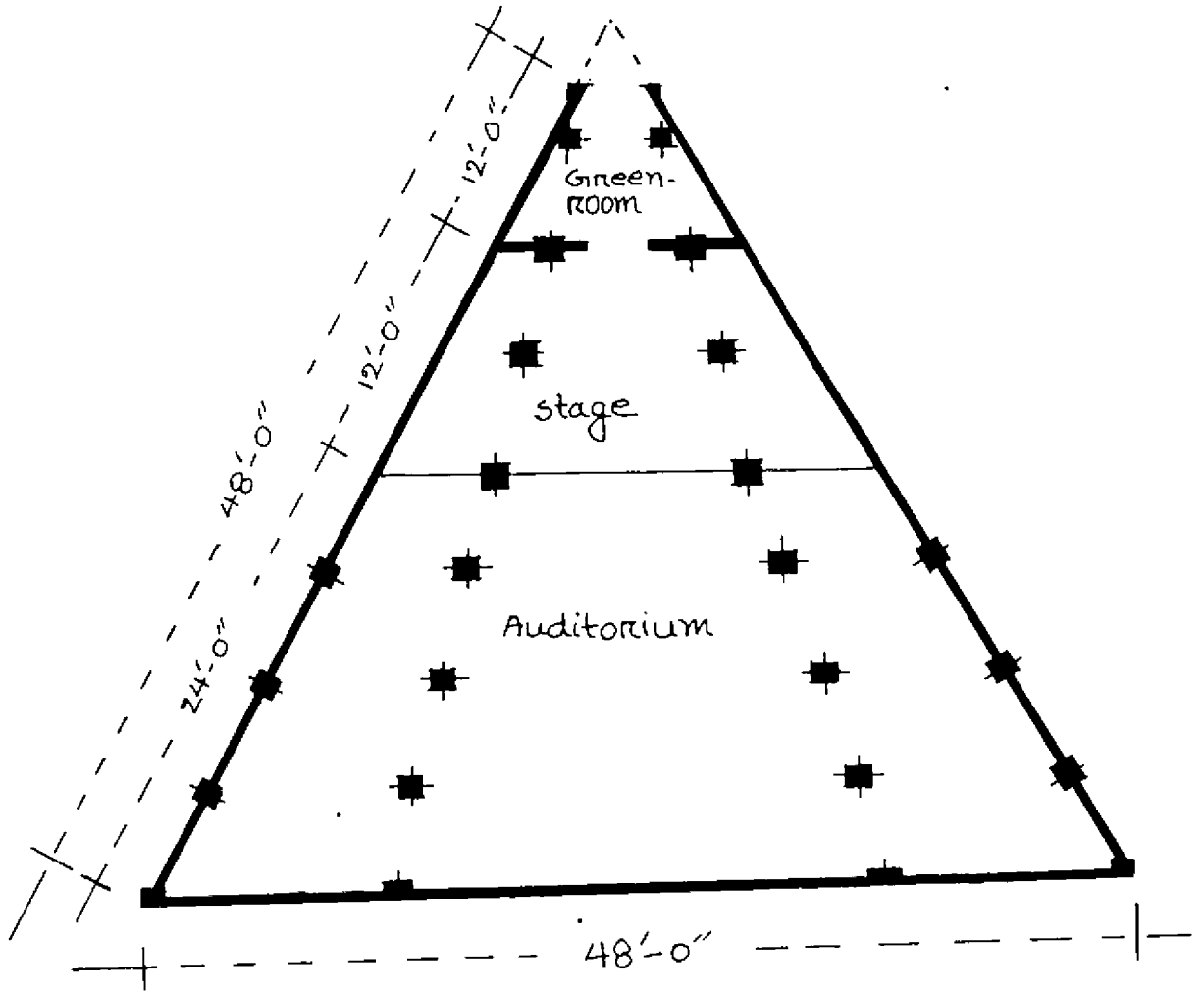


Fig.7 Sanskrit Theatre : The Small Triangle  
Source : Rao, "A Critical Survey", *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

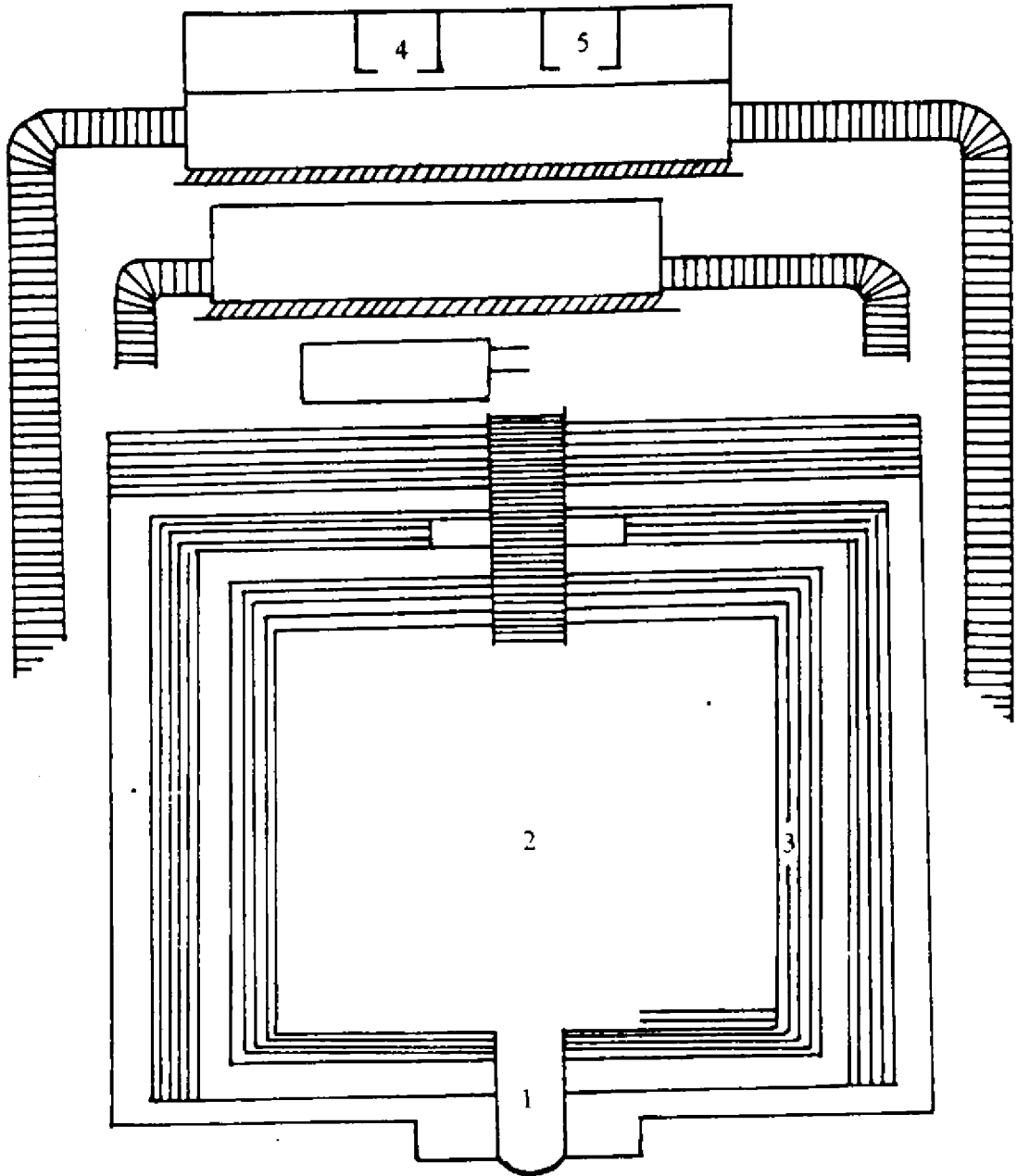


Fig 8 Amphitheatre at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa

- |                      |                     |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Entrance          | 4. Temple of Hariti |
| 2. Performance Space | 5. Temple           |
| 3. Galleries         |                     |

Source : H. V. Sharma, *The Theatre of the Buddhists*

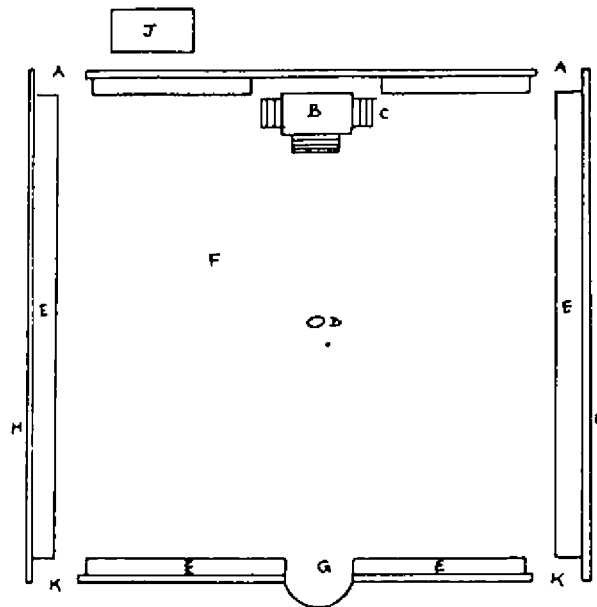


Fig.9 Open-air theatre for Kulan

Source : Sharma, *The Theatre of the Buddhists*

- |                                 |                               |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| A Performers' entrances         | F Paved performing area       |
| B Platform for 'King' & 'Queen' | G Main entrance for audience  |
| C Steps                         | H Short wall around           |
| D Big earthen lamp              | J Hut behind the stage        |
| E Single bar of seating         | K Side entrances for audience |

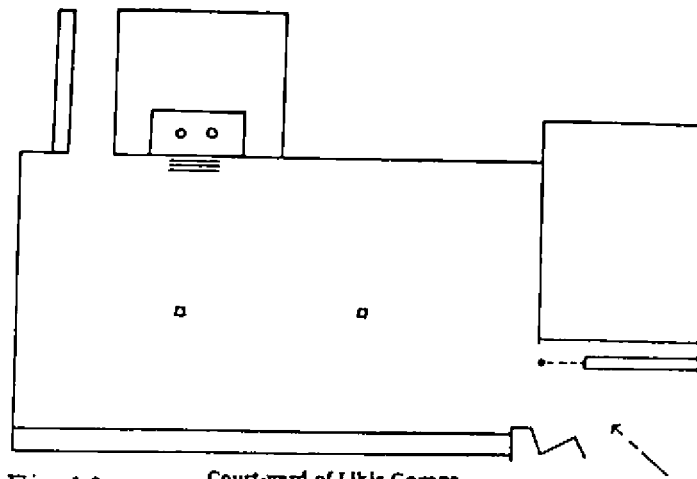


Fig.10

Court-yard of Likir Gumpa

Source : Sharma, *The Theatre*

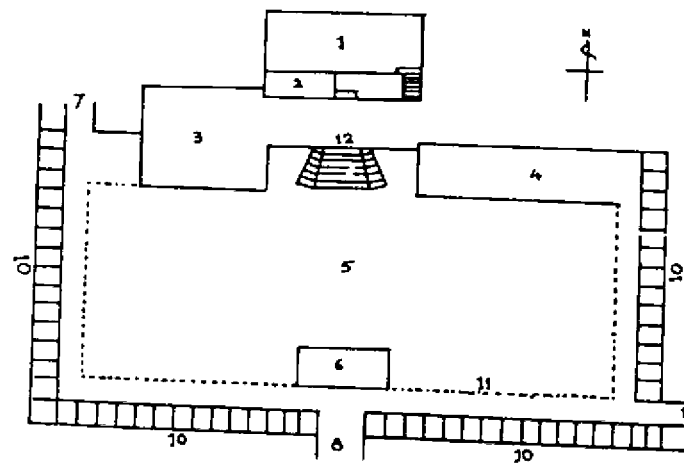


Fig.11

Ground plan of Royal Monastery at Teng-gye-ling, Lhasa

- |                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. King's palace                  | 7. Performers' entry  |
| 2. Green-room & store for masks   | 8&9. Audience's entry as well as temporary exits for performers |
| 3. Temple                         | 10. Monks' cells  |
| 4. Secretariate Office & Treasury | 11. Rope barrier to contain audience                            |
| 5. Stone-paved court-yard         | 12. Seat for Rev. Dabi Lama                                     |
| 6. Tent for musical instruments   |   |

Source : Sharma, *The Theatre*

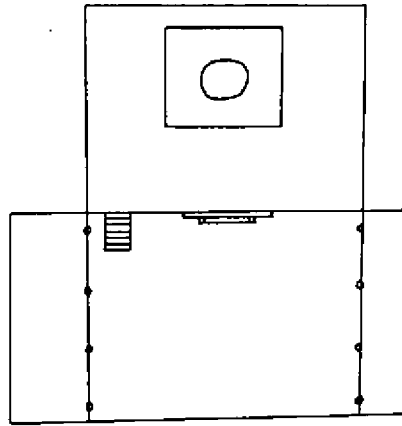


Fig.12 Court-yard of Bhey Gompe  
Source : Sharma, The Theatre

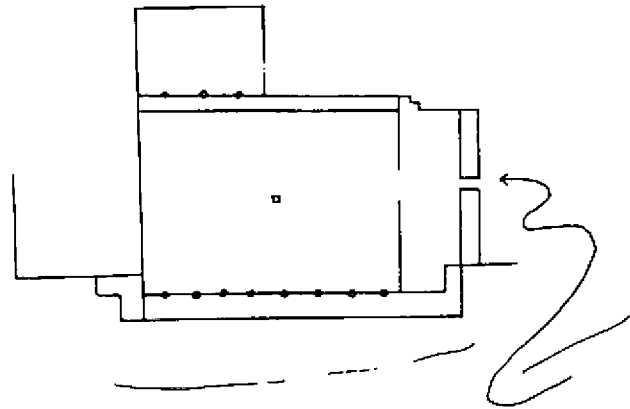


Fig.13 Court-yard of Tikse Gompe  
Source : Sharma, The Theatre

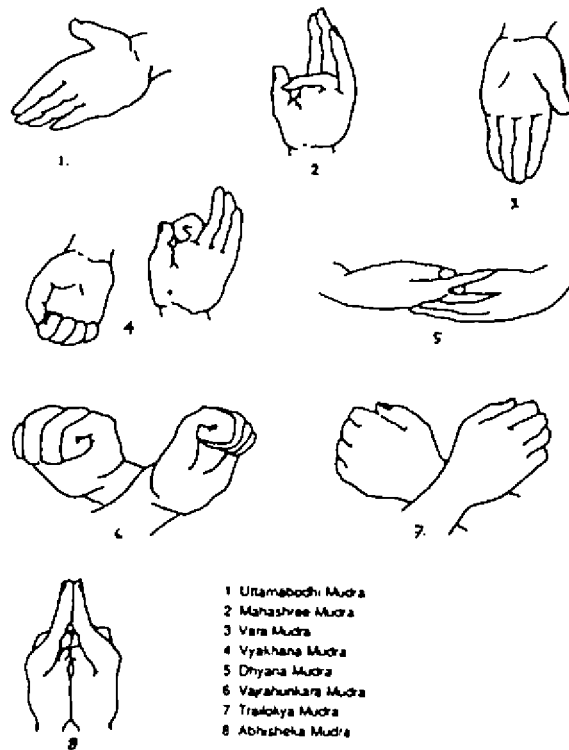


Fig 14 A set of Mudras (gestures) used in Tibetan theatrical performances  
Source : Sharma, The Theatre



Fig.15 A female dancer, two actors and three musicians of an indigenous performance in the Himalayan region

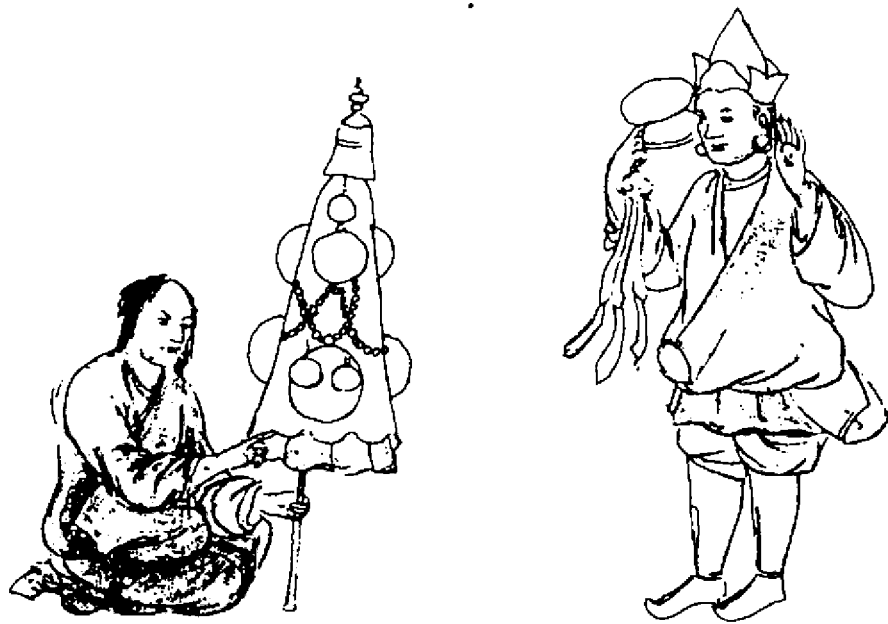


Fig.16 Itinerant story-teller at a festival in the Himalayan region

Source : Singh, *Himalayan Art*

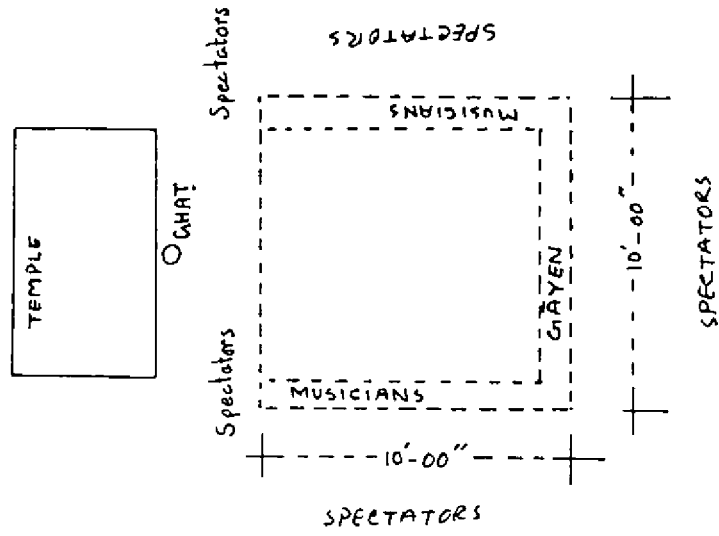


Fig.18 Rayānī Gān

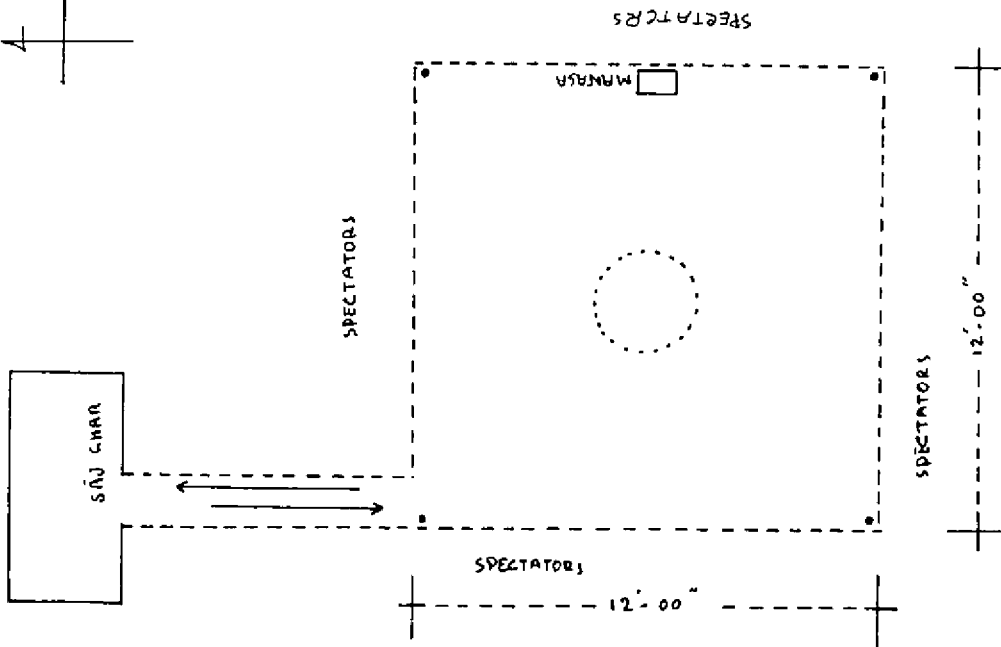
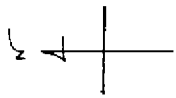


Fig.17 Padmā-purāṇ Gān (Rangpur)



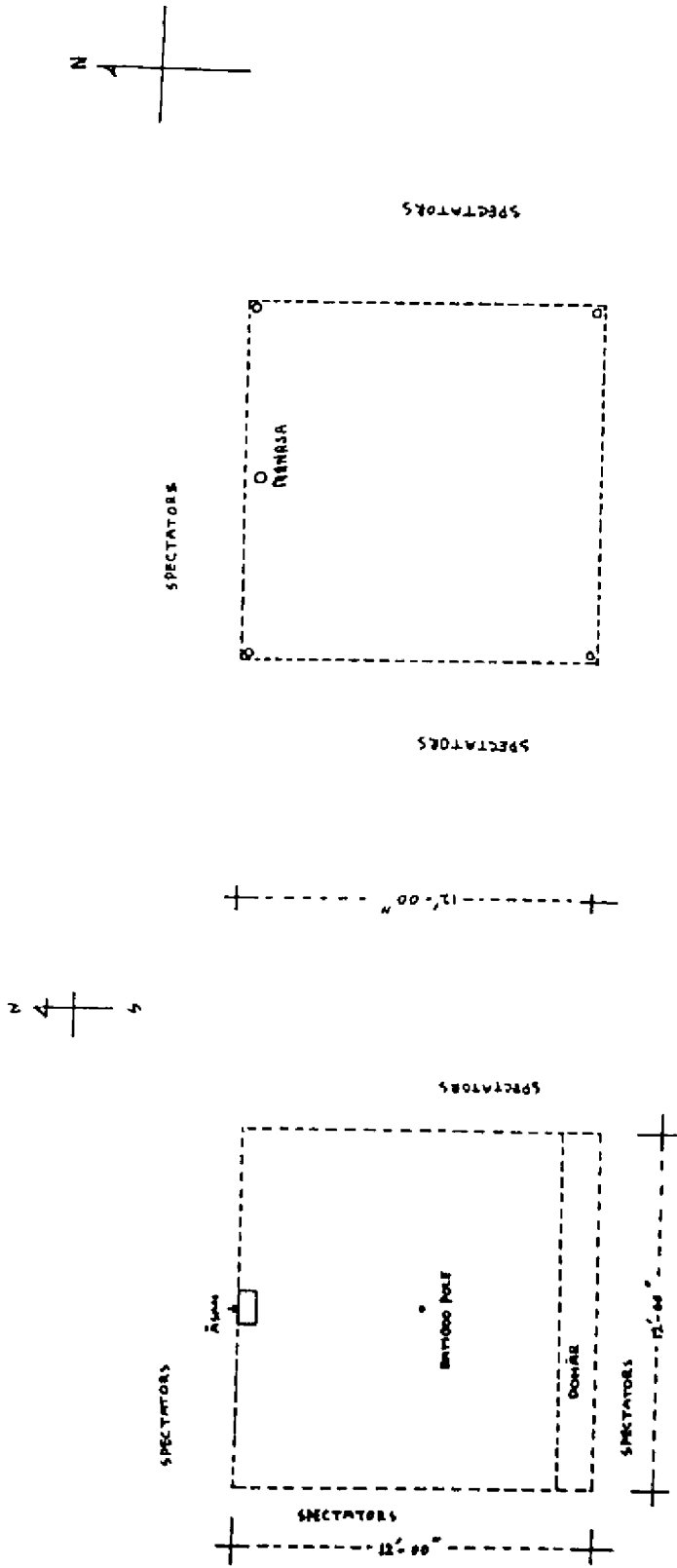


Fig 19 Manasār Pācāli

Fig.20 Padmā-purāṇ Gān (Natore)

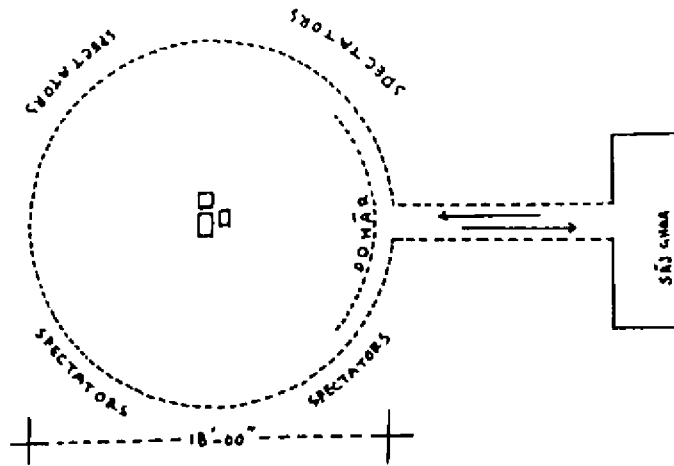
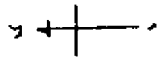
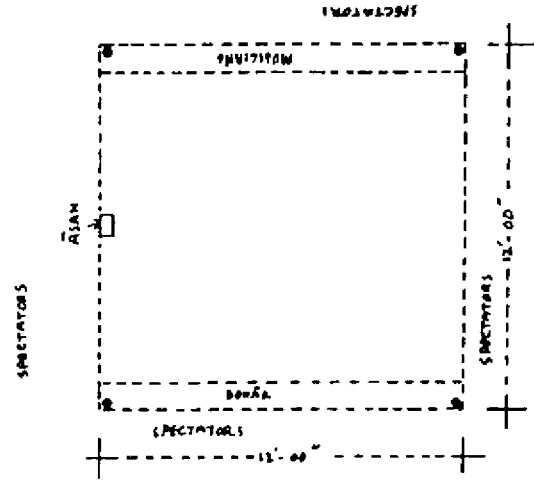
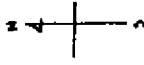


Fig.22 Bhasan Pala Gan

Fig.21 Bhasan Gan

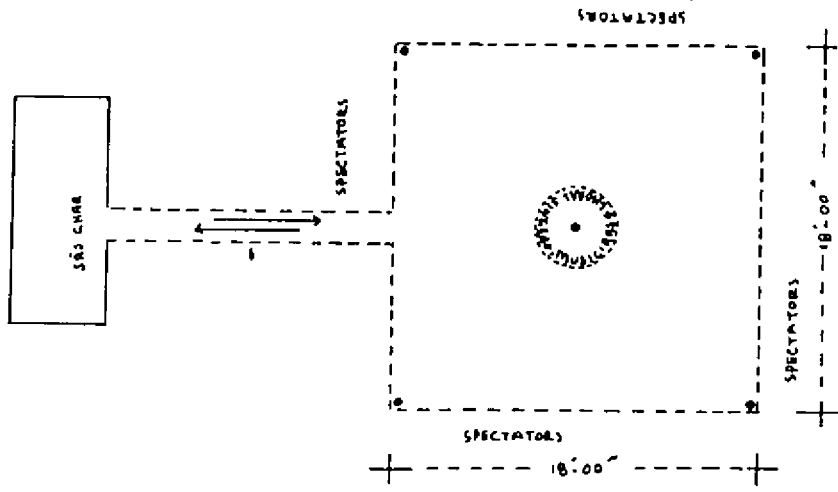


Fig.24 Beilyā Nācārī

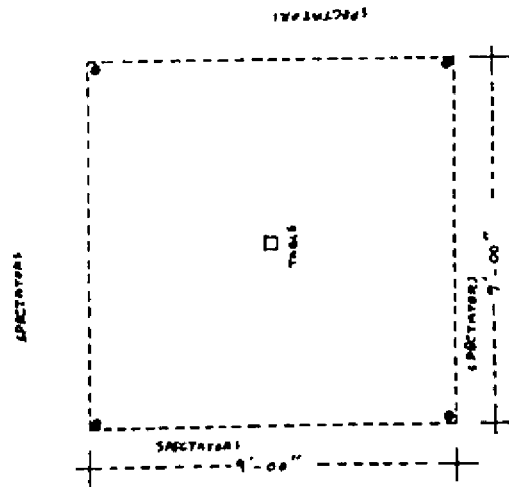


Fig.23 Biṣaharī Gān

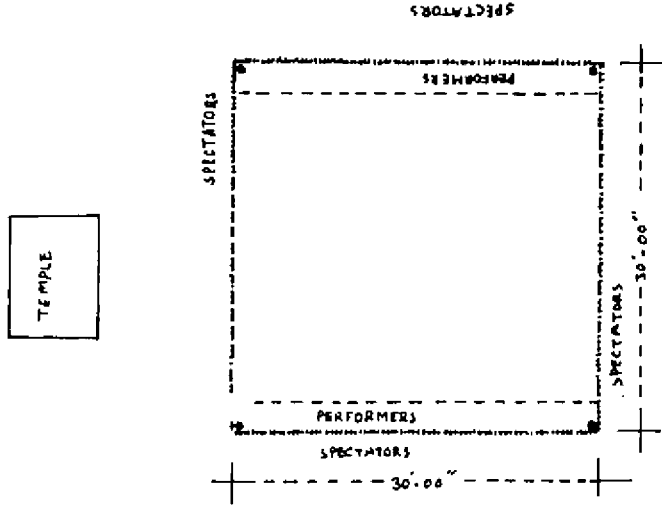


Fig.26 Jhāpān Khelā

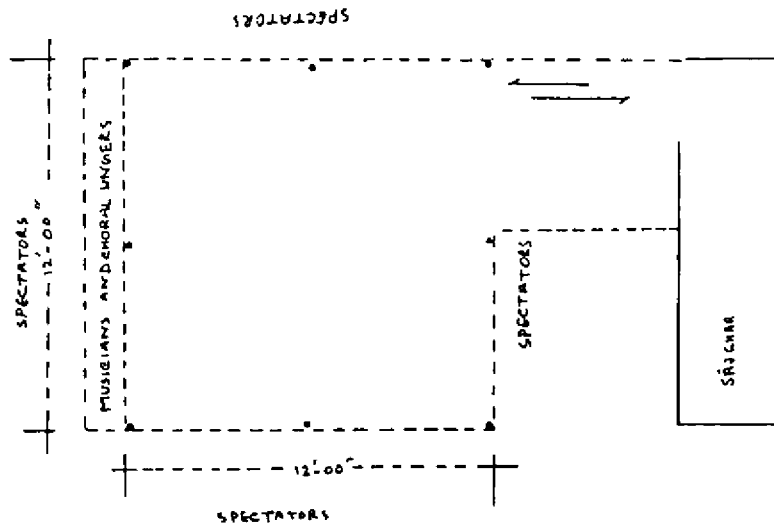


Fig.25 Bhāsan Yātrā

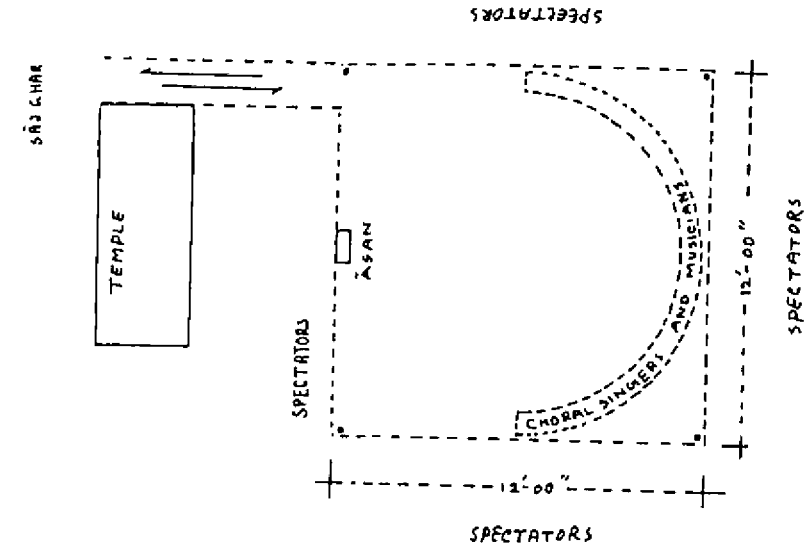


Fig.28 Pālā Kīrtan

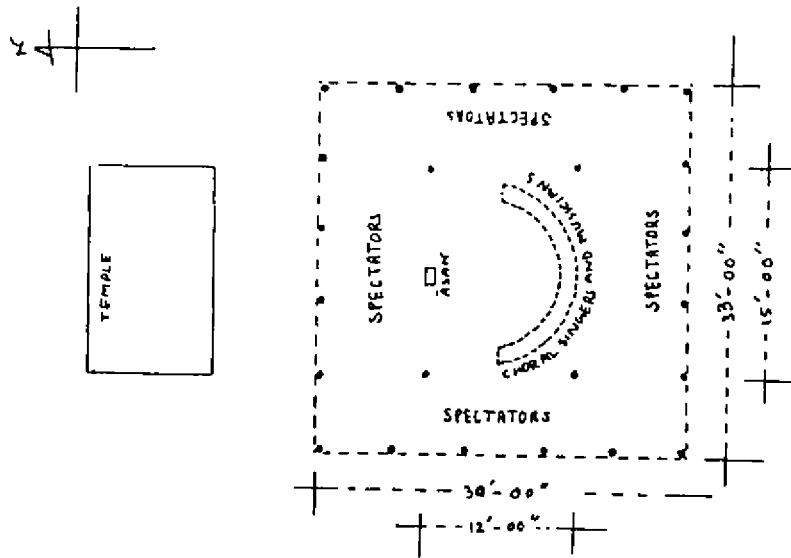


Fig.27 Līlā Kīrtan

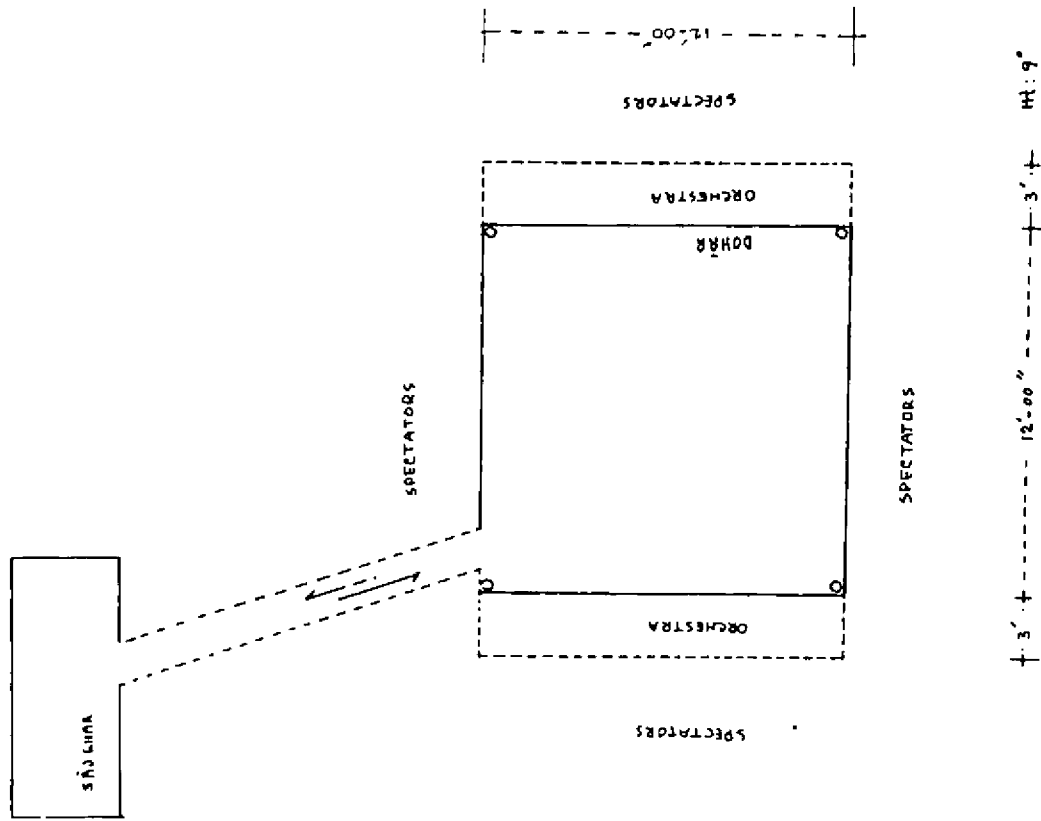


Fig 30 Sāḷ Kīrtan

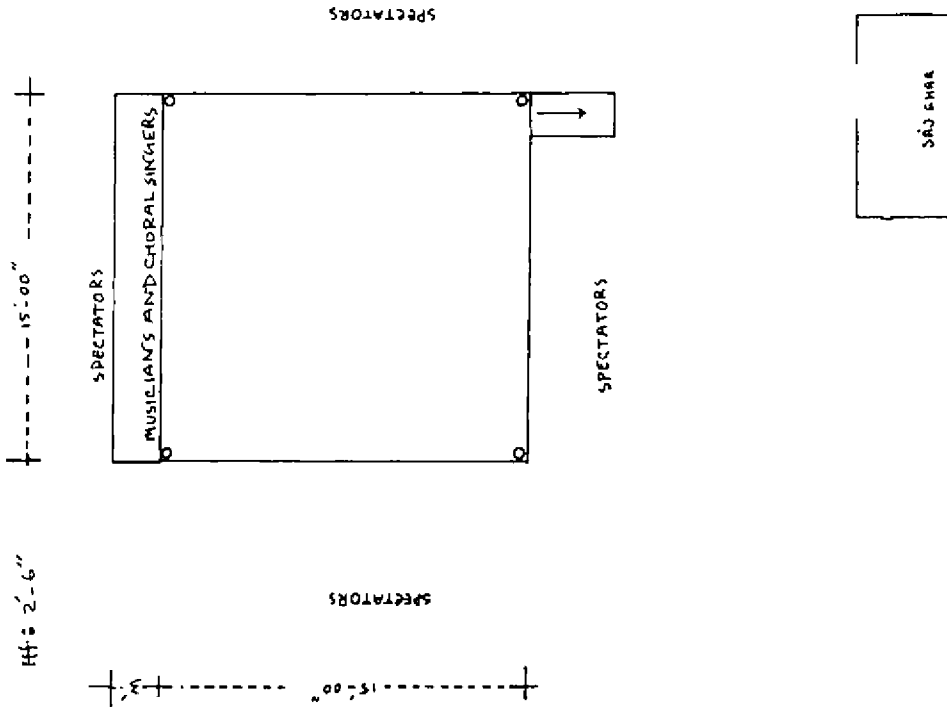


Fig 29 Kīṣṇa Yātrā

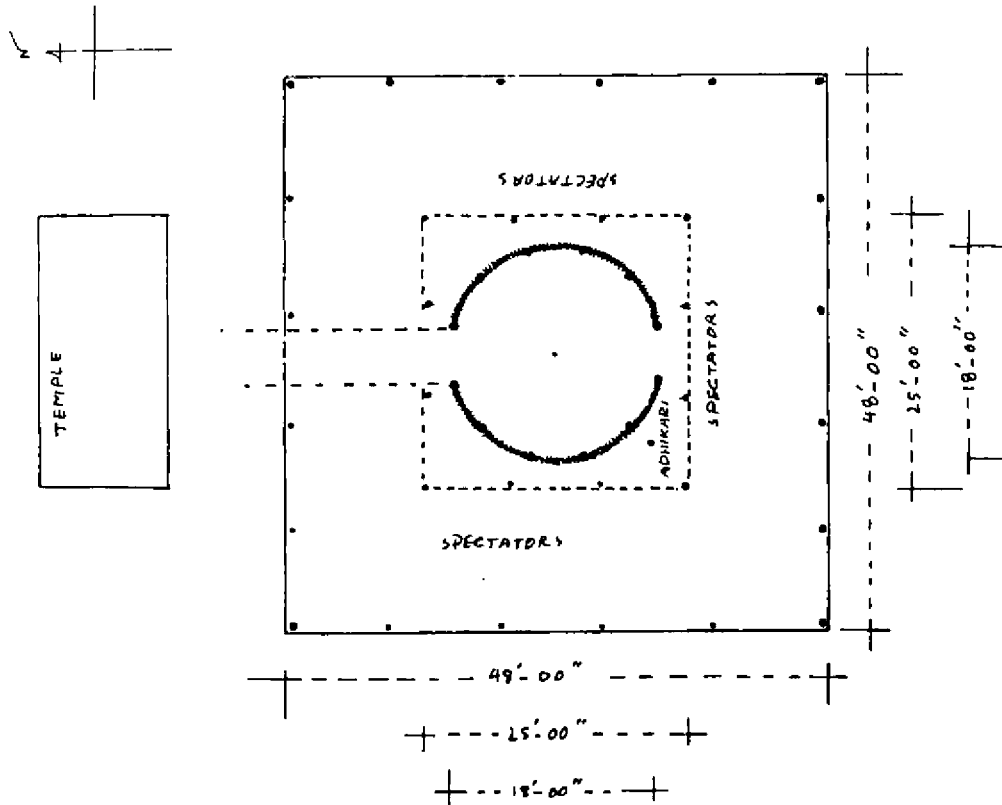


Fig.31 Manipuri Rās Nriya  
Rās Līlā

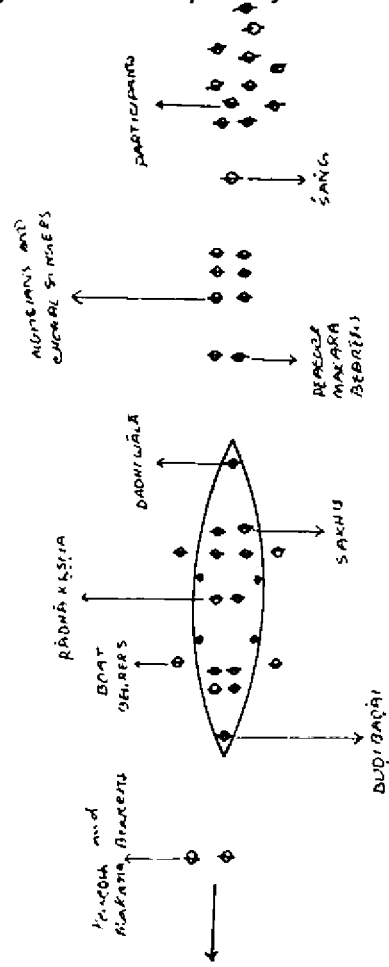


Fig.32 Nauka-vilas Michhil

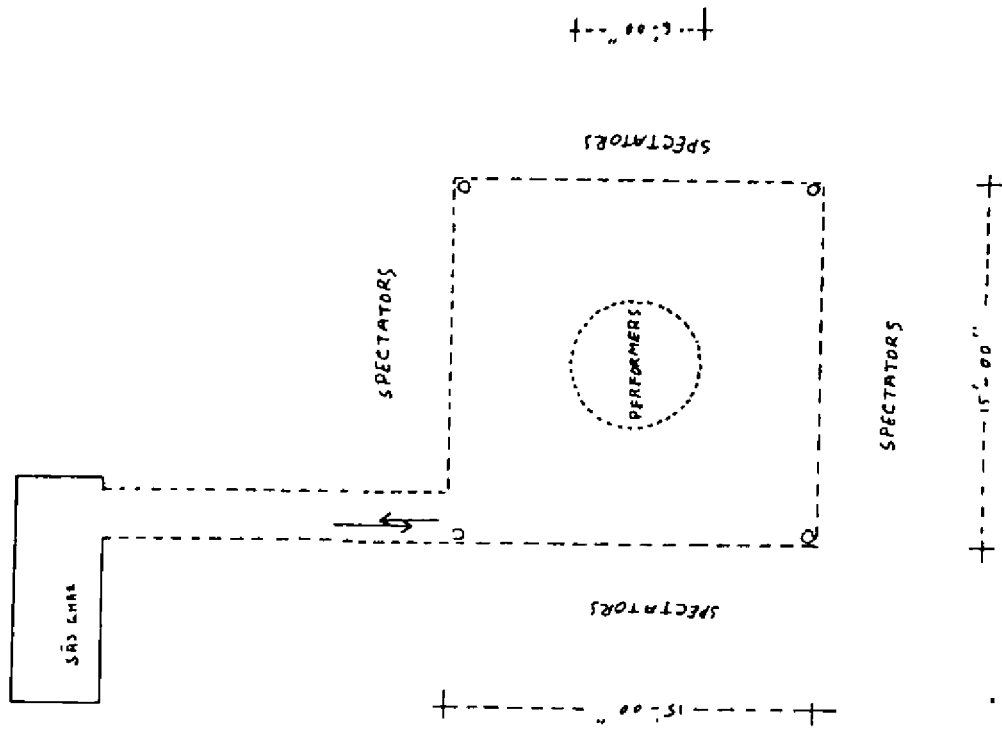


Fig.34 Kuṣān Gān

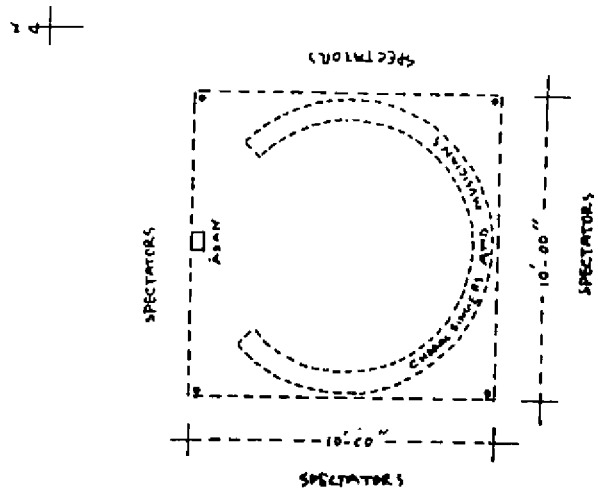


Fig.33 Rāmāyaṇa Gān



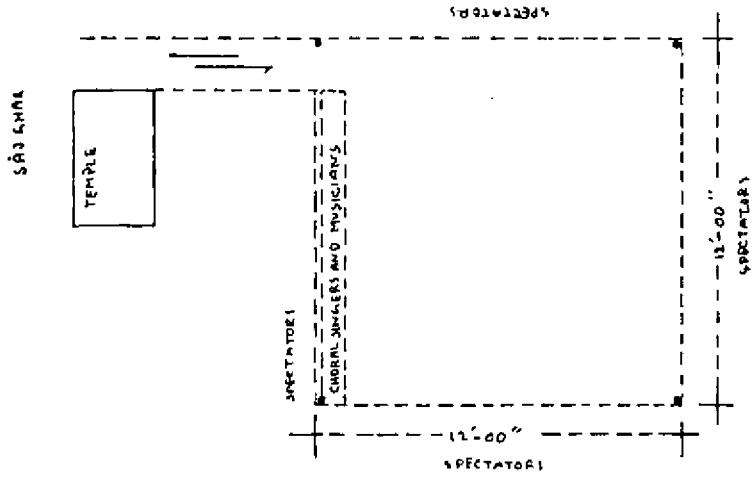


Fig.36 Rāma Yātrā

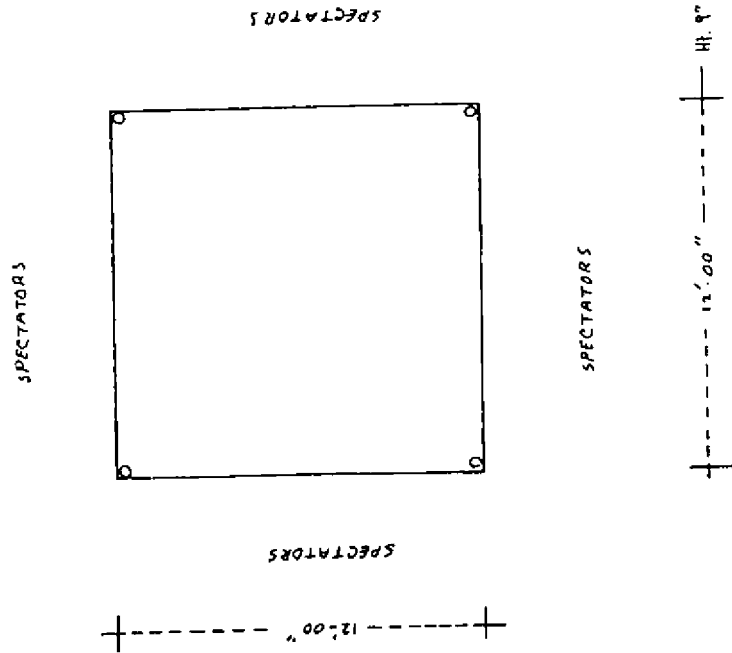


Fig.35 Lakṣmī Gān

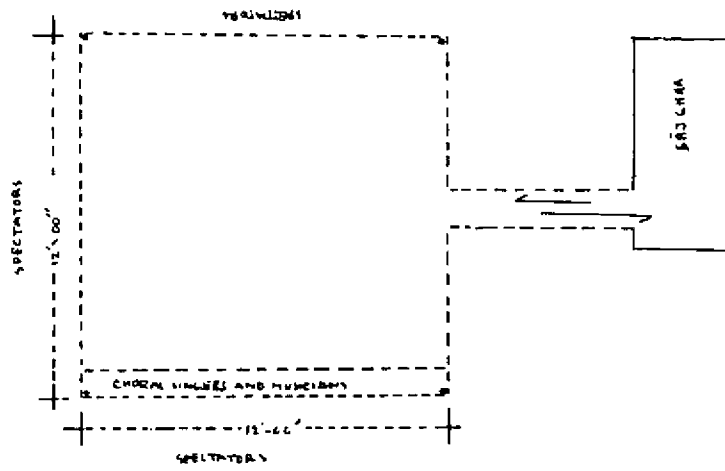
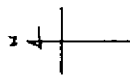


Fig.37 Mahesha Khela

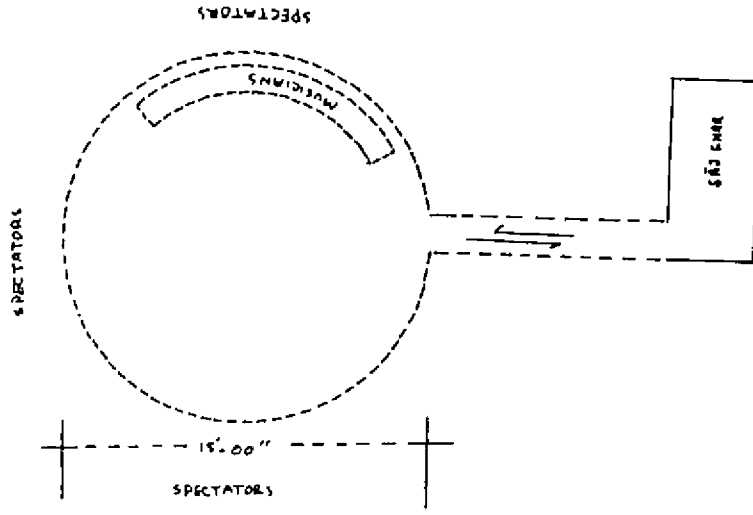


Fig.38 Saing Yatra

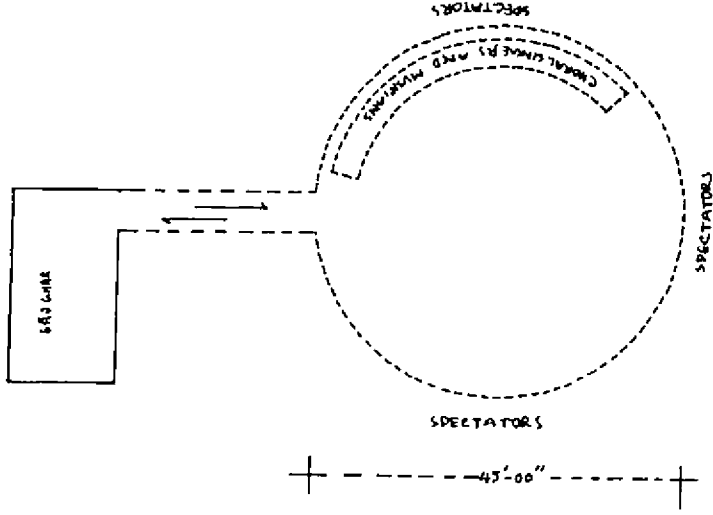


Fig. 40 Kālī Kāc

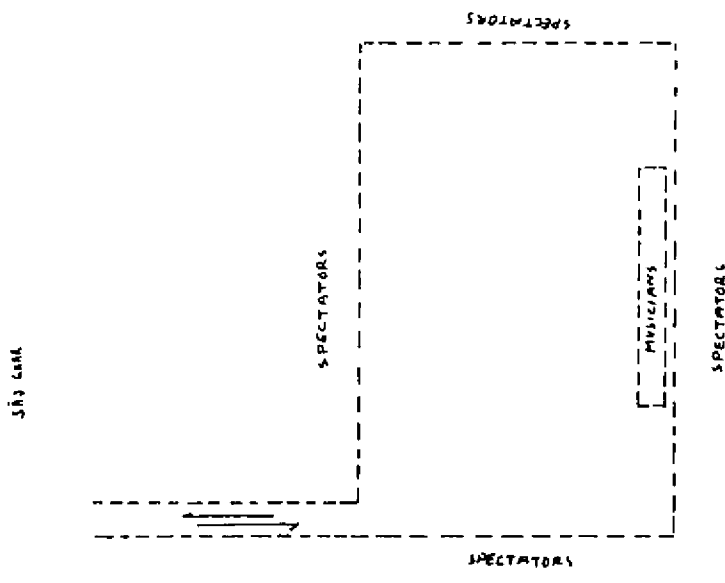


Fig. 39 Mukho Nācā

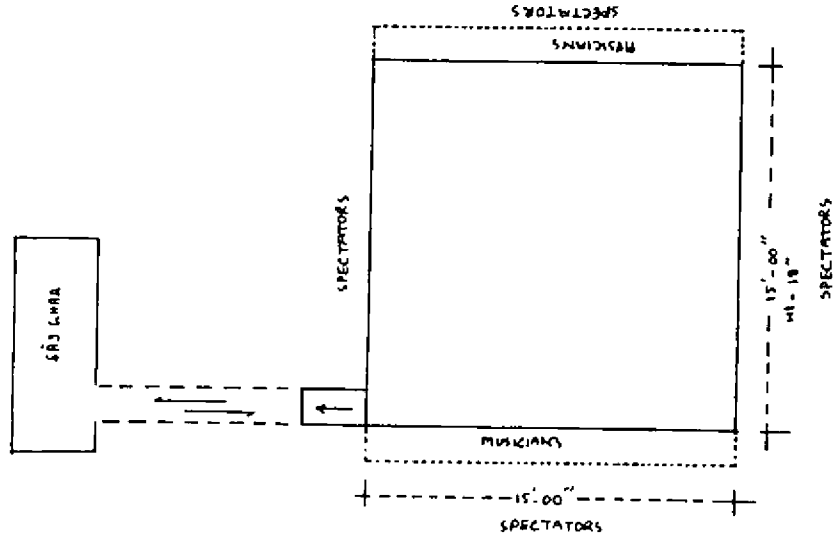


Fig 42 Aştak Yatra

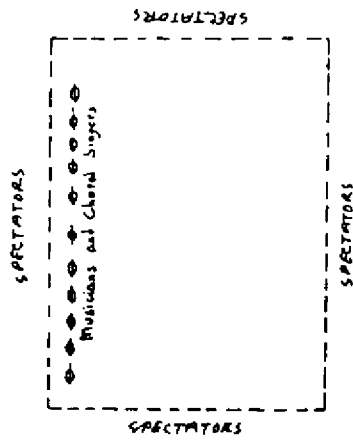


Fig 41 Aştak Gran

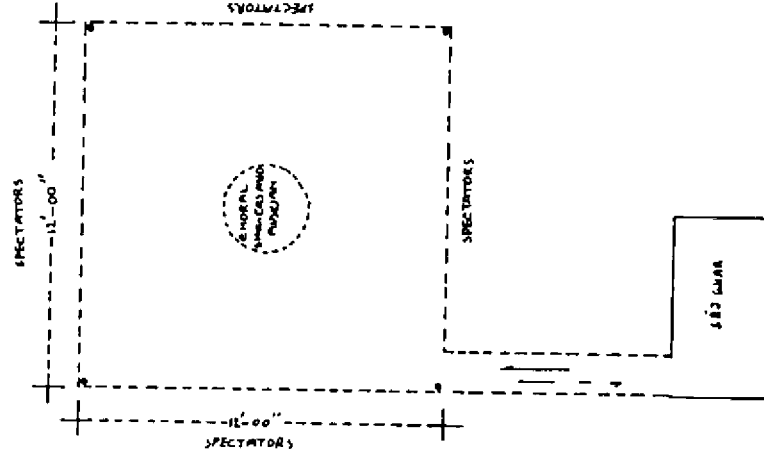


Fig.44 Yogir Gān

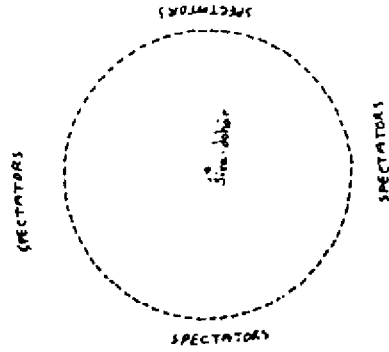


Fig.43 Gamirā Nāc

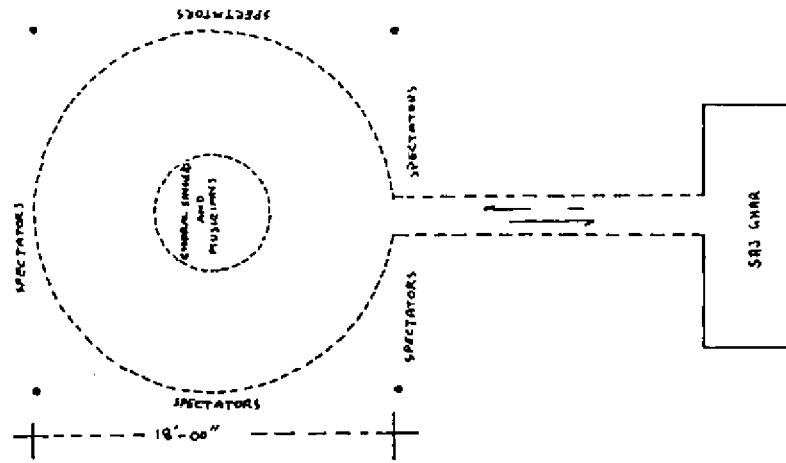
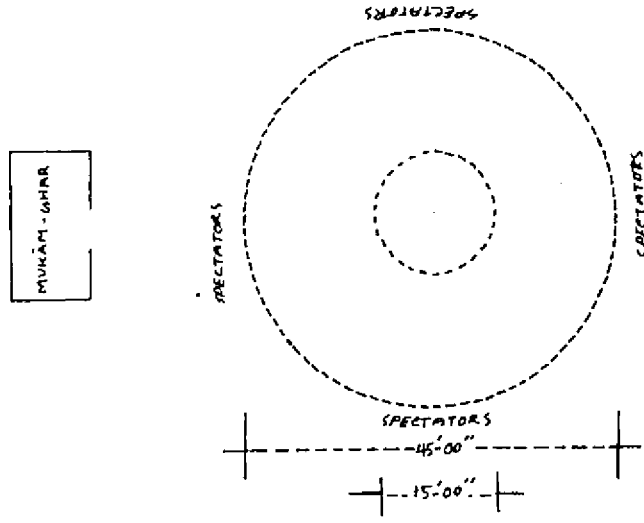


Fig.46 Jārī Gān (Eastem Mymensingh)

Fig.45 Yugi Parva

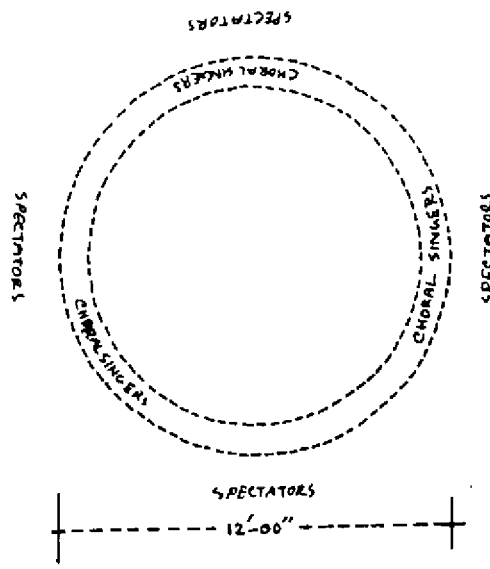


Fig.47 Jari Gazal (Eastern Mymensingh)

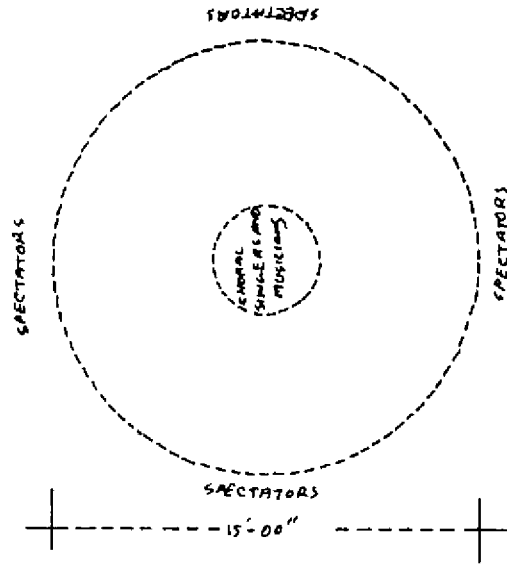


Fig.48 Bangla Jari (Eastern Mymensingh)

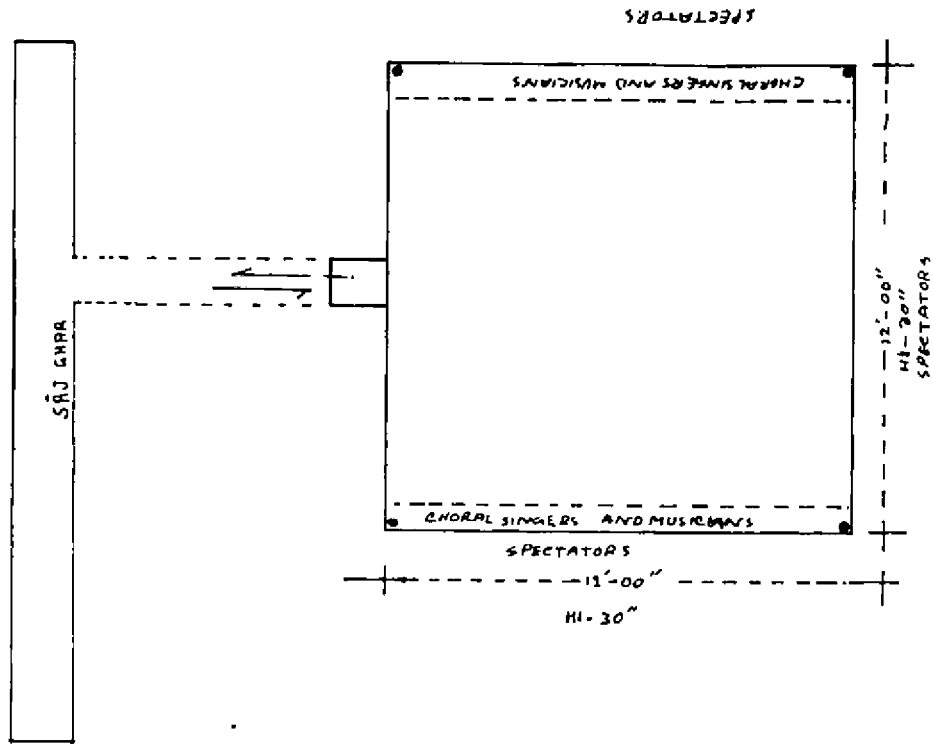


Fig. 50 Jari Gan (South-western Bangladesh)

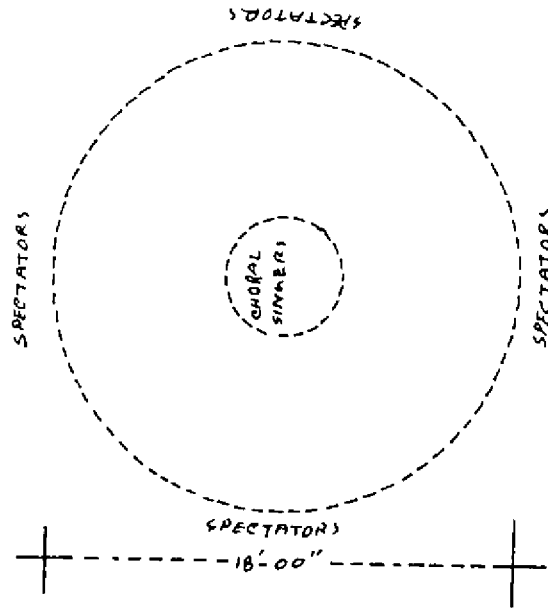


Fig. 49 Jari Gan (Northern Bangladesh)



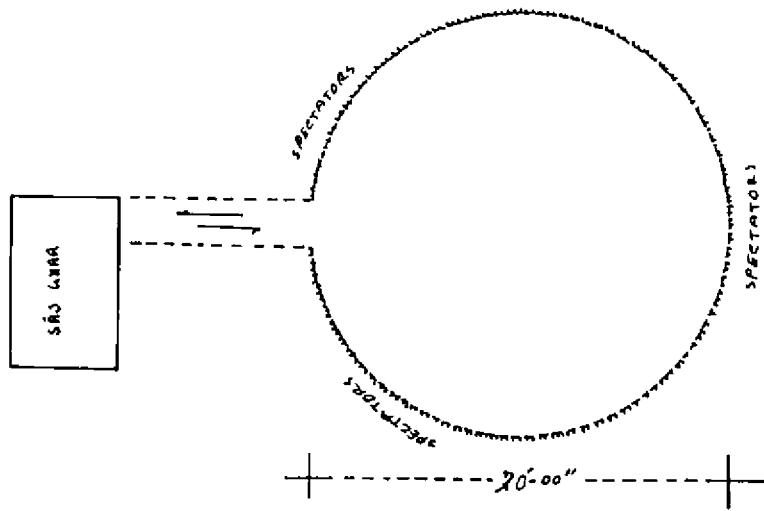


Fig.51 Nâicer Jârî

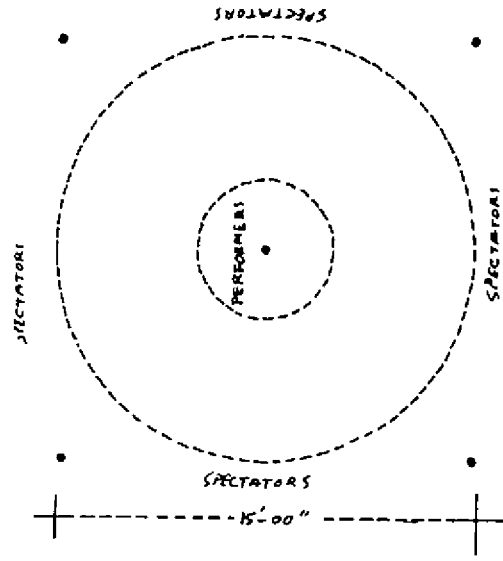


Fig.52 Jang Jârî

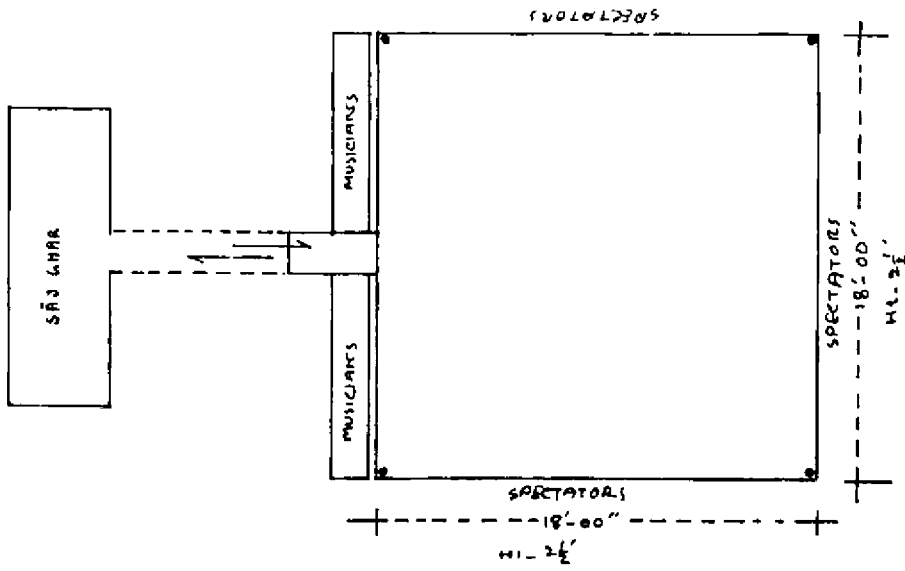


Fig.53 Imām Yātrā

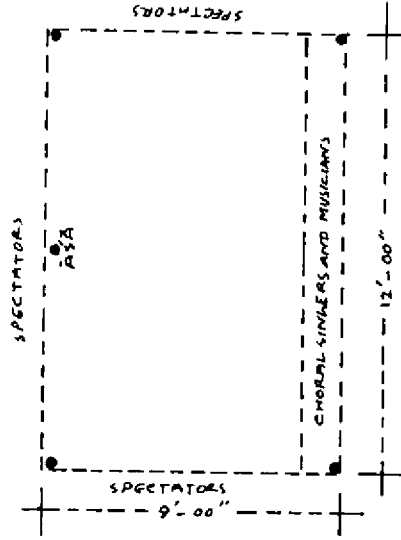


Fig.54 Gāzir Gān

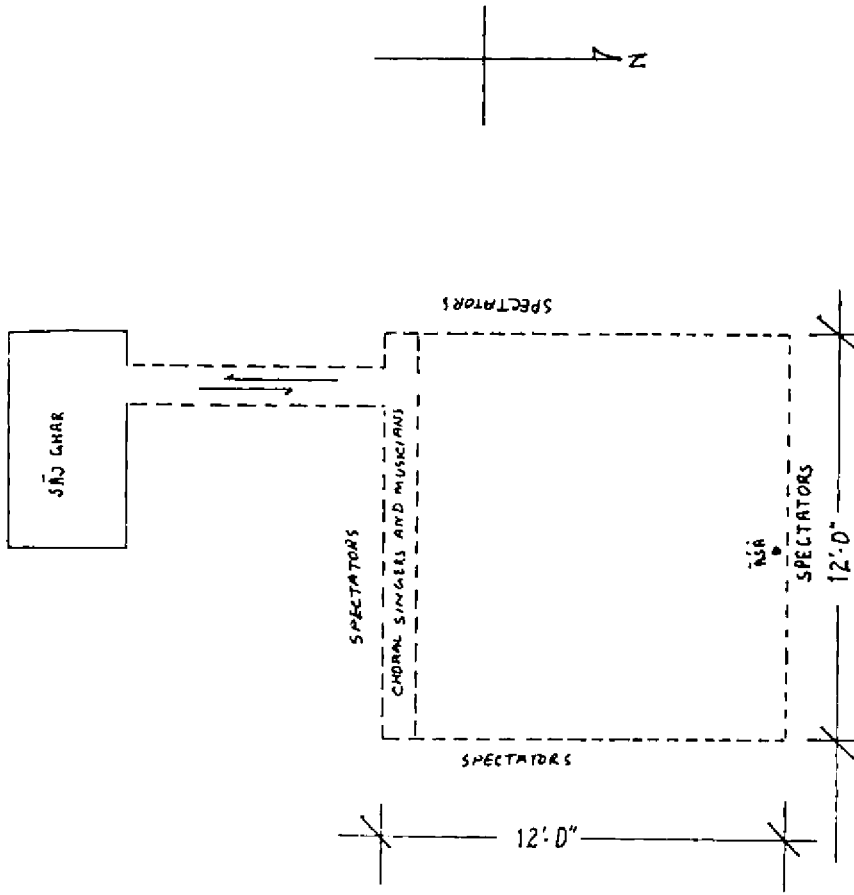


Fig.56 Gāzīr Yātrā

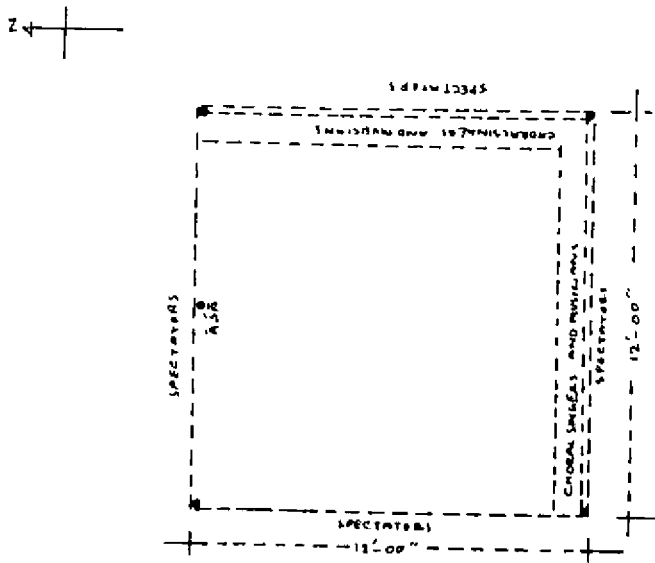


Fig.55 Gāzīr Gān

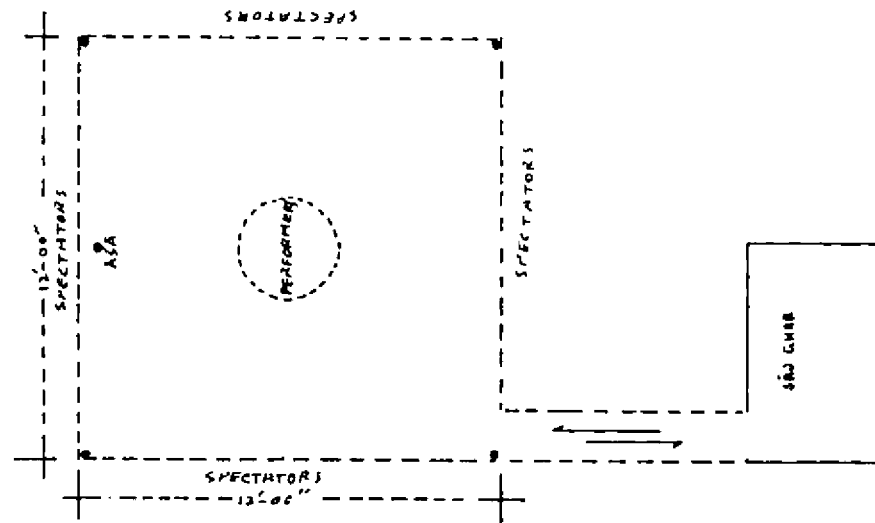


Fig.57 Gāzīr Yātrā

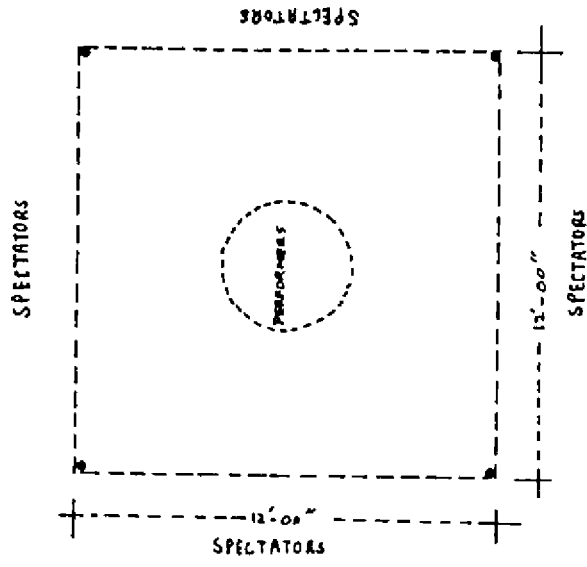


Fig.58 Mādār Pīrer Gān

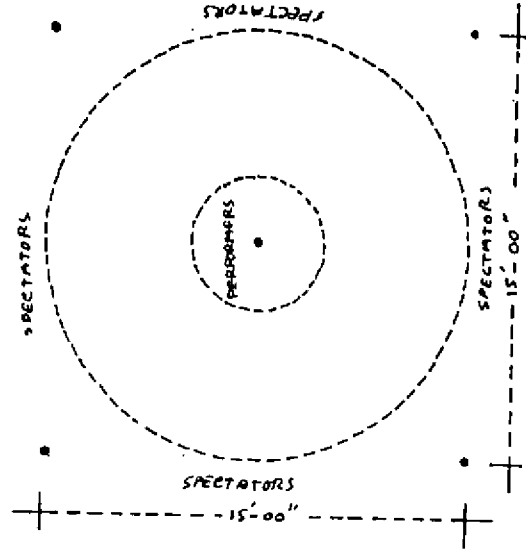


Fig.60 Satya Pirer Gān

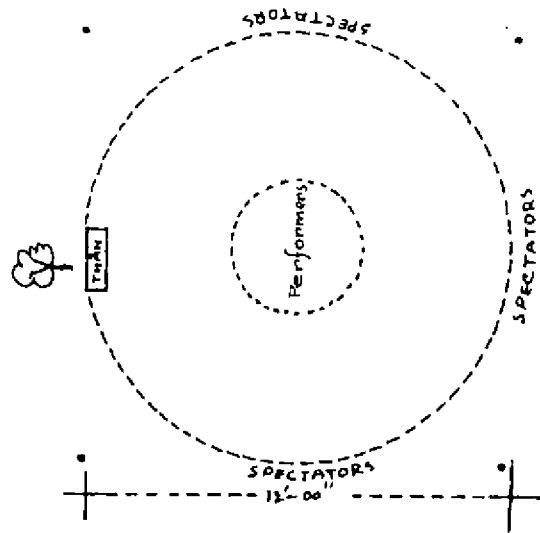


Fig.59 Mādār Pirer Gān

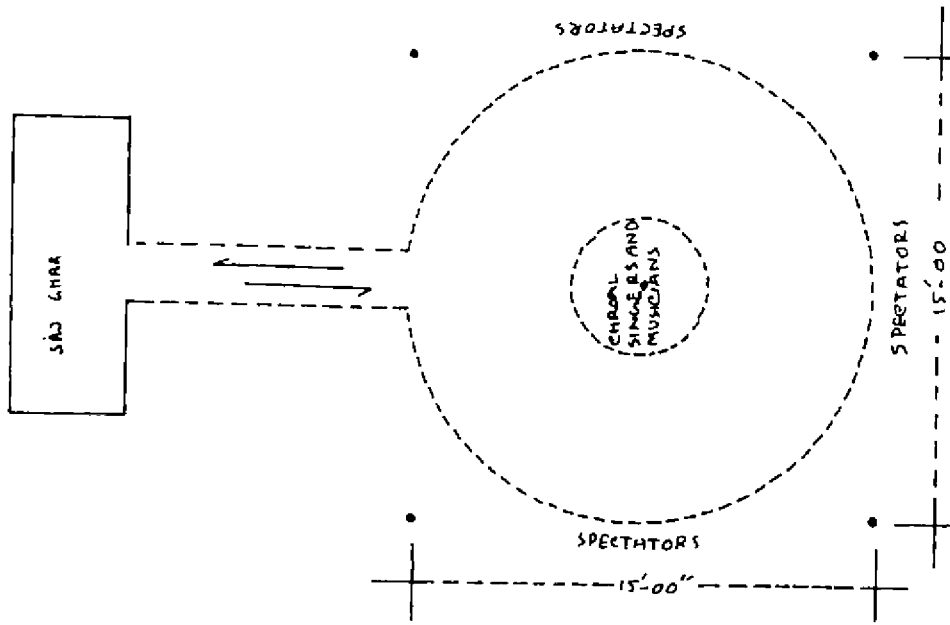


Fig.61 Satya Purer Yatra

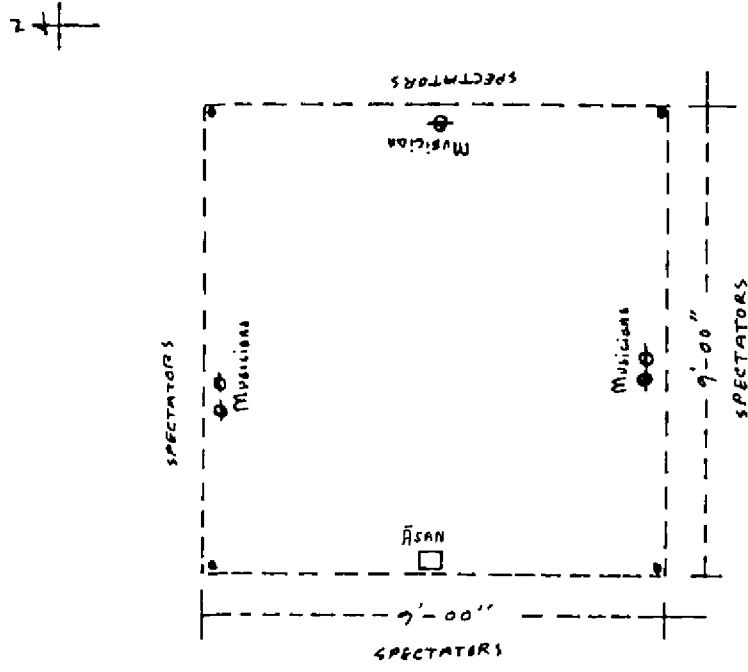


Fig.62 Manik Purer Jari

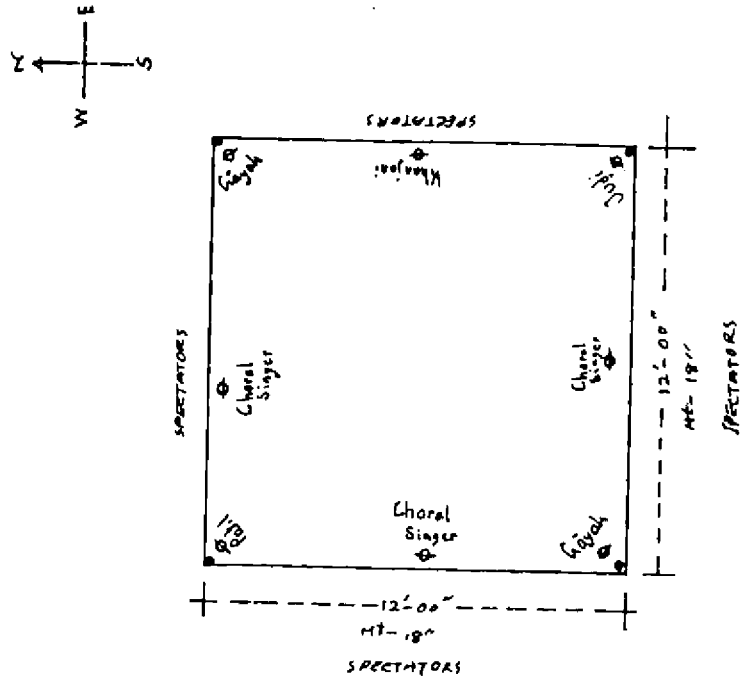


Fig.64 Paillyā Yātrā (Pātīā Gān)

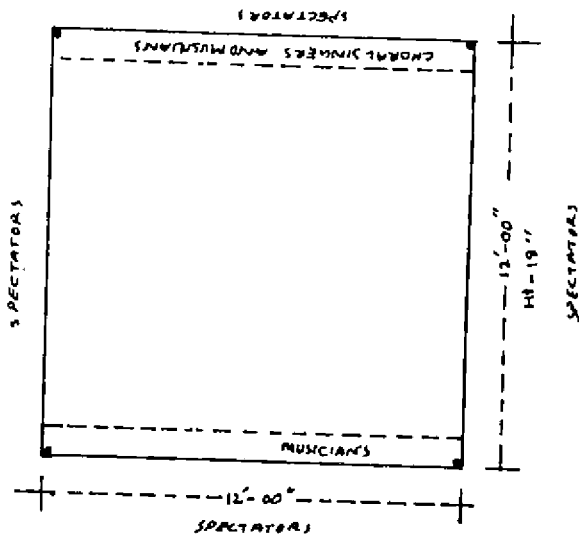


Fig.63 Mā Māi Campār Kicchā-kāhīnī Jārī

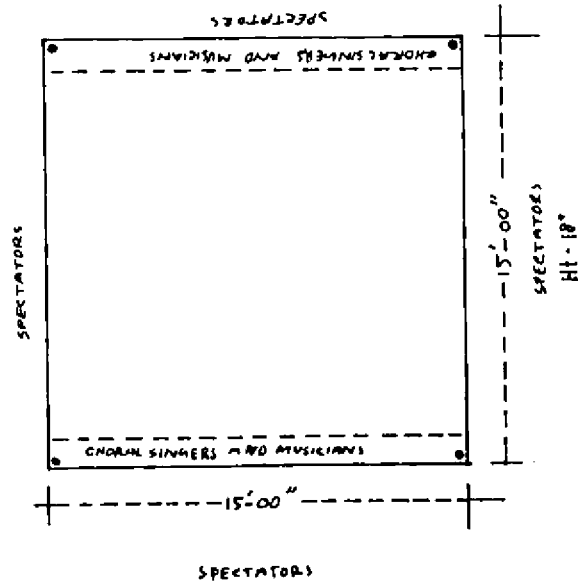


Fig 65 Kadca

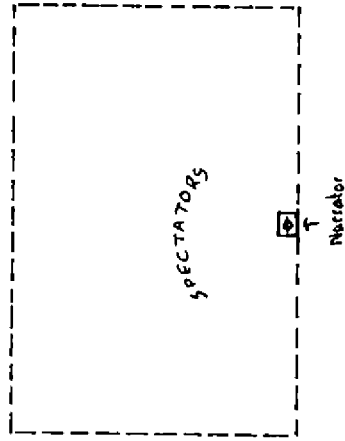


Fig 66 Puthi Path (Kitab-pada)



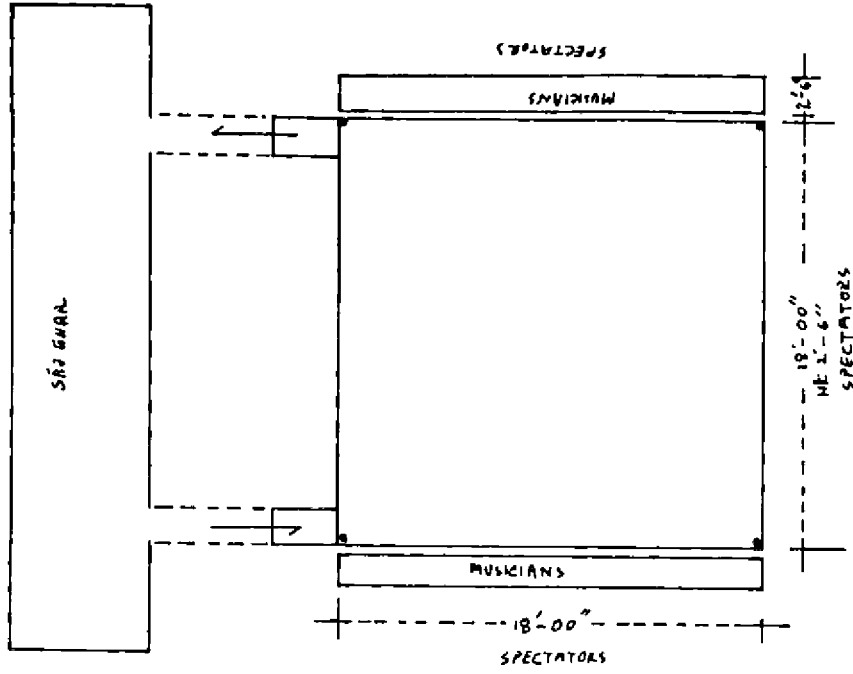


Fig.68 Yātrā

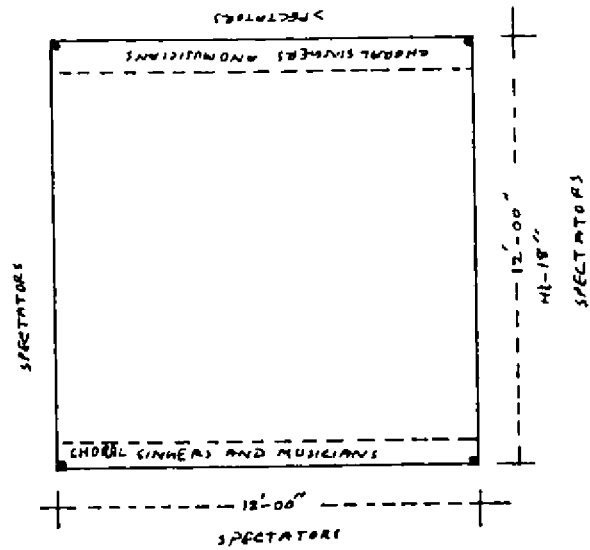


Fig.67 Sawāl Jawāb (Kitāb-paḍā)

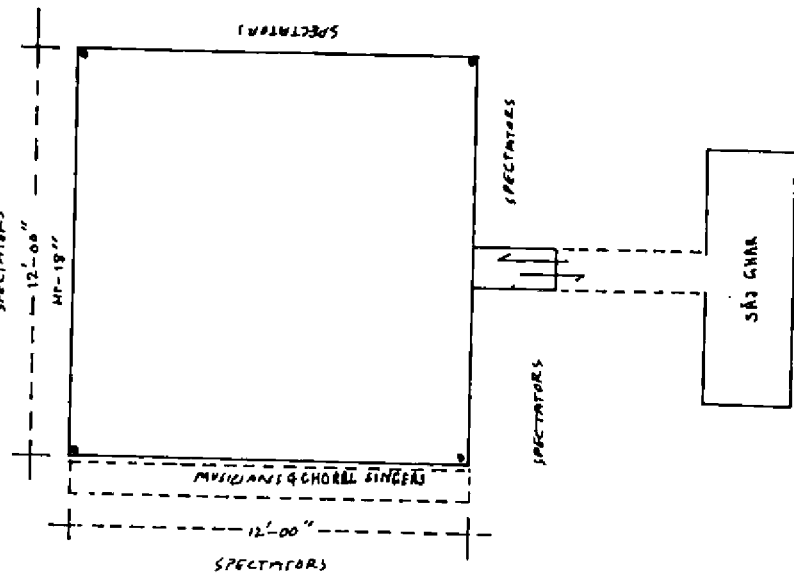
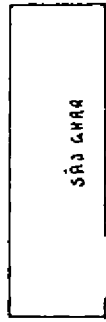


Fig.70 Jhumur Yātrā

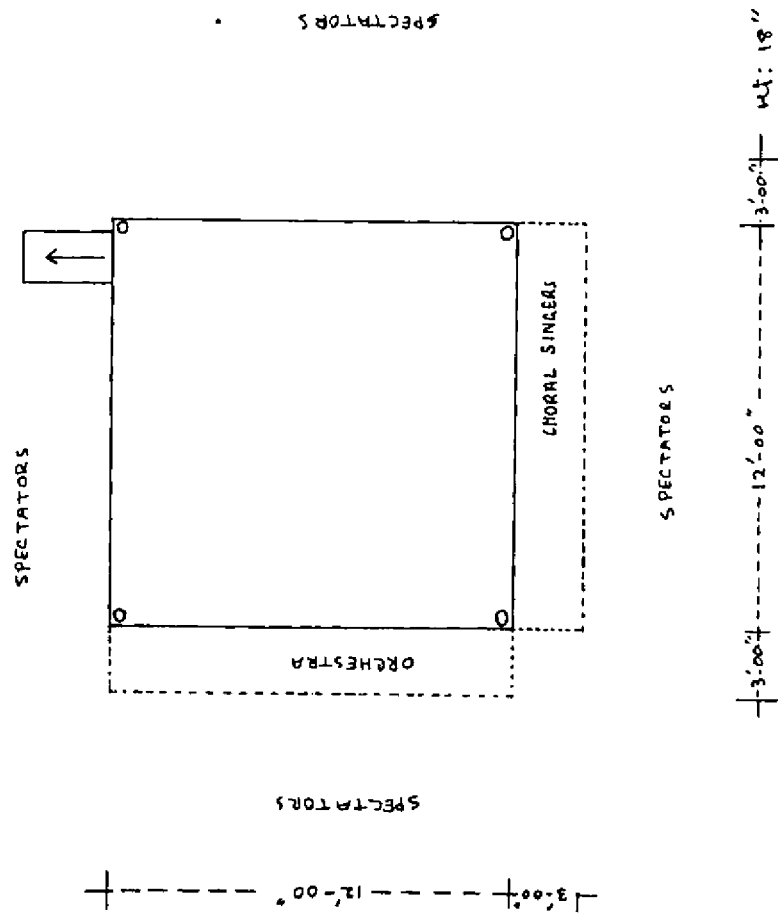


Fig.69 Jhumur Yātrā

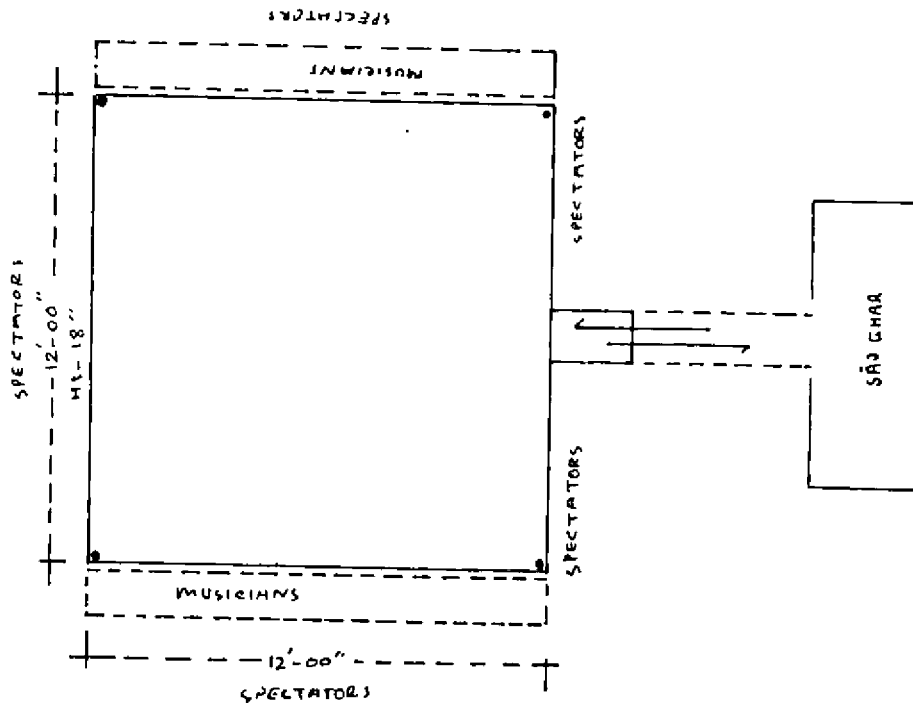


Fig. 71 Jhumur Yātrā

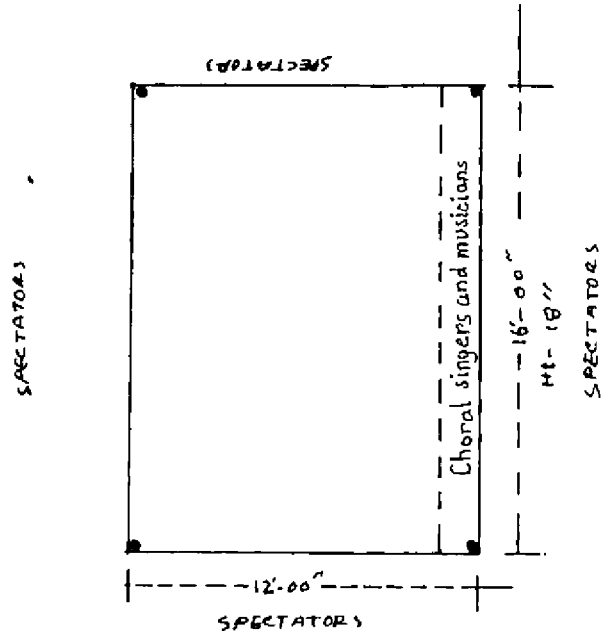


Fig. 72 Pālā Gān

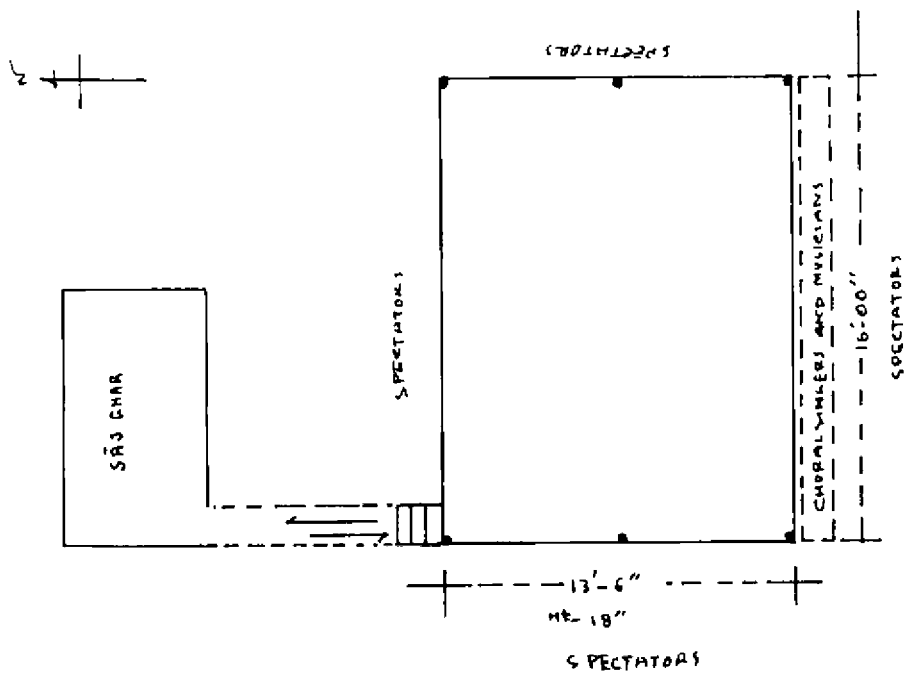


Fig. 73 Māiṭṭyā Tāmsā

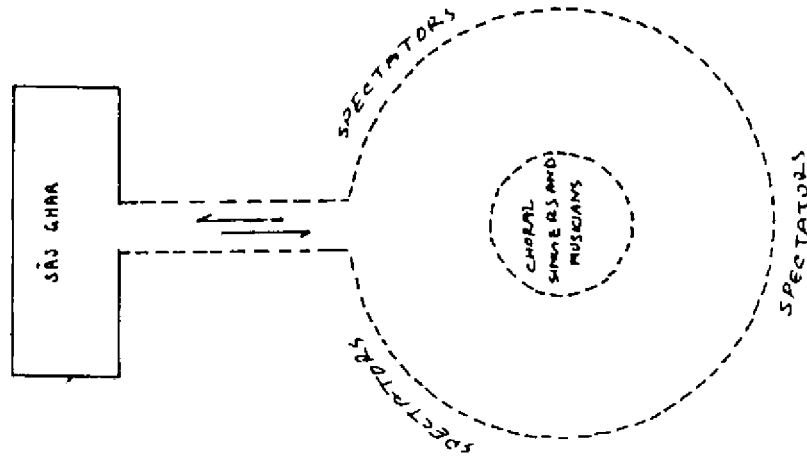


Fig. 74 Māiṭṭyā Tāmsā

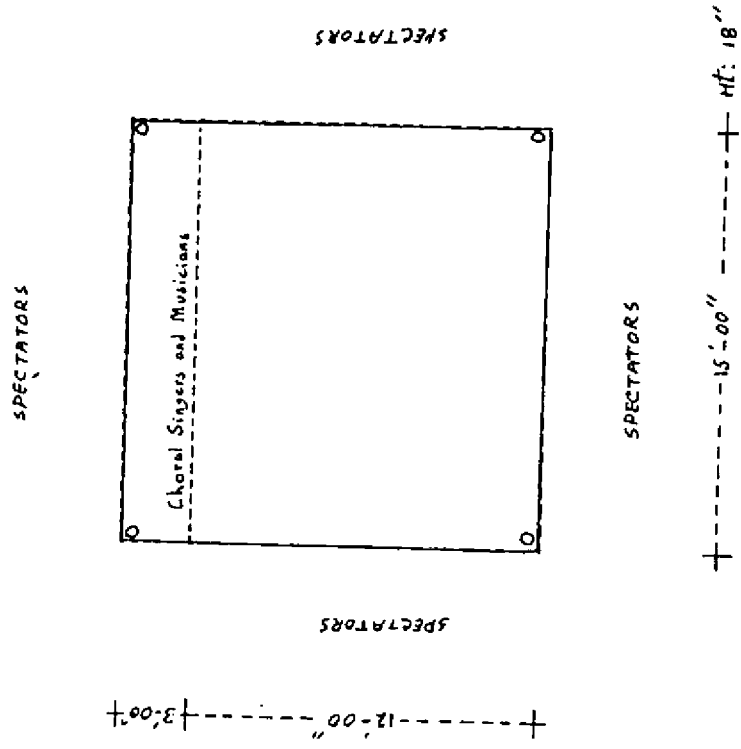


Fig 76 Keocha Kahini

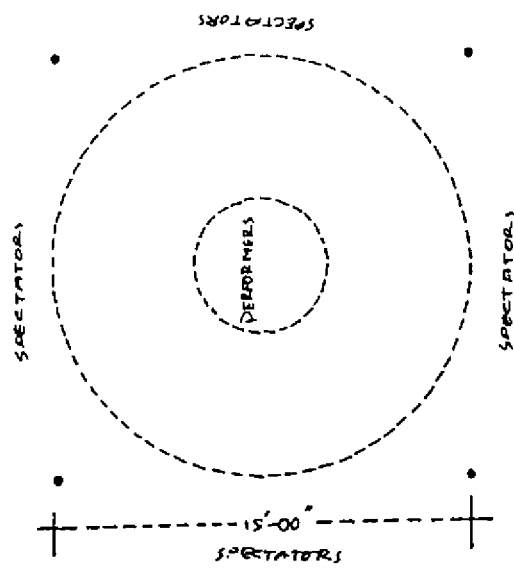


Fig 75 Pālā Gān (Bogra)

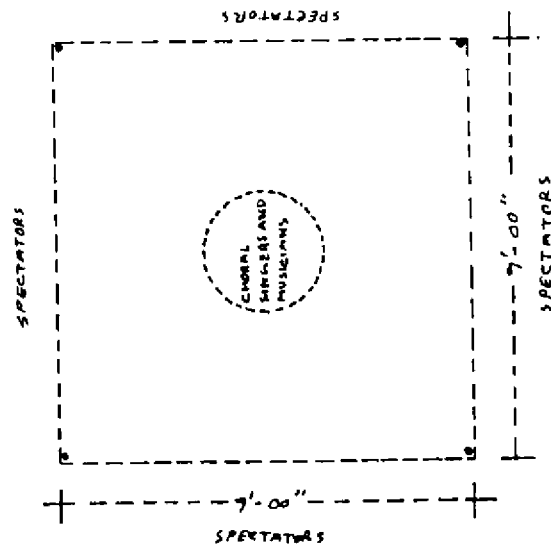


Fig.77 Kechā-bandī Gān

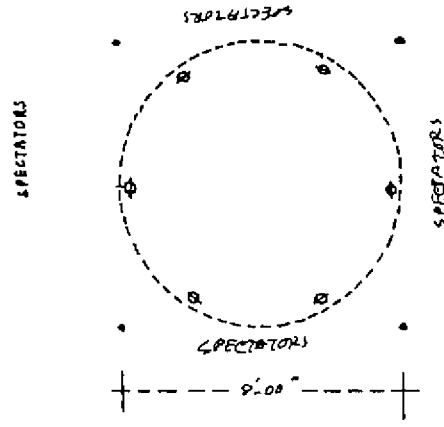


Fig.78 Śāstra (Hāstar Gān)

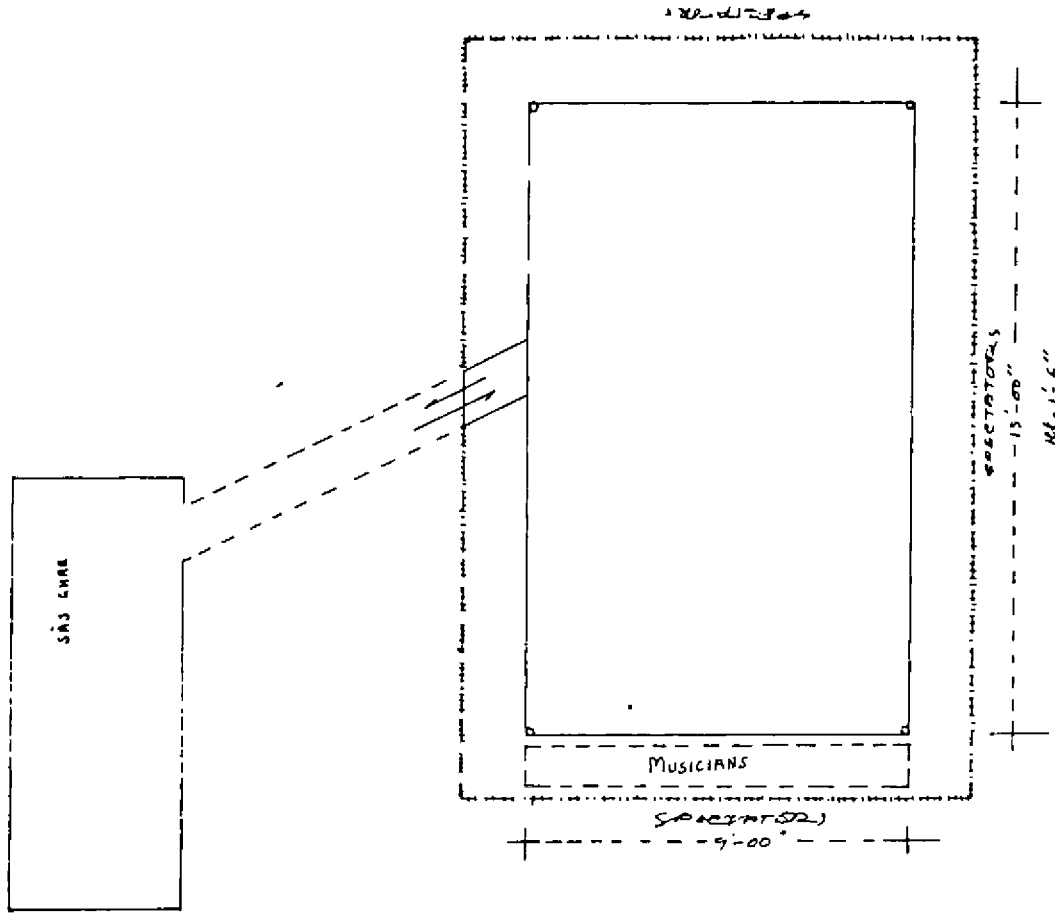


Fig 80 Dhang Yatra

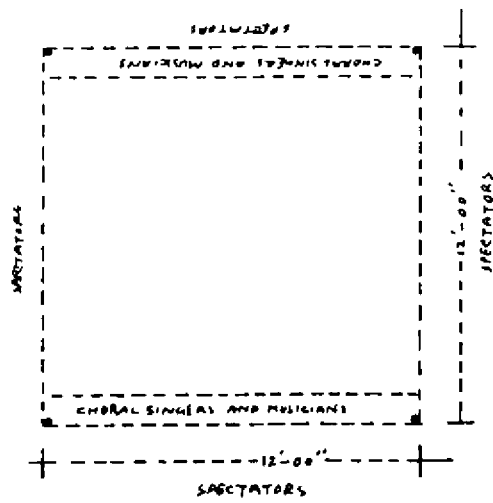


Fig 79 Dhak Yatra

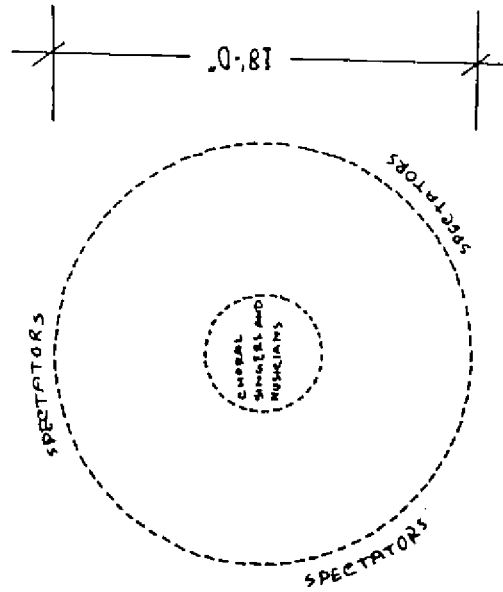
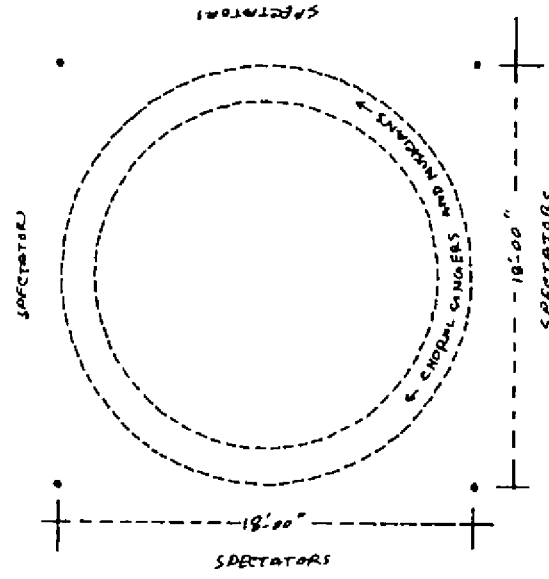


Fig 82 Ghāṭu Gān

Fig 81 Ghāṭu Gān



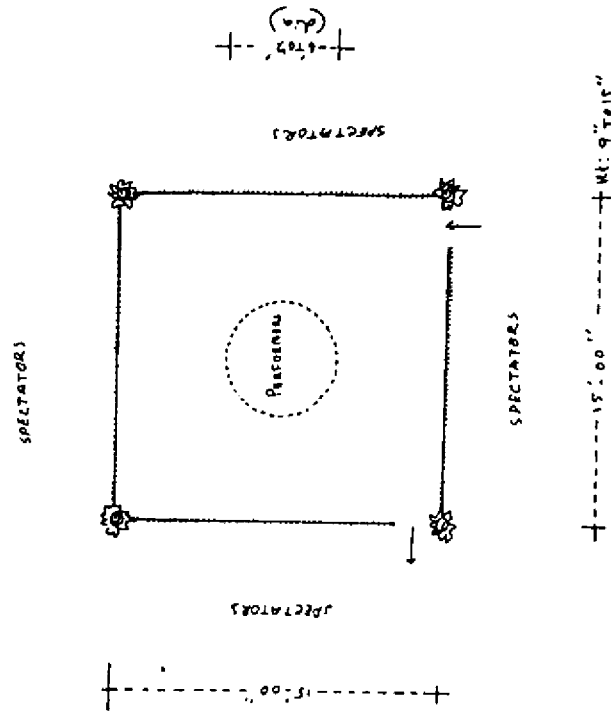


Fig 84 Pālāiā Gān : Rang Pācāi

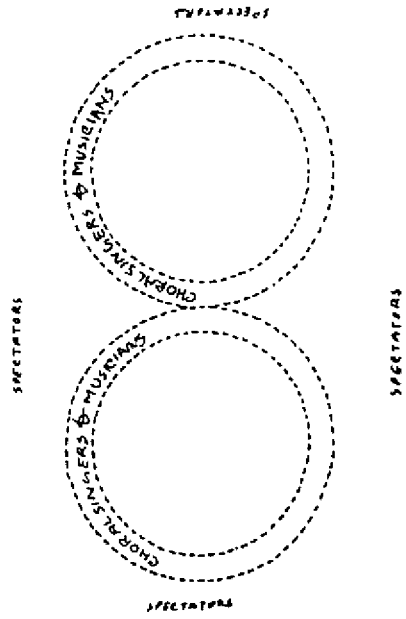


Fig 83 Ghātu Gān

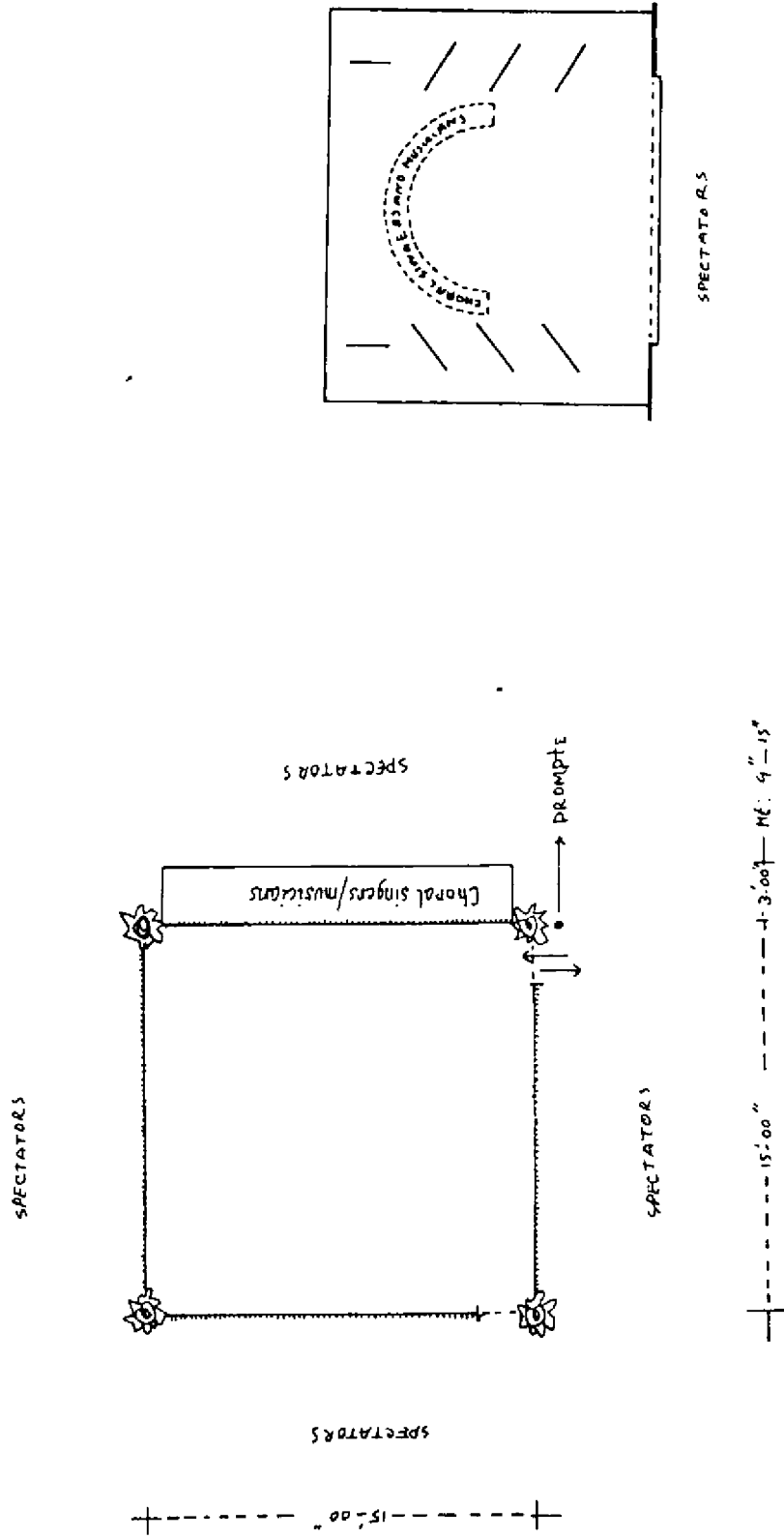


Fig 86 Gambhīrā Gān

Fig 85 Pālātā Gān : Śāstrīya Pācālī

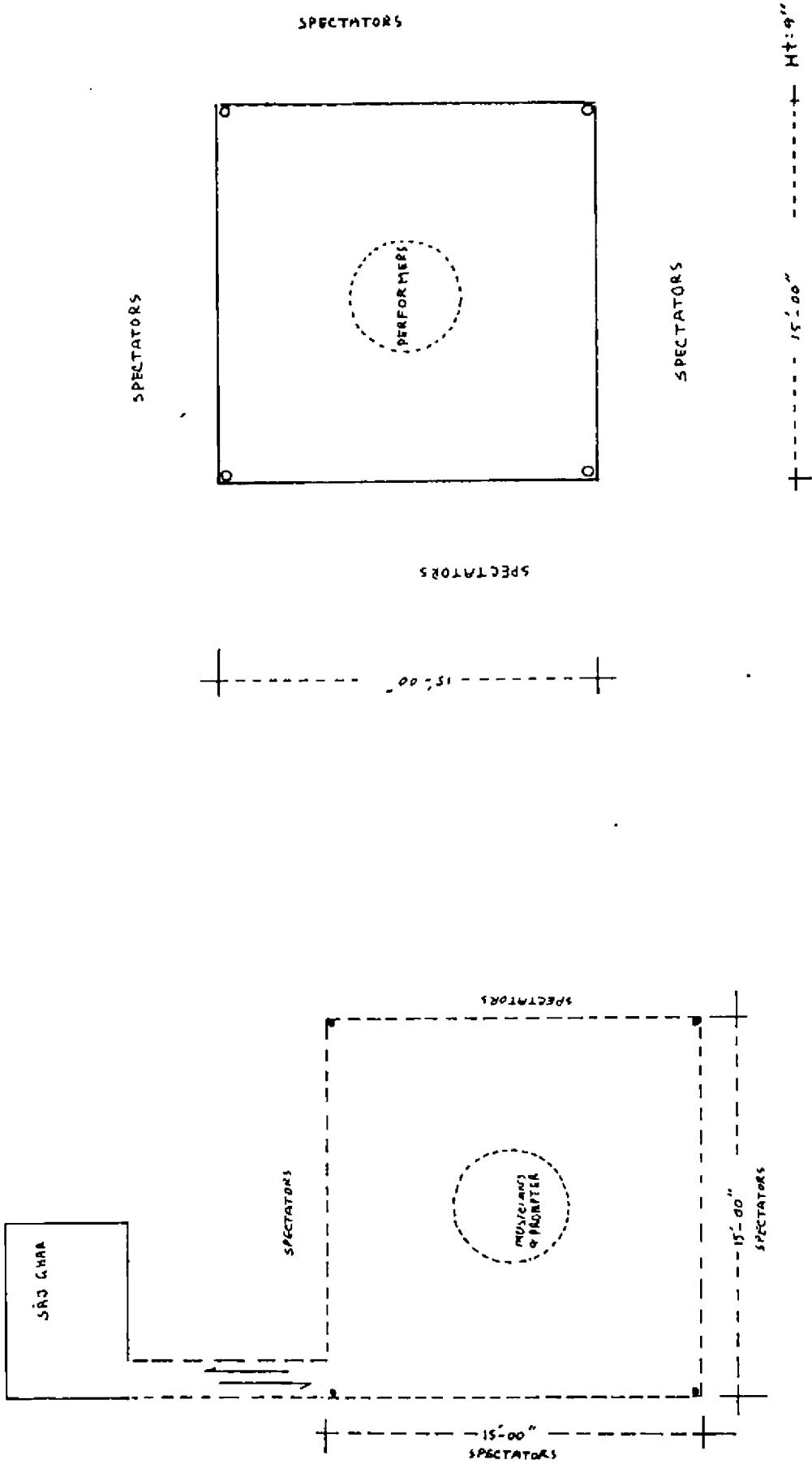


Fig.88 Ālkāp Gān

Fig.87 Gambhūrā Yātrā

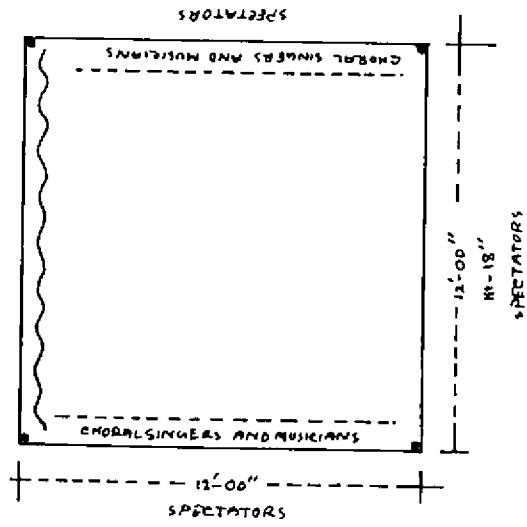
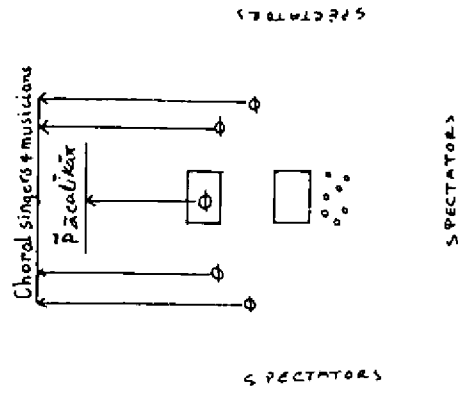


Fig. 89

Tādi Gān

Fig. 90

Pācalī

ROJA  
MANDAPA

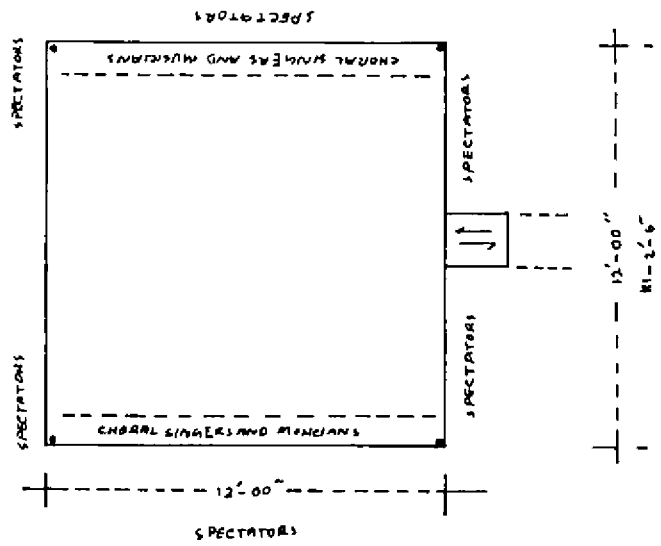


Fig.91 Kavi Gan

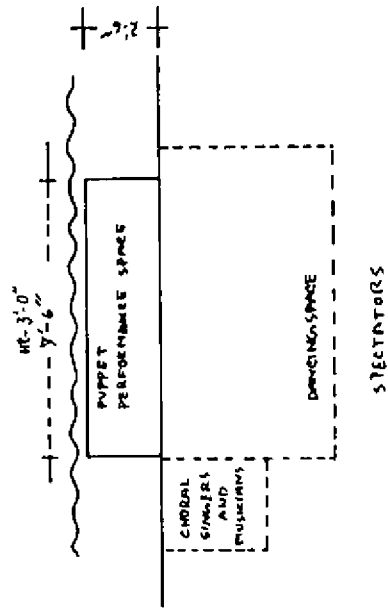


Fig.92 Putul Nac

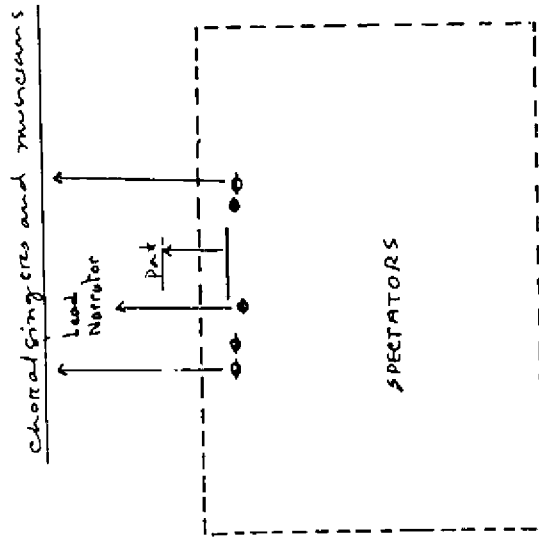


Fig.94 Patua Gan

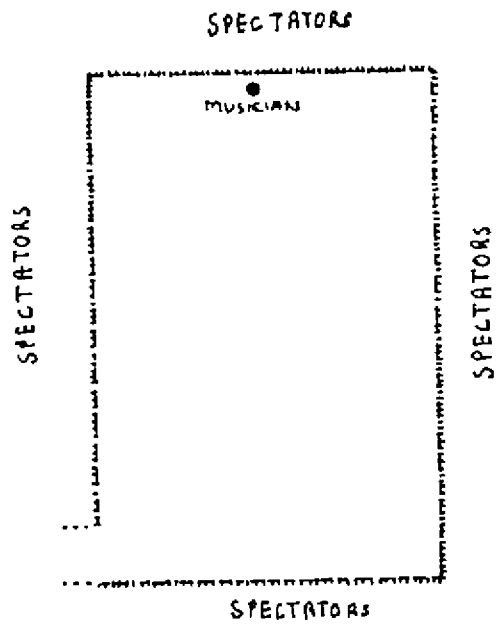


Fig.93 Lathi-khela